The Legend of the Septuagint

From Classical Antiquity to Today

Abraham Wasserstein
David J. Wasserstein

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THE LEGEND OF THE SEPTUAGINT

The Septuagint is the most influential of the Greek versions of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The exact circumstances of its creation are uncertain, but different versions of a legend about the miraculous nature of the translation have existed since antiquity. Beginning in the Letter of Aristeas, the legend describes how Ptolemy Philadelphus (285–247 B.C.E.) commissioned seventy-two Jewish scribes to translate the sacred Hebrew scriptures for his famous library in Alexandria. Subsequent variations on the story recount how the scribes, working independently, produced word-for-word, identical Greek versions. In the course of the following centuries, to our own time, the story has been adapted and changed by Jews, Christians, Muslims, and pagans for many different reasons: to tell a story, to explain historical events, and – most frequently – to lend authority to the Greek text for the institutions that used it. This book offers the first account of all of these versions over the last two millennia, providing a history of the uses and abuses of the legend in various cultures around the Mediterranean.

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Dávid Iván

30 January 1935 Újpest, Hungary
1944 Auschwitz

nephew and cousin

יהי זכרו ברוך

What is Plato but Moses speaking in Attic?

Numenius of Apamea (2nd century C.E.)

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book is an essay in tracing the life of the legend that grew up around the origin of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. It is not concerned, except incidentally, with how that translation, surely the most momentous literary enterprise in the annals of western mankind, came into being. The answer to that question is largely unknown and must be sought mainly in the internal evidence of the texts. That task must be left to textual critics and other students of the Greek Old Testament. What is presented here is an analysis of the legend of the original translation of the Pentateuch.

As far as our evidence allows us to judge, the legend of the Pentateuch has its beginning in the *Letter of Aristeas*. We have attempted to examine the embellishments that later generations added to the story as told in that work. Commentators, apologists and polemicists belonging to different traditions, in Jewish hellenism and in rabbinic Jewry no less than in the Christian churches and in the world of Islam, often used the legend for partisan purposes. Their additions were inspired by various theological and sectarian interests, and they created narrative patterns, literary motifs and models of special pleading that lived on for many centuries, occasionally in unexpected places. To this day the legend exerts its power over the formulation of arguments about the inspiration of sacred texts.

The frame-story of the *Letter of Aristeas* is well known: Ptolemy II Philadelphus, ruler of Egypt in the third century B.C.E., was persuaded by Demetrius of Phalerum, Director of the famous Library in Alexandria, to enrich that collection by obtaining a translation of the Jewish Law for the library. Ambassadors were sent to the High Priest in Jerusalem to ask for his help in that enterprise. As proof of his own goodwill towards the Jews, the King ordered that more than one hundred thousand Jewish captives be freed at his expense; in addition, many costly presents were sent to the High Priest. The High Priest despatched seventy-two elders, six chosen from each of the twelve

tribes, all well versed in both languages, to Alexandria, where they translated the Law in exactly seventy-two days from Hebrew into Greek.

Like the scholar who is studying the history of the Septuagint itself and must examine the texts critically, the reader of the *Aristeas Letter*, too, must keep in mind partisan interests and innocent prejudices, honest misconceptions and pious frauds, doctrinal stubbornness and naive sectarianism. He must study the use to which one interpretation rather than another, one narrative detail added or omitted, could be put to serve now half-forgotten polemical purposes in disputations between Christians and Jews, orthodox and heretics, Jews of various kinds, Christians and Muslims who adhered to related doctrines concerning alleged tampering by Jews (and sometimes Christians) with their holy scriptures, and between Eastern upholders of the inspiration of the Seventy and Latin champions of the *hebraica veritas* which, it was thought, could be found in Jerome's Vulgate.

As far as the data at our disposal allow us to judge, the legend arose from what was originally a work not of religious or sectarian argument but an exercise in hellenistic Jewish apologetics joined to Ptolemaic dynastic propaganda. This became the seedbed, the nursery and the forcing-house for the production of literary artifices that for many centuries, down to our own day, became the underpinning of some Christian theological positions. Defenders of these positions rely on arguments taken from that tradition, even where they no longer argue for the literal truth either of the account contained in the *Letter of Aristeas* or even of the biblical text itself. It is a strange and remarkable fact that patterns of argument that go back to a pre-Christian propaganda work are used to this day by defenders of conservative interpretations of Holy Scripture.

This is an exciting story, not least because it crosses many barriers: of language, of religion, of culture and of geography. But it is also a story fraught with difficulties, arising mostly from the unfamiliarity of much in the cultural and intellectual furniture, the background to what is said; the rabbinic and oriental sources are particularly likely to be new to many readers. We have endeavoured, within the limits of the reasonable, to explain what may be strange expressions and ideas in the course of the book.

A word about method and approach is also in order here. The attempt to track the occurrences of a long series of versions of a well-known and important legend in a wide variety of cultures and linguistic dresses resembles the scholarly collection of surviving fragments of an ancient writer's works; it shares something too of the dangers inherent in such a task, in particular the risk that one will end up looking at bits and pieces of intellectual matter in isolation, not so much from each other as from their real contexts, social and linguistic and cultural. It is, however, only in those contexts and via an awareness of the links among and between all of them that such fragments, whether of an ancient writer or of a legend, possess, develop and transmit their meanings. This

legend in particular is part of the common heritage of the civilizations clustering around the Mediterranean. Despite the links between many of them provided by the inland sea, the differences among these cultures are also many and varied. The risk of atomisation in the study of these fragments has therefore been ever-present to us in the preparation of this book. We have aimed to show something of the immense variety of this story and of its significance in so many contexts and for so many people and peoples. At the same time, by fixing a concentrated light on a single legend – one small assemblage of narrative elements – as it makes its way through the vagaries of time and space, of language and religion and culture, from Alexandria in the third century B.C.E. to Jerusalem at the start of the twenty-first century, we hope to illuminate something of the common heritage of all who live around this sea.

This book fits, in different ways, into a variety of disciplines. It is not complete. No study can be, nor can any collection, when our material is so polymorphous, amoeba-like in its capacity to embrace themes and motifs from every direction, quicksilver in its ability to penetrate into the unlikeliest of corners, cultural and geographic and, not least, linguistic. Nonetheless, this is the most wide-ranging assemblage to date of material connected to our topic, and it studies that material in greater depth than any previous work.

The character of our story has encouraged a roughly chronological organisation of this book. Following an introduction to the world of Hellenistic Jewry, we study the *Letter of Aristeas* and how the legend contained in it was taken up in the Greek writings of Jews in the Near East in succeeding centuries. As early as this, we see the number of the translators, originally seventy-two, being referred to sometimes in the rounder and more convenient form of seventy; this, in its Greek form, has given us the name by which the translation of the whole Old Testament has become known, the Septuagint. Around the end of the first century C.E., the Rabbis transformed the story, introducing a miracle into what had been a straightforward account of a translation, and giving the story the element essential to its significance for Jews and, still more, for Christians, over two thousand years. The nature of that miracle and of the alleged textual changes in the biblical text associated with it provide the subject of Chapters 3 and 4. At an early stage, the legend, complete with miracle, was taken up by Christian writers, who introduce many new details, adapting the story to Christian needs and even using it in anti-Jewish polemic. In Chapter 5 we examine these changes and their connections with the attitude of the early church to the Greek version of the Bible in Latin and Greek writers.

The rise of Islam brought massive linguistic change to the Near East. The Greek Bible gradually lost its centrality for Christians there, whereas Muslims were never very interested in it. As a result, we find new attitudes to the Greek translation and the legend begins to atomise into its constituent narrative elements and to be used for different polemical and historiographical ends. These

are examined in Chapters 6 and 7. In Chapters 8 and 9 we return to the Jews and look first at the version of the story in Yosippon, a medieval Hebrew historical text with an extremely complicated tradition and widespread influence on other writings, and secondly at texts by Karaites, Samaritans and Rabbanite Jews from all over the Mediterranean basin. Finally, with the Renaissance, we enter upon a new age, when the *Letter of Aristeas* and the legend became the subject of modern scholarly study, among both Jews and Christians. Between the Renaissance and the end of the twentieth century, debate has concentrated on the authenticity of the *Letter* itself and its contents and, just as importantly, on the character of the Greek version whose birth it relates. Among Roman Catholics, the realization that the *Letter* is not authentic has created problems for those who retain belief in the divine inspiration of the Greek version of the Bible. In Chapter 10, we follow the debate from the earliest translations of the *Letter* in the fifteenth century to the most recent discussions of inspiration at the end of the twentieth.

The central thesis of this book is that the most powerful argument used by the Christian Church in favour of the inspiration of the Greek Bible is based on a story fashioned in the workshop of rabbinic *aggada*, interpretation of the Bible, homiletics. That story – the legend of changes introduced by the Jewish translators of the Septuagint into Greek – was invented by the Rabbis around the turn of the first century of the Common Era. Within another century or so, it provided Christian writers with "proof" for the inspiration of their text(s) of the Greek Bible, and possibly also fed the claim that Jews had tampered with the words of scripture in order to hide prophecies of the coming of the messiah.

The legend itself was not born in a vacuum. It grew out of an atmosphere that had been prepared for it in the cultural world of Hellenistic Judaism. In that world, the reception of Judaism was helped by the claim that the Bible had been available in Greek and that Greeks had been acquainted with the biblical text long before the time of the Septuagint translation. In this claim really begins the process that leads to the integration of an oriental cult into the intellectual community of the West. This was to be of universal importance, for it is this process that made possible the Christian civilisation of Europe. This civilisation could now be both Hebrew and Hellenic. Hence the epigraph of this book, borrowed from the second-century Platonist and Pythagorean Numenius, "What is Plato but Moses speaking in Attic?"

"Habent sua fata libelli": my father had thought to use this phrase in the body of this book about the history of the book of books. It seems most appropriate to place it here, at the head of an account of the genesis of this work. My father died on 20 July 1995.[1] In the last part of his life, he had been

[1] For an account of his life and work see D. Wasserstein 1996.

working on various problems associated with the relations between Greek and Jew, between the hellenistic world and that of ancient Judaism. One of the topics that most engaged his attention was the legend contained in the *Letter of Aristeas* concerning the translation of the Septuagint and the literary posterity of that legend. He had been interested in the Septuagint and in the legend for decades. He had discussed this with me and with others on numerous occasions, especially in the last five years of his life. After his death, I went through his papers and found, *inter multa alia*, his materials for a book on this topic.

At the start I saw my job as essentially that of an editor. To that end, I tidied up the notes, eliminated repetitions, provided where necessary linking text and organised the whole in the shape toward which I knew my father to be working. Where my father gave extensive quotations in Greek or in other languages, I have generally provided English translations, except where the original language of the passage in question was necessary to the argument.

As I continued, however, I discovered that my task was more complex than simply editing a more or less complete manuscript, for two main reasons. The first was that my father had collected a vast amount of materials; he had assembled and to some degree organised and sifted these. He had also written a long introduction, parts of Chapters 1 and 2 and the principal part of Chapter 3, though the material was incomplete and unrevised. As to the rest, though part of the materials existed, the chapters were not written at all. My task, therefore, involved not merely editing but also writing extensive sections of this book. I hope that I have been able to do justice to my father's views, especially on the matters discussed in the latter parts of the book.

This is in a great degree, then, a joint production. In most cases, it is clear from the context and from what has been said above who is speaking at any point. For the rest, I take responsibility for the final appearance and shape of the work.

The second reason for my greater difficulty as I proceeded was a curious illustration of the fact that subjects that have languished unexplored for many years occasionally burst into life with the publication of a number of studies more or less simultaneously: two other works on topics connected with the Aristeas story appeared after my father became ill. Each overlaps, though differently, with this book. Giuseppe Veltri's *Eine Tora für den König Talmai* (1994) argues, as its title indicates, that there is a real link between the Septuagint and Ptolemy II and, consequently, that the *Letter of Aristeas* should be seen as an authentic historical source. There is much of importance in this valuable book, but the basic standpoint and the central concern of Veltri's book differ greatly from those of this study. However, Veltri's book contains extensive collection, study and analysis of the lists of changes that the translators are alleged to have introduced into the biblical text for Ptolemy II; consequently, the detailed study of these that my father has envisaged does not appear here.

More recently, as I began work on this project, Luciano Canfora published *Il Viaggio di Aristea* (1996), which I reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* (6 June 1997). Canfora looks at a superficially similar topic, but ignores completely the later Jewish element (largely in Hebrew and Aramaic) in the story, which my father saw as central. Canfora, moreover, pays limited attention to what I have called here the oriental aspect of the story; partly in consequence of this, its interpretation of certain important aspects differs from ours.[2]

These two works, because of the ways in which they overlap with each other and with the subject of this book, in fact offered me encouragement in my pursuit of this enterprise, for they showed me that we still lacked an integrated synthesis of the topic in all its aspects. Neither the Jewish nor the Christian dimensions of the subject could be properly studied in isolation; a study that simply put the two side by side would ignore the influence that the one had had upon the other strand of this tradition. My father, as a Hellenist, always took the view that one must have a thorough command of a field to produce useful scholarship in it;[3] and he also took the view that in the Hellenistic environment of many of the texts studied here the field in question included far more than merely Greek or merely Jewish sources. Each element in this enormously rich and complex set of cultures needed to be studied and understood if we were to be able to deepen our understanding of the problems that it presented. This is the first study of the subject that attempts to look thoroughly at all the sources known from all the relevant cultures, including those in oriental languages, in their mutual relationship.

A word on transliteration and translations: in transliteration from oriental languages we have sought to follow a commonsensical middle path between scientific exactitude and outright error, without being a slave to some artificial consistency. We have omitted all diacritical marks.

As to translation, generally we have used standard modern versions (except for the Bible, where I follow my father in preferring for the most part that of King James, in its Revised version, both for scholarly and for aesthetic reasons). In general, we have not provided texts in the original languages, but we have preferred to give English renderings. However, it should be stressed that, especially in respect of rabbinic texts, my English versions pretend to offer no more than an approximation of the original, for the guidance of those without direct access to those languages. As parts of the argument in this book turn on the

[2] A third work, MacLeod 2001, is a collection that looks at aspects of the Library and intellectual subjects connected with it, but it addresses the questions studied here only in passing. See also the Conclusion.

[3] Cf. the views of Wolf and Scaliger, in Pfeiffer 1976:118.

exact meaning or meanings that individual expressions may bear, this should be borne in mind.

My father worked on this book over many years. He built up debts to many individuals and institutions along the way. A stay at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, in 1985–86, and another at the Annenberg Institute in Philadelphia in 1988–89 were devoted largely to work on this and related topics. He delivered a lecture in memory of Professor I. Seeligmann in Jerusalem on this subject and the Simon Rawidowicz Memorial Lecture at Brandeis University in Boston in 1989, and he spoke on a similar topic at the meeting of the European Association for Jewish Studies in Berlin in 1987. I spoke at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem in 1996, at a meeting of the working group on Acculturation in the Greco–Roman World, and am grateful to the participants in that meeting both for their comments and for their encouragement. I also spoke at a conference in the same institute in 2001, organised by the working group on the subject From Hellenistic Judaism to Christian Hellenism, on The Tradition of the Seventy: From the *Letter of Aristeas* to Epiphanius; once again, I am grateful to the participants in that meeting for their advice. A fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in 1999–2000 and another at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2002–03 (as one of the leaders of the research group Greeks, Romans, Jews and Others in the Near East from Alexander to Muhammad: "A Civilization of Epigraphy") made it possible for me to devote the concentrated energy that was necessary to the completion of this work. A special word of thanks goes to the staffs of these two institutions and to the librarians in all the institutions where the work on this book was carried out in three continents over these many years.

Two articles by my father that appeared only after his death, which were in effect taken out of this book, have been partially re-integrated in this work. They are 'The Number and Provenance of Jews in Graeco–Roman Antiquity: A Note on Population Statistics', *Classical Studies in Honor of David Sohlberg*, edited by Ranon Katzoff with Yaakov Petroff and David Schaps, Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University Press, 1996, pp. 307–17; and 'On Donkeys, Wine and the Uses of Textual Criticism: Septuagintal Variants in Jewish Palestine', *The Jews in the Hellenistic-Roman World: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern*, edited by Isaiah Gafni, Aharon Oppenheimer and Daniel Schwartz, Jerusalem, Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History and the Historical Society of Israel, 1996, pp. 119*–42*. I thank the editors and publishers of the volumes in which they appeared for their permission to reprint parts of these articles in revised form.

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David J. Wasserstein
Jerusalem
August 2004

Abbreviations

AdRN	Abot de-Rabbi Nathan
AdRNB	Abot de-Rabbi Nathan B (ed. Schechter)
ANET	J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, 1950
BR	Bereshit Rabba
BT	Babylonian Talmud
CAH	*Cambridge Ancient History*
CHI	*Cambridge History of Iran*
CHJ	*Cambridge History of Judaism*
CIJ	*Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*
CPJ	*Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*
DNB	*Dictionary of National Biography*
EI	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*
EJ	*Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem)
JE	*Jewish Encyclopedia*
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edition, Oxford, 1940; *Supplement*, ed. E. A. Barber, Oxford, 1968
LXX	Septuagint
MS	Massekhet Sopherim
MST	Massekhet Sepher Torah
NT	New Testament
OCD	*Oxford Classical Dictionary*
OT	Old Testament
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PT	Palestinian Talmud
RE	A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart 1893–

SIG	W. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* 3rd edition, 1915–24
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philosophical Association*
§	sections in Wendland's 1900 edition and all subsequent editions and translations of the *Letter of Aristeas*

Introduction

ON TRANSLATION IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible was a literary enterprise of immeasurable consequence in the history of western mankind. It has justly been called "the most important translation ever made".[1] It was not, however, the first translation of a text from one language into another.[2] The practice of translation was old and well established in the Near East long before the translation of the Hebrew Bible, and translation techniques had existed for many centuries before the hellenistic age. Its products had long been known over wide areas. Such translations often served official and administrative purposes.[3] Literary bilingualism and translation technique were also widespread in the second millennium in Mesopotamia where Sumerian texts were regularly accompanied by Akkadian translations.[4] We know also of Babylonian interest in the grammar of the Sumerian language.[5] A number of official translations have survived, particularly such as glorified the conquests and commemorated the achievements of imperial rulers. Among the most famous of these are the Behistun (Bisitun) inscription, on the road from Babylon to Ecbatana, of the greatest of the Achaemenid kings, Darius I (521–486 B.C.E.), in Old Persian, Elamite and Assyrian.[6] The same ruler erected monuments inscribed on one side in

[1] Bickerman 1988:101. Cf. also Seeligmann 1990:169.

[2] For the somewhat over-stated claim that it was, see Frankel 1841:2.

[3] For translation for official and administrative purposes in the ancient Near East see Greenfield 1985; Tadmor 1989, with copious references to further literature.

[4] Cf. Falkenstein 1953:14, et alibi; Hallo and Simpson 1971:165 et alibi; von Soden 1960; Sjöberg 1960; see also later references to pictorial representations.

[5] For the texts see Landsberger 1956; Civil, Gurney and Kennedy 1986; for studies see Black 1989; 1991; Reiner 1990.

[6] See Pritchard 1974, plates 249, 250, 462; and pp. 277, 302–03, for notes and bibliography; von Voigtlander 1978, with bibliography on pp. XIIIf.; Greenfield and Porten 1982, with bibliography, p. X. See also Sarre and Herzfeld 1910:189ff. with tables XXXIII–XXXV; Weissbach

Persian, Elamite and Babylonian and on the other in Egyptian hieroglyphics, along the course of the canal connecting the Nile with the Red Sea in Egypt.[7] Such triumphal inscriptions as that at Behistun were translated into Aramaic and thus "published" throughout the empire.[8] For translations of literary works, we need remind ourselves only of the ancient versions in various languages of the legend of Ahikar. Of this we have, for example, an Aramaic version, apparently of the fifth century B.C.E., among the papyri of Elephantine, the original of which may go back to the sixth or even seventh century B.C.E.[9]

It would be a mistake to suggest that the Greeks, who were well acquainted with many parts of the Achaemenid empire, were somehow not conscious of the variety of languages spoken by other nations, the βάρβαροι, "barbarians", = non-Greeks. The Greeks certainly did not imagine that all the βάρβαροι spoke the same incomprehensible language. This common notion goes back to simplistic explanations of the meaning and the connotations of the term βάρβαρος. Such words as βάρβαρος, βαρβαρίζειν, βαρβαρισμός, βαρβαριστί, βαρβαρόγλωσσος, βαρβαροστομία, βαρβαροφωνεῖν, and βαρβαρόφωνος are indeed often used for indiscriminate gibberish or broken Greek, generally referring to non-Greek speakers, βάρβαροι, but this does not mean that the Greeks thought all non-Greeks spoke the same language. It is true that Strabo suggests that the word βάρβαρος may have originated in onomatopoeia, but he says this in a context in which he refers to the characteristics of various different (non-Greek) languages. He tells us that to the Greek ear, non-hellenic languages sound harsh and perhaps also incomprehensible because they are unlike Greek, just as to some English ears all non-English languages sound "foreign"; but that does not mean that they all sound alike, let alone that they are all thought to be the same.[10] On the contrary, the Greeks were well aware that different so-called Barbarian nations spoke different non-Greek languages.[11]

1911:XIff., 8ff. On the value of this inscription as a historical source see Bickerman and Tadmor 1978. This trilingual inscription was the main source of material for the first decipherment of cuneiform writing; see Daniels 1994.

[7] The construction of the waterway between the Nile and the Red Sea was begun by Pharaoh Necho and completed by Darius I: Herodotus II. 158 and IV. 39, 42; see for the text and literature, Weissbach 1911:XXIf., 102ff.; see also H. R. Hall, in *CAH*, III, 1970, pp. 314ff., and T. J. H. James, in *CAH* (2nd ed.), III, 2, 1991, p. 722; Posener 1936:48ff.; 180f. with notes; Kraeling 1953:29; Ghirshman 1954:163ff.; Frye 1963:137; also Porten 1968:21f., with notes 78–80, for other multilingual inscriptions.

[8] For one such translation found at Elephantine see Greenfield and Porten 1982; Sachau 1911:185ff. with plates 52 and 54–56; and Cowley 1923:248–71.

[9] See Cowley 1923:204–48; Pritchard 1958:245ff. (trans. H. L. Ginsberg). For more on later translations see Conybeare, Harris and Lewis 1898; see also Charles 1913:715–84; Nau 1909; Baumstark 1922:11f., with valuable notes.

[10] Strabo, 14, 2, 28, with context.

[11] Though Greek and Latin writers occasionally express horror at the sound of "barbarian" languages (see Norden 1909 (1983): 60ff., especially n. 2), this is not the same as a confession of (or testimony to) ignorance of these languages.

Similarly, there can be no doubt that translation was not as unfamiliar to the ancients, Greeks or Barbarians, as is sometimes thought.[12] Thus, Herodotus records, as a matter of fact not as an exotic marvel, the erection of two stelae by Darius I on the Bosphorus, one inscribed in Ἀσσύρια γράμματα, the other in Ἑλληνικὰ γράμματα.[13] It is not entirely clear whether Ἀσσύρια here refers to Cuneiform or to Aramaic, although in this case the former seems more likely. However that may be, the reference illustrates not only Persian translation activity but also Greek awareness of it as early as the fifth century B.C.E. The same author also records the existence of a whole class of ἑρμηνεῖς ("interpreters") in Egypt, and he tells us that these were the descendants of Egyptian boys taught Greek by Ionian and Carian mercenaries in the service of Psammetichus I, the founder of the Saite dynasty.[14] It is in the context of this story (and with reference to Ionians and Carians) that Herodotus uses, for the first time in extant Greek literature, the word ἀλλόγλωσσος,[15] describing the difference between Egyptians and Ionians (and Carians) by a term referring merely to difference in language, not difference of ethnic or geographical origin. On the one hand, Herodotus is thus not using words such as ἀλλογενής, ἀλλοδαπός, ἀλλόδημος, ἀλλοεθνής, or ἀλλόφυλος, most of which, in any case, are not found in literary use before the fourth century B.C.E. or later; on the other hand, ἀλλόγλωσσος is found in a graffito scratched by Greek mercenaries in the service of Psammetichus II on the lower part of a colossal statue of Ramses II before the temple of Abu Simbel in Nubia as early as the sixth century B.C.E., long before Herodotus.[16]

That Greeks themselves also translated, when the need arose, from oriental languages into Greek we know, e.g. from Thucydides who tells us of some letters sent during the Peloponnesian War by the King of Persia to Sparta; these were intercepted by the Athenians who had them translated (or, literally, "transcribed", μεταγραψάμενοι: this word, and this distinction, will recur – see Chapter 1) from "Assyrian" (ἐκ τῶν Ἀσσυρίων γραμμάτων, here probably "Aramaic") into Greek.[17] Thus there is no reason to think that translation from one language into another was regarded either by the Greeks or by orientals

[12] For the Latin and Roman situation, in the Greek world and in the West, see Rochette 1997; Adams, Janse and Swain 2002; Adams 2003.

[13] IV. 87.

[14] Herod. II. 154.

[15] Herodotus here (II. 154) refers to Ionians (and Carians) as ἀλλόγλωσσοι in an Egyptian context; cf. its correlative ὁμόγλωσσοι in 158, where we are told that the Egyptians called all men who did not share their language "barbarians". Herodotus does not himself use the word βαρβαρόφωνος (for which he could have appealed to Homeric precedent, precisely in relation to the same Carians: *Il.* II, 867), except where he quotes it from an oracle: VIII, 20; IX, 43.

[16] Meiggs and Lewis 1969:12–13 with literature cited there. It is dated by the editors in 591 B.C.E. Dittenberger in *SIG* I (3rd ed.), p. 1, no.1 had dated it ca. 589 B.C.E.; cf. also *IG* XII. (3), 328, line 20 (from the third century B.C.E. in Thera).

[17] IV, 50.

as anything other than a commonplace activity in response to a frequently encountered need.[18]

That activity rested on a continuing awareness of linguistic variety. It is well to remember that as early an author as Homer was aware (and made his audience aware) not only of linguistic diversity between Greeks and "Barbarians" but also of the fact that the latter differed among themselves in language:

> for there are many allies throughout the great city of Priam, and tongue differs from tongue among men from many lands: let each one give the word to those he leads, and them let him lead out, when he has marshaled the men of his own city. (trans. A. T. Murray, Loeb series; *Iliad* II, 803–06)

(This is Iris addressing Hector; it comes immediately before the enumeration of the troops of Priam's allies.)[19] It is an engaging conceit of some eminent modern scholars to pretend to think that "the Greeks", when faced with speakers of foreign languages, simply spoke Greek more loudly in order to be understood, almost like some latter-day Anglo-Saxon travellers and empire builders *in partibus infidelium*.[20] I am aware neither of any evidence that would entitle us to accept such a generalisation nor even of any anecdotal illustration that would tempt us to think it a *storia ben trovata*.[21]

Nobody in antiquity could have been more aware than the Greeks of the existence and diversity of foreign languages, and translation was evidently an activity well known and much practised in antiquity both among Greeks and among orientals. It is interesting that we actually have, *inter alia*, pictorial representations, from the eighth century B.C.E., of simultaneous translation. On these we see, for example, an Assyrian official reading, from a document probably written in Aramaic, a surrender demand addressed in their own language to the defenders of a city under siege.[22]

JEWS IN EGYPT: THE PRE-HELLENISTIC PERIOD

There had been Jews in Egypt long before the hellenistic age. We have some evidence of a Jewish presence in Egypt before the Persian period, which began

[18] So commonplace that, in the first century B.C.E., we find Sallust, in the *Bellum Jugurthinum*, claiming to use a Latin translation of "*libri Punici*"; the demonstration by Oniga (1995) that the work in question was almost certainly written in Greek and that this is at base a literary conceit does not affect the truth of this point.

[19] Cf. also *Iliad*, IV. 433–38.

[20] See Grafton 1990:17 with n. 25, citing Momigliano 1976 (the correct date should be 1975).

[21] But see Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1061 (with Frankel's note) and Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 4.5.33.

[22] Tadmor 1989; cf. Naveh and Greenfield 1983:116; see ibid. for simultaneous translation by scribes. See on this also Greenfield 1985:698 with n. 5 for reliefs and wall paintings from the time of Tiglath Pileser III onwards showing pairs of scribes, one writing in Aramaic and the other in Akkadian; cf. ibid., 704, 708–09; and see Schaeder 1930:5ff.; Ghirshman 1954:163.

with the conquest by Cambyses in 525 B.C.E. Jewish mercenaries were employed there perhaps as early as the seventh, certainly in the sixth century B.C.E. Some were stationed in a military colony established in Elephantine in Upper Egypt, near the First Cataract, to help defend the southern border of Egypt against Nubian incursions.[23] Following the Babylonian conquest of Palestine in 587 B.C.E., the prophet Jeremiah was forced to go to Egypt with refugees from Judea, after Gedaliah, the Jewish governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, had been murdered.[24]

In the fifth century Aramaic documents from Elephantine, claims are made that imply not only a contemporary Jewish presence in Egypt but also the existence of a considerable Jewish population there before the Persian conquest. Thus, in a petition addressed to the Persian satrap Bagoas = Bagohi in Jerusalem, dated 408 B.C.E., the Jews in Elephantine complain about the destruction of the temple of their community and request its rebuilding. In this petition they argue that their forefathers had built this temple (described in the document as a splendid and costly edifice) in the Pharaonic age before the coming of Cambyses, and, although petitioners are known occasionally to magnify their grievances and to exaggerate their losses, the documents give an impression of a numerous and prosperous community.[25]

Nevertheless, the fifth century B.C.E. papyri which testify to the existence of numerous Jewish communities in Egypt do not give us any reason to think that these communities were large in number by the standards of the hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods.

It is clear that in the fifth century, the language of these Jews was Aramaic. But this changed gradually with time. In the period following the Persian domination, although a few Jewish inscriptions found in Egypt are written in Aramaic, most are written in Greek.[26] These few Aramaic inscriptions may indicate that Aramaic did not entirely disappear as a language used by Jews in Egypt, at least in the earlier part of the Ptolemaic period after the death of Alexander in 323 B.C.E. Some Aramaic may have survived from the Persian

[23] See, for example, Porten 1968:16ff.; and on the earlier use of Jewish mercenaries in Egypt see ibid., 8ff.

[24] Jeremiah 40ff.; II Kings 25, 22ff.

[25] The text is in Cowley 1923, no. 30 (and no. 31, a copy of no. 30): from Pap. 30, lines 13–14 (Cowley, p. 113). The satrap's answer is in Cowley 1923, no. 32; and cf. Sachau 1911:3–27; plates I–III; see also ibid., pp. 28ff. and plate IV. See also Porten 1968:110ff.; Pritchard 1950:491–92 (see also Pritchard 1958:279ff. for translations (by H. L. Ginsberg) of the petition and the satrap's answer).

[26] For Jewish inscriptions in Egypt see Frey, *CIJ*, II, 354ff.; see also D. M. Lewis, in *CPJ*, III, 138ff. The vast majority of these are in Greek. A few, from the early Ptolemaic period, are in Aramaic; and the equally small number of Hebrew inscriptions (see Lewis, *op.cit.*, 165) are too late to be of interest here. For other Aramaic documentation from hellenistic Egypt see Hengel, *CHJ*, II, 195 and notes there.

period;[27] the earliest of the new settlers would have brought their Aramaic speech with them. In any case, migration of Aramaic-speaking Jews into Egypt continued into the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, in the first century. In spite of this, after the middle of the second century B.C.E., Aramaic seems to have disappeared from the written documentation of Egyptian Jewry.[28]

In the Persian period, there is no evidence of Jewish contact with Greeks in Egypt, no travellers, traders, or permanent inhabitants in Egypt (as in Naukratis), and no evidence elsewhere in north Africa, such as in Cyrene. It is not known how long the Jews who were settled in Egypt before Alexander survived as Jews and whether any significant number remained in the second half of the fourth century, although it has been suggested that some of the Jewish settlements still existing in Ptolemaic Egypt went back to the Persian period.[29] We can discern no continuity in religious practice or cultural tradition between the Aramaic-speaking Jews who had long been settled in Egypt and Alexandrian Jewry in the hellenistic period. The pre-Ptolemaic Jewish settlers seem to have inherited pre-exilic Judaism; they seem to have known little or nothing of the Judaism that developed in Palestine after the return from the Babylonian exile. It has been pointed out that in the Aramaic papyri there is no reference to the Law, no memory of the Exodus, no allusion to the Sabbath.[30] Indeed, it has been claimed, perhaps too radically, that the Jews of Elephantine were polytheists who believed in the God of Israel as the chief, but not the only, god.[31] Whatever their reasons or methods, they succeeded in preserving some kind of Jewish identity, along with their Aramaic speech, for a fairly long time.

JEWS IN HELLENISTIC EGYPT

With the Macedonian conquest, a radical demographic change took place in the Jewish diaspora: the Jewish population in Egypt increased rapidly and dramatically. Although we cannot estimate reliably how many Jews there were, all our evidence indicates that they were very numerous in Egypt practically from the start of Macedonian rule.[32]

Is it conceivable that what appear to be large concentrations of Jews in the hellenistic diaspora could have originated in what was, after all, a geographically

[27] In the Persian period Aramaic in Egypt was not confined to Jews; it was the language of the Persian administration in that country. See Gardiner 1966:369f.

[28] See Tcherikover, *CPJ*, I, 30.

[29] Bell 1957:32; and see Hengel, in *CHJ*, II, 187ff.

[30] But there are indications of Sabbath observance on ostraca; see Porten 1968:126f., with notes. For Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, see pap. 21 (in Cowley 1923), and for ostraca see Porten 1968:131ff. with notes.

[31] Bell 1957:28ff.; cf. also Meyer 1912:38ff.; 67ff.; 91ff.; and Porten 1968:173ff.

[32] See on this especially Wasserstein 1996a.

very small area, Palestine? Egypt offers a good case in point and is especially relevant to our concerns here. Whatever its exact size, the Jewish population of Alexandria was undoubtedly large. From the earliest times onwards our documentation for these Jews is, for practical purposes, all in Greek. These two facts inescapably lead us to the conclusion that the origins of the Jews of this city cannot be sought only in Palestine.

We can account for some of the Jews of Egypt. A good number were captives or descendants of captives who had been brought to Egypt from Palestine by Ptolemy Soter. We are told that their numbers amounted to more than one hundred thousand, of whom about thirty thousand are said to have been stationed in fortresses or military settlements. Even if the numbers are exaggerated, they must still have been considerable.[33] Other settlers had come earlier, to take part in the foundation of the city; more are said to have come after Alexander's death.[34] In any case, there is ample evidence throughout the centuries, in papyri and in inscriptions, of a Jewish presence in the *chora*; and from these communities, whether they survived from the Persian period or were newly formed following the Greek conquest, some must eventually have come to Alexandria.[35]

Even so, this alone cannot satisfactorily account for the large number of Jews in Alexandria in the first century, unless we assume massive and large-scale proselytization among Greek-speaking elements of local populations, in Alexandria as elsewhere.[36]

In all such estimates and in all calculations based on them one must remember that it is only in Egypt that we have more than isolated pieces of information on Jewish population sizes; practically everywhere else in the Diaspora our information is poor, sketchy and mostly unrelated to the wider picture. Even when we have welcome and sometimes striking evidence of Jewish presence in places other than Palestine and Egypt, our witnesses testify to the presence of Jews – to the time of their arrival, to their social status, to their degree of hellenization – but on the whole they are unhelpful where statistical questions are involved. In metropolitan Greece, for example, we have evidence of Jews very early: an inscription from the Amphiareion of Oropus securely dated to the first half of the third century B.C.E. concerns the manumission of a Jewish slave, Moschus the son of Moschion. The fact that the slave's father has a Greek

[33] *Letter of Aristeas*, §§4, 12f.; and Tcherikover, in *CPJ*, I, 4 with n. 10; Tcherikover 1959:273; Baron 1952:I, 172; Fraser 1972:I, 57 and II, 141, n. 162; Tramontano 1931:20ff.; Bell 1957:32. See Hengel, in *CHJ*, II, 187–94, and Harmatta 1959 (quoted by Hengel, *loc. cit.*, at 187, n. 2). See also, in *CPJ*, III, 197ff., Appendix III, for a list of places of Jewish habitation in Egypt.

[34] Hecataeus ap. Jos. *c. Ap.* 1.194; and see Stern 1974:I, 43.

[35] See *CPJ*, I–III, *passim* (especially vol. III, Appendix II: Prosopography of the Jews in Egypt; and Appendix III: Places of Jewish habitation in Egypt); and *CIJ*, II, 355–446.

[36] See on this theme Harnack 1924:13ff. with copious notes.

name clearly points to the arrival of Jewish captives in Greece not long after the beginning of Macedonian expansion outside Greece. As is stressed by D. M. Lewis, the contents of the inscription bear witness to the advanced stage of hellenization of both father and son. But there is nothing here to help us with estimates of numbers.[37]

Still, even with such reservations, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that many Gentiles, mostly of Greek-speaking origin, though possibly with an admixture of hellenized or semi-hellenized non-Greeks, joined the Jewish communities in various places in the newly hellenized world: in Asia Minor, in the Syrian area, in Egypt, and even in north Africa to the west of Egypt.[38] We can only speculate about the elements in pre-destruction Judaism that attracted such proselytes. But there seems to be no doubt that, whatever their motives, many men and women were attracted to Judaism. Jewish proselytization seems to have begun as early as the Persian period. Despite what the Bible reports about the origin of the Samaritans, their cult, in one way or another, may well reflect the effects of some kind of missionary activity or of other reasons for conversion to Judaism. In Egypt under Persian rule, too, there is some evidence for non-Jews joining the Jewish community; thus, the occurrence of Egyptian theophoric names in the Elephantine papyri has been understood as providing evidence for such a process.[39] But the catalyst for the process of large-scale conversion to Judaism was probably the cultural and moral character of the society that emerged from the meeting and mingling between hellenism and oriental civilizations after the conquests of Alexander.

However that may be, there is no reason to doubt that the process of Jewish proselytisation continued throughout the Ptolemaic and early imperial periods. Proselytization no doubt added much to the numerical strength of Diaspora Jewry. The proselytes themselves, by virtue of their backgrounds, must have contributed no less to the hellenization of that Jewry.

The Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt used Greek at a very early stage of their settlement there. We have Greek papyri written by or for Jews from the middle of the third century B.C.E.[40] Synagogues of Greek-speaking Jews seem always to have been known as προσευχαί.[41] They are documented in Egypt as early

[37] See D. M. Lewis 1957.

[38] On this and on Jewish proselytism among populations of non-hellenic, for example, Phoenician, origin, see Baron, 1952:I, 172ff. with notes.

[39] See Meyer 1912:39.

[40] Cf., for example, *CPJ*, nos. 12 and 13 (Fayyum), probably from the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus; and other papyri in the same collection. Cf. also no. 18, ibid., of 260 B.C.E.

[41] For the term προσευχή, see *CPJ*, III, 35, on no. 473, line 7. The word συναγωγή is often applied to Jewish communities: see *CPJ*, I, 7, n. 21; Schürer 1973–87:II, 439f., with notes, nn. 60f.; III.1, 90ff.; but often, especially outside Egypt, it was also used for the place of worship.

as the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–221 B.C.E.), in the middle of the third century, and through the second century and into the first.[42] Thus, it is not surprising that the Jews of Egypt early felt the need to translate into Greek, the language of their daily life, at least those portions of their scriptures that were read as part of the service in their synagogues. Yet although προσευχαί are attested in Ptolemaic Egypt already in the third century B.C.E., we know too little of the forms of the order of service in these synagogues and we know little of how worship – and the concomitant instruction of the faithful – was organized in contemporary Palestine, outside the Temple in Jerusalem, in the villages and towns of the countryside.[43] Moore suggested that the synagogue as a fixed institution may have originated in spontaneous gatherings of Jews in Babylonia and other lands of their exile on Sabbaths and feasts and fast days.[44] Ezra Fleischer has argued plausibly and forcefully that the synagogue before the destruction of 70 C.E. was not a place of prayer and worship at all but solely and exclusively an institution for reading and studying the Scripture;[45] its function was purely didactic, not at all liturgical. If Fleischer is right, that would further strengthen the argument that the Greek translation of Scripture was made to fill a role in the prime function of the synagogue. It is true that Fleischer's case may not be fully applicable to the Jewry of Ptolemaic Egypt. The usual name for the synagogue in Egypt was, as has been seen, προσευχή. This name for the institution seems to have been coined by the hellenistic Jews in Egypt and is attested, as has been seen, as early as the third century;[46] the term clearly denotes a place of prayer, and it leads inescapably to the conclusion that organized communal prayer was an essential part of the function of the institution. But even so there can be no doubt that in Egypt as in Palestine the reading and study of the Law played an exceptionally large, important and central part in the service of the Synagogue.[47]

[42] See D. M. Lewis on the inscriptions numbered 1440 (Schedia-Kafr ed Douar) and 1532a (Arsinoe-Crocodilopolis), in *CPJ*, III, 141, 164. See also Schürer 1973–87:II, 425, with notes. For synagogues in hellenistic Egypt in general see *CPJ*, I, 7ff.; Krauss 1922:261ff. For the second century see *P. Tebt.* I, 86, 18 (Arsinoe, cf. *CPJ*, I, 247ff.) and for the first century Philo, *Leg. ad Gaium*, 132ff.; *in Flacc.* 41ff.; *Sp. Leg.*, II. 62; *Hypothetica*, ap. Eus. *PE* VIII. 7, 12–13. See also Hegermann in *CHJ*, II, esp. 137 and 151ff.; Hengel, *CHJ*, II, 196f.

[43] On the origin of the synagogue and its function as a house of study no less than as a house of prayer see Schürer 1973–87:II (Eng.) 415–63, with additional references; Krauss 1922:50–102; Elbogen 1931:passim, esp. 444ff.; 1972; Moore 1932–40:I, 281ff. (with nn. in vol. III).

[44] Moore 1932–40:I, p. 283.

[45] Fleischer 1991.

[46] The word προσευχή does not normally seem to have been used in that sense in Palestine; for apparent exceptions see Fleischer 1991:408; and Schürer 1973–87:II, 439ff., with n. 61. Schürer notes that the occasional pagan use may be due to imitation of the Jewish expression.

[47] On the connection between liturgy and the origin of the Septuagint see Thackeray 1923.

The Jews of Alexandria, in translating the Law into Greek, were responding precisely to the same need as their Aramaic-speaking co-religionists in Palestine and Babylonia. Those Jews, when they lost their familiarity with Hebrew, made arrangements for the Hebrew text to be translated (during the reading of the Law in the synagogue) into Aramaic for the benefit of those congregants who no longer had a sufficient knowledge of the Holy Tongue. This at first was done orally.[48] In the course of time a more or less "standard" version may have become both familiar and crystallized; and at some stage this was fixed in a written form. Some elements of extant *targumim* may predate the Christian era by some centuries.[49] The custom of having the text of Scripture translated into the local vernacular during divine service was long-lasting and widespread and was later inherited by the Christians from their Jewish forebears. Its existence in Christian congregations (from Greek into Aramaic) is reported from Scythopolis (now Beth Shean) in the third century and from Jerusalem in the fourth;[50] the synagogal office of the *meturgeman* (translator) was paralleled and performed in the Church by an officer bearing the same title translated into Greek, ἑρμηνευτής.[51]

Although the earliest Jewish settlers in Alexandria no doubt brought with them their Aramaic speech and some degree of familiarity with Hebrew at least as a literary and liturgical language, they soon learned to speak Greek and forgot Hebrew.[52] As early as ca. 310 B.C.E. we hear of a Jew in Egypt bearing a

[48] See Elbogen 1931:186ff.; Krauss 1922: index s.v. Dolmetscher, and Hebrew index s.vv. מתורגמן, תורגמן. On the regulations concerning the *meturgeman* see, for example, PT Megilla, cap. 4, 74f. and Massekhet Sopherim, for example, cap. 9, cap. 11, cap. 12. On the term (מ)תורגמן see Bacher 1899 (1965):206.

[49] On written *targumim* see Schürer 1973–87:II, 452–53 with notes. It is remarkable that our written Targumim include those passages which, by rabbinic injunction (Megilla IV.10; Tosefta, Megillah IV,31, and more on p. 228 of Zuckermandel's edition; cf. PT Megillah 75c; *Siddur* of R. Sa'adya Gaon (ed. Meqitsei Nirdamim), Jerusalem 1949/1:368. Cf. Elbogen 1931:189–90 with notes), were expressly excluded from the public translation of the lesson from the Law.

[50] See Violet 1896:110, on Procopius of Scythopolis, who served in the church as ἀναγνώστης and ἑρμηνευτής (lector and translator); and cf. ibid., 4. Cf. also *Peregrinatio Egeriae* (ca. C.E. 400), cap. 47 (*PL*, Suppl. I, Paris, 1958, col. 1091), who describes translation from Greek into Syriac in Palestine and also reports that in Jerusalem lessons were translated into Latin as well, for those who knew neither Greek nor Syriac.

[51] See previous note; Epiphanius, *Expositio fidei*, 21 (GCS p. 522.22; M.42.825 A) mentions ἑρμηνευταί in Christian churches both for the scriptural readings and for the sermons (προσομιλίαι). See Schürer 1973–87:II, 453, n. 131; Harnack 1924:654; Krauss, 1922:134 and 176–79, also for the rabbinic sources; Schlatter 1898:52f.; Lieberman 1942:2, citing also the *Diatessaron* of Tatian, 1881:19, and n. 1.

[52] Hebrew survived, in some parts of Palestine at least, for longer than some scholars used to think. See now J. Barr, in *CHJ*, II, 79ff.; but see Schwartz 1995. However, in the hellenized Diaspora, Hebrew was soon forgotten so thoroughly that in the course of time, its name came to be

Greek name.[53] In the third century only about 25 per cent of the names of Jewish military settlers found in the papyri are Hebrew; the rest apparently are Greek.[54] As time went on, the number of those who had never had any acquaintance with either Hebrew or Aramaic must have increased; for the hellenistic diaspora communities continued for long periods to absorb Greek-speaking proselytes. As in Palestine and Babylonia, so in Alexandrian synagogues too, during the reading from the Pentateuch, the Hebrew text may have been orally translated at stated intervals by a person specially appointed for this task. We certainly need not doubt the antiquity of the Palestinian custom to allot a prominent part in the service of the synagogue to the reading of scriptural texts, and it is likely that this custom in Palestine in one form or another goes back to the beginnings of the Second Commonwealth.

The practice of reading the pentateuchal text during the synagogue service varied between one- and three-year cycles. Rabbinic statements are fairly explicit: we are told in the Babylonian Talmud that the three-year cycle was current in Palestine but apparently not elsewhere, and the same source informs us that in Babylonia the Law was read in an annual cycle.[55] However, we cannot be sure at what precise date one cyclical arrangement or another was introduced and where precisely one or the other arrangement was adopted.[56] It is likely that a regulated public reading from the Law had been the custom of Israel long before the canon of the Old Testament was fixed and indeed before some of the books in that canon were written.[57] The biblical injunction in Deuteronomy 31:10–13 refers to the public reading of the Law once every seven years, on the Feast of Tabernacles in the Shemitta Year. Whatever the precise chronology of the post-exilic liturgical developments, at some stage provision was made for the regulation of the reading of Scripture as part of public worship. Though we are not required to assume that the same, specific, systematic order was observed and always prevailed in all the communities of Israel in the Holy Land and in the Diaspora, we can be reasonably sure that some sort of generally prevailing order and system existed not later than the first century B.C.E. both in Palestine and in

confused with various forms of the name of the Aramaic language, such as Aramaic, Syrian, Chaldaean.

[53] *Pap. Cowley* 81 (Cowley 1923:190ff., esp. 192, line 10 [Aramaic]), dated by Cowley ca. 300; but see also Hengel, in *CHJ*, II, 187, n. 2; Harmatta 1959.

[54] Hengel, ibid., 188; Tcherikover, *CPJ*, I, 148.

[55] BT Megilla 29b; see also Elbogen 1931:160.

[56] The three-year cycle was certainly still in use in some communities as late as the twelfth century: see Maimonides, *Hilkhoth Tephilla*, 13, 1; see also Benjamin of Tudela 1907:63 (Hebrew text), 70 (English); see also Schürer 1973–87:II, 450f., and especially n. 120; and the three-year cycle may even have been in use as late as 1670: cf. Elbogen 1931:161.

[57] Even the additional reading from the prophetic books, though of more recent origin than the reading from the Law, is likely to be older than the fixed prophetic canon: see Elbogen 1931: 175.

hellenistic Jewry.[58] And beyond that, more importantly for the present purpose, without needing to insist on a universally accepted systematic order of the scriptural readings, we can also be sure that reading from Scripture was an essential and characteristic part of divine worship in the synagogue from very early times. The fact that the Law was the first part of the Bible to be translated and seems to have existed as a separate corpus may indeed indicate that reading from the Law in an ordered and regulated sequence became an obligatory part of the liturgy of Greek-speaking Jews before the same was true of the prophetic books.

The systematic ordering of the biblical passages to be read in the synagogue served didactic no less than liturgical purposes. Philo, for example, tells us: "[To this day the Jews assemble on the Sabbath to study the 'philosophy' of their fathers] For what are our places of prayer throughout the cities but schools of prudence and courage and temperance and justice and also of piety, holiness and every virtue by which duties to God and men are discerned and rightly performed?"[59] In Alexandria, as in Palestine, both purposes were probably served, at first, by a merely oral translation, and it is not at all unlikely that in time an oral version of Greek pentateuchal readings, accompanied by a similar version of prophetic passages, became more or less fixed. In a culture of largely oral tradition such crystallization of an orally transmitted text is easy to imagine.

This is a possibility, but no more. In any case, there seems to be no trace whatsoever of the existence of a written Greek translation of the Old Testament before the Septuagint. Whether the LXX as we have it is the version that was made by the first redactors of the Greek Old Testament is not a question germane to our purpose. There is no evidence to support the suggestion that a Greek translation of the Old Testament may have existed in the Temple of Leontopolis, and that Ps.-Aristeas wrote his work in order to establish the authority of the Septuagint as against that of the Leontopolis text and, in particular, against its possibly tendentious variants.[60]

Could there be an older legend behind the *Aristeas Letter*? An ingenious case was made for this notion by Herrmann.[61] He tried to show, by painstaking analysis of the legend as we have it in the *Letter*, that this exhibits a structure

[58] See Schürer 1973–87:II, 424ff.; also Tosephta Megilla 4, 13, with Lieberman, *Tosephta Ki-Fshuta*, 117f., on בית הכנסת של לועזות; and, on the reading of the Law in synagogues, Philo, *de spec. leg.*, II. 62; id., *Hypothetica*, ap. Eus. *PE* VIII. 7. 12–13. As the English translators of Schürer point out, II, 450, n. 118, the triennial cycle is not mentioned anywhere in tannaitic literature.

[59] *Vita Mosis*, II, 216. Cf. id., *de opif. mundi*, 128; *de spec. leg.* II, 62; and *de legatione*, 156; *Hypothetica*, 7, 11ff.; cf. also Josephus, *c.Ap.* II 175; and id., *Ant.* XVI, 43, both cited earlier; also Acts 13:15 (Antioch); 27 (with reference to Jerusalem); 44; and 15:21: James, speaking in Jerusalem. See Schürer 1973–87:II, 425, n. 3 for further NT passages testifying to the didactic function of Bible readings in the synagogue; and ibid., 426–27.

[60] Momigliano 1932, esp. 170; Dalbert 1954:93; Jellicoe 1965–66, esp. 144ff.; 1968:50. On Leontopolis see Wasserstein 1993.

[61] See Herrmann and Baumgärtel 1923.

from which he believes it possible to isolate accretions (the work of Ps.-Aristeas); what is left when these are taken away, so his argument runs, must have been the legend in its older form. This reconstruction cannot be verified. However, even if accepted, this would not point to the existence of a Greek version of the Bible different from (and perhaps older than) that of the Seventy, but only of an older and somewhat different version of the story of its origin. This is a rather different thing. Further, Momigliano assumes a very late date for the *Letter*, putting it at such a distance from the origin of the LXX that we do not need to argue from the dating of the legend as we have it in the *Letter* to the existence of a different and perhaps older version of the Septuagint.[62] Such testimony (as distinct from clear, probative evidence) as we have for a pre-Septuagintal Greek version is, as will be argued below (see Chapter 2), to be rejected.

The existence of a Greek translation of Scripture facilitated Jewish proselytization in the hellenistic and Graeco–Roman periods. Jewish missionary activity continued well into the Christian era and seems to have competed with Christian propaganda at least until the Hadrianic period, in the first third of the second century.[63] The availability of the Bible in Greek prepared the ground for the Christian mission to the Jews of the Diaspora as well as to gentiles wherever Greek was spoken. The houses of prayer and study of Jewish communities in the diaspora served the Apostles and other early Christian missionaries as way stations; it was from the Jewish synagogues that they expanded their activity to the gentile neighbours of their Jewish hosts.[64] It should not be forgotten that the earliest generations of the followers of the new religion had no other Bible than the Old Testament.[65] In the first Christian centuries, the Greek Bible was used, even in the western parts of the empire, both in Jewish synagogues and in Christian churches. The use of Latin translations seems to be attested only toward the end of the second century; in Rome, Greek continued to be used well into the third century, though by the middle of the second century Latin probably began to compete with Greek in Christian worship and Scripture.[66]

[62] Momigliano 1932:168 posits a date ca. 110–100 B.C.E.

[63] See, for example, Harnack 1924:17, quoting Schürer 1905:40ff. on the adoption of the Jewish Sabbath and of the seven-day week in general. But cf. Goodman 1994: Chapters 3–4.

[64] See, for example, Harnack 1924:5ff., 14ff., 20ff., and elsewhere; and on the role of the Greek Old Testament in the Christian mission 289ff. Bardy 1948:I, 8 makes the important point that the role of the Greek-speaking St Paul was of great importance in the preaching of the Christian gospel to members of the Greek-speaking communities of the Jewish diaspora (and even in Palestine) because the first Christians of Jerusalem would have been unable to speak to such people in Greek. (There were, of course, other communities too, whose language was, generally, Aramaic, in Palestine and in Mesopotamia.)

[65] See Harnack 1924:5ff., 14ff., 20ff., and esp. 294, n. 2 with further references.

[66] Harnack 1924:799ff.; and the literature cited in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 1974:718, 996.

It is, of course, true that the Greek Bible in the East did not, from the earliest Christian centuries, enjoy the near-monopoly held by the Latin Bible in the West for well over one thousand years, practically until the Reformation. In the East from the early Christian centuries there existed translations of the Bible into oriental languages, and these translations were (and are) read and used for liturgical purposes from antiquity to our day. Thus there were early translations into Aramaic, not only Jewish but also Christian too, viz., Syriac, into Armenian, Coptic, etc.[67]

Nevertheless, this does not diminish the importance of the Greek translation. That was the first Bible used by the new Christian Church in its proselytizing mission to the Gentiles. It had an especially authoritative status, in any case, because it had been translated by Jews directly from the Hebrew original and, so it was believed, had been produced under divine inspiration. Other facts underline its historical importance. It was the text used by the Byzantine Church, the dominant Church in the East (at least within the frontiers of the Empire) for many centuries; even more importantly, that text served as the basis for all or at least most[68] oriental translations of Scripture and indeed for the oldest Latin translations as well. The Vetus Latina was made from it, and even the Vulgate *iuxta hebraicam veritatem*, as it left the hands of Jerome, is not quite as "Hebrew" as Jerome might have wished to make it. Although he planned to revise the text of the Latin Bible so as to make the translation as faithful as possible to the Hebrew original, he knew that there were limits to what the Christian churchgoer could tolerate.[69] Indeed, Jerome did not always succeed in freeing himself entirely from the shackles of the Septuagint background of the Vetus Latina, partly because the Greek Bible in itself as well as in its Latin version had undergone a process of christianization from which there was no return.[70] In some respects, the tradition of the Church had, by the time of Jerome, already sanctified some parts of the Latin text of the Vetus Latina to such an extent that Jerome's "Hebraized" version simply could not replace it. This is seen most clearly in the case of Psalms. Their use in the liturgy of the Western Church had ensured for the so-called Gallican Psalter (itself the work of Jerome, who ca. 392 had revised the Old Latin version on the basis of Origen's text of the Septuagint) a popularity that Jerome's new version based on the Hebrew original could not displace.[71] Thus it is this rather than the "Hebrew"

[67] Cf. Roberts 1951; Rabin 1984; Tov 1989.

[68] The case of the Peshitta may be different, in that there appears to be Jewish involvement in its production, and links with the Targumim.

[69] See *Epist. ad Suniam et Fretellam* and *Praef. Evang. ad Damasum*. See also the preface to the Vatican edition of the Vulgate of 1592 (the "Clementine" edition).

[70] Among the best known examples of this is the translators' treatment of Lamentations 4:20.

[71] It is this "Gallican Psalter" that is found in the printed editions of the Vulgate and has been obligatory in all post-Tridentine editions ever since the Clementine edition published in 1592

Psalter that until very recently was the version used in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. The "Hebrew" Psalter of Jerome was hardly known among Catholics for many centuries, and it fell to a Protestant scholar (de Lagarde) to draw sustained attention to it in modern times.[72]

The importance of the LXX and the value attached to it throughout Christian history cannot be overestimated. As we shall see in Chapter 10, it still plays a role in the argumentation of some Christian thinkers concerning the inspiration of Holy Writ, a role quite independent of that which the LXX naturally performs in the textual criticism of the Bible by virtue of being the oldest non-Hebrew witness to the text of the Old Testament as read in antiquity.

It is thus Christian history and Christian use that gave the LXX its greatest historical importance. However, there is no reason to think that the translation was originally made for any other need than that felt by the Jews of Alexandria (and of other Jewish communities in the hellenistic diaspora) for a translation of Scripture to be used in worship, to be read for edification, and to serve as a text to be studied by the faithful. Proselytism, propaganda, apologetics, possibly even polemics, all might be served by the existence of the translation; they are unlikely to have been the reason for making it. Similarly, the claim made in the *Letter of Aristeas* that the translation owed its origin to royal initiative and patronage is part of Jewish and possibly also Jewish pro-Ptolemaic propaganda but is supported neither by historical evidence nor by any plausible consideration of probability.[73]

It is never safe to conclude the purpose of an action from its effect, but for what it is worth, it may be noted that well into the Christian period, the Septuagint was read by Jews and Christians only. Even in the Christian period such evidence as we have of pagan acquaintance with Scripture only highlights the scantiness of that acquaintance: a few words in περὶ ὕψους, ascribed to the third century C.E. rhetorician Longinus but probably written in the first century C.E.;[74] somewhat more extensive knowledge in Celsus (a second century polemicist against Christianity fragments of whose work *contra Christianos* have survived through being quoted by Origen in his work *c. Celsum*) and the pagan philosopher Porphyry do not amount to very much. Numenius in the second half of the second century (who seems to have influenced Porphyry),

on the authority of Pope Clement VIII (a revised and corrected edition of that issued in 1590 *Sixti Quinti Pontificis Maximi iussu*).

[72] See *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. Vulgate, with rich bibliography; see also the entry on de Lagarde.

[73] Veltri 1994; Canfora 1987, 1989 and 1996; and Collins 2000 seem a little too open to the persuasiveness of the legend retailed in the *Letter of Aristeas*.

[74] Ps.-Longinus, 9.9; see Russell 1964:92–94, with references, especially to articles by Mutschmann, Norden, and Ziegler, to which add Bernays 1885:I, 351ff. See also Stern 1974:I, 361–65, with full discussion.

notable chiefly for his happily phrased question τί γάρ ἐστι Πλάτων ἢ Μωυσῆς ἀττικίζων ('What is Plato but Moses speaking in Attic?'), knew a few scraps of the Bible, which he may have learned from apologetic or polemical works written by Jews or Christians. He is cited, by Christian writers, not only as praising Moses but also as being acquainted with the Scriptures, though apart from a nearly exact quotation from Genesis 1:2, and a possible echo or two of biblical phraseology, there is nothing in his surviving writings that can be unequivocally asserted to be an actual quotation from the Septuagint or even a clear reference to a specific text in it.[75] What we have of this writer is less impressive than the bulk of modern learned discussion might lead us to believe. The occasional reminiscence of Old Testament texts that may be found in pagan inscriptions is interesting but is far from testifying to pagan knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. These too can be discounted for our purposes. All of this serves to confirm, in negative manner, that, at least so far as our evidence allows us to suppose, the LXX was read, well into the Christian period, only by Jews and Christians.

The Septuagint is at once the greatest achievement of hellenistic Jewry and its most important legacy to western mankind. Its creation was the response to an existing Jewish need; its effect was the preparation of the soil for the spread of the Christian gospel. With the disappearance from history of hellenistic Jewry much of what it had created disappeared from the historical memory of the people of Israel. The legacy of Greek-speaking Jewry survived almost exclusively in the Christian Church. Excepting only some references in rabbinic literature to a Greek translation of the Pentateuch by seventy (or seventy-two) elders from Jerusalem and to some alleged departures from the original Hebrew in that translation,[76] nothing of the Septuagint is found in the tradition of historical Judaism. We may disregard here the comparatively recent finds in the Dead Sea area, such as the Scroll of the Minor Prophets from Nahal Hever,[77] because, historically speaking, in the bi-millennial history of the Jewish people in exile, the discoveries in the caves of the Judaean desert are of no more account than the papyri found in the sands of Egypt.[78] Throughout the whole period from antiquity to their re-appearance in modern times they had been inaccessible and hence unknown to Jews. No post-talmudic rabbinic writer down to the Renaissance ever quotes from the Septuagint except for the well-known passages in the Talmud and the Midrash (to be studied later) in which

75 See especially Stern 1974–1984:II, 206–16, with discussion. See also Rinaldi 1989.
76 See later, Chapters 3–4.
77 Tov 1990.
78 Cf., e.g., P.Oxy 656 (Genesis); P.Oxy 3522 (Job?) cited by Tov 1990:12; cf. also P.Fouad 266; and cf. Waddell 1944; see on this Kahle 1947:172. For a list of Old Testament papyri published between 1855 and 1971 see O'Callaghan 1975. Most Greek Old Testament papyri of the later centuries are, of course, *prima facie* to be taken as being of Christian origin.

the story of the translation by the Seventy is cited.[79] The same is true, with such qualifications as impose themselves, even of the Aquila fragments found in the Cairo Geniza.[80] But these texts had no afterlife in historical Judaism. What we are concerned with is the living and life-giving survival of texts read and used in a living community, affecting the thought of that community, its beliefs and its customs, and, on another level, the transmission of its Holy Scriptures as well as their form and format. In these respects, there is no trace of the Septuagint in the Judaism that we know from history.

It is clear that the Septuagint as well as all other works of extant Jewish literature in Greek owe their survival to the Christian Church. This is true not only of works originally written in Greek, such as the works of Philo and Josephus, but also of Greek translations made from Hebrew originals, for instance some of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament.[81] It was the Christian Church that preserved the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha; it was the Christian Church that preserved the works of Philo and of Josephus; in particular, it was the Christian Church that preserved the Greek translation of the Old Testament, together with some legend(s) concerning the origin of that translation. One important consequence of this is that the Septuagint, as we have it, is a version that is contained in manuscripts written, without a single exception,[82] by Christian scribes and without exception contaminated by Christian scribes or editors.[83]

[79] For one or two apparent exceptions see Wiesenberg 1957/8:56, nn. 351–56, and id., ibid., contra Steinschneider, in *Hebräische Bibliographie*, VI, 1863, 114–15. Segal 1976:XVI; Rabinovitz 1976:183.

[80] For these see Burkitt 1897; Taylor 1900; Kahle 1947, 1959; Sokoloff-Yahalom 1978.

[81] No exception ever really proves a rule; but some apparent exceptions may be disregarded, explained away or used as an incentive for re-formulating the rule. For a striking illustration of this see Wasserstein 1983:111–12, n. 28. Cf. Wiesenberg 1957/8:56, with nn. 345–48. See also later.

[82] We again leave out of account here the Dead Sea material as well as Greek papyri from Egypt, even if any of the latter were to be of Jewish provenance.

[83] One example suffices to demonstrate the Christian character of all known manuscripts of the Septuagint. At Lamentations 4:20 the Hebrew has רוח אפינו משיח ה׳, which is correctly translated in the Authorised Version: 'The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord' (translated thus by only one, so far as we know, of the ancient versions, the Peshitta רוחא דאפין משיחה דמריא; that this was read by Syriac-speaking Christians in antiquity is shown, for example, by the fact that this is the reading quoted by Aphraates, *Demonstratio*, V.9 [*Patrologia Syriaca*, I.1, Paris, 1894, p. 200]. The divergence of the Peshitta from other Christian versions lends some further strength to the argument that this Syriac translation owes more to Jewish influences than other Christian translations.). Some, though not all, modern LXX *editions* have the correct translation: Πνεῦμα προσώπου ἡμῶν χριστὸς κυρίου . . .; and so do the Protestant translations, for example, the Authorised Version and Luther's German Bible. But all the manuscripts of the Septuagint without a single exception have χριστὸς κύριος. See the *apparatus criticus* of Rahlfs 1965 and that of the Septuagint of Göttingen 1976. Both editors read κυρίου in their text. The total unanimity of all the manuscripts must be due to a conscious, deliberate

The rabbinic references to the Greek translation of the Pentateuch may provide valuable testimony to "septuagintal" lections current in hellenistic Jewish antiquity. Similarly, the finds in the Dead Sea region contain important evidence for the text of the Greek Bible as read by ancient Palestinian Jews, and thus enable scholars to gain further access to the "Jewish" text of the Septuagint.[84] But it is clear that what we usually think of as *the* Septuagint lies outside later[85] Jewish history, owes its survival to the Christian Church and is shaped by Christian theological, ecclesiastical and liturgical needs and uses.

These needs and uses not only affect the form of the Greek Bible but also shape the accounts given in Jewish and Christian literature about the origin of the translation itself. Stories embodying these accounts are found in the tradition of the Jews and of the Christians and, to some extent, in the works of Muslim writers. We shall see that some motifs from these sources have entered even into traditions not directly related to either Judaism or Christianity. All these traditions are ultimately derived from the *Letter of Aristeas*, a product of hellenistic Jewish literature that we shall now consider directly.

decision that this should be the text read in Christian churches, and this decision clearly has a Christian background going back to the earliest times. The received Vulgate has taken over the Christian readings from the septuagintal text: Spiritus oris nostri Christus Dominus captus est in peccatis nostris. . . . This, in spite of the attempt by Jerome to restore to the Latin text the pristine purity of the Hebraica veritas. It is interesting to note that the New Vulgate (unlike other modern Catholic translations) has restored the reading corresponding to the masoretic text: unctus *Domini*.

[84] Additional help in this direction may be hoped for from the study of the Syro-Hexaplar, especially the recently discovered new Syro-Hexaplaric materials (see the works of Vööbus listed in the Bibliography) because the seventh-century Syriac translation by Paul of Tella is thought to be based on the septuagintal text in the fifth column of Origen's Hexapla (hence Syro-Hexaplar; not to be confused with the Peshitta, the standard Syriac Bible of the Aramaic-speaking Christian East); and it has been argued that Origen used Jewish, not Christian, manuscripts of the LXX for establishing the text of this fifth column (Vööbus 1975:5). The Syro-Hexaplar might therefore afford us access to the "Jewish septuagint", at least as it was read by Origen in the third Christian century. However, difficulties and doubts remain, especially such as arise from well-grounded suspicions about the conflation of different sources underlying the work of Paul of Tella in the form in which we have it (e.g., Vööbus 1975:13–15; 39–43). Not only for the fresh opportunities offered by this material but also for the caution with which it must be approached, see Vööbus 1971; 1975; 1983.

[85] In this context, "later" refers to the period following on the first third of the second Christian century, though we must not forget that the Bible was read in Greek in Greek-speaking Jewish communities for centuries thereafter. That period can, however, safely be left out of account at this point precisely because hellenistic Jewry as such disappeared without leaving discernible traces in the exegetical tradition of rabbinic Judaism. We need do no more than compare the enormous contribution of the LXX, and of Philo, to Christian interpretation of Scripture with their miserable echoes in rabbinic literature of antiquity and the middle ages.

1

The *Letter of Aristeas*

The *Letter of Aristeas* is a curious and paradoxical work. It is best known as what purports to be a contemporary, and thus the earliest extant, account of the translation of Scripture into Greek. It is important not least because, with the exception of the Septuagint itself, it is the longest of the extant products of Alexandrian Judaism in the Ptolemaic period and because it is the most complete piece of Alexandrian prose surviving in its original dress.[1] Yet its historical significance derives from its function in Christian history rather than in the history of hellenistic literature. It was quite obviously written by a Jew largely for Jewish purposes, but, with the possible exception of one short period, it has played no role in Jewish life. Like all other extant works of hellenistic Jewish literature, including the Septuagint itself, it has survived exclusively in the Christian Church, serving purposes only incidentally related to any that could have been envisaged by its author.

The text of the *Letter*, of which we have a good number of witnesses,[2] appears exclusively in manuscripts of Octateuch catenae.[3] (*Catenae* are collections of exegetical quotations from theological and other writers that follow the sequence of the text and are attached to particular verses of the Bible. The Octateuch is the first eight books of the Bible: Genesis to Deuteronomy, together with Joshua, Judges and Ruth. The creation of catenae on the Octateuch has Byzantine origins.) Indeed, it has been conjectured that this conjunction may go back to Procopius of Gaza (c. 475–538) and that the text

[1] Fraser 1972:I, 703.

[2] For details see the editions of Wendland 1900, Tramontano 1931, and Pelletier 1962.

[3] One of the manuscripts, in Istanbul, copied in the twelfth or thirteenth century, also contains a paraphrase of the work prepared by Isaac Porphyrogenitus Sebastocrator, son of the Byzantine emperor Alexis I Komnenos (reigned 1081–1118). Isaac tells us, at great length and in rather flowery prose, that he prepared the paraphrase in order to relieve the text of its superfluities and thus bring out its content more clearly; see Pelletier 1962:10–13, with references, including especially Ouspensky 1907.

of the *Aristeas Letter* may already have had a place in the editions of the Greek Bible made by Pamphilus and Eusebius.[4] This presumably should mean that the extant manuscript tradition in its entirety goes back to a common ancestor in the early sixth century or possibly even in the middle of the third century.[5]

The date of the *Letter* is still a matter of scholarly debate. The most probable date for the composition of this text is ca. 200 B.C.E. though a later date is, on various grounds, preferred by some modern scholars.[6] It has justly been pointed out that, in the *Letter*, the king is never called Philadelphus. By the end of the second century this name became quite common in its application to Ptolemy II, whereas before that it had been used only for the Queen Arsinoe II. This too would support a date rather earlier than the dates now current in scholarly discussions. The ignorance of the *Letter*'s author concerning facts about the court of Philadelphus shows that he is not who he pretends to be, but it shows no more than that. There is even one expression in the *Letter* that suggests a certain distance in time (§28, where the author, in describing how the king instructed Demetrius to prepare a report about the translation, tells us "For all business used to be transacted by these kings by means of decrees and with great precaution, and nothing was done in an off-hand or casual manner"). But the need to assume such a distance in time is satisfied by a distance of one or two generations. However, this debate, and its outcome, are not strictly relevant to our present purpose and would not affect our conclusions on the matters under discussion here.[7]

Much has been written on the diverse problems connected with the *Letter*. In respect of the problems that concern us here, three questions are of particular interest:

1. What can be learnt from the form the author has chosen to give to his work?
2. What were the later developments of the story of the translation as told in the *Letter of Aristeas*?
3. Can we know the approximate date and likely source of these developments?

In this chapter, our principal concern is with the first of these questions. The later developments of the story of the translation form the subject matter of following chapters. As to the date and source of these developments, it is argued in Chapters 3 and 4 that, although the most important development

[4] By Wendland 1900:VIIf. As will be seen in Chapter 10, there is a curious echo of this in the case of some of our other evidence for the legend.

[5] It should be added that Josephus quotes extensively from the *Letter* as well, in *Antiquities*, XII: 12–118 (see Chapter 2). For the significance of Josephus as a witness to the text of the *Letter*, see Stählin 1930.

[6] For example, Bar-Kochva 1996.

[7] Pfeiffer 1968:100 (relying on Volkmann, in *RE*, XXIII, 1645, 50ff.).

in the history of this legend was of significance primarily for the Christian Church, it was actually a product of Jewish cultural needs and that this fact, in its turn, enables us to fix the period in which it occurred within fairly narrow limits.

As to the first of these questions, what can be learned from the *Letter*'s form and structure, though the *Letter* has achieved fame as the earliest surviving account of the translation of the Law into Greek, the story of the translation is only a subsidiary theme of the composition. Far from being merely an appendix or a colophon to the Greek version of the Jewish Bible, the *Letter* is a collection of exercises in, and examples of, a number of well-known genres of hellenistic literature, such as epistles, ekphraseis,[8] symposia, questions and answers, and epideictic speeches.[9] That the epistolary form is no more than a literary device is shown by the fact that the author himself (in §1 and in §322, that is, in the very first and the very last words of the text, as well as in §8) uses the word διήγησις, "narration": the use of the epistolary form for this text is as purely formal as it is transparent.[10] It is only a fiction conforming to the widespread genre of the literary letter that we find in the classical, hellenistic and Graeco-Roman periods no less than in more modern times. The conventional form of the letter was widely used for political propaganda (e.g., Isocrates) and religious instruction (e.g., St Paul), for the teaching of scientific (Eratosthenes, Archimedes) and philosophical (Epicurus) doctrines, even as a vehicle for the theory of poetics (Horace), for erotic fiction (Aristaenetus, in the fifth century C.E.) and the display of stylistic elegance.[11] The literary genre of the Epistle included the genuine works of scientists, philosophers and poets and other works, no less genuine, by authors whose names we do not know and whose writings for one reason or another went into the world under an assumed name. Such letters must be carefully distinguished from spurious letters falsely ascribed to famous (or infamous) historical personages, like most letters in the Platonic corpus, and the letters allegedly written by Phalaris (tyrant of Acragas in the sixth century B.C.E.) which were shown, in the seventeenth century, to

[8] The *ekphrasis*, originally a type of the *progymnasma*, or rhetorical exercise, was in the hellenistic period an independent genre of literature, both in prose and in poetry, with its own rules and conventions (such as we find enumerated in Menander Rhetor). Later on it spilled over into art history and art criticism (e.g., in Philostratus), and into Latin literature (Statius). Objects of *ekphrasis* included works of art, buildings (e.g., in Pausanias), landscapes and so on.

[9] See Deissmann 1895:189ff. (with further references), 222 ff., and index, s.vv. Brief, Epistel (on the epistle as a literary form); and Mendels 1979 (on the banquet).

[10] Eissfeldt 1934:658.

[11] See K. Dziatzko, 'Brief' in *RE*, III, 836ff.; J. Sykutris, 'Epistolographie', in *RE* Suppl. V; Koskenniemi 1956. See now also Rosenmeyer 2001, though this work adopts a narrower definition of the letter than the ancient evidence permits.

be sophistic forgeries not earlier than the Christian era and perhaps to be dated as late as the fifth century;[12] or collections of letters purporting to be written by Hippocrates, Aristotle or Demosthenes. In the case of such deceptions, the motive was often, no doubt, monetary gain to be expected from the sale of *soi-disant* newly discovered works of famous authors to the great royal libraries of the hellenistic age that competed for such wares. Occasionally, mischievous mystification, hoaxes and the like too may have played a role, and there may have been cases in which manuscripts of imitative school exercises or similar productions were mistaken for the real thing.

Thus it is necessary to distinguish forgeries from other kinds of pseudepigraphy.[13] In ancient forgeries, the supposititious work is asserted to be that of a more or less well-known personage, such as Plato, Aristotle or others like those mentioned above; or perhaps a forger might claim to have discovered the works of one of the authors of whose genuine works only fragments were still to be found in existence. Some pseudepigrapha owe their existence to a different kind of motivation: conformity to an existing literary genre or letting pseudonymity take the place of anonymity. What is aimed at is not dishonest deception but rather a purely formal literary fiction.[14]

That the *Aristeas Letter* is a pseudepigraphon, that is that the author was not the man he pretended to be, is certain, and there have been few scholars who ever thought otherwise.[15] That, however, does not make Ps.-Aristeas a forger. To think of the *Letter* as a forgery[16] is not helpful to an understanding either of the genre or of the work. That the author chooses a name not otherwise known in Greek literature at once removes one of the constituent elements of a forgery. The author of the *Letter of Aristeas* is *not* the Jewish historian Aristeas.[17] That Aristeas was a Jew, but the pseudonymous author of the *Letter* does not pretend to be that historian. The whole point of the false authorial self-identification in the *Letter* is that the author wishes to present himself as a non-Jew; the *name* Aristeas is an invention that does not usurp the name of a historical figure otherwise known. There is no question here of ascription to a writer or otherwise famous person of remote or even recent antiquity or of forging a "newly-discovered" work or manuscript for monetary gain. The *Letter* is no more justly called a forgery than are the pseudepigrapha of

[12] Bentley 1697; 1699.

[13] See Speyer 1968/69; 1971; Fritz 1972; Brox 1977; Grafton 1990.

[14] Cf. Grafton 1990:17, with n. 24 on 131.

[15] There have been a few notable exceptions: Ussher and Vossius in the seventeenth century; Grinfield and Oikonomos in the nineteenth.

[16] Grafton 1990:14ff. (at 16: "Aristeas' letter is certainly a forgery").

[17] See, for example, Stählin 1930; Wacholder 1972 (with references). Holladay 1983:261–66 (with bibliography). On the alleged identity between the author of the *Letter* and the historian (who lived in the second or early first century B.C.E.) see Freudenthal 1874–75:I, 141–43.

the Old Testament and the New Testament. The mask of the alleged author is transparent; and there is no known face behind it.

But although the *Letter* is not a forgery in the vulgar sense of that word, it is true that there is an important element of pretence to be found in it. Unlike the pseudonymous name of the writer, his fictive *persona* is not chosen completely at random. He is represented as a pagan officer at the court of Ptolemy II Philadelphus,[18] precisely because the work is a piece of Jewish propaganda and a "pagan" author is presumably thought to be more plausible and persuasive than a Jew.

There is no reason to think that the epistolary form of the work is of any significance whatsoever, except insofar as it points to conventional conformity with established literary custom. The word *letter* itself does not appear in the title of the work as it appears in the manuscripts, which seem to say simply "Aristeas to Philocrates"; nor do the earliest writers who refer to it call it a letter; Josephus calls it a βιβλίον, Epiphanius a σύνταγμα, and Eusebius says of it "Περὶ τοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων Νόμου," which has more the air of a description than of a title.[19] As has been seen, the author himself refers to the work as a διήγησις, a technical expression for a "narration". But the introductory words and the general flavour of the phraseology throughout agree with the pattern of the literary epistolary style.

Another formal element in the composition, however, is of real interest, the fact that the work as a whole consists of a number of disparate sections and examples of diverse literary genres that have very little directly to do with each other and that are fitted together by a frame-story that is the organizing principle of the composition. This provides the scaffolding for the other sections, and it is this part of the work, alone, which has attracted the almost exclusive attention of readers in the history of Christian literature. It would certainly seem disproportionate to a critic not exclusively or primarily interested in the implications of this frame-story for the history of the biblical translation which was destined to become the Bible of the Christian Church.[20]

We are not concerned here with the question what kernel of historical truth may be hidden in the legend. It is clear that at least some of the details of this narrative are pure invention that could not possibly have been true. Thus the role of Demetrius Phalereus is an impossibility; it is generally agreed that he cannot have been Librarian under Ptolemy II and that he cannot have been connected with any initiative to have the Jewish scripture(s) translated into Greek in the reign of that ruler. He seems to have been involved in court intrigues regarding

[18] 308–246 B.C.E.; reigned from 285 as co-regent of Ptolemy I Soter and as sole ruler from 283.

[19] Pelletier 1962:47; Alexander 1984:580, and n. 8, with references.

[20] Thus for Isaac Porphyrogenitus (see above, n. 3) the principal point of the *Letter* is "the question of the translation of the Mosaic law" (Pelletier 1962:12).

the succession to Ptolemy I Soter, and he is said to have supported the claims of the son of Eurydike, Soter's third wife, against those of the son of Berenike, his fourth wife. Soter decided finally in favour of the latter, who eventually succeeded him as Ptolemy II (later called Philadelphus). Demetrius died (or was put to death) under suspicious circumstances (poisoned by the bite of an asp) at the beginning of that king's reign.[21]

Quite apart from the historicity of the story as such, other details are clearly *meant* to be literary embellishments, the most obvious among many here being the detail that the work of translation was carried to completion in the space of seventy-two days (§307), a number corresponding neatly and exactly to the number of the translators. Such embellishments abound in the work: lengthy descriptions of Palestine, Jerusalem, the Temple and its service; a long speech of the High Priest containing an apology for the Jewish Law; a description of the banquet given by the King in honour of the translators and much besides.

Students of literature are often, and sometimes rightly, suspicious of, and uneasy with, statistics. Still, there is virtue in numbers; occasionally they illuminate a situation more clearly than a lengthy argument could do. A reader coming to the *Letter of Aristeas* for the first time after having known of it only by report would be surprised to find how very small a part of it is concerned with the translation or with the translators. Of the 322 sections of the whole work (as it is organized in modern editions), sixteen (§§12–27) deal with the story of the liberation of the Jewish captives; thirty two (§§51–82) are taken up with the description of the royal presents sent to the High Priest; thirty eight (§§83–120) deal with the description of Jerusalem, of Palestine and of the priestly service in the Temple and so on; forty four (§§128–171) are devoted to an apologia for the Jewish Law (cast in allegorical mode) by the High Priest; and a huge one hundred and twenty (§§181–300, taking us almost to the end of the whole work) make up the longest part of the work by far, namely a record of the table talk at the banquet given by the king in honour of the translators, in which the wisdom of the Jewish elders is exemplified and illustrated by their wise and learned answers to a long series of testing questions put to them by the monarch. These sections have no direct relation or relevance to the story of the translation, yet they amount by themselves to well over two thirds of the length of the work as a whole. On the other hand, those sections which are in any way concerned with the translation or the translators take up a very small proportion of the work. These figures tell their own story; they indicate that the account of the translation is a *Rahmenerzählung*, a frame story, the purpose of

[21] See Wehrli 1968; Diogenes Laertius V, 78, citing Hermippus (cf. fr. 69 Wehrli, with his commentary, 1968:55, with further literature); see also Hody 1685, 1705; Tramontano 1931; Pfeiffer 1968:96, 101.

which it is to provide a framework for a multitude of other stories and examples of varied literary genres, much like the best known example of all frame stories, that of Scheherezade in the *Thousand and One Nights*. No doubt such a frame story may have a charm and value of its own, but its primary function is to serve as a structural element to enable the other stories to be accommodated and organized together.

Thus, it is not in the story of the translation of the Hebrew Law into Greek that we shall find the purpose of the whole composition. That purpose, rather, is to be found in what unites all the disparate elements of the *Letter of Aristeas*: the clearly apologetic and propagandistic purpose of the Jewish author who endeavours to show the pagan reader how well regarded the Jews were at the Ptolemaic court; how highly their Law was esteemed there; how persuasive their High Priest was in expounding the underlying principles of their Law and how learned their Elders in translating and thus explicating its text. The purpose can be seen also in the attempt, apparent in every part of the work, to display the Ptolemaic regime in the best possible light, not only in Egypt but also in the eyes of the Jewish population of Palestine and elsewhere. Such propagandistic purposes would easily fit either into the period immediately before the Seleucid conquest of Palestine (198 B.C.E.) or into the period of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids a generation later. Duality of propagandistic purpose is known to us from other Jewish apologetic literature of antiquity. It is, for instance, clear that the various writings of Josephus were written with the double purpose of glorifying the Flavian dynasty and of defending the reputation of the Jewish nation.[22]

What can the historian learn from the text of the *Letter*? The *Letter* does not, whatever else it does, document the history of the Greek translation of the Pentateuch, let alone of the entire Old Testament, nor does it offer authentic testimony to the procedures adopted by the real translators. The *Letter* is evidence *only* for the existence of *a* translation at the time the *Letter* was composed and for the existence of a wish to ascribe authority of some kind to that translation. It demonstrates that the Greek translation of the Jewish Scripture was thought to be important at an early stage in its existence.

This is all that we can be sure of from the *Letter*. Nothing else that the *Letter* purports to tell us can be regarded as securely founded. There is no reason to accept the claim made by the author of the *Letter* that the whole of the Law was translated on one occasion and by the same body of translators. On the contrary, such evidence as the internal analysis of the extant LXX version(s)

[22] Yassif has suggested a background for the story in oral, popular, even folk narratives, but his suggestion does not stand up to analysis; see Yassif 1988; see also 1999:41, 98–99, where the idea is developed further.

provides points in another direction, namely that not all portions were translated at the same time and not all portions were translated by the same translators. Alexandria is likely to have been the home of the translation, but this may be argued on grounds unconnected with the claim made in the *Letter*. The *Letter* in itself is worthless as a direct historical source. This does not mean that everything contained in it must be false nor that everything that it tells us may not serve as indirect evidence for the circles which produced it and in which it was used and in which it exerted influence long after its own composition.

2

The Hellenistic Jewish Tradition

The first stage in the surviving testimony to the history of the Septuagint lies in the hellenistic Jewish tradition. This is as it should be, not only because the Septuagint was born in that community and not only because the legend of its birth there was a creation of a member of that community but also because that community was the largest and culturally the richest of all those to the west of Palestine in its time. From this point of view, indeed, we may be a little surprised at the paucity and thinness of the evidence that we have. The evidence consists in three parts. The first, associated with the name of Aristobulus, is of very dubious character. The third, from Josephus, is essentially a long quotation in the form of an extensive paraphrase, from the *Letter of Aristeas*, although there is also some information in the same writer's *Against Apion*. Only the second witness, Philo, offers testimony of real value and significance, and even what he has to say is not wholly free of difficulty.

1. ARISTOBULUS

Aristobulus is a most recalcitrant witness, even a slippery customer.[1] He stands out among the small group of Jewish writers of the hellenistic age. Who was he? Did he ever exist? How many individuals, if any, lie hidden behind the name Aristobulus in our sources? How much of the writings attributed to him can be regarded as genuine? When was it composed? Is it all by a single person? We cannot be sure of the answers to any of these questions.

[1] See Valckenaer 1806; Walter 1964; Schürer 1973–87:III,1, 579–87, with bibliography; see also Fraser 1972:84, 484, 694–96, 700, 713, 963–66. The clearest account of the history of scholarly study of the problems associated with Aristobulus is now Holladay 1995, though he generally assumes the existence of the man and accepts the date and the authenticity of the material under his name proposed by Walter.

If we are to believe our sources, Aristobulus was connected with the court of Ptolemy VI Philometor.[2] We are told even that he was a teacher of the king;[3] Philometor became king when he was only three or four years old, and that Aristobulus was his teacher before then is unlikely.[4] That Aristobulus was said to have been the ruler's tutor, moreover, is probably to be connected with the further tradition that he dedicated a commentary on the Law of Moses to Philometor.[5] We are also told about Aristobulus that he was a peripatetic philosopher.[6] However, "peripatetic" may mean no more than "Alexandrian".[7] Aristobulus is said to have been a Jewish writer of works exegetical of the Law, employing the method of allegorical interpretation.[8] This exegetical method built on well-known precedents in classical Greek and Hellenistic scholarship and philosophy as, for instance, in the interpretation of the Homeric epics,[9] and itself had a long later history in Jewish and Christian exegesis of Scripture.

We also hear that Aristobulus testified to the existence of a Greek translation of (perhaps parts of) the Hebrew Bible earlier than the Septuagint.[10] The alleged testimony of an Alexandrian Jewish writer of the second century B.C.E.[11] to the existence of a pre-septuagintal version of the Old Testament, or of parts of it, is not lightly to be disregarded; all the more reason for subjecting it to close critical examination.

All of our knowledge of Aristobulus and his writings comes from testimonia and fragments. *Testimonia* are references to a person in writings by others, while *fragments* are pieces of writings by one writer preserved in writings by others. In many cases, such fragments will be quotations taken directly from the works of the original writer. In other cases, and very commonly in Antiquity, although they may be quotations from the original works, they may be cited via quotation in other writers, intermediary between the original writer and the later one. It

[2] Reigned 184–146 B.C.E., according to Habicht, 1976:202, 181–145 B.C.E. (so also Abel 1949:289).

[3] T. (= Testimonium) 1. See below.

[4] Cf. Habicht 1976:202 n. 10 c; and see below.

[5] Eusebius 1913:139.

[6] T. 2 = Clem. *Strom.* 72, 4; T. 7 = Eus. *Chron. a. Abr.* 1841 cf. Eusebius 1911:203; 1913:139; T. 11 = Eus. *PE* VIII, 9, 38; T. 12 = Eus. *PE*, IX, 6.

[7] Cf. Fraser 1972:320, and n. 102; and see also n. 290 to Chapter 8, where he points out that, used of later, post-Callimachean scholars, the term refers to their activity as collectors of material in the peripatetic and, especially, the Callimachean manner. See also ibid., 453f., 770f.; Dirlmeier 1974:266.

[8] T. 5 = Origen, *contra Celsum*, IV, 51; T. 10 = Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.*, VIII, 8, 56, *et alibi*.

[9] See Pfeiffer 1968:9–10; Myres 1958:29, 33–34.

[10] T. 3 = Clem. *Strom.* I. 150, 1. See below.

[11] The dating in the second century seems to be generally accepted; although Anatolius (see below) makes him one of the Seventy and thus a contemporary of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. The reference (ibid.) to Ptolemy I Soter is, of course, as unreliable as so much else in that passage.

is clear that both testimonia and fragments can, like whole works but far more easily than they, be invented in order to serve later interests. Even when such testimonies and fragments are genuine, but far more when they are not, in the contexts in which we find them now, they naturally serve the interests and aims of the authors or compilers of these later works, and these aims may of course be very different from those of the original writers.

It is not always certain or easy to determine whether the information offered by a testimonium is true; or whether it is authentic, that is to say, whether it was in fact written by the author to whom it is ascribed. Nevertheless, even where the information provided is found to be unreliable or where its authenticity is doubtful, we should still remember that, regardless of how true its information is or who wrote it, the testimonium existed in history and, thus, played a role in shaping the tradition. It is important to investigate its origin and, in particular, to attempt to place it chronologically.

Invention of earlier writers, ascription of alleged writings to earlier writers, fathering of what are really new works on earlier people, real or not, writers or not, is easy – all the more so in an age before modern communications and printing, when copying by hand was the only way in which books and their contents might be reproduced. It was easier, and possibly more effective, because harder to detect, to ascribe such a work to someone of whom little or nothing was otherwise known. Thus might anachronisms and inconsistencies the better be avoided; thus too might the forger be freer to adapt the personality thus employed to his own purposes.

In the case of Aristobulus, we have thirteen testimonies and five fragments.[12] The fragments are found, in the form of quotations, in the writings of the church father Clement of Alexandria (*c.* 150–*c.* 215), of Anatolius (died *c.* 282)[13] and of Eusebius of Caesarea (*c.* 260–*c.* 340), the great Church historian. The passages quoted by the latter contain all those offered by Anatolius and Clement, they are more extensive, they appear to be more reliable and it is they, rather than the quotations by Clement, that enable us to identify them as belonging to the Aristobulus tradition[14] because Clement, in most cases, cites them without naming his source.[15] The testimonies about Aristobulus occur in the Second Book of Maccabees, in the Apocrypha (one reference), in Clement of

[12] For lists of the fragments and testimonia, see Walter 1964:7–9, where see also the notes.

[13] Anatolius, born in Alexandria, died *c.* 282, was active in that community, where he taught philosophy and the mathematical sciences and was named head of the Aristotelian school. He was successively bishop of Caesarea in Palestine and of Laodicea (Eusebius, *HE*, VII, 32, 6ff., and 32, 21). He is best known for his lost work on fixing the date of Easter, from which Eusebius (*HE* VII, 32) quotes a fragment.

[14] In using this expression I do not mean to imply that they are all taken from authentic works of Aristobulus but merely that they were, in Christian tradition, ascribed to him.

[15] See Walter 1964:7 and 117 ff.

Alexandria (three references), in the important theological and exegetical writer of the early Church, Origen (*c.* 185–*c.* 254) (a single reference), in Anatolius (a single reference), and in Eusebius (seven references).

A moment's consideration shows that with the single exception of the reference in the Second Book of Maccabees (of which more below), all of our testimonies to Aristobulus and all of the fragments of text attributed to him are very late; all belong to the Christian period. In addition, all of them come from Christians who have a shared interest in demonstrating that there had been a Jew called Aristobulus who had written appropriately on the relevant issues; to this we may add the fact that all of the fragments have a common tendency to provide information from 'Aristobulus' which serves, providentially one might say, a Christian purpose.

Both testimonies and fragments present major problems to scholarship. The argument over them has lasted since Hody in the seventeenth century.[16] Some scholars have seen in 'Aristobulus' simply a Christian invention; others have argued strongly for the existence of the man and have seen him as an early Jewish exponent of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. On occasion the debate over the texts associated with his name has taken on dimensions reminiscent of the debate over the structure of the universe at the time of Galileo. In the case of one text, a poem of some forty or fifty lines belonging to the Orphic corpus which is quoted by 'Aristobulus', one scholar went so far as to hypothesise the existence of sixteen different and separate versions of the poem, all within a very short period, in order to account for the way in which it appears in our manuscript transmission.[17] The current consensus on 'Aristobulus', that he did exist and that the material going under his name is at least largely authentic, cannot be seen as the final word on these questions. For our purposes here, there are three principal questions. (1) Do the fragments associated with the name Aristobulus form a unity – in other words, are they all by the same person? (2) When did the author (or authors) of the fragments live? And (3) Were they written before or after Ps.-Aristeas? The central question, however, from which everything else to do with Aristobulus flows, concerns the date, or the dates, of the texts bearing his name.

The only pre-Christian reference to 'Aristobulus' is in the Second Book of Maccabees. It occurs in an apocryphal letter of Judah Maccabaeus, which

[16] Walter 1964:8–9 draws attention to the fact that Cyril of Alexandria, *contra Iulianum*, p. 134 ed. Aubert-Spanheim, mistakenly connects a quotation from Megasthenes in Clem., *Strom.*, 72, 5, with Aristobulus. It was this mistake which led Humphrey Hody to think that Aristobulus was a pagan: Hody 1705:54, n. 2.

[17] The sixteen-stage theory is that of Elter, writing at the end of the nineteenth century. See Holladay 1996:51, with discussion and references; see also Walter 1964:210–18. Holladay 1996:43, speaks of not a single poem, but "rather a piece of floating poetic tradition that existed in two or three, perhaps more, recensions". This is perfectly plausible.

purports to be written in December 164 B.C.E., beginning Οἱ ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις καὶ οἱ ἐν τῇ Ιουδαίᾳ καὶ ἡ γερουσία καὶ Ιουδας Ἀριστοβούλῳ διδασκάλῳ Πτολεμαίου τοῦ βασιλέως, ὄντι δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ τῶν χριστῶν ἱερέων γένους, καὶ τοῖς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ Ιουδαίοις χαίρειν καὶ ὑγιαίνειν. "The people of Jerusalem and of Judaea, and the Council, and Judah: to King Ptolemy's teacher Aristobulus, who is a descendant of the anointed priests, and to the Jews of Egypt, Greetings and Good Health!" (II Macc. 1, 10).

This passage, if it were genuine, would be the only non-Christian and the only pre-Christian mention of Aristobulus. It does not proffer any information that would connect Aristobulus with the Greek translation or with its transmission; nor does it so much as hint at the allegorical method of interpreting the Bible that is, in Christian tradition, ascribed to him. It cannot even be taken for certain that the alleged addressee is in fact the Aristobulus who appears in that Christian tradition. Nor, even if the letter from which this testimonium comes were genuine, would we be bound to take it as likely that Aristobulus really was the teacher of the king. Calling a well-known scholar or writer "teacher" of a Ptolemaic king seems to have been a topos of hellenistic biography: Apollonius and Aristarchus are both called διδάσκαλοι, teachers, of the royal princes, Zenodotus is said to have tutored (ἐπαίδευσεν) the children of Ptolemy I Soter, and similar claims are made for the poet Philitas.[18] Although in some cases such stories may be true, the frequency of the motif may be merely a literary commonplace. However, quite independently of all this, there is good reason to think that the letter cited in II Maccabees is a later forgery.[19] If it is a forgery, then any evidential value that the letter might have for our present concern falls away.

All our other ancient testimonies and all our fragments, without exception, come from the Christian period, are found in the writings of Christian authors and, as will be seen, serve to promote a Christian message. We have no reason whatever to date them earlier. We are bound to ask whether the reference to an 'Aristobulus' in II Maccabees has not simply been taken up by later, Christian writers as a convenient hook on which to hang their own inventions.

A similar conclusion awaits us with the fragments attributed to 'Aristobulus'. Here the most important piece of evidence is a fragment found in Clement and in Eusebius, probably there taken from Clement. In this short passage, we find the following:[20]

[18] Pfeiffer 1968:92, n.3, 154, with nn. 7–9; Pfeiffer seems to accept these claims, and he cites for the terms διδάσκαλος, καθηγητής, τροφεύς, τιθηνός Eichgrün 1961:181ff. Exkurs I: Prinzenerzieher.

[19] On II Macc. as a whole (including the documents, among them this letter) see Stern 1991:347ff.; 370; Habicht 1979:199f.; Habicht 1976:170f., 174ff. and 199ff.; Abel 1949:288–90; Momigliano 1931 and 1932.

[20] Clement, *Strom.* I, 150, 1–3; Eusebius, *PE*, XIII, 12, 1. See also Eusebius, *PE*, IX, 6, 6–8.

For before Demetrius of Phalerum, before the dominion of Alexander and the Persians, others had translated accounts of the events surrounding the exodus from Egypt of the Hebrews, our countrymen, and the disclosure to them of all the things that had happened as well as their domination of the land, and the detailed account of the entire law, so that it is very clear that the aforementioned philosopher [scil. Plato] had taken over many ideas; for he was very learned, just as Pythagoras, having borrowed many of the things in our traditions, found room for them in his own doctrinal system.

When did this text come into being? Some scholars have argued, from the absence here of certain details known from the *Letter of Aristeas*, that this text must antedate the *Letter* and hence that 'Aristobulus' lived before Ps.-Aristeas. According to this argument, Ps.-Aristeas borrowed the story of the LXX either from Aristobulus or from a common source of them both. Detailed analysis of the passages in Clement and in Eusebius shows, however, that it is much more likely that they are fabrications, that their attribution to 'Aristobulus' is a sham, and that 'Aristobulus' himself is also an invention.

There remains, nonetheless, the question with which we began here: when was the fragment attributed to 'Aristobulus' composed? There is no reason whatever to think of a date before Ps.-Aristeas. To refer to the story in this brief and allusive way ("before Demetrius . . . "), and for this sort of purpose, the author does not need to be independent of Ps.-Aristeas; on the contrary, if he knows the story, he is far more likely to post-date him and to be dependent on him. This is because the story in Ps.-Aristeas is a literary invention, not a popular tradition. What is of importance here is the relative dating of the two texts, not an absolute date for either of them. Since we can assume that 'Aristobulus' is dependent on Ps.-Aristeas, their relative datings fall into place naturally; this makes it clear that Ps.-Aristeas is either himself the originator of the story of the LXX translation or at all events the closest to it that we shall be able to come.

However, there is another aspect to the story: it is one thing to place 'Aristobulus' later than Ps.-Aristeas. It is another to try to offer an absolute dating for the author of the fragments attributed to a man of this name. In the case of II Maccabees, it was less the contents than the context and the overall character of the material that made it appear untrustworthy.

In other cases there are different problems. We have no other pre-Christian references mentioning Aristobulus by name, but it has been argued that there is at least one other reference to him, although his name does not occur there. The reference occurs in Josephus, in *contra Apionem*, I. 165.[21] In the text of

[21] Thackeray 1966:I, 229, n. e (referring to Eusebius, *PE*, XIII, 12, 664A). Could the sentence in Josephus in fact be a reference to Eupolemus?

Josephus we read that "it is said (λέγεται) in fact that that man [the reference is to Pythagoras] introduced many Jewish legal or ritual practices into his philosophy". No name at all is mentioned here as Josephus' source for this information, but much later, Eusebius takes up this reference and attaches it to the name of Aristobulus. The similarity to what we have seen in 'Aristobulus' already makes it clear why Eusebius should have thought to do so. This is not the only place in the works of Josephus where we find material reminiscent of that which in the Christian tradition is ascribed to Aristobulus; see for example *c. Ap.* II, 168; II, 257; II, 282. But neither here nor in those other places is any name, let alone that of Aristobulus, even mentioned.

No doubt these and similar passages bear witness to the existence in Jewish apologetic literature in the first century, and possibly earlier, of motifs that are found again in the fragments which, in Christian tradition, are ascribed to Aristobulus; the existence of such passages does not, however, prove that they are his. There are obvious similarities and affinities between the apologetic motifs used by Jewish and Christian apologists in the hellenistic and Graeco-Roman periods; but the use made of these motifs is subtly different in the two traditions. Jewish claims, such as those made, or repeated, by Josephus, for example in *contra Apionem*, 162ff., to the effect that Pythagoras knew and admired Jewish customs, serve the same purpose as the other claims, namely to underpin the Jewish propagandistic argument of the high antiquity of the Jewish nation.

In ancient civilisation antiquity and purity of stock (or, in some traditions, autochthony, having a primary relationship to the native soil) were highly prized attributes of the history of a nation. If additional propagandistic aims were achieved by the same argument so much the better, as here. "Pythagoras introduced many Jewish legal or ritual practices into his philosophy" – a great and famous philosopher admires Jewish customs: this obviously serves national pride. Thus we are also told, in a number of passages in Josephus, that the Greeks learned the alphabet or philosophical or even religious doctrines from Jews, Chaldaeans or Egyptians. But when Josephus makes these claims, the main thrust of his argument is directed to strengthen the claim to antiquity of the oriental nations in comparison to the Greeks.

Like the Jews, the Christians not infrequently use the same motifs and make the same claims in their apologetic literature. They too argue for the priority of their Jewish forebears in comparison to the Greeks. However, they stress the antiquity and the priority of the Mosaic Law not for the sake of antiquity as such but for a purely Christian purpose. On the one hand, if the Greeks learned philosophy, laws and sciences from the Jews, then, for the Jewish apologist, that proved the antiquity of the Jews. For the Christian apologist, on the other hand, establishing the antiquity of the Mosaic Law and, in particular, establishing the existence of a pre-Ptolemaic Greek translation of Scripture, made it possible to

do two things. It enabled him to claim that it was chronologically possible for Pythagoras and other Greeks, for instance Plato, to have learned their wisdom from the Jews, and it allowed him to achieve the central purpose of the Christian propaganda argument, based on the pattern of the providential *praeparatio evangelica*,[22] readying the pagan world for the reception of the Christian truth: namely, that Judaism and its divinely appointed continuation or fulfilment, Christianity, were compatible with Greek philosophical thought.

If in the apostolic age the Christian message had appealed, in the main, to the uneducated classes of society, we find that not later than the second Christian century the need was felt to make the new religion palatable to the intellectual world of ancient paganism. Christianity itself lacked antiquity, and pagan critics pointed to the low social status of its adherents and to the absence of philosophical and logical arguments in a system that was based on revelation and on faith. Thus Christians, once theirs had become a religion of gentiles, turned to Greek philosophy as a training ground for debate and a storehouse of argument. Philo the Jew, who provided so much of the armoury of Christian exegesis of Scripture, had coined a slogan that could be turned into an argument: φιλοσοφία δούλη σοφίας. Philosophy is (or ought to be) the handmaiden of (true) wisdom (i.e., of the faith).[23] In Greek philosophy one could hope to find arguments and methods of argumentation to support the faith. But the urge to study Greek philosophy was prompted also, in part at least, by the desire for a link with an old-established, and long-legitimated, tradition and authority. The link with the past of the Jews and with the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament had, of course, been an essential element in the thought and preaching of the primitive Church that thought of itself as Verus Israel, the true Israel. But the break with the Jewish present and the severance, in Pauline Christianity, from the Law were there for all to see. A new legitimation by ancient authority was sought, and found. Greek thinkers were recognised as having actually prepared the minds of men for the reception of God's word and also as having known and taught part of divine truth.

Here really begins the process that leads to the integration of an oriental cult into the intellectual community of the West. This was to be of universal importance, for it is this process that made possible the Christian civilisation of Europe. This civilisation could now be both Hebrew and Hellenic.

For this process to be set moving, for the visions of the prophets to be made intelligible to Greek philosophers, Hebrew words had to be made Greek. And indeed, more than that was necessary: it was necessary also to claim that they had been made Greek long before the Seventy Elders had come to Alexandria.

[22] This is the title of the work of Eusebius in which we find these fragments of text.

[23] Philo's slogan is better known to modern readers in Peter Damian's more explicit Latin formulation: *Philosophia ancilla theologiae*.

How else was it possible for Greek thinkers to know the Mosaic Law? Hence the necessity for postulating the existence of a pre-Ptolemaic translation. Hence the invention of the report concerning an earlier translation that we have just seen. No Jew in the rabbinic tradition of Judaism felt such a need.[24] And it is worth adding that this alleged testimony, together with everything else we are told about its alleged author, turns up, with conveniently appropriate timing, in Christian sources just at the time when it is needed, when a Jewish witness to the existence of such a version is required.

2. PHILO

Philo (*c.* 25 B.C.E. to *c.* 50 C.E.) is a very different character from 'Aristobulus'. A leading figure in the Jewish community of Alexandria, he represented it in an embassy to Rome in 39–40 C.E., which sought to persuade the Roman government to exempt the Jews from the obligation of emperor-worship. He left a large number of writings, many of which have come down to us; however, like all other Jewish writings in Greek from the ancient world, none of them has been retained in the Jewish tradition. All of them have survived only thanks to their interest to the Christian Church.[25] In his *Vita Mosis* Philo includes a lengthy account of the Greek translation of Scripture, which is worth giving here in extenso:[26]

V. That the sanctity of our legislation has been a source of wonder not only to the Jews but also to all other nations, is clear both from the facts already mentioned and those which I proceed to state. In ancient times the laws were written in the Chaldean tongue, and remained in that form for many years, without any change of language, so long as they had not yet revealed their beauty to the rest of mankind. But, in course of time, the daily, unbroken regularity of practice exercised by those who observed them brought them to the knowledge of others, and their fame began to spread on every side. For things excellent, even if they are beclouded for a short time through envy, shine out again under the benign operation of nature when their time comes. Then it was that some people, thinking it a shame that the laws should be found in one half only of the human race, the barbarians, and denied altogether to the Greeks, took steps to have them translated. In view of the importance and public utility of the task, it was referred not to private persons or magistrates, who were very numerous, but to kings, and amongst them to the king

[24] As we saw in Chapter 1, there is no evidence for any pre-Aristean folk legend, far less history, of a translation.

[25] This does not necessarily mean, however, that Philo was wholly unknown to the Jewish tradition. Cf. Wasserstein 1983 (esp. nn. 20, 29); Chadwick 1967:156; Posnanski 1905; E. I. J. Rosenthal 1960.

[26] Philo, *de vita mosis*, II. 25–44 (V–VII) (the translation is that of Thackeray).

of highest repute. Ptolemy, surnamed Philadelphus, was the third in succession to Alexander, the conqueror of Egypt. In all the qualities which make a good ruler, he excelled not only his contemporaries, but all who have arisen in the past; and even till today, after so many generations, his praises are sung for the many evidences and monuments of his greatness of mind which he left behind him in different cities and countries, so that, even now, acts of more than ordinary munificence or buildings on a specially great scale are proverbially called Philadelphian after him. To put it shortly, as the house of the Ptolemies was highly distinguished, compared with other dynasties, so was Philadelphus among the Ptolemies. The creditable achievements of this one man almost outnumbered those of all the others put together, and, as the head takes the highest place in the living body, so he may be said to head the kings. VI. This great man, having conceived an ardent affection for our laws, determined to have the Chaldean translated into Greek, and at once despatched envoys to the high priest and king of Judaea, both offices being held by the same person, explaining his wishes and urging him to choose by merit persons to make a full rendering of the Law into Greek. The high priest was naturally pleased, and, thinking that God's guiding care must have led the king to busy himself in such an undertaking, sought out such Hebrews as he had of the highest reputation, who had received an education in Greek as well as in their native lore, and joyfully sent them to Ptolemy. When they arrived, they were offered hospitality, and, having been sumptuously entertained, requited their entertainer with a feast of words full of wit and weight. For he tested the wisdom of each by propounding for discussion new instead of the ordinary questions, which problems they solved with happy and well-pointed answers in the form of apophthegms, as the occasion did not allow of lengthy speaking.

After standing this test, they at once began to fulfil the duties of their high errand. Reflecting how great an undertaking it was to make a full version of the laws given by the Voice of God, where they could not add or take away or transfer anything, but must keep the original form and shape, they proceeded to look for the most open and unoccupied spot in the neighbourhood outside the city. For, within the walls, it was full of every kind of living creatures, and consequently the prevalence of diseases and deaths, and the impure conduct of the healthy inhabitants, made them suspicious of it. In front of Alexandria lies the island of Pharos, stretching with its narrow strip of land towards the city, and enclosed by a sea not deep but mostly consisting of shoals, so that the loud din and booming of the surging waves grows faint through the long distance before it reaches the land. Judging this to be the most suitable place in the district, where they might find peace and tranquillity and the soul could commune with the laws with none to disturb its privacy, they fixed their abode there; and, taking the sacred books, stretched them out towards heaven with the hands that held them, asking of God that they might not fail in their enterprise. And He assented to their prayers, to the end that the greater part, or even the whole, of the human race might be profited and led to a better life by continuing to observe such wise and truly admirable ordinances.

VII. Sitting here in seclusion with none present save the elements of nature, earth, water, air, heaven, the genesis of which was to be first theme of their sacred revelation, for the laws begin with the story of the world's creation, they became as it were possessed, and, under inspiration, wrote, not each several scribe something different, but the same word for word, as though dictated to each by an invisible prompter. Yet who does not know that every language, and Greek especially, abounds in terms, and that the same thought can be put in many shapes by changing single words and whole phrases and suiting the expression to the occasion? This was not the case, we are told, with this law of ours, but the Greek words used corresponded literally with the Chaldean, exactly suited to the things they indicated. For, just as in geometry and logic, so it seems to me, the sense indicated does not admit of variety in the expression which remains unchanged in its original form, so these writers, as it clearly appears, arrived at a wording which corresponded with the matter, and alone, or better than any other, would bring out clearly what was meant. The clearest proof of this is that, if Chaldeans have learned Greek, or Greeks Chaldean, and read both versions, the Chaldean and the translation, they regard them with awe and reverence as sisters, or rather one and the same, both in matter and words, and speak of the authors not as translators but as prophets and priests of the mysteries, whose sincerity and singleness of thought has enabled them to go hand in hand with the purest of spirits, the spirit of Moses. Therefore, even to the present day, there is held every year a feast and general assembly in the island of Pharos, whither not only Jews but multitudes of others cross the water, both to do honour to the place in which the light of that version first shone out, and also to thank God for the good gift so old yet ever young. But, after the prayers and thanksgivings, some fixing tents on the seaside and others reclining on the sandy beach in the open air feast with their relations and friends, counting that shore for the time a more magnificent lodging than the fine mansions in the royal precincts. Thus the laws are shewn to be desirable and precious in the eyes of all, ordinary citizens and rulers alike, and that too though our nation has not prospered for many a year. It is but natural that when people are not flourishing their belongings to some degree are under a cloud. But, if a fresh start should be made to brighter prospects, how great a change for the better might we expect to see! I believe that each nation would abandon its peculiar ways, and, throwing overboard their ancestral customs, turn to honouring our laws alone. For, when the brightnesss of their shining is accompanied by national prosperity, it will darken the light of the others as the risen sun darkens the stars.

This account has numerous features in common with the story related in the *Letter of Aristeas*; at the same time, there is much in which it differs from that text, ranging from the level of minor detail to that of the overall atmosphere which pervades the Philonic account. That Philo depended on the *Letter of Aristeas* is demonstrated in his use of several elements integral to that account. He associates the translation closely with royal initiative; that initiative is not

only royal but also tied to the specific figure of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who is praised here in even more extravagant terms than in the *Letter* itself. As in the *Letter*, the translation is seen as a product of a direct and explicit request sent by the ruler to the High Priest in Jerusalem. As in the *Letter*, so in Philo we are told about the choice of the translators and about the qualifications they were required to have; we are given a description of their reception by the Egyptian ruler; Philo tells us about the posing of questions to them and about their wise responses to these.

At the same time, there is much in the account given by Philo that goes beyond what is in the *Letter*; some of this clearly builds on and extends what Ps.-Aristeas tells us. Indeed, the air of divine approval and even inspiration that suffuses the account in Philo, although it goes beyond the *Letter*, clearly derives from the general feeling of admiration pervading the text of the *Letter*. However, there is also information which, equally clearly, does not do this but comes from outside. The most obvious example of this is the statement that the posts of High Priest and King in Judaea were held by a single person.

Similarities and differences, differences in the form both of additions to the *Letter* and of omission from the *Letter*, are telling, for they serve to create a new story, new especially in the atmosphere of divine, as well as royal, favour which surrounds the creation of this translation of Jewish Scripture in the way in which Philo relates it. The collective import of the combination of the borrowings from the *Letter of Aristeas* and of the omissions and alterations and extensions to which Philo has subjected his source as well as of the new elements which he has added to it, is radically to alter the impression designed to be left by the story in the *Letter*. Although Ps.-Aristeas was concerned essentially to offer in his work an apologetic-cum-propagandistic account of Jews and their religion, Philo's aim is very different, and so is the method which he uses to attain that aim.

The account in the *Vita Mosis* presents the Egyptian ruler as responding, in his desire to obtain a Greek translation of Scriptures, to a generally felt need: "... in course of time, the daily, unbroken regularity of practice exercised by those who observed [the laws] brought them to the knowledge of others ... " (§27). More than this, Philo draws a picture that represents the Bible as being available to one half of mankind – the "barbarians", by which here he means the non-Greeks (it is not clear whether Philo really understood the difference between Hebrew, as used in Scripture, and Aramaic, what he calls *Chaldean*) – and as being unavailable, *denied*, to the other half, the Greeks. In that situation, "some people", "thinking it a shame", "took steps" towards a translation. Philo here is concerned to show that the translation of the Bible was made in response to a perceived need, perceived not just (or perhaps not even) by Jews in Egypt but by members of other nations; Philo's purpose here goes far beyond what Ps.-Aristeas was aiming at in his work. Philo is writing here for a different sort

of non-Jewish audience from that of Ps.-Aristeas. Ps.-Aristeas aimed simply to assert and to persuade his audience of the qualities which he believed to inhere in the Jews and in their religion and culture. Philo has larger aims. He is concerned to argue that the religion and the scriptures of the Jews have a potentially universal application, and beyond that he is interested, as this passage shows, in the possibilities of proselytism created and enhanced by the availability of a translation of the Jewish scriptures in the Greek tongue.

To render such possibilities real, however, he adds a second element to the story of the *Letter*. Aristeas had been content to make the translation a collective enterprise of human effort, whereas Philo adds to this a strong element of divine aid and involvement. Ps.-Aristeas had been content to add a semi-miraculous element which was in reality no more than a literary decoration for the story: his seventy-two translators completed their task of translating, comparing and finalising their version in the literarily appropriate period of seventy-two days, "as though this coincidence had been intended" (§307). This attractive element offers a suggestion of divine involvement, a hint and a basis upon which such involvement could later have been constructed; it should have survived through all the versions of the story. However, it is in fact almost completely ignored in the later history of the story. In its stead, here in Philo, we find something much greater. Philo introduces, almost at the very start of the history of the story, an element of divine aid and inspiration which leads the translators towards the production of a single version, not by means of the individual work and collective consultation described for us by Ps.-Aristeas but, more simply, by the direct means of divine inspiration for the translators in their work. The decoratively miraculous detail of the seventy-two days is dropped and replaced by a religiously more authentic, if in the event somewhat vaguer, element of inspiration.

The *Vita Mosis* is, in the form of a biography,[27] a panegyric, an apologetic work, and perhaps even a missionary tract. It is clear that it is the characterisation of Moses as High Priest and King that is uppermost in Philo's mind. Although Philo at various points also represents Moses as legislator, prophet, sage, and so on, it is significant that in the passage leading up to the story of the translation and the mention of the Priest–King (II. 31) in Jerusalem, Philo especially stresses the two characteristics of Moses as both King and High Priest, and indeed he stresses the essential connection between these two offices:

But a king and lawgiver ought to have under his purview not only human but divine things; for, without God's directing care, the affairs of kings and subjects cannot go aright. And therefore such as he needs the chief priest-hood, so that, fortified with

[27] Botte 1954:57ff. shows that unlike, for example, *de Abrahamo* or *de Joseph*, the *Vita Mosis* is really meant to be a biography properly so called, which does not, of course, exclude other, additional characterisations such as panegyric and apology.

perfect rites and the perfect knowledge of the service of God, he may ask that he and those whom he rules may receive prevention of evil, and participation in good from the gracious Being Who assents to prayers. (*Vita Mosis* II. 5)

The phrase used by Philo here, οὐκ ἄνευ θείας ἐπιφροσύνης, "not without God's directing care", recurs in the very passage in which Philo speaks about the Priest–King seeing in the royal plan to have the Bible translated a sign of divine providence (II. 32). The combination High Priest–King flows easily from Philo's pen, even where it refers to the High Priest of Jerusalem who was said to have sent the translators to Alexandria.

The conjunction of kingship and priesthood is not mentioned in the *Letter*. The appearance here of this union of the two offices in a single person might be interpreted as testifying to a tradition about the translation in which the High Priest in Jerusalem was also represented as King; thus our passage might support dating this tradition after the Maccabean revolt, for it was only in the Hasmonean period that kingship and the office of High Priest are united in the same person. A reading of the testimonium in its original context, however, shows conclusively that it is an integral part of the argument of Philo himself who wants to represent Moses as Philosopher, Lawgiver, King, High Priest, and Prophet.[28]

The description of the High Priest in Jerusalem as king is thus not to be taken as any kind of historical allusion to a time when the two offices were in fact combined. It fits smoothly into the context of thus describing Moses. It tells us something about the way in which the context shapes the expression. It is this context that suggests the conjunction High Priest–King, and we learn nothing from it about either the date of a tradition on which Philo draws here (if he is not adding this element himself) or, indeed, about the existence of a tradition separate from that of the *Letter of Aristeas*.[29]

Similarly, in respect of the importation of the miraculous, Philo seems not to be drawing on an external tradition but rather to be importing the detail from himself for the purposes of the *Vita Mosis*. He does so for the aims involved in that work. This begins, as was just mentioned, with the reaction of the High Priest–King to Ptolemy's request. Philo has him see, in the despatch of the king's letter and in his interest in a translation, evidence of divine providence: οὐκ ἄνευ θείας ἐπιφροσύνης, "not without God's directing care" (II. 32).[30]

[28] See Philo, *Vita Mosis* II. 3, 187, 292; see also I. 148ff.; 158; 334; and *Sacrif.* 130; *Her.* 182; *Praem.* 53ff. etc.

[29] This is why we do not need to see in the use of this element by Philo evidence of a post-Hasmonean, or at least not pre-Hasmonean, date for this motif.

[30] Note here also the attractive suggestion made by the editors of the *Vita Mosis* in *Les Œuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie*, Paris, 1967, 20, in order to explain the prominent place given by Philo in *VM* to the recital and adaptation of the story already known from the *Letter of Aristeas*: "Pourquoi donner tant d'importance à cette adaptation, quand on se proposait d'écrire la vie du prophète? Plaisir de livrer au public d'Alexandrie une version nouvelle d'un récit qu'il connaissait déjà? Coquetterie d'écrivain en quelque sorte? Ce n'est pas impossible, et Philon goûtait assez les joies

Other details of the Egyptian scenery contribute to the more general effect created by Philo. The fact that the translators here, unlike in the *Letter*, actually choose a spot in which to work and do so on the basis of the conditions of peace and tranquillity that the spot can offer again makes a contrast with the bald information offered by the *Letter*. Such details are also combined by Philo, in a gesture of the theatrical, with other elements which bring the Ptolemaic and the divine closer together. Arriving at the island and starting their work, the translators raise the scrolls heavenwards with their own hands, imploring divine assistance in their task. Both accounts offer us descriptions of the Jews praying, but the accounts differ. Although the *Letter* simply mentions that the Jews show gratitude to their God, Philo describes the prayers in ways which tie God and the work of translation much more closely together.

There is a further difference between the two accounts, concerning the events following completion of the translation. Ps.-Aristeas tells us that when the translation was ready, it was read out by Demetrius to the assembled Jews in the presence of the translators. The Jews gave the translators a great ovation, asked Demetrius to have a copy of the work made for "the rulers" (an interesting and striking departure from the story told at the start of the text, in which not the Jews but the ruler is said to be the moving force behind the work of translation) and forbade the introduction of any changes into the received text (*Letter* §§308–11). In Philo, by contrast, the immediate aftermath of the translators' completion of their task is transformed: from telling us how the work was done, Philo goes on indeed to tell us of a celebration, as in Ps.-Aristeas. But the celebration which he reports, far from being that of the Alexandrian Jews at the time of the translation celebrating its completion, is instead that of the Jews, and others, of Alexandria, in the time since then, celebrating something rather different: the Jews and others 'do honour to the place in which the light of that version first shone out, and also . . . thank God for the good gift so old yet ever young' (II. 41). And he adds a description of the erection of tents on the beach of the island, and of celebrants "reclining", in terms which at least hint at, although they are not explicit about, the celebration of the feasts of Tabernacles and of Passover.[31]

At the same time, Philo leaves certain elements of the story which are present in the *Letter* out of his account. He also shortens some others. Thus he refers to the wisdom of the translators exhibited in the answers which they give to

de la rhétorique pour ne pas résister à cette tentation. Mais, plus profondément, la traduction grecque de la législation mosaïque légitime l'effort de l'exégèse philonienne."

[31] It is noteworthy that in §180 of the *Letter*, the King is made to address the translators on their arrival as follows: "I regard this day of your arrival as a great day, and from year to year shall it be held in honour all our long life." He adds: "Moreover, it happens to be the anniversary of our naval victory over Antigonus". May we see in this the seed of Philo's celebration? Because Philo is our only source for this annual celebration, we have no way of knowing whether he is giving us a description of a real event.

the king's unusual, and by that token unusually difficult, set of questions, but he tells us neither what the questions nor what the answers to them actually were. He refers to but does not describe the banquet and the overall hospitality given to the translators by the king; in a context merely of panegyric and of praise for the generosity of the Ptolemy such a missed opportunity may surprise. He spares us the number of the translators and, in consequence of this, has no reason to tell us that they completed their work in seventy-two days. That number has no significance in the absence of the number of the translators. He does not mention Demetrius, the Librarian, and for good reason; this is not because he is aware of any chronological difficulty attaching to the report of that man's involvement in the account in the *Letter* but for a much more significant reason. He does not mention the connection of the translation with the Library of Alexandria. If the Library is not mentioned, then the librarian has no reason to be mentioned either. The Library is omitted from Philo's account because he is adapting the story in the *Letter*: Ps.-Aristeas was concerned to magnify the Jewish people and its contribution to the culture of mankind; the addition of their holy scriptures, by means of the translation, to the Library of Alexandria helped to achieve the effect that he intended. Philo's aim was different, and for him not the completion of the collection in the Library but the interest of the king was paramount here. That is why he tells us (II. 31): "This great man, having conceived an ardent affection for our laws, determined to have the Chaldean translated into Greek, and at once despatched envoys. . . ". Here the king wants to have the laws translated for himself, and, as Philo indicates, for the general benefit of mankind. Philo stresses the royal motivation: "having conceived an ardent affection" – even without any access to these works, composed in a language and written in a script of which the king knew nothing – he "at once" despatched envoys to procure him a translation. Both of these details are absent in the *Letter*; they are both integral to the construction of Philo's version of the story.[32] In such a context the Library and its Librarian are pedestrian details.

The most significant contrast between the two accounts, however, concerns the work of translation itself. We are told by Ps.-Aristeas that the Greek translation of the Law was "well and piously executed and with perfect accuracy" and that no revision should take place in it (*Letter* §310); if generous, this is hardly detailed description. We are also told a little about the methods employed by the translators: they worked in co-operation, meeting to compare what they had done and to edit what they had produced as a result of their discussions,

[32] At §174, however, in the *Letter* we learn that the king was "so anxious to meet the delegates" sent from Jerusalem on their arrival that he "gave orders to dismiss all the other officials and to summon" them, a most unusual proceeding. But, unlike in Philo, this detail is not integral to the structure of the *Letter*, and merely adds to the effect which the author is trying to create here, in which the ruler is shown to have a very favourable attitude to the Law of the Jews.

producing an agreed transcription of their rendering of each passage as they went along (§302). Before beginning their work every day they would wash their hands in the sea ("in token that they had done no wrong, since the hands are the medium for all activity") and offer prayer to God not, it seems, in order to ask for divine favour for their work, but rather their normal, daily prayer (§305).

In Philo, the picture that we get of the translators at work is very different, and tellingly so. Similarly, the description of the result of their work given to us by Philo is rather different from that offered by Ps.-Aristeas.

In his account of their work, which we have seen, Philo writes, among other things, of the practical difficulties involved in the task of translation between languages. Much of the content of this passage reflects a genuine understanding of the problems involved in trying to produce a version of a complex text in which the effort of the translator is, at least in part, devoted to producing a version reflecting some degree of uniformity, *ad litteram*, rather than *ad sensum*, while not forgetting the sense. This difficulty was not unknown. As has been seen, the fact of translation, as also the techniques involved in it, were well known in antiquity, and the idea that a translation meant a loss of content or of clarity was not new. We find the grandson of Ben Sira, translating his grandfather's work from Hebrew into Greek in the last third of the second century B.C.E., speaking in similar vein:

> . . . let me intreat you to read it with favour and attention, and to pardon us, wherein we may seem to come short of some words, which we have laboured to interpret; for the same things uttered in Hebrew, and translated into another tongue, have not the same force in them. And not only these things, but the law itself, and the prophets, and the rest of the books, have no small difference, when they are spoken in their own language. (Ecclus. Prologue)

Similarly, the author of a passage in the *Corpus Hermeticum* "laments the day when the divine teaching will be turned into Greek and warns against any effort toward such a translation, which will only obscure and confuse the simple clarity of the truth". As Wigtil points out here valuably, "there is no evidence that this text was composed in the indigenous language of Egypt and later translated": in other words, a Greek writer, pretending to have written in a foreign language, here shows himself fully aware of at least part of the difficulties which translation brings in its train.[33]

But practical aspects of translation technique are not Philo's main concern in this passage, nor in the broader discussion of the Greek version of Scripture as a whole. As has already been seen, he wishes rather to draw a picture of the process and the event which reflects a mood and an atmosphere very different from those of the *Letter*. Part of the difference lies in the involvement of the

[33] Wigtil 1986:2057.

divine, which Philo introduces. Here he may be developing a feature which existed in nucleus, perhaps, in the original *Letter* – Ps.-Aristeas' remark "as though this coincidence had been intended" – but in Philo that seed grows remarkably.

The Philonian account of the translation is occasionally regarded as introducing the element of the miraculous into the story of the translation. Thus one modern account of the version offered by Philo has it that "the translators worked independently of each other and yet arrived at verbal agreement in their translations", adding that "this is Philo's version".[34] The real facts are a little more complicated.

It seems clear that separation is not explicitly stated in Philo, although it may be implied in his use of the word ἑκάστοις. Equally clearly he does stress an element of inspiration in the work of the translators; he writes "as men possessed", and "invisible prompter" (II. 37). These expressions echo, as they also go far beyond, the accounts of Theopompus and Theodektes in the *Letter*, who, when they tried to quote passages from the Jewish scriptures in their own writings, were afflicted by mental derangement and cataracts (*Letter* §§314, 316). And he speaks of the translators as "not translators but priests of the mysteries and prophecies". However, some readers have misunderstood what Philo writes about what he takes to be miraculous in the process of the translation. He does not say, as many later sources do, that the translators were deliberately separated, that they were all given the same texts to translate, and that they all produced literally identical versions. What he says is rather different. His text is best read as reporting the story against a background in which it is taken for granted that the task of translating the Law was divided between the translators (whose number, incidentally, as has already been mentioned, is not given), each of them being assigned a different part of the work. Such separation between the translators as is implied by Philo is merely incidental to the arrangements that supervene on the allotment of different texts to different translators. The motif of different books of Scripture being allotted to different translators recurs again later in the confused jumble of reminiscences from a variety of sources offered by Epiphanius, as will be seen later; its appearance here is far from explicit, but it is not, for all that, absent. Here, however, it has no special meaning.

That the translators hit upon exactly the same terminology in their individually assigned portions of the Law is sufficiently remarkable to arouse wonderment and admiration; it may be described as a miracle, but the description is basically metaphorical rather than literal. Even so, it is clear that Philo goes out of his way to spice his tale with more than a soupçon of inspiration. Yet for the ordinary reader, what is more remarkable than the near-miraculous atmosphere

[34] Schürer 1973–87:III, 684. It should be noted that not only is this not Philo's version; it is also not found in either the third or the fourth edition of Schürer's original German.

surrounding the translation and the translators as described by Philo is the ingenuity of the translators. The historian's attention is engaged by the tale not so much because of its miraculous element but rather because Philo's account expresses the recognition that translation of Scripture needs a special vocabulary and that that special vocabulary is useful and valuable in direct proportion to its uniformity; hence the significant analogy with geometry and logic. This motif in the story as told by Philo may thus reflect a reminiscence of actual interpretational (*meturgemanic*) practice in Greek-speaking synagogues, as experienced, described and, to some extent, analysed by the audience, that is, the congregation of the faithful.

In this context, it should be noted that when Philo says καθίσαντες δ' ἐν ἀποκρύφῳ καὶ μηδενὸς παρόντος, "sitting there in seclusion with no one <else> present", he is referring to separation of the translators from the urban multitude, not from each other. That they worked individually is, indeed, implied by such expressions as προεφήτευον οὐκ ἄλλα ἄλλοι, τὰ δ' αὐτὰ πάντες ὀνόματα καὶ ῥήματα, ὥσπερ ὑποβολέως ἑκάστοις, ἀοράτως ἐνηχοῦντος, "they put forth their interpretation . . . as if an invisible prompter were whispering into their ears, they all used the same words and expressions, not one man one phrase and his fellow another". What Philo means to tell us is that what happened here was due to divine intervention. But all that he means by this here is that these different translators used the same terminology (τὰ αὐτὰ ὀνόματα καὶ ῥήματα, cf. also λέξεις a few lines lower in the same passage). The Rabbis and the Christians, later on, tell us about a different kind of miracle. The historian will treat the miracle story as he treats other stories of the same kind; he will learn from the fact of their existence more than from their contents. Philo's story, and his miracle, must be read in a different spirit: there is nothing in what he says that compels us to imagine that the different translators all worked on the same parts of the biblical text. What he says may, without forcing the evidence, be understood to mean that the translators, while working on different parts of the text of the Law, not only always found the right words to represent what they found in their text but also all used the same (and the only right) words and expressions when they appeared in the different contexts that they were translating: this is an outcome no less miraculous than that reported by the Rabbis and the Christians, but one that is postulated by a writer who has addressed himself to the real problems of translation from one language into another, particularly if these languages belong to cultures as different from each other as those of the Hebrews and the Greeks.

3. JOSEPHUS

The only Jew writing in Greek after Philo who mentions the story of the Septuagint is Josephus, who lived some half a century after Philo. Although

Josephus knows of Philo (he mentions him once, in *Ant*. XVIII, 8, 1, in connection with his participation in the embassy to Rome), he does not know this story from him.[35] Josephus is clearly dependent entirely for his knowledge of the story on the *Letter of Aristeas*.

As so often, Josephus is much more down to earth than other writers. He mentions the translation twice, once in the *Antiquities of the Jews* and once, much more briefly, in the *contra Apionem*. In the latter work, he is concerned to show the high favour in which the Ptolemies held the Jews; thus he mentions the positive attitude of the first Ptolemy towards the Jews, expressed in his employment of Jews as garrison troops in Egypt. He also mentions the freeing of Jewish captives by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, adding:

> The highest compliment, however, which he paid us lay in his keen desire to know our laws and to read the books of our sacred scriptures. It is, at any rate, the fact that he sent and requisitioned the services of Jewish deputies to interpret the law to him; and, to ensure accuracy in transcription, entrusted the task to no ordinary persons. Demetrius of Phalerum, with Andreas and Aristeas, the first the most learned man of his time, the others his own bodyguards, were his appointed commissioners.[36]

The references to Demetrius and to Andreas and Aristeas demonstrate, if demonstration were needed, that Josephus is here dependent on the *Letter*.

In the *Antiquities*, too, Josephus mentions the translation of the Bible into Greek; here his dependence is much more blatant, for he merely paraphrases and transcribes large sections of the *Letter of Aristeas*. For our present purpose, it will be of interest to note which passages he chooses to include and which he does not transcribe.[37]

Josephus does not confess that what he is giving is merely a transcription of a text by someone else. He disguises the fact by omitting the sections at the beginning and the end which show that the text is cast in the form of a letter from Aristeas to his friend Philocrates. He includes the bulk of the *Letter* in the overall flow of his narrative, as if it were part of his own composition. He also omits other sections: thus he leaves out the names of the translators – but here he takes the trouble to say that he is doing so, and adds that he did

[35] Freudenthal 1874–75:218 lists a good number of passages in which, he claims, Josephus used Philo. He may be right about this, but there is also a case to be made, at least in some of these passages, for a common source. These include particularly those passages where Philo himself seems to depend on some source other than his own ingenuity, such as the etymologies (regardless of whether these are right or wrong) of Hebrew names based on Hebrew meanings, which Philo (who probably did not know Hebrew) is even more unlikely than Josephus to have invented or discovered himself. But Freudenthal may have a point in those cases where the allegorical interpretations may well have been taken from Philo. The reference to Philo in the *Antiquities* shows that Josephus at least knew of him.

[36] Josephus, *contra Apionem*, II, 45–47.

[37] Josephus' paraphrase of sections of the *Letter* occurs in *Antiquities*, XII, ii, 1–15 (11–118).

not think it necessary to repeat them. At the same time, while in his version of the letter from the High Priest he has reported their number as "six from each tribe", afterwards, when he says that he does not propose to give their names, he gives their number as seventy, and not as seventy-two.[38] Pelletier, among others, sees here the development by the time of Josephus of the use of "Seventy" as a shortened name for the translators and, hence, also for the product of their labours, the Septuagint.[39] It seems no less likely that the habit may have grown up following, and perhaps even in response to, Josephus' use of the number seventy here. At all events, we have no other evidence before Josephus on which to base such a judgement, and in such a case the onus of demonstration seems to lie on those who adopt the view offered by Pelletier. Like Philo before him and others later, Josephus makes nothing special of the number, and the reduction from seventy-two to seventy is to be seen as no more than a convenient rounding-off of a large number that had, for him, no special significance.

Afterwards, Josephus explicitly says that

> as for the magnificence and workmanship of the dedicatory offerings which the king sent to the temple of God, I have thought it not inappropriate to describe them, in order that the king's eagerness to honour God may be apparent to all. . . . How magnificent each of these was I shall describe, although perhaps my History does not call for such an account, because I believe that in this way I shall bring home to my readers the king's love of art and his magnanimity.

Josephus then reproduces the description of the Table and other gifts sent by the king more or less in full. The following sections of the *Letter*, however, where Ps.-Aristeas describes the surroundings of Jerusalem, the Temple, the priests and much else in Jerusalem, as well as the despatch of the translators from Jerusalem to Egypt, are omitted in their entirety, and Josephus moves straight on to the arrival of the translators in Alexandria. It is clear from all of this that Josephus is deliberately focused on Egypt and, just as deliberately, avoiding too close a concern with Jerusalem and the Jewish state of that time. While he does not forget the banquet given by the king for the translators on their arrival and

[38] At *Ant.* XII, ii, 7, he says, 'This, then was the high priest's reply. But I have not thought it necessary to report the names of the seventy (sic) elders who were sent by Eleazar and brought the Law, their names being set down at the end of the letter'. In the *Letter*, the letter of Eleazar ends at §46; the names fill §§47–50; and in §51, the text continues 'Such then was the reply which Eleazar gave to the king's letter'. The consequence is that although the letter itself ends at the end of §46, the names seem nevertheless to be very closely associated with the letter. As a result, Josephus' description of his action in omitting them somehow disguises his action in copying/paraphrasing from another work, and retains an implied fiction of his use of an actual document.

[39] Pelletier 1962a:199.

makes sure to mention the care devoted by the king to the special needs of his guests, Josephus leaves out a very long section of the *Letter* dealing with the question-and-answer session at that banquet; in this case, as in that of the names of the translators, he also tells his readers that he is leaving this out and indeed adds that "anyone who wishes to find out the details of the questions discussed at the banquet can learn them by reading the book which Aristaeus [sic] composed on this account". Here, as at other points, Josephus takes care to disguise the fact that he is in effect simply copying from Aristeas. Plagiarism was not then regarded as a sin, but Josephus wanted to make the text look like his own. This omission, like the previous one, not only illustrates the simpler approach of Josephus as a writer by comparison both with the author of the *Letter* and with Philo and not only points to his drier approach, as a Pharisee, to such matters as allegory but also points to his greater interest in local Egyptian topics.

Pelletier draws attention to the contrast between the ways in which, after the end of the translators' work, the Greek text is treated in Josephus and in the *Letter*. In the *Letter* we hear of a solemn ceremony, in which an imprecation is pronounced on any who should alter the text that had thus been created: neither addition nor omission might be made, nor might the order of the contents be changed. In Josephus, by contrast, the Jews request that no changes should be made, and order that, "if anyone saw any further addition made to the text of the Law, or anything omitted from it, he should examine it and make it known and correct it; in this they acted wisely, that what had once been judged good might remain for ever". Here as elsewhere, Josephus shows himself pedestrian: he takes thought here for the possibility of errors in the copying of manuscripts. Such errors certainly occur; they have been the bread and butter of scholars since before his time. But this was not the concern of Ps.-Aristeas, nor does it suit the atmosphere that has been created both in the *Letter* and in the narrative of Josephus himself. A monarch does not commission an important translation, entertaining the translators royally, in order to oversee the checking of slips in the copying of manuscripts of the work. What the *Letter* offers us, and what Josephus himself has built up to in his narrative, is a special royal authorisation of a particular version of the text. No matter what Ps.-Aristeas understood by such a particular version; no matter what ancient readers and users and copyists could have meant by it. What the author of the description of the ceremony at the end of the *Letter* has in mind is an authorized text, authorized by, among other things, the patronage of the king who had commissioned the translation. What Josephus has in mind is something far more modest. Pelletier explains the contrast here between Josephus and the *Letter* in terms of the existence of so-called aberrant manuscripts of the LXX text.[40] For him, the existence of a

[40] Pelletier 1962a:204.

standard text, sanctioned by the competent authorities and confirmed by the presence of the original exemplar in the royal library, was what was promoted by Ps.-Aristeas. By Josephus' time, it was a century since the library had been burnt. This is all true, but it seems to ignore the difference in the aims and the abilities of the two writers.

In this connection, one of the most interesting departures by Josephus from the account in the *Letter* concerns the working methods of the translators. In the *Letter*, as also in Philo, we are given some detail about how they worked, and in the *Letter* in particular we hear about the way in which they worked together in order to produce an agreed version of the Law. In Philo, we saw the glimmerings of the birth of what will later on turn into a story about a miracle. Josephus has none of this. This is not his style, nor, perhaps, would he have understood such an approach. In Josephus' version of the story their host provides the translators with every facility for their work, and "requested them, since they had everything they might need for the translation of the law, to carry out their task without interruption. Thereupon they set to work as ambitiously and painstakingly as possible to make the translation accurate, continuing at their work. . . . " We learn from this nothing about the working methods employed by the translators. They work "ambitiously and painstakingly", and they keep at the work until it is completed, but we learn absolutely nothing about how they carried it out; in consequence, there is also nothing here from which later writers, Christian or Jewish, might have built up a tale of a miracle, or even created an atmosphere conducive to such a development. Josephus is a far more pedestrian mind than Philo, and his account here is far less ambitious and far less adventurous.

Josephus does not simply transcribe word for word the sections of the *Letter* that he uses in his own work. A comparison between the two versions of these passages that we have, those in the *Letter* and those in Josephus, shows that Josephus has in effect re-written them. Pelletier, who made an extremely detailed study of the borrowings, showed conclusively that we could not use the passages in Josephus as a source from which to check the accuracy of our manuscript versions of the *Letter*.[41] However, this does not mean that Josephus was trying in this way merely to disguise his borrowing. He has other aims.

What Josephus, unlike Ps.-Aristeas, offers us really is an account of the translation of the Bible into Greek. Ps.-Aristeas, as we have seen, used the story as a motif to provide a frame for an apologetic work about Judaism in Egypt, with elements of propaganda for the Ptolemies and their attitude to the Jews. Josephus, by contrast, even though he also has broader aims than mere storytelling for its own sake, is concerned with relating the story of the

[41] Pelletier 1962a.

translation itself. His omissions all appear to be deliberate, and such additions as he makes demonstrate his aim clearly. As Pelletier reminds us, Josephus is living in a different world from that of Ps.-Aristeas. This is no longer the world of the confident Jewries of the Hellenistic period, with a semi-autonomous Jewish entity in Jerusalem and the proud service in the Temple under the leadership of the High Priest Eleazar. The world of Josephus is one in which the Jews have failed in the great revolt against Rome; the hellenistic states, including Egypt herself, are largely subject to Rome; Jerusalem has fallen, the Temple is no more. That is more important for Josephus than the fact that the Library of Alexandria was burnt a century before. All this is reflected in the adaptation which Josephus makes of the *Letter*: all the passages relating to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, to the embassy to Eleazar, the description of the Temple and its service and more, all are omitted in order to draw the reader's attention away from the failed project of the Jewish Revolt, and instead to draw it on to a different way of viewing the Jews.

In this new context, writing in a Greek that reflected for his readers the manners and taste of his own time, Josephus is especially concerned to show a pagan audience a plausibly pro-Jewish Ptolemy Philadelphus. He sought to show the greatest representative of the most powerful and the most civilized monarchy of recent times treating with the Jewish High Priest, actually his subject, on terms of near-equality. For the readers of Josephus' work, the contrast with the contemporary predicament of the Jews could not have been more striking.

3

The Rabbis and the Greek Bible

The legend told in the *Letter of Aristeas* about the Greek translation of Scripture engaged the attention and stimulated the imagination of Jews and Christians alike. The Septuagint was important to the followers of both Palestinian religions. For some considerable time it served large parts of Diaspora Jewry and, to some extent, Jews in Palestine, as their only accessible text of the Bible to be used in worship and study as well as in proselytization and apologetics.[1] The reasons for the high value attached to the Septuagint by the Christians were similar: as soon as Christianity ceased being merely a local, Palestinian, Jewish sect and became the religion of Greek-speaking gentiles, the Bible had to be read to the faithful and to potential converts in the only language many of them knew. Providentially, the Old Testament, the Jewish inheritance of the new Church, was available in the language in which the Gospel was to be preached to a large part of mankind. Hence Christians shared with Jews the desire to invest the Septuagint with an authority that could approach, perhaps even equal, that of the original revelation from Mount Sinai. In both traditions the text of the Greek Bible was thought to be literally inspired. Veneration for the text of the Septuagint among Jews in the Greek-speaking Diaspora is reflected in the *Letter* where, apart from the praises heaped on the excellence of the translation, the author reports expressions concerning the need to keep its text inviolable that

[1] There is much evidence for the use of Greek biblical translations in Palestine before the rise of Christianity and in the early Christian period; Barthélemy 1975 (1953); 1963; Tov 1990; Lieberman 1942:47ff. See also, for permission to use Greek versions in the synagogue, for example, PT Megilla 71 c; and cf. PT Megilla 71 b; also BR cap. 36 ad fin. (with the notes in the Theodor-Albeck ed.). The reference here may be to Aquila's translation (towards mid-second century C.E.), although this is not certain; for Greek in Jewish Palestine, see Lieberman 1942:30 (on PT Sota 21 b), where we hear of the Shema being read in a synagogue in Caesarea in Greek as late as the fourth Christian century; on Greek studies among rabbinic Jews in general, see Lieberman 1942 and 1950 passim.

are reminiscent of those that are found in the Torah itself about the Hebrew text.[2]

Over the course of time various additions to the Aristeas legend were propagated both by the Rabbis and by the Fathers of the Church with the obvious purpose of legitimizing the Greek version of the Bible and supporting the claim that its text was divinely inspired. To this end the original story was transformed: what had been a tale of marvel, of astounding human achievement, became one of divine intervention, of supernatural signs and miracles.

Of the later additions to the core of the legend as first presented to us in the *Letter of Aristeas*, particular importance attaches to those which emphasize, for one purpose or another, the miracle that brought about and made manifest the complete agreement of all the Elders from Jerusalem on all the details of their individual translations. In an obviously deliberate departure from what we are told in the original account of the *Letter of Aristeas*, the rabbinic reports emphasize that the translators worked separately and independently from each other but produced identical versions.

There is nothing miraculous in the *Letter*'s report about the production of the translation, nor about how long it took. In §307 of the *Letter* we read that the work was completed by the seventy-two translators in seventy-two days. This coincidence of the number of translators with the number of days needed to accomplish their task is a happy embellishment, no doubt designed to add some aura of more than ordinary significance to the account of the proceedings ("as though this coincidence had been intended"), but it is not a miracle that is presented to us here. Nor was it thus understood or elaborated in later tradition. The motif of the completion of the translation in exactly seventy-two days hardly ever re-appears in the later versions of the story. As has been seen, Josephus and Philo both virtually ignore this aspect of the story in their accounts. This suggests that even the inventors and purveyors of the miracle tale did not think this element of seventy-two translators completing their work in seventy-two days miraculous or in any way significant. Indeed, as far as the number of the translators themselves is concerned, the number *seventy-two* does not seem to have impressed itself very strongly on the imagination of storytellers in the Jewish and Christian traditions.[3] In both these traditions, the number seventy-two alternates with that of seventy; the latter soon becomes the more typical appellation both for the translators and for the translation. Josephus uses both seventy and seventy-two in different places without noting any special relationship between the number of translators and the number of days which

[2] Cf. §§310–11 and Deut. 4:2 and 13:1 (12:32).

[3] This is all the more remarkable because the number seventy-two is borrowed from our present context into other, unrelated, traditions as a 'migratory motif', for example the Peisistratean recension of Homer by seventy-two scholars.

they took for their work (see *Ant*. XII. 39, 49, 56, 57, 86). Justin Martyr, around the middle of the second century, speaks habitually of the Seventy translators.[4] So do Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Jerome and many others.[5] Tertullian and Epiphanius both have seventy-two.[6] The rabbinic sources similarly know both numbers.[7] St Augustine tells us that in his day, 'Septuaginta' had become the current name of the Greek translation.[8] Philo, a writer very susceptible to the lure of number symbolism, does not mention either the number of the translators or the number of days in which they accomplished their task. Neither PT nor the Mekhilta, which clearly draw on the Baraitha (discussed later), in which the number of the translators is given as seventy-two, gives either number; and similarly Megillat Ta'anit and Tanhuma and other sources. It is obvious that any symbolism intended by the original author of the *Letter*, or that we may read into the coincidence of the number of translators with the number of days in which their work was done, was not thus understood by later readers in antiquity.

In contrast to their indifference to the potential offered by the coincidence of the number of days required for the translation with the number of translators involved, the rabbinic and Christian accounts deliberately turn away from the mention of the translators' agreement arrived at by comparison. Instead, they make a point of insisting on the exact opposite, namely the avoidance of comparison. To make comparison impossible, the translators were, in the later versions of the story, carefully separated from each other.[9] Thus, by separating the translators and, in spite of the separation, making them achieve exact agreement in their individual versions, the element of the miraculous was created.

As will be seen, the later rabbinic attitudes to the translation changed in the course of time from apparently wholehearted acceptance to a feeling of acute discomfort, yet there is no sign of any move away from belief in divine intervention at the time of the translation as a given fact of the story. Almost without exception, Jewish readers and writers throughout late antiquity and the middle ages, indeed down to the nineteenth century, accepted the rabbinic accounts as historical and without any attempt at critical analysis of the texts.[10] The motifs that were added to the fund of stories about the LXX were indeed

[4] Justin Martyr, *Dial*. 68, 7; 71, 1; 120, 4; 124, 3; 131, 1; 137, 3.

[5] Irenaeus, *haer*. III. 21.2; Clement, *Strom*. I. 148; Jerome, *Praef. in Pent.*

[6] Tertullian, *Ap*. 18; Epiphanius, *de mens. et pond*. 3ff.

[7] For example, BT has 72; MST has 70; MS has 72.

[8] *De civitate Dei*, XVIII. 42 "... [the seventy two translators], quorum interpretatio, ut Septuaginta vocetur, iam obtinuit consuetudo".

[9] See below, Chapter 5, for a case showing that at least one of the later Christian tradents of the legend seems to have been aware of the contradiction between, on the one hand, the later, miraculous story, and on the other, the story told in the *Letter*.

[10] Virtually the only exception to this is Azaria de' Rossi, about whom see Chapter 10.

expressive of rabbinic anxieties about the existing LXX and, conceivably, about the use made of it by Christian missionaries and polemicists, but this disquiet did not cause the Rabbis to jettison what had become the rabbinic foundation legend of the Greek translation or to abandon faith in its historical authenticity. Even where the story, although alluded to, is not actually told, for example in the Mekhilta and the Palestinian Talmud, it is still there, implicitly, in the background of the enumeration of the alleged changes made by the translators for Ptolemy: "thirteen things did our Sages alter for Ptolemy the king: they wrote for him . . .". One may suspect that, as time passed, the Greek translation was no longer perceived either as being significant or as presenting a problem to rabbinic Jews; at least, they did not think it problematic or menacing enough for them to depart entirely from the ancient story whose contents had lost both sufficient contemporary relevance and threatening implications. It was enough to modify the story by adding in some of the later texts such motifs as that of comparing the day on which the translation had been made to that on which the Golden Calf had been fashioned or to say that on that day darkness fell upon the earth.

The Christian reports – like those of the Rabbis – ultimately derived from the *Letter*, though in essentials following in the footsteps of the Rabbis, are far more numerous and elaborate than those contained in rabbinic literature. They stress the supernatural more insistently and more purposefully than the rabbinic texts. Like the Jews, Christian writers down to the end of the middle ages tended, on the whole, to treat the ancient reports relating to the Septuagint with great credulity. Yet paradoxically it is among Christian readers rather than among Jews that we find some traces of a critical attitude toward the more luxuriant growths of the miraculous element in the story. Such critical moods can be discerned already in late antiquity, explicitly in the works of Jerome and, before him, in Origen's textual work on the LXX. But it is only since the humanist revival of learning, and especially since the seventeenth century, that the *Letter* has been the object of vigorous scholarly investigation and of attacks on its claim to be the authentic account, by a pagan contemporary, of the translation of Scripture into Greek. The rabbinic texts relating to the Septuagint have had to wait longer for sustained critical attention.

The chief passages in rabbinic literature dealing with the Greek translation are three in number: they are the Baraitha in Tractate Megilla 9 a-b in the Babylonian Talmud (BT), supplemented by the list of so-called "changes"; a similar, though very abbreviated, version in Tractate Megilla 71 d, in the Palestinian Talmud; and a similar list in Mekhilta Bo, 14.

The Babylonian Talmud represents the product of the assembly and editing of Jewish halakhic and other discussions over several centuries in Babylon; this process was completed at some time around the end of the fifth century C.E.,

giving us the Talmud more or less in its present form. Much of the contents of the Talmud comes from as far back as the period of the Mishnah, which was edited around the end of the second century C.E. by R. Judah ha-Nasi. A *Baraitha* (pl. Baraithot; from the Aramaic word meaning "outside") is a passage of mishnaic text which was not included in the formal redaction of the Mishnah. Baraithot may vary greatly in date: some came into being long before the date of the redaction of the Mishnah, while others were created even after that date. The word *tanya* (also from Aramaic, meaning "taught") is a standard way of introducing a Baraitha.

I. BT MEGILLA 9 A–B

The Mishnah, Megilla I, 8, has the following:

אין בין ספרים לתפילין ומזוזות אלא שהספרים נכתבין בכל לשון ותפילין ומזוזות אינן נכתבות אלא אשורית רשב״ג אומר אף בספרים לא התירו שיכתבו אלא יונית.

There is no difference between (a) Books[11] and (b) Tefillin and Mezuzoth except that Books may be written in any language, Tefillin and Mezuzot only in Assyrian.[12] Rabban Shim'on b. Gamaliel said "Even with regard to Books they [the Rabbis] allowed the use of only one language (other than Hebrew), namely Greek".

On this passage the Babylonian Talmud has the following (Megilla 9 a-b):

דתניא א״ר יהודה אף כשהתירו רבותינו יונית לא התירו אלא בספר תורה ומשום מעשה דתלמי המלך. דתניא מעשה בתלמי המלך שכינס שבעים ושנים זקנים והכניסן בשבעים ושנים בתים ולא גילה להם על מה כינסן ונכנס אצל כל אחד ואחד ואמר להם כתבו לי תורת משה רבכם נתן הקב״ה בלב כל אחד ואחד עצה והסכימו כולן לדעת אחת וכתבו לו

We are taught: R. Judah said: Even though our teachers permitted Greek, they permitted it only in respect of the Scroll of the Law and (that) because of the story of Ptolemy the King. We are taught: A story about Ptolemy the king, who brought together seventy two elders and put them in seventy two [separate] houses (or: rooms) without telling them why he had brought them together; then he went in to each and every one of them [separately] and told them [each] to "Translate for me the Torah of Moses your Master";[13] (and) the Holy One, Blessed be He,

[11] "Books" probably refers here to the scroll of the Torah (the Pentateuch as used in the reading from the Law during the service of the Synagogue), which to this day is the *Sepher* ('book') par excellence. It is conceivable, however, that ספרים could be understood as referring to biblical books in general; that would explain the more restrictive interpretation given by R. Judah later.

[12] "Assyrian" refers to the square characters used in Hebrew writing, borrowed from Aramaic, which in ancient literature, both Greek and Hebrew, is frequently confused with Syrian and with Assyrian.

[13] This is clearly an inner-Jewish adaptation of the Hebrew expression משה רבנו, "Moses our Master".

put wisdom (or: counsel) in the heart of each of them, and they all agreed of one accord, and wrote for him[14]

1. Genesis 1:1 אלהים ברא בראשית ("God created in the beginning"; also in PT and in Mekhilta)
2. Genesis 1:26 אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמות ("Let me make man in [my] image, after [my] likeness"; also in PT and in Mekhilta)
3. Genesis 2:2 ויכל ביום הששי וישבות ביום השביעי ("And [God] ended [his work] on the sixth day and he rested on the seventh day"; also in PT and in Mekhilta)
4. Genesis 5:2 זכר ונקבה בראו (ולא כתבו בראם) ("Male and female created He him [and they did not translate 'created He them']")
5. Genesis 11:7 הבה ארדה ואבלה שם שפתם ("Go to, let me go down, and there confound their language")
6. Genesis 18:12 ותצחק שרה בקרוביה ("And Sarah laughed in her insides")
7. Genesis 49:6 כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס ("for in their anger they slew an ox and in their selfwill they digged down a crib")
8. Exodus 4:20 ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושא בני אדם ("And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them to ride upon a carrier of the children of men")
9. Exodus 12:40 ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו במצרים ובשאר ארצות שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה ("And the sojourning of the Children of Israel who dwelt in Egypt and other lands was thirty years and four hundred years")
10. Exodus 24:5 וישלח את זאטוטי בני ישראל ("And he sent the youths of the Children of Israel")
11. Exodus 24:11 ואל זאטוטי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו ("And upon the youths of the Children of Israel he laid not his hand")
12. Numbers 16:15 לא חמד אחד מהם נשאתי ("I have not taken one desirable thing from them")
13. Deuteronomy 4:19 אשר חלק ה׳ אלהיך אתם להאיר לכל העמים ("which the Lord thy God hath divided to give light unto all nations")
14. Deuteronomy 17:3 וילך ויעבוד אלהים אחרים אשר לא צויתי לעובדם ("And hath gone and worshipped other gods whom I did not bid [you] worship")
15. Leviticus 11:6 (or possibly Deut 14:7) וכתבו לו את צעירת הרגלים ולא כתבו לו את הארנבת מפני שאשתו של תלמי ארנבת שמה שלא יאמר שחקו בי היהודים והטילו שם אשתי בתורה ("And they wrote for him 'the young-legged' and they did not write for him 'the hare' because Ptolemy's wife was named Arnevet ['scil. 'hare'] lest he say 'The Jews have made fun of me and put the name of my wife in the Torah'").[15]

This list is part of a story contained in a Baraitha. That Baraitha is preceded by another, which introduces R. Judah <b. Ilai>, a pupil of R. Tarfon and of

[14] I translate here the texts as allegedly adjusted by the translators; in a couple of cases, it has not proved possible to do so in a way that brings out the difference implied.

[15] This item is discussed in Wasserstein 1996; see 140* for the ghost word ארנתא.

R. Aqiba and before that perhaps of Rabban Gamliel II. He lived in the middle of the second century C.E. This is valuable and helpful in dating the Baraitha containing the translation legend. For although no details are mentioned, we have here fairly clear evidence for the proposition that R. Judah was already familiar with the rabbinic belief that the Greek text of the Torah had been formulated under divine inspiration: R. Judah distinguishes between the translation of the Torah and that of the rest of the Old Testament. He thinks that the former (and only the former) is permitted because of its connection with the translation legend, משום מעשה דתלמי המלך, "because of the story about Ptolemy the king". This strongly suggests, even if it does not conclusively prove, that R. Judah knew the story in the version which we know from the Baraitha immediately following.[16] What is certain is that he knew some version that established and justified the superior respect accorded the septuagintal Pentateuch as compared with the rest of the Greek Old Testament. This Baraitha, incidentally, also establishes the certainty that the Rabbis knew of the existence of the other Old Testament books in Greek, even though they never refer to any readings in them. Perhaps, although knowing of the existence of these books in Greek, they were unacquainted with their actual texts.

On the face of it, these are two separate Baraithot; each is introduced by the conventional formula דתניא, *de-tanya*. But though separate, they are connected. The talmudic redactor at least connected them. He meant to convey that the second amplified the first; and he could scarcely have been wrong about this.

2. PT MEGILLA 71 D

The Palestinian (or Jerusalem) Talmud offers us a shorter text. This Talmud, representing the distillation and editing of rabbinic discussions from the Land of Israel, is to be dated in its present form around the second half of the fourth century C.E. Here, in Tractate Megilla 71 d, we find the following:

י״ג דבר שינו חכמים לתלמי המלך כתבו לו . . .

"Thirteen things the Sages changed for Ptolemy the king; they wrote for him. . . ."

This short sentence serves as the introduction to a list of thirteen changes introduced by the Sages:

1. Genesis 1:1 אלהים ברא בראשית
2. Genesis 1:26 אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמות
3. Genesis 5:2 זכר ונקוביו בראם
4. Genesis 2:2 ויכל בששי וישבות בשביעי

[16] R. Judah b. Ilai is responsible for transmitting many old traditions; see Hyman 1987:534–42.

5. Genesis 11:7 הבה ארדה
6. Genesis 18:12 ותצחק שרה בקרוביה לאמור
7. Genesis 49:6 כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס
8. Exodus 4:20 ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושאי בני אדם
9. Exodus 12:40 ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו במצרים ובכל הארצות שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה
10. Leviticus 11:6 ואת הארנבת את צעירת הרגלים אמו של תלמי המלך ארנתא הוות שמה
11. Numbers 16:15 לא חמד אחד מהם נשאתי
12. Deuteronomy 4:19 אשר חלק ה׳ אלהים אותם להאיר לכל העמים תחת כל השמים
13. Deuteronomy 17:3 אשר לא צויתי לאומות לעובדם

3. MEKHILTA BO 14

Finally, Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael: this work is one of the oldest Midrashim and is a tannaitic exposition of a large part of the book of Exodus. Although it received its present form not earlier than the end of the fourth century C.E., much of it too goes back to earlier centuries. In this work we find the following:[17]

ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו במצרים ובארץ כנען ובארץ גושן שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה זה אחד מן הדברים שכתבו לתלמי המלך כיוצא בו כתבו לו . . .

"Now the time that the Children of Israel dwelt in Egypt and in the Land of Canaan and in the Land of Goshen was four hundred and thirty years" (cf. Exodus 12:40; and see later). This is one of the passages which they (changed when) writing (the Torah) for king Ptolemy. Likewise they wrote for him

1. Genesis 1:1 אלהים ברא בראשית
2. Genesis 1:26 אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמות
3. Genesis 1:27 זכר ונקוביו בראם
4. Genesis 2:2 ויכל ביום הששי וישבות ביום השביעי
5. Genesis 11:7 הבה ארדה ואבלה שם שפתם
6. Genesis 18:12 ותצחק שרה בקרוביה לאמור
7. Genesis 49:6 כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס
8. Exodus 4:20 ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושא אדם
9. Numbers 16:15 לא חמד אחד מהם נשאתי
10. Deuteronomy 4:19 אשר חלק ה׳ אלהיך להאיר לכל העמים
11. Deuteronomy 17:3 וכתבו לו אשר לא צויתי לאומות לעובדם
12. Leviticus 11:6 וכתבו לו את צעירת הרגלים
13. Exodus 12:40 ומושב בני ישראל שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה

[17] Mekhilta, ed. H. S. Horovitz-I. A. Rabin, Jerusalem, 1960, 50–51; ed. J. Z. Lauterbach, Philadelphia, I, 1976, 111–12; ed. I. H. Weiss, Vienna, 1865, 19–20; ed. Ish-Shalom, Vienna, 1870, 15b–16a.

We should see the last item, Exodus 12:40, apparently repeated from the beginning of the passage and out of order here, as simply a return to the lemma at the end of the broader discussion to which it has given rise. One consequence of this is that no. 12, Leviticus 11:6, is, effectively, the last entry in this version of the list, just as in BT. This may indicate that this version of the list is older than that in PT, which has this item in its proper place in terms of the order of the biblical text.

From a detailed examination of these texts there emerge simple elements of a story. One of the Ptolemies[18] assembled seventy-two Jewish elders or sages. Without revealing his purpose to them, he put them into seventy-two separate rooms (literally בתים = houses) and asked each one of them separately to translate (כתבו literally = write) for him the Torah of Moses their Master. God put counsel (עצה) into the heart of each one of them and they all agreed of one accord[19] (והסכימו כולן לדעת אחת) and wrote for him (וכתבו לו)....

This tale serves as a prologue to what purports to be a list of changes introduced into a number of pentateuchal passages, all being deviations from the masoretic text, all (with one exception[20]) offered without any explanation, and all, apparently, listed without any tendentious purpose on the part of the rabbinic redactor or his source;[21] on the contrary, it is worth noting at this point that the story as we read it in the Baraitha in BT is clearly reported from a source whose attitude to the Greek translation is marked not only by acceptance but by the wish to stress divine intervention in its making.

[18] None of the rabbinic sources names Philadelphus. No. 15 in the List of Changes may, in the note on ארנבת (Leviticus 11:6 or perhaps Deuteronomy 14:7), preserve a confused reminiscence of the name of the founder of the Lagid dynasty; see later, ad loc. and D. Wasserstein 1998. Most, but not all, Christian sources, if they specify at all which Ptolemy is referred to, mention Philadelphus, although occasionally we hear of Soter (e.g., in Irenaeus, *c. haer.*, III.21.2; and cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, I, 148). The connection of the translation with a Ptolemy is due to the author of the *Letter*, whose Ptolemy is Philadelphus; for, although he is not in the *Letter* called by that name, he is identified by the references to his father, Ptolemy I Soter (the reference in Jellicoe 1968:47 to Lagos is a slip of the pen). Thus, 'Ptolemy son of Lagos' (= Ptolemy I Soter) in §14, is identified as the same person as 'the king's father' in §4. References to other Ptolemies are due to confusion in the tradition derived from the *Letter*. As is mentioned in Chapter 1, the *name* Philadelphus is rarely found in use for the second Ptolemy before the end of the second century B.C.E., and its absence from the *Letter* may therefore indicate an early date for that text.

[19] The words used by St Augustine (*de civitate Dei* XVIII. 42) on the agreement of the translators, 'quoniam ... spiritus unus erat in omnibus', sound curiously like an echo of the Hebrew expression והסכימו כולן לדעת אחת here.

[20] The exception is no. 15 (Leviticus 11:6 or, perhaps, Deuteronomy 14:7) in the list presented in the Babylonian Talmud. The "explanation" appended to no. 4 in the same list (on Genesis 5:2 or, perhaps, 1:27) is not really an explanation and, in any case, almost certainly arises from a scribal annotation.

[21] It will be seen that Qirqisani and Usque do offer explanations, but they are late exceptions.

There are good reasons for thinking that the Baraitha in BT Megilla 9 a–b is our nearest approach to the original source of the translation story (together with the list of the alleged changes) in its rabbinic version; our Baraitha may itself be that original source. It claims the authority of antiquity, relying on its tannaitic source (דתניא). That its list of the changes reportedly introduced by the translators is longer than the lists of the Mekhilta or the PT is a proof neither of priority nor of relative lateness, for it is not necessary to argue that the text we have has remained unchanged. In the course of its transmission it has no doubt suffered from contamination and from corruption. However, of our three main rabbinic witnesses it is the only one that has the full story; the short sentences introducing the lists in Mekhilta and PT are almost certainly abbreviations of, or allusions to, the story told in the Baraitha quoted by BT. It is well known that the rabbis of the Palestinian Talmud were much more ready to amend the text of the Mishnah (and thus presumably that of a Baraitha) than their more conservative counterparts in Babylonia. It seems clear, further, that the Baraitha, although it is, like so many other Baraithot, found in a Babylonian text, was not invented in Babylonia. There can be no doubt that the Baraitha is known to the Palestinian redactors of the Mekhilta and of PT; although they do not tell it they allude to it, and it would be far-fetched to imagine that they received and accepted from Babylonian sources a spurious Baraitha claiming to be of Palestinian origin.[22] Even if it were not authentic (i.e., not of tannaitic origin) – which there is no reason to believe – it would be unlikely in the highest degree for such a story and such a list (for the two go together) to be invented in Babylonia where knowledge of Greek or of the Greek Bible is much less to be expected than in semi-hellenized Palestine; and it would be difficult to imagine whose interests or needs could conceivably be served in Babylonia by such an invention. In any case, the likely time of the invention (on which see later) would not fit a Babylonian origin.

The Baraitha as we find it in BT (like the other rabbinic texts associated with it) has a plain meaning: it speaks about the Greek translation of the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch and it reflects a hospitable welcome to this translation.[23]

Rabbinic literature, like the *Letter of Aristeas*, ascribes to the Seventy no more than the translation of the Pentateuch. The Rabbis show no evidence of any familiarity with the septuagintal version of the rest of the Old Testament, in spite of the fact that, substantially, the whole of the Hebrew Bible had already been available in Greek for well over two hundred years. By the time the grandson of

[22] Frankel 1841:27ff. suggests that the tale is a late (Babylonian) talmudic "explanation" that may not even have been known in Palestine, but this view cannot stand up to critical examination.

[23] Contra Frankel 1841:25ff.; 3f. suggests that the passages in PT and Mekhilta refer to a Hebrew text, not a translation, though he recognizes that the passage in BT did refer to a translation. Gooding 1963:376 says that 'ἑρμηνεία was the only noun available for "translation"'. This is not quite accurate.

Ben Sira translated the Hebrew text of his grandfather's work into Greek around 132 B.C.E., he could speak of "the Law and the Prophets and the other books" with the clear implication that they were available in Greek.[24] And there can be no doubt that, certainly before Christianity had become a factor affecting rabbinic attitudes to the Septuagint, Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible including more than just the Pentateuch were known in Palestine: the Greek scroll of the Minor Prophets from Nahal Hever in the Judaean desert area is probably to be dated in the first century;[25] the text that it contains may, of course, be much older than the manuscript itself. Yet although the Rabbis knew as a fact that there existed Greek translations of the non-pentateuchal parts of the Old Testament, they give no sign of being directly acquainted with these translations. The Baraitha (Megilla 9 a) immediately preceding that in which we read the rabbinic legend of the translation together with the list of alleged changes reads: "As it is taught: R. Judah said 'Even when our teachers permitted <the use of> Greek, they permitted it only in respect of the Torah'". The distinction made here by R. Judah shows that he knew that there existed Greek versions of non-pentateuchal portions of the Old Testament. On the other hand, rabbinic acquaintance with Aquila's Greek version, which is to be dated somewhere in the first third of the second century, extended over much wider portions of the Hebrew Bible. Although the rabbinic lists of changes allegedly introduced by the translators into the version they are said to have made for a Ptolemy are exclusively concerned with lections of pentateuchal passages, such readings of Aquila's as are mentioned in rabbinic literature contain a good number of non-pentateuchal references.[26]

For whom precisely and for what reason this new translation of Aquila's was made is unclear. The Christian appropriation of the existing Greek translation and its use in missionary activities among potential Jewish converts to the new faith would, of course, have been a sufficient incentive for providing a new version for Greek-speaking Jews. There can be no doubt that while accusing the Jews of tampering[27] with the text of Scripture in order to hide or remove supposed prophetic references to the coming of Jesus as the messiah, Christian

[24] For the date see Ecclesiasticus, Prologue, line 27; for the books, cf. 1–2, 8–10, and especially 21–26.

[25] See Barthélemy 1963: passim and especially part III (and also Barthélemy 1975 [1953] for some preliminary results); Tov 1990, where see especially 22ff., where Parsons opts, tentatively, for a date in the later first century B.C.E.

[26] See Swete 1914:33 for some of these; cf. Friedmann 1896:41ff.

[27] It was a frequent accusation brought by early Christian writers against their former co-religionists that they were either wilfully misinterpreting Scripture or maliciously tampering with its text (e.g., Justin, *Dial.* 43, 8; 68, 7ff.; 71, 1 [G. pp. 181f.]; 72, 3; 83, 1; 84, 3; 112, 1ff.; 120, 4f.); *et sic saepissime*, using expressions such as ἀναιρεῖν, περιαιρεῖν, παραγράφειν, ἐκκόπτειν vel sim. Cf. also Lukyn Williams 1935:33f.; Simon 1986:158 and 461 n. 17, with further examples.

editors and copyists of the LXX themselves introduced (or accepted) at a very early age changes into the text of the LXX that pointed in a christological direction.[28] But we are not told anywhere in early rabbinic literature that that was the motive for making a new translation. It is only from Christian sources that we hear explicitly of rabbis, as early as the second century, complaining about the LXX: Justin Martyr writes, "...your teachers who dare to say that the interpretation which your Seventy elders gave who were with Ptolemy the king of the Egyptians is not completely true".[29] There is indeed a well-known tale, in late Midrashim, in which we find expressions of dissatisfaction with the Greek Bible because of the use made of it by gentiles, and where the reference seems to be to Christians: "R. Yehudah bar Shalom said...Moses desired that the Mishnah should be written down, for the Holy One Blessed be He foresaw that the nations of the earth would translate the Torah and read it in Greek and say 'We are <the true> Israel etc.'"[30] This is cited in late Midrashim from a fourth century Palestinian Amora, and it is to be noted that even as late as this there is no hint of any suggestion that the gentiles had been tampering with the text of Scripture. What is at issue in this passage is the fear that the gentiles might appropriate Holy Writ and use it to support their claim to be the *Verus Israel*.[31] But no source from the tannaitic period suggests that the translation of Aquila was made for the purpose of counteracting the Christian use made of the LXX.

It has been suggested, not implausibly, that the motive for making a new translation may not have been suspicion of any sectarian, or christianizing, tendency in the then current Greek texts of the LXX but rather the intervening adoption of a particular Hebrew text form as canonical. This differed considerably from the Hebrew underlying the LXX, and Aquila's version had the two great advantages from the point of view of rabbinic Jews that (1) it translated the by then canonized Hebrew text literally word for word; and (2) it thus remained in close conformity with the text underlying the traditional exegesis of the Rabbis.[32] However, we are not ever told explicitly in rabbinic literature

[28] Cf. Seeligmann 1948:25, especially his note on Lam 4:20.

[29] Justin, *Dial.* 68, 7. Cf. also 71, 1; 112, 2; et alibi. It seems reasonable to understand the διδάσκαλοι in such passages to be the Rabbis, as in 137, 2: Φαρισαῖοι διδάσκαλοι.

[30] Tanhuma, כי תשא, 34: א״ר יהודה בר שלום...בקש משה שתהא המשנה בכתב ולפי שצפה הקב׳ה שאומות העולם עתידין לתרגם את התורה ולהיות קוראין בה יונית והם אומרים אנו ישראל וכו׳; and Tanhuma, וירא, 5; and cf. Tanhuma (Buber), כי תשא, 6, p. 88 and Tanhuma (Buber), *כי תשא*, 17, pp. 116f; similarly in Pesikta Rabbati 14B (ed. Ish-Shalom = Friedman).

[31] Cf. Gal 6:15–16; and, for example, Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 123. Cf. Harnack 1924:259ff.; Seeligmann 1948:25; Lieberman 1950:207; Simon 1986. The dangers arising from such a claim had, of course, become apparent before the rise of Christianity since it had been made by the sectarians of the Dead Sea area.

[32] See Swete 1914:30, with n. 1 and the literature cited there; and also 41.

that Aquila was commissioned to make the new version, nor do we ever find among the Rabbis so unambiguous and explicit a condemnation[33] of the LXX as that contained in the famous saying of R. Judah b. Ilai, "He who translates even one verse [of the Torah] literally is a liar . . .", with apparent reference to translating into Aramaic.[34] In any case, Aquila's version does not seem to have been unambiguously received by the Jews of the hellenistic diaspora. There is evidence of Jewish use of the LXX for many generations after Aquila.[35] As late as the sixth century we have evidence, such as from Justinian's Novella 146, for continued Jewish use of the LXX alongside other versions. And there seems to be no reason to doubt that the LXX was in general Jewish use at least until the Muslim conquest in the seventh century.

The dependence of the rabbinic sources on the *Letter of Aristeas* explains the restriction in the rabbinic version of the legend to the translation of the

[33] Nowhere in rabbinic literature do we find so unhappily phrased a reference to the Septuagint, and incidentally to the Eastern Church, as that by Francisco Ximénes de Cisneros, Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, Primate of Spain, High Chancellor and Regent of Castile, Inquisitor General of the Holy Office (1436–1517), initiator and sponsor of the Complutensian Polyglot (in which he printed the first edition of the whole of the Septuagint). In describing the layout of the various texts on the pages of this famous Bible, he mentions that the Latin column stands in the middle between the Hebrew on the outer margin of the page and the Greek on the inner margin: ". . . mediam autem inter has (i.e., between the Hebrew and the Greek) Latinam beati Hieronymi translationem velut inter Synagogam et Orientalem Ecclesiam posuimus, tanquam duos hinc et inde latrones, medium autem Iesum, hoc est Romanam sive Latinam Ecclesiam, collocantes." The savage bigotry of this comment must not obscure the merit of its author in printing for the first time the whole of the Greek Bible, but it does highlight the moderation of the ancient Rabbis. (*Vetus Testamentum multiplici lingua nunc primo impressum, et imprimis Pentateuchus Hebraico Greco atque Chaldaico idiomate, adiuncta unicuique sua Latina interpretatione*; thus on the title page of the copy in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, without date or place of publication. Reference books (e.g., Swete 1914:171f.) cite it as follows: *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta complectentia V. T. Hebraico Graeco et Latino idiomate, N. T. Graecum et Latinum, et vocabularium Hebraicum et Chaldaicum V. T. cum grammatica Hebraica necnon Dictionario Graeco.* Studio opera et impensis Cardinalis Fr. Ximenes de Cisneros. Industria Arnoldi Gulielmi de Brocario artis impressorie magistri. Compluti, 1514 [-15, 17].)

[34] Tosephta Megilla, 4, 41, p. 228 Zuckermandel; BT Qiddushin 49a. המתרגם פסוק כצורתו הרי זה בדאי וכו׳.

[35] See, for examples, Trebilco 1991:61ff., and especially 68 and 74ff. Trebilco's conclusion that the LXX was used in third-century Acmonia is entirely acceptable (see esp. 75); but one of his arguments (68) in support of that conclusion, that the use of the name Δευτερονόμιον in Jewish inscriptions that he quotes shows that the Scriptures were read in the septuagintal version, seems unconvincing. It is true that this Greek name for the fifth book of the Pentateuch is of Alexandrian origin (it is found in the septuagintal text of Deuteronomy 17:18; and Jo 9:2c = Hebrews 8:32, in both of which it translates the Hebrew משנה תורה). But this does not prove that the version in which or about which this name was used was that contained in the Septuagint; the rabbinic designation (e.g., at BT Megilla 31b) for the fifth book of the Pentateuch (nowadays generally referred to in Hebrew as דברים) is, like that in the Hebrew Bible, also משנה תורה; this Hebrew name would suggest acceptance and use of the Greek Δευτερονόμιον to readers of any Greek version who did not use the Septuagint as easily as to the translators themselves.

Pentateuch. It does not explain the almost total silence about the rest of the Greek Old Testament elsewhere in rabbinic literature.[36]

The rabbinic accounts of the translation made for Ptolemy Philadelphus, though in important respects different from that of the *Letter of Aristeas*, are ultimately derived from that work; they are far from providing an independent confirmation of, or testimony to, the veracity of the account propagated in the *Letter* or to the existence of a different tradition about the fact of the translation.[37] On the contrary, the rabbinic accounts, in spite of the problems raised above which left us with some perplexities, only testify to two indubitable facts:

1. Rabbinic interest in and acquaintance with the Septuagint of the Pentateuch. But even this is limited: on the one hand the lists of "changes" provided by the Rabbis contain more or less trustworthy information about some individual readings, on the other hand they do not show that the Rabbis were acquainted with any particular, specific form of the septuagintal text.[38]
2. No less importantly, the Rabbis were acquainted with the tradition of the *Letter of Aristeas*. Thus they draw from it some of the important motifs of the story as they tell it: the involvement of a Ptolemy; the importance attached to the translation; the number of the seventy-two translators. Although there is no trace in their account of some other details concerning the translators, e.g., that they were sent to Alexandria from Jerusalem,[39] it is clear that they are represented by the Rabbis, as by Ps.-Aristeas, as men of standing: the Rabbis call them זקנים, "Elders" (in BT) and חכמים, "Sages" (in PT), both terms well known as honorific appellations in rabbinic Hebrew.[40]

The rabbinic sources do not, any more than the *Letter*, serve as a source for the origins and early history of the LXX, except in that, as was just noted,

[36] The Greek OT includes, in addition to all the books of the Hebrew canon, much apocryphal and pseudepigraphic material of Jewish origin. Some of these additions are translations of Hebrew originals (e.g., Ben Sira; I Macc) the greater part of which are lost and survive only in translation; to these were added other Jewish-hellenistic productions written originally in Greek (e.g. II Macc; the Wisdom of Solomon).

[37] See later, notes on Massekhet Sopherim, where five translators are mentioned. The number *five* there (and in some other sources) is obviously intrusive. Its only value resides in the fact that it indicates affinities and lines of descent connecting the various versions of the rabbinic legend.

[38] They confirm the antiquity of some septuagintal deviations from the masoretic text (e.g. ἕκτῃ in Genesis 2:2; ἐπιθύμημα in Numbers 16:15).

[39] The Rabbis, in all their reports, avoid mentioning the place where the translation was made and the purpose for which it was made, though the reference to Ptolemy shows that they were not trying to hide the Alexandrian origin of the translation, just as the tone of the reports, as in BT, is such that the generally sympathetic attitude to the LXX, and that means, of course, also to its use, is obvious.

[40] BT זקנים; PT חכמים (Mekhilta has simply the verb כתבו); MST זקנים; MS חמשה זקנים . . . ע׳ב זקנים; Tanhuma and Tanhuma Buber רבותינו; AdRN (B) חמשה זקנים; Midrash ha-Gadol רבותינו; Megillat Ta'anit (this does not explicitly mention the translators) נכתבה התורה יונית. . . .

they incidentally confirm the antiquity of some deviant septuagintal readings. An examination of the rabbinic accounts therefore aims rather at elucidating on one hand the history of the reception in rabbinic Judaism both of the LXX itself and of the Aristeas legend, and on the other the place of the rabbinic accounts in the further history of the legend.

There was no miracle in the account of the *Aristeas Letter*, but the story as told by the Rabbis, introducing the list of alleged changes made by the translators, is clearly intended to commend the changes to the reader as being worthy of attention precisely because they are the direct outcome of a miraculous event. This should be properly understood. The miracle, as told by the rabbis, is even more miraculous than the version later found in Christian writers. The latter see the miracle in the complete agreement, word for word, of all the individual versions. The rabbinic version is more extreme: it contains in addition to the unanimous agreement, in itself sufficiently miraculous, of the individual Greek translations of the Hebrew text, the further agreement of entirely unpredictable, unpremeditated, and uncoordinated changes in these Greek translations of the original Hebrew text.

This additional motif finds its place more easily in the rabbinic context than in a context of Christian writers and readers. Among the Rabbis, the originators of the "list" and at least some of their audience knew both Hebrew and Greek. Christians, by contrast, were either monoglot or, if bilingual, then not in Hebrew and Greek but more likely in Syriac and Greek. In any case, it is amongst the Rabbis that the inventor of the embellishments added to the original story must be sought; these embellishments appear in order to commend the lists. Christian writers would only repeat what they had heard from Jewish informants and would, in the nature of things, be interested in the tale of divine intervention but not in the details of the alleged changes. The lists are not found in the Christian sources, which see in the story embellished by further additions a witness to the divine inspiration of the Greek Bible. Christian tradition did, of course, know of "changes" allegedly made by Jews in the text of the Bible, but these changes were said to be tendentiously anti-Christian and are wholly unrelated to the rabbinic lists, as they are also unrelated to the story of the translation.[41]

The original rabbinic story as narrated in the Baraitha is very different in its function from versions that we find in other, later, rabbinic sources. PT and Mekhilta, unlike the Babylonian Talmud, are both Palestinian, and it is significant that these and other Palestinian sources (in MST, MS and Megillat

[41] It is not entirely inconceivable that the Christian polemical *topos* of Jewish tampering with the text may to some extent echo the story of the Ptolemaic changes. The Jews, so some Christian polemicists said, tampered with the text in order to remove evidence of prophetic predictions of the coming of Jesus Christ; see, Swete 1914:31, citing Epiphanius on Aquila, and below, especially Chapter 6.

Ta'anit) give us the list either with only part of (sometimes only an allusion to) the introductory story or with the story in a form that modifies the miraculous element so as to make it appear sinister. For example, in Massekhet Sepher Torah we are simply told that the Seventy translated the Torah into Greek but without any mention of their miraculous agreement in spite of the fact that "changes" are listed; instead, the compiler remarks that "that day was as hard for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made". These latter accounts emerge from the same reactive background as the story about the Targum Jonathan to the effect that when Jonathan b. Uzziel (first century B.C.E. – first century C.E.) produced the Aramaic translation of the Prophets, "at the dictation of Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi", the Land of Israel shook over an area of 400 parasangs (BT Megilla 3 a). The negative attitude is clearly and unmistakably the same in all of these passages.[42]

In the so-called Babylonized[43] version which we find in Massekhet Sopherim (MS), two alternative and in their tendency contradictory stories are told. The first story clearly belongs to the late Palestinian tradition of which Megillat Ta'anit (in the so-called Last Chapter) is a not untypical representative; like MST, MS in the first story compares the translation to the making of the golden calf. The second story, also originating in Palestine but at some stage abandoned there, describes the translation as the outcome of a miraculous event, obviously drawing on the tradition that embodies an initially welcoming attitude to the LXX; in other words, it clearly draws on our Baraitha. The Babylonian account and those others which, like that of the confused compiler of Massekhet Sopherim, draw on Babylonian traditions, are transmitted by or rely on redactors who do not feel threatened by the Greek Bible. Christianity was not powerful and influential in Mesopotamia as it was in Palestine at the time the Mekhilta and the Palestinian Talmud were given their final shape,[44] and, in any case, the redactors of the Babylonian Talmud were not living in an environment as

[42] Cf. for the same expression of universal horror the similar passage in Baba Qama 82b–83a, where the context is one of Greek language and Greek wisdom. In a context in which Jonathan b. Uzziel is represented as the greatest of the disciples of Hillel the Elder, surpassing by far even Yohanan b. Zakkai (Sukka 28a), we are told another, equally miraculous story about him: whenever he sat studying the Torah any bird that happened to be flying over him was burnt. Stories of this kind seem to have attached themselves to various teachers; with changing contexts they may variously assume an auspicious or a sinister significance. In Berakhot 59 comets, earthquakes and other natural phenomena are severally explained as the expression of God's sorrow over the sufferings of Israel; see on this Fishbane 1991.

[43] See Higger 1930:10f., who argues that the Palestinian compiler of Massekhet Sopherim knew and was influenced by the Babylonian Talmud.

[44] The final redaction of the Palestinian Talmud cannot be dated before the end of the fourth century; that of the Mekhilta seems to be later. See on this Herr 1972, who points out that, like other halakhic Midrashim, the Mekhilta was apparently unknown to the Rabbis of the Talmudim.

strongly marked by Hellenism as Palestine. The redactors and transmitters of the Palestinian Talmud and of the Mekhilta were more aware of the problematic nature of the various Greek versions current in their area and therefore were perhaps at some stage unlikely to propagate a story ascribing great authority to the Greek Bible. Hence, in these Palestinian sources, we find the list of alleged exegetical and homiletical changes made by the translators, but we find them either without the introductory story or with that story merely in the background, alluded to but not actually related, as, for example, in PT and Mekhilta. However, in such cases, even the Palestinian sources do not entirely suppress the legend.

Our sources do not necessarily draw here on different accounts. Rather, it seems that the original version of the story was at some stage amended. This amended version, which by implication condemns or throws suspicion on the Greek translation, must have come into being in a period in which some of the rabbis saw in the LXX tendentious interpretation and indeed adulteration of the Greek text and reprehended its use by Christians in their missionary activities. It is also clear that the amended version does not derive its information from an earlier source different from and independent of the tradition which stems from the *Letter of Aristeas*. It is simply another, later, invention, reacting to a changed situation, and expressing changed attitudes, less sanguine about the Septuagint, perhaps somewhat fearful. This was grafted onto the existing account of the translation. Even so, it is remarkable that the "pessimistic", no less than the "optimistic", attitude is clearly expressive of awe at the divine intervention at the time when the translation was produced.

Can we know when, where and by whom the element of divine intervention and the miraculous agreement of the translators was invented and added to the original account? As we have seen, it seems very likely that of all the rabbinic texts the Baraitha in BT preserves the earliest extant rabbinic form of the story of the miracle. One might be tempted to assume that these new elements were a Hellenistic-Jewish invention. This, however, seems unlikely, for the following reasons: Philo's account is already coloured by the apparent desire to see in the work of the translators *some* divine inspiration. But he does not know the motif of the deliberate separation of the translators with the purpose of making it impossible for them to consult with each other. Josephus too is innocent of any allusion to the miracle.[45] Most important, however, of all the arguments against the assumption of a Hellenistic-Jewish origin of the story is the complete

[45] See previous chapter. Eichhorn 1823:II, 440f., says that Josephus repeats the tale of the inspiration of the LXX. He seems to misunderstand *Ant.* XII.2. This is in fact no more than a lightly adapted summary of the relevant passages from the *Letter*. Josephus knows nothing of the miracle-mongering so beloved of later writers. For the relationship of Josephus to the *Letter*, see Pelletier 1962a.

absence of any trace of the existence of the legend in that real or imaginary Hellenistic-Jewish tradition so often appealed to, rightly or wrongly, in Christian literature. The latter is full of allusions to and relations of the miracle story, but in no place at all is it referred to a real or even to an imaginary Hellenistic Jewish writer.[46]

Was it then a Christian invention? This is equally unlikely. It is virtually inconceivable that the Rabbis would have borrowed this story from their Christian rivals at any time, and particularly when the Rabbis are said to have abandoned or at least modified their earlier favourable attitude to the Alexandrian translation of the Law. Such a change cannot be dated later than the generation of R. Aqiba (d. 135 C.E.). The earliest occurrence of the story including the miraculous element in extant Christian sources is found in St Irenaeus (c. 130 – c. 200 C.E.).[47] Justin Martyr (100–165 C.E.), himself a Palestinian, offers a garbled version of the original story of the translation but, significantly, without the miraculous element.[48] Thus, as far as our evidence goes, the Christians do not know the story of the miracle before the second half of the second century, a time when the Rabbis would certainly not want to adopt from a dissident and by now hostile sect a version of the legend which ascribed divine inspiration to a Greek translation, which at that time they seem to have sought to replace or supplement by that of Aquila.

This leaves us with one explanation. The miracle story was fashioned in Palestine, in rabbinic circles, and the invention fits into a very narrow span of time, within the period between the destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kokhba revolt, namely the years in which Rabban Gamaliel II is said in the Jewish sources to have been *Nasi* in Yavne, that is to say between ca. 80 and 117 C.E. Rabban Gamaliel is well known as a Rabbi who favoured contacts with the surrounding non-Jewish Hellenistic civilisation. His was the first generation of Rabbis in which we can account for the use of the story without having to explain away the absence of the story from Jewish-Hellenistic sources or from the earliest Christian sources. His was also the last generation of Rabbis likely not to be affected by misgivings about the use of the Greek translation of the Law.[49]

If this explanation is right, then we have reached a very paradoxical conclusion. The most powerful argument used by the Christian Church in favour of the inspiration of the Greek Bible is based on a story fashioned in the workshop

[46] For the apparent exception constituted by Aristobulus, described by Anatolius (in the third century) as "one of the Seventy" (ap. Eus. *HE*, VII.32), see the preceding chapter.

[47] See Chapter 5.

[48] *Apol.* I.31. Justin places the translation in the time of Herod!

[49] See Barthélemy 1975 (1953), 1963; Tov 1990, for the seductive rather than satisfying hypothesis of a written revised recension of the LXX made in the first half of the first century under the auspices of the rabbinate.

of rabbinic *aggada*, interpretation of the Bible, homiletics, designed to underpin that same version that was soon to be used for Christian anti-Jewish polemics. It is ironic that it was that very legend of the miracle invented by the Rabbis that provided the Christian writers with "proof" for the inspiration of their text(s) of the Greek Bible; indeed, it may even be the case that it was the motif, so prominent in the rabbinic accounts, of "changes" introduced by the Seventy into the translation that suggested to Christian polemicists one of their recurrent accusations against the Jews, namely that they had tampered with the text of Scripture, in order to remove or to obscure such passages as seemed to them to refer to Jesus of Nazareth.[50]

Although, as we have seen, it is difficult to imagine that the Rabbis borrowed the legend from the Christians, it is not at all surprising that Christian writers should have taken the miracle story from rabbinic sources; there are other, comparable, cases of such borrowings. Thus when Epiphanius (*de mens. et pond.*, 14) tells us his version of the biography of Aquila, he clearly relies on rabbinic sources for several of the most colourful details, such as that Aquila was a proselyte and that he allegedly belonged to the family of the emperor Hadrian. He may, of course, have known these and other details through other Christian intermediaries such as Origen, but there can be no doubt that they have their source in rabbinic tales.[51]

These three texts are not the only rabbinic sources to refer to the story of the translation. We find the story in a wide variety of texts from ancient times down to the middle ages and even beyond. Here the principal occurrences of the story in rabbinic tradition will be considered.

4. MASSEKHET SEPHER TORAH, I, 8–9 (= HIGGER, 1930, I.6)

This version is introduced by a negative account of the translation:[52]

שבעים זקנים כתבו התורה לתלמי המלך כתיבה יוונית והיה אותו היום קשה לישראל כיום שעשו את העגל שלא היתה תורה יכולה להתרגם כל צרכה. י״ג דברים שינו בה:

"Seventy elders wrote the Torah for Ptolemy the king in Greek writing and that day was as hard for Israel as the day when they made the Calf for the Torah could

[50] See above, nn. 24, 39.

[51] See also Wasserstein 1977.

[52] This is the text printed with the BT. Higger 1930:23–24 (of Hebrew numbering) presents some variants from the manuscript tradition; of these most are of little significance, but the following three exceptions are worth noting: (i) לשון (in the Halberstamm-Epstein manuscript) for כתיבה; the difference is not great; (ii) at change no. 12, the words לכל העמים seem not to occur in the manuscript tradition as known to Higger, other than in a manuscript published by Kirchheim (1851), but that manuscript is tainted by an association with the suspected forger Eliakim Carmoly; and (iii) the word מעלין, on which see following note.

not be properly translated. Thirteen things did they change in it:

1. Genesis 1:1 אלהים ברא בראשית
2. Genesis 1:26 אעשה אדם בצלם ודמות
3. Genesis 2:2 ויכל בששי וישבות בשביעי
4. Genesis 5:2 זכר ונקבה בראו
5. Genesis 11:7 הבה ארדה
6. Genesis 18:12 ותצחק שרה בקרוביה לאמר
7. Genesis 49:6 כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס
8. Exodus 4:20 ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושא בני אדם
9. Exodus 12:40 ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו בארץ כנען ובארץ מצרים שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה
10. Numbers 16:15 לא חמד אחד מהם נשאתי
11. Leviticus 11:6 ואת צעירת הרגלים
12. Deuteronomy 4:19 אשר חלק ה׳ אלהיך אתם לכל העמים להאיר בהם תחת כל השמים
13?. Deuteronomy 17:3 ומעלין (רשות) לשמש או לירח או לכל צבא השמים אשר לא צויתי לעבדם.[53]

This text, which is very early, bears witness to the main change which was to occur in the Jewish history of this tradition.[54] The version of the legend of the translation offered by this text is very spare: "Seventy elders translated the Torah into Greek writing for Ptolemy the king". It almost removes the story from the realm of the historical; it gets rid of all the detail. But it goes further; having cut out everything that might have supported a positive view of the LXX, it proceeds to add new interpretation that is very negatively charged: "and that day was as hard for Israel as the day when they made the Calf". And in case the reason for the comparison with the day when they made the Calf is unclear, a justification is provided: "for the Torah could not be properly translated". "Properly" here reflects the Hebrew כל צרכה: "as fully as it required". In other

[53] What does מעלין mean here? It seems to be a misspelling arising from a misreading of נוטלין. See Taussig (ed.), *Neveh Shalom*, 35–36. This reading seems also to be corrupt, but it nevertheless contains the truth about מעלין, namely, that it is a mistake for נוטלין (Higger 1930:24, of Hebrew numbering, notes the correct reading in MSS Adler and Halberstamm-Epstein, but Adler's MS presents further problems). What the text wants to say (though it is perhaps still corrupt) is that it was the intention of the Seventy to take away from the pagans the "permission" which they might think they could find in the Hebrew text to worship the sun, the moon and the other heavenly bodies. No, the text seems to say, they wrote the Greek word corresponding to להאיר, "to give light", in order to make it clear that the heavenly bodies were created and given to mankind to give men light, not for men to worship them. But something is still wrong here, particularly because according to Taussig this passage comes from Massekhet Sopherim, rather than from Massekhet Sepher Torah. If, however, as Higger argues, Massekhet Sopherim is based on Massekhet Sepher Torah, then it would be a witness to the original text of Massekhet Sepher Torah.

[54] Strack 1992:252 suggests that in its basic form the work may date from the third century, but notes that it was revised later.

words, no translation could do full justice to the meaning contained in the Torah in the original language.

5. MASSEKHET SOPHERIM I, 7–8 (= ED. MÜLLER, I, 8f.)

Massekhet Sopherim is a later text than Massekhet Sepher Torah. Weiss, arguing that it is post-talmudic, suggested that the redactor, possibly of Palestinian origin, knew the traditions of the Palestinian Talmud well, but clearly did his work in Babylonia, and that our version of his redaction contains some later additions from Babylonian sources.[55] Higger argued that it is a modified version of Massekhet Sepher Torah. He argued that Massekhet Sepher Torah is closer to the traditions of the Palestinian Talmud; this text, on the other hand, although it is of Palestinian origin, is influenced by the Babylonian Talmud.[56] The first five chapters look like little more than a transcription of the text of Massekhet Sepher Torah. But there are differences, and, as has been seen, the full nature of the relationship between these two texts remains to be clarified. It exists in two distinct recensions. For these reasons it offers a much more complicated set of material. The first recension has the following:

מעשה בה׳ זקנים שכתבו לתלמי המלך את התורה יונית ,והיה היום קשה לישראל כיום שנעשה העגל, שלא הייתה התורה יכולה להתרגם כל צרכה.

שוב מעשה בתלמי המלך, שכינס ע״ב זקנים, והושיבם בשבעים ושנים בתים, ולא גלה להם על מה כנסם, נכנס לכל אחד ואחד מהם אמר להם כתבו לי תורת משה רבכם. נתן המקום עצה בלבב כל אחד ואחד, והסכימה דעתן לדעת אחת, וכתבו לו תורה בפני עצמה, ושלשה עשר דבר שינו לו, ואלה הן

"A story about five elders who wrote [scil. translated] the Torah in Greek for king Ptolemy; and that day was as hard for Israel as the day when the Calf was made, for the Torah could not be properly translated."

"Likewise,[57] a(nother) story about king Ptolemy, who brought together seventy two elders, placed them in seventy two houses and did not reveal to them why he had brought them together. He went in to each and every one of them (and) said to them 'Write [i.e., translate] the Torah of Moses your Master[58] for me.' God gave counsel to the heart of each of them, and their minds agreed as one, and they wrote for him an independent Torah; and thirteen things they changed for him, and these are they:

1. Genesis 1:1 אלהים ברא בראשית
2. Genesis 1:26 ויאמר אלהים אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמות

[55] Weiss n.d.:II, 217–18.

[56] Higger 1930:10 (Hebrew numbering), and 6 (English numbering).

[57] "Likewise" (Heb. שוב) = Aramaic תוב, very common in Syriac, where it is used like the Latin *item* in lists of stories of sayings and so on. Indeed, it is even found occasionally at the beginning of a book. See Payne Smith 1903:606, col. a, s.v. *twb*; Mishnah yeb 17:4, 17:6.

[58] See above for a note on this expression.

3. Genesis 2:2 ויכל בששי וישבת בשביעי
4. Genesis 5:2[59] זכר ונקוביו בראם
5. Genesis 11:7 הבה ארדה ואבלה
6. Genesis 18:12 ותצחק שרה בקרוביה לאמר (var. ותשחק)
7. Genesis 49:6 כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס
8. Exodus 4:20 ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושאי אדם
9. Exodus 12:40 ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו בארץ מצרים ובארץ כנען שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה
10. Exodus 24:11 ואל זאטוטי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו
11. Numbers 16:15 לא חמד אחד מהם נשאתי
12. Leviticus 11:6 את צעירת הרגלים
13. Deuteronomy 4:19 אשר חלק ה׳ אלהיך אתם להאיר לכל העמים תחת כל השמים
14. Deuteronomy 17:3 אשר לא צויתי לעבדם

The list in Massekhet Sopherim is extremely close to that in Masssekhet Sepher Torah (and in PT). That in Massekhet Sopherim has one entry more, no. 10 Ex 24:11. Higger omitted this, even though it appears in the manuscripts, apparently wanting to assimilate it to the version of the Palestinian Talmud. It is closer, however, to Massekhet Sepher Torah because of the order of the items in their lists.

The second version of Sopherim offers a more corrupt text, but in 1937 Higger published a version of this in an appendix to his edition of Massekhet Sopherim (at 375ff.):

מעשה בתלמי המלך שכתבו לו שבעים ושנים זקנים כל התורה, והסכימה דעתן לדעת אחת, וכתבו לו, תורה אחת כל אחד בפני עצמו, שבעים ושתים תורות.

The passage is now much more comprehensible. It can be translated: "A story about king Ptolemy, for whom seventy two elders wrote the whole of the Torah, and their view(s) agreed as one (view), and they wrote for him one Torah, each one by himself, (in all) seventy two (identical) Torahs".

The passage from Sopherim B, and Higger's re-construction of it, show how we can understand the problematic parts of the passage in Sopherim A. In such a reading, the text is telling us what we have learned already from other, earlier versions of the story, namely that each translator wrote a separate, but identical, version of the Torah in the Greek tongue. The scene which is drawn for us in this reading of the passage also recalls what we find in a number of the Christian sources which transmit the legend (see Chapter 5).

This text offers a new development. In using the motif of five translators, and in being thus virtually forced to create two versions of the story, or two

[59] For the order of these two items see discussion later.

separate stories, it seems to be attempting to deal with the problem created by the radical differences in attitude to the LXX revealed by the story in Massekhet Sepher Torah. On one hand, the first story offered here preserves the negative attitude represented, on the surface, by the story in Massekhet Sepher Torah; on the other, the second story told here preserves, quite fully, the other, favourable, version of the legend which we have seen in our other sources.

We shall see that the new motif of the five translators, in the negative version of the story which we are offered here, crops up again, in the version given by Abot de-Rabbi Nathan, version B. The datum of "five elders" does not necessarily testify to the existence of a tradition concerning the Greek translation different from that deriving from the Ps.-Aristean *Letter*; rather, it may suggest that certain motifs have insinuated themselves into the story from other sources. We have seen on a number of occasions that the tradition originating in the *Letter of Aristeas* is, at one and the same time, (1) the source for narrative elements that become literary motifs and *topoi*; (2) a vehicle for their transmission; and (3) a receptacle for similar elements from other sources. Here, the number of the translators may possibly come from the Esdras tradition where we are told that Ezra dictated the books of Scripture and many other texts to *five* scribes.[60] But closer than this, from within the rabbinical tradition, we have a number of references to "five elders" (i.e., not just the number *five*, but that number in association with *elders*) in various legal contexts.[61] Halevy suggests that the phrase *five elders* is a conventional expression denoting the five rabbis Rabban Gamaliel (II), R. Elazar b. Azarya, R. Yehosha, R. Aqiba, and R. Tarphon at the beginning of the second century in Lydda. Whatever their identity, the expression *five elders* had become in that generation a conventional expression denoting an authoritative body of rabbinical scholars.[62] Possibly this conventional number *five* insinuated itself into the story of the translation. Or perhaps some redactor, at an early stage of the story's history, thought that the number of translators corresponded to the number of languages, seventy-two; and another may have chosen the number *five* because that corresponds to the number of alphabets that, according to some sources, were allotted to Japhet and his descendants.[63]

60 See Ginzberg 1909:VI, 445, n. 50, citing II Esdras 14, a text originally composed in Hebrew, possibly between the fall of Jerusalem and the reign of Hadrian, that is, at just the period to which we have assigned the invention of the newer tradition about the translation.

61 Lieberman 1968:96–97, with references to Sifre Zutta, 314; Tosefta Miqvaot 7 (8), 10 (Zuckermandel, 660); Tosefta Tohoroth, 9, 14 (Zuckermandel, 671); PT Betzah 62a (3, 6); Halevy 1979, part I, vol. 5, cap. 38, on 361–62, citing additionally Mishnah Eruvin, 3, 4; Rosh ha-Shanah 15a.

62 See Halevy 1979: loc. cit., and 366–67, where he makes the point that the *five elders* were regarded as the leaders of that generation.

63 For this see the material collected by Ginzberg 1909:I, 173 and V, 194–95, nn. 72–3.

6. MIDRASH TANHUMA, EX. 22

This compilation is to be dated, according to Lieberman, to the end of the fourth Christian century; Barnes by contrast and others see it as later, of the sixth century.[64] And there are also good arguments in favour of considerably later dates for the redaction both of the version cited here and of that edited by Buber (see below). We must, of course, remember that such compilations, whatever the precise date of their redaction, reflect discussions going back to much earlier times and, conversely, that they remained for long periods liable to conflation and contamination. In this particular case, the existence of two substantially differing versions of this Midrash affects our tradition. Like the version in Mekhilta (no. 3 above), this redaction of Tanhuma offers its version in illustration of a passage which happens to figure on the list of alleged changes made for Ptolemy.

ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם: זה אחד מעשרה הדברים ששינו רבותינו לתלמי המלך בשעה שכתבו לו את התורה יונית. ואלו הן

And Moses took his wife and his sons and set them to ride: this is one of the ten things which our teachers changed for Ptolemy the king when they wrote the Torah for him in Greek. And these are they:

1. Genesis 1:1 אלהים ברא בראשית
2. Genesis 1:26 אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמות
3. Genesis 5:2 זכר ונקבה (?) בראו
4. Genesis 2:2 ויכל ביום הששי וישבות ביום השביעי
5. Genesis 11:7 הבה ארדה ואבלה שם שפת
6. Genesis 18:12 ותצחק שרה בקרוביה
7. Genesis 49:6 כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס
8. Exodus 4:20 ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושא אדם
9. Exodus 12:40 ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו במצרים ובארץ כנען גושן ובארץ שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה
10. Exodus 24:5 וישלח את זאטוטי בני ישראל
11. Exodus 24:11 ואל זאטוטי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו
12. Deuteronomy 4:19 אשר חלק ה׳ אלהיך אתם להאיר לכל העמים אשר תחת כל השמים
13. Deuteronomy 17:3 (?)אשר לא צויתי לאומות לעובדן (Does this belong with the preceding?)
14. Leviticus 11:6 וכתבו לו את צעירת הרגלים ולא כתבו לו את הארנבת לפי שאשתו של תלמי המלך ארנבת שמה שלא יאמר שחקו בי היהודים וכתבו לי שם אשתי בתורתם.

The presence of Leviticus 11:6, out of its natural order at the end of the list and accompanied by an explanation for its having been changed, recalls the pattern of BT, but the order of numbers 3 and 4 here recalls rather that

[64] Lieberman 1950:30 n.12; Barnes 1900:388ff.

in PT. More significantly, there is a striking dissonance between the number of items which the introductory text says that the translators changed (ten) and the number of alleged such changes actually given: we have fourteen such changes. We can reduce this number if we regard number 13 as no more than an extension of number 12; and if we remove numbers 10 and 11 as intrusive, but this reduces the number still to no fewer than eleven. It is difficult to see how we could reduce it further, unless we were to remove the final item, that allegedly concerned with the name of Ptolemy's wife. The real explanation seems different.

7. MIDRASH TANHUMA ED. BUBER, EX 19

In this recension of Tanhuma we have what is clearly a variant of the same version of the tradition. It offers a slightly different introductory account; the difference consists essentially in the absence of the number of the alleged changes; and the list itself is shorter.

ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על החמור. זה אחד מן הדברים ששינו רבותינו לתלמי המלך כשכתבו לו את התורה יוונית, אלו הן

'And Moses took his wife and his sons and made them ride on the ass': this is one of the things that our teachers changed for Ptolemy the king when they wrote the Torah for him in Greek; and they are:

1. Genesis 1:1 אלהים ברא בראשית
2. Genesis 5:2 זכר ונקבה בראם
3. Genesis 2:2 ויכל ביום הששי וישבות ביום השביעי
4. Genesis 1:27 ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלם ובדמות
5. Genesis 11:7 הבה ארדה ואבלה
6. Genesis 49:6 כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס
7. Exodus 4:20 ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושא בני אדם
8. Exodus 12:40 ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו במצרים ובשאר ארצות
9. Deuteronomy 4:19 אשר חלק ה׳ אותם להאיר
10. Deuteronomy 17:3 אשר לא צויתי לעובדם
11. Leviticus 11:6 וכתבו את צעירת רגלים ולא כתבו את הארנבת

This list consists of eleven items, having lost numbers 6, 10 and 11 of that in the first recension of Tanhuma. Like the other recension, this too places the alleged change to Leviticus 11:6 out of place at the end of the list and, although it says what the translators did not write (it gives the Hebrew word from the Bible, ארנבת, *arnevet*), it does not say explicitly why this word was not translated. Strangely, although it gives the items numbers 2–4 in a different order from the first recension, it still does not restore the correct order of their occurrence in the biblical text.

8. Abot de-Rabbi Nathan B (Schechter) cap. 37

This work is an amplified commentary on the Mishnaic treatise Abot. In date it appears to be very old; although some have placed its compilation in the seventh century or even later than that, much of the material which it contains has a long history predating that period. Some of it may be contemporary with the time of the Mishnah.[65] It contains an echo, or mixture, of the two versions of the translation story, which we have seen already in the passage from Massekhet Sopherim.[66]

חמשה זקנים כתבו את התורה לתלמי המלך יונית ועשרה דברים שינו בה. ואלו הן:

Five elders translated (lit. wrote) the Torah for Ptolemy the king in Greek, and ten things did they change in it. And these are:

1. Genesis 1:1 אלהים ברא בראשית
2. Genesis 1:26 [ויאמר אלהים] אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמות
3. Genesis 5:2 [ונקוביו בראם] (ונקובי בראו) זכר
4. Genesis 11:7 [ארד ואבלה שם שפתם] (ארדה) הבה
5. Genesis 18:12[67] ותשחק שרה בקרוביה לאמר
6. Genesis 49:6 כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס
7. Exodus 4:20 [ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו] וירכיבם על נושא אדם
8. Exodus 12:40 [ומושב בני ישראל] אשר ישבו במצרים ובארץ כנען [ובארץ גושן שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה]
9. Numbers 16:15 לא חמד אחד מהם נשאתי
10. Leviticus 11:6 ואת צעירת הרגלים
11. Deuteronomy 4:19 אשר חלק ה׳ אלהיך אותם להאיר בהם לכל העמים תחת כל השמים.

As we have seen, the introductory sentence to this list reports that it contains only ten items but there are, in fact, eleven, and although one of these is the *arnevet* passage from Leviticus, that is now in its correct place in the list. As can be seen, the number *five* has displaced the number *seventy*; virtually all of the narrative elements of the story have disappeared, leaving only the bare fact of the five elders translating the Torah for king Ptolemy; and the number of alleged changes said to have been introduced by the translators has now changed again.

[65] For the dating see the discussion in Schechter 1887 and Goldin 1955.

[66] The text is taken from Schechter's edition (1887); the square brackets contain his supplements to the text, and the round brackets contain the words found in the MSS which he proposes to excise and/or to emend.

[67] Note here ותשחק, not ותצחק. Schechter seems here to have given the text as found in Taussig's *Neve Shalom*, where it appears likely that the *sin* is simply a pronunciation spelling for *tsadde*; that is, unless it is only a copyist's mistake, or even a printer's slip. But see Rashi on Exodus 32, 6, for the possibility that ותצחק might have been regarded as offensive because of its sexual allusiveness.

9. MIDRASH LEQAH TOV (PESIQTA ZUTARTA), ED. S. BUBER, WILNA, 1884, P. 2

This work dates from the end of the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century. It was composed in the Balkans and contains references to contemporary events, including the First Crusade. Like many such works, it is made up, in part, of extracts and quotations from earlier works, some now lost. It includes the following passage:

בראשית ברא אלהים: זה אחד מן הדברים שהפכו זקני ישראל לתלמי המלך, וכתבו לו אלהים ברא בראשית, כי לא היה לו דעת להתבונן במדרש תורה, מדרשו של (ה)פסוק הזה שאמר בראשית ברא אלהים, הוא כמו שאמר בויקרא (?) אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה׳ (ויקרא א, ב) ולא אמר לה׳ קרבן . . . שאין דרך המקרא להזכיר שם הנכבד קודם הזכרת המעשה . . .

'In the beginning created God': this is one of the things that the Elders of Israel changed for king Ptolemy, and they wrote for him 'God created in the beginning'; for he did not have the knowledge to understand the explanation (? Hebrew *midrash*) of the Torah, the explanation of this verse, where it says 'In the beginning created God': this is like what it says in Leviticus, 'a man of you when he offers a sacrifice to God' (Lev 1:2), and it does not say '. . . to God a sacrifice . . .' [in that word-order], for it is not the way of the Bible to mention the name of the one who is honoured before mentioning the action.

Here the author does no more than refer to the fact of the changes made for Ptolemy. He does this in connection with one of the passages on the list, although as happens in some other texts which have been examined here, he does so in connection with Genesis 1:1, which is not a passage which we have found used in this way before, despite its presence prominently at the head of the list of so-called Ptolemaic changes. Beyond this, he also provides an explanation for the change, a fact which is highly unusual because, as has been seen, this practice is generally confined to the change said to involve the name of Ptolemy's wife (Leviticus 11:6). The explanation which he offers is unexceptionable, and it can easily be parallelled.[68] Here, however, it is placed unusually in combination with the reference to the translation for Ptolemy. Although this shows the Ptolemy story or traces of it spreading out and working in ways very different from those in which it originally came into use, it also shows that the story has, to some extent, become atomised. The story, as a story, has now disappeared, and only stray elements from it have survived to crop up in such contexts as this. That this is not entirely the case, however, is shown by the following text.

[68] Cf. Genesis Rabbah, 1, 12–13 (ed. M. A. Mirkin, Tel Aviv, 1956, I, 12–13, with references to parallel texts, including Tanhuma [Buber], Genesis, 4, where the passage from Lev 1:2 is cited).

10. YALQUT SHIM'ONI, GENESIS 2–3

There is some controversy about the precise date of Yalqut Shim'oni. Dates that have been proposed range between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. But the thirteenth century is the most probable. Its authorship is ascribed to a certain Simon ha-Darshan of Frankfurt.[69] Like so many of our sources, this too is largely a compilation from earlier works, and it contains a passage on the Seventy which has a very familiar look to it:

מעשה בתלמי המלך שכינס ע״ב זקנים והושיבם בע״ב בתים ולא גילה להן על מה כינסן. נכנס כל אחד ואחד ואמר לו כתבו לי תורת משה רבכם. נתן הק׳ בלב כל אחד ואחד והסכימה דעתן לדעת אחד וכתבו לו:

A story about king Ptolemy, who assembled 72 elders and placed them in 72 (separate) houses and did not reveal to them why he had brought them together. He went in to each one and said to him Write for me the Torah of Moses your Master. The Holy One, blessed be He, gave [counsel] into the heart of each of them and their minds agreed as one, and they wrote for him. . . .

This text occurs in a passage where the centre of discussion is the order of the first three words in the Bible. As in the case of the passage from Midrash Leqah Tob, the reason for the story's presence is simply the fact that it mentions Genesis 1:1, which is the subject of the immediate discussion in the broader text.

This passage is very similar to that in Massekhet Sopherim (no. 5 in this list), but it is also similar to that in the Babylonian Talmud (no. 1 in this list); the differences between the three versions are so slight that, on the basis of this section of the passage at least, it would be difficult to decide from which of the two works the author of the Yalqut Shim'oni had taken it. Fortunately, however, he provides also the list of the passages which the elders allegedly changed, and this enables us to decide the issue very simply. The Yalqut list contains fifteen items, that in Massekhet Sopherim thirteen, and that in the Babylonian Talmud fifteen. Like the version in the BT, that in the Yalqut places the passage from Leviticus 11:6 out of order at the end, and supplies it with an explanation, in wording which scarcely differs from that in BT. It is unlike Massekhet Sopherim in both these respects. Although there are differences between the versions in the Yalqut and in the BT, these are very slight. We should conclude that the version of the story plus the list, as these appear in the Yalqut, is no more than an extended citation, derived directly or indirectly, from the Babylonian Talmud.

[69] *EJ*, vol. 16, cols. 707–09, has a useful entry on this work (by J. Elbaum), with refs.

11. MIDRASH HA-GADOL, EX 4:20

Midrash ha-Gadol was put together only in the thirteenth century, whereas many other such compilations, as we have seen, acquired their final shape centuries earlier. Although it does not bear the name of an author, it is certain that its compiler was a native of Aden, David b. Amram Adani.[70] The work consists largely of excerpts from rabbinic texts of the talmudic period. It has the following account:

ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על החמור. זה אחד משמונה עשר דבר ששינו רבותינו בתורה לתלמי המלך בשעה שכתבו לו את התורה יונית. דתנו רבנן מעשה בתלמי המלך שכינס שבעים ושנים זקנים והושיבן בשבעים ושנים בתים ולא גילה להן על מה כינסן ונכנס אצל כל אחד ואחד ואמר להן כתבו לי את התורה. ונתן הקב״ה עצה בלב כל אחד ואחד והסכימה דעתו לדעת כולן וכתבו לו

'And Moses took his wife and his sons and placed them upon the ass' (Ex 4:20): this is one of the eighteen things that our masters changed in the Torah for king Ptolemy at the time when they wrote the Torah in Greek for him. Our masters teach: a story about king Ptolemy who brought together seventy two elders and placed them in seventy two houses and did not reveal to them why he had brought them together; and he went in to each and every one of them and said to them 'Write for me the Torah'. And the Holy One blessed be He put counsel in the heart of each one and their views agreed with each other and they wrote for him

1. Genesis 1:1 אלהים ברא בראשית
2. Genesis 1:26 אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמות
3. Genesis 1:27 ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלם ובדמות
4. Genesis 1:27 זכר ונקוביו ברא אותו
5. Genesis 5:2 (?) זכר ונקוביו בראו
6. Genesis 2:2 ויכל אלהים ביום הששי וישבות ביום השביעי
7. Genesis 11:7 הבה ארדה ואבלה שם שפתם
8. Genesis 18:12 ותצחק שרה בקרוביה
9. Genesis 49:6 כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס
10. Exodus 4:20 ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושא אדם
11. Exodus 12:40 ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו במצרים ובשאר הארצות שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה
12. Exodus 24:5 וישלח את זעטוטי בני ישראל
13. Exodus 24:11 ואל זעטוטי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו
14. Numbers 16:15 לא חמד אחד מהם נשאתי
15. Deuteronomy 4:19 אשר חלק ה׳ אלהיך אותם להאיר לכל העמים
16. Deuteronomy 17:3 אשר לא צויתי לאומות לעבדן
17. Leviticus 11:6 וכתבו ואת צעירת הרגלים ולא כתבו את הארנבת לפי שאשתו שלתלמי המלך ארנבת שמה, שלא יאמר שיחקו בי היהודים וכתבו שם אשתי בתורה.

[70] See *EJ*, 11, cols. 1515–16, art. "Midrash ha-Gadol" (by S. Fisch), with further references.

The lemma here is the same as that introducing the list in Midrash Tanhuma (in both versions).[71] It is immediately striking that although eighteen changes are referred to in the introductory passage here, only seventeen such changes are actually listed. The seventeen changes listed look very much like an attempt to pad out earlier versions of the list of changes in order to raise the number of items in it to eighteen. That number seems to be derived from what we may term *masoretic lists*, in which we find, *inter alia*, collections of alleged changes in the text of the Hebrew Bible, ascribed variously to Ezra, Ezra and Nehemiah, the Sopherim, and so on. Hence the name Tiqqunei Sopherim, "Corrections of the Scribes". These changes, unlike our so-called Ptolemaic lists, which confine themselves wholly to the Pentateuch, extend over the whole of the Hebrew Bible and are introduced by formulae such as אלה הם שמונה עשר דברים תקון סופרים, "these are eighteen things, the correction of the Scribes", or words to the same effect. Thus, we have, for example, in the well-known text *Sepher Ochlah ve-Ochlah*, ...י״ח מלין תקן עזרא, "Eighteen things did Ezra correct...", followed by a list of eighteen *tiqqunim*, "changes", or "corrections", in the Old Testament.[72] The majority of these are from non-pentateuchal books, unlike the "Ptolemaic" lists, which are confined to the Pentateuch. Not a single one of the pentateuchal lections in this list or in any of its parallels coincides with those in the "Ptolemaic" lists. It seems thus that the redactor of Midrash ha-Gadol (or his source) borrowed the number eighteen for the total of the entries in his list of "Ptolemaic" changes in the Greek text of the Seventy from the standard (one is tempted to say "canonical") number eighteen of the Tiqqunei Sopherim in the masoretic lists related to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Eighteen is certainly not the original number of such "Ptolemaic" changes.

The number eighteen also occurs elsewhere. In an isolated reference to the changes involved in the Ptolemaic translation, for example, in Exodus Rabbah, v.5, we have וירכיבם על החמור, זה אחד משמונה עשר דברים ששנו חכמים לתלמי המלך ("'and set them upon the ass': this is one of the eighteen things that the sages changed for king Ptolemy"). Note that here too the lemma is Exodus 4:20. Here neither the list nor the alternative "Ptolemaic" reading is given. There is

[71] A version of this list exists in a manuscript of Midrash ha-Gadol now in the British Library. It is not quite the same as the version given here. It contains only thirteen items (it lacks nos. 3, 4, 11 and 14 of the standard list); and several items on it differ slightly from the standard version.

[72] Frensdorff 1864:113 para. 168. For other occurrences in masoretic discussions of the list of eighteen Tiqqunei Sopherim, see Masorah to Ps. 106:20; Minhat Shai to Zech 2:12; Masorah on Num 1:1. The expression *tiqqunei Sopherim* seems to be derived from R. Joshua b. Levi (first half of the third century), who used it in reference to Zech 2:12 (one of the examples quoted in this literature). For this and for a wealth of related material, see Lieberman 1950:28–37. The most comprehensive treatments of the Tiqqunei Sopherim are Geiger 1928:308ff.; Ginsburg 1897:347ff.; McCarthy 1981 (with full and up-to-date bibliography); see also Dotan 1967; Barthélemy 1963.

also another use of the number eighteen in rabbinic lists: this is in lists of 18 *halakhot*, "laws", on which the sages (*hakhamim*) in the "Aliyah" of Hanania b. Hezekia b. Gurion by a majority vote decided in favour of the opinion of the School of Shammai.[73] Significantly, in this story too we find that the rabbis thought that day "as disastrous for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made".[74] It could well be that the motif of the calf was transferred from here to the story of the Greek translation, just as the number eighteen was.[75]

The number eighteen is connected with the Septuagint translation in other ways too. In a Geniza document containing a table of fasts written in Judaeo-Arabic, discussed by Fleischer, we find it stated that "on the eighteenth [of Tebet] they fasted because of the writing of the Torah in Greek". The same scholar refers to material on a fast, on 3 (or possibly 4) Adar, commemorating the disputes just mentioned between the followers of Hillel and Shammai;[76] these disputes are described there as the "eighteen things" (צום גזירת י״ח דבר), in phraseology very reminiscent of what we are used to in the texts describing the Seventy.

This reference to fasting on 18 Tebet to mark the translation of the Septuagint seems also to reflect contamination by the conventional number eighteen, for the more general references to fasting for this reason place the fast not on 18 but on 8 Tebet. Thus in Megillat Ta'anit we find: בשמונה בטבת נכתבה תורה בימי תלמי המלך יונית והחשך בא לעולם שלשה ימים. בתשעה בו לא כתבו רבותינו על מה הוא ובו ביום מת עזרא הכהן ונחמיה בן חכליה. בעשרה בו סמך מלך בבל על ירושלים להחריבה "On 8 Tebet the Torah was written in Greek in the days of king Ptolemy, and darkness came upon the world for three days.[77] On the ninth [there is a fast] but our masters did not write why, and on that day Ezra the priest and Nehemiah son of Hacaliah died. On the tenth the king of Babylon went up against Jerusalem to destroy it".[78]

[73] See Mishna Shabbat 1.4; Danby 1933:100; Weiss n.d.: Part 1, book 4 cap. 19 (= vol. I, p. 175 of the undated reprint); BT Shabbat 13b–17b; PT Shabbat 3c; Lieberman, Tos. Kifsh. Pesahim IV 499.

[74] BT Shabbat 17a; similarly Tos. Shabbat 1, 16ff. = Zuckermandel p. 111, and PT Shabbat 3c.

[75] There are other examples of the number *eighteen* used as a round number, or as a conventional or a canonical figure; see Ginzberg 1909:index, s.v.

[76] Fleischer 1983: 94–95, and see also no. 9 there.

[77] Meg. Ta'anit. Cf. for the attitude expressed here Megilla 3a, "the Targum (viz. the Aramaic translation) of the Prophets was produced by Jonathan b. Uzziel at the dictation of Haggai, Zecharaiah and Malachi, and the land of Israel shook over a distance of 400 parasangs"; the whole story presupposes that the publication, that is, the writing down, of the Targum was, at some stage, regarded with a degree of ambivalence so that it was forbidden until changed circumstances created a need for it, made it unobjectionable, and perhaps even inevitable. We can perhaps see the LXX following an opposite path.

[78] Cf. Biruni 1879:272, quoting a passage which seems to share the same source as this text. For the best recent treatment of the problems posed by Megillat Ta'anit, see the incisive and learned paper by S. Z. Leiman (1983), which, in spite of its ostensibly restrictive title, offers a

The tradition found in Megillat Ta'anit[79] lives on through history. In the middle ages and in the early modern period it still appears both in historiographical works and in the Codes, and even in the liturgy. Even nowadays, when the optional fast of 8 Tebet is not observed in any Jewish community,[80] the worshipper is still reminded of it in the liturgy for the fast of the Tenth of Tebet. There we have, for example:[81] אזכרה מצוק אשר קראני. בשלש מכות בחדש זה הכני. גדעני הניאני הכאני. אך-עתה הלאני. דעכני בשמונה בו שמאלית וימנית. הלא שלשתן קבעתי תענית. ומלך יון אנסני לכתוב דת יונית. על-גבי חרשו חרשים האריכו מענית.

Let me mention the distress which called me: with three blows it struck me in this month. It cut me off, it turned me away, it made me grieve; and now it has exhausted me. It destroyed me on the eighth of the month, right and left. Have I not established the three of the[se days] as fast days. And the king of Greece forced me to write the religion in Greek – the plowers plowed upon my back, they made long their furrows [Ps 129:3].

The writer (who signs himself Joseph) depends on Megillat Ta'anit for the date of the fast with which the Greek translation of the Torah is associated.

Similarly, another liturgical poem, or piyyut, contains the following passage:[82] טעיתי אחרי גלולים וכל תבנית, יהירים אז הריקו בי חרב וחנית, כלתה רוחי בחדש זה כשנכתבה תורה יונית, לכן וימש חשך שלשת ימים וגזרתים תענית

I erred after idols and every graven image, so that arrogant ones plunged their swords and lances into me; and my spirit perished in that month when the Torah was written in Greek, and therefore there was darkness for three days [cf. Ex 10:21–22], and I decreed that they should be fast-days.

comprehensive study of chronological, historical and source-critical problems raised by this text. This scholar dates the (Hebrew) Megillat Ta'anit to ca. the eighth-ninth century (see 1983:178, n.14); he also suggests (193) that official lists of fasts circulated in Palestine as early as the sixth century.

79 Leiman 1983:194 expresses the suspicion that Megillat Ta'anit, although Palestinian, may be of non-rabbinic origin; if this suspicion were confirmed it would add a wholly new and important dimension to research in this field.

80 The question of fasts that have fallen into desuetude is complex; Leiman 1983:177, no. 12 quotes the remark of R. Joseph Caro, that he had never seen or heard of people who observed such fasts as this one; he then points out that this same R. Joseph Caro went on to codify all the fasts mentioned in the Megillat Ta'anit in his *Shulhan Arukh*. For lists of fast days, many no longer observed, see Fleischer 1974, especially 15ff. (Hebrew numbering).

81 Baer 1868:608. For this and the following see Davidson 1924–33, no. 2287 (vol. I, 108; see also vol. IV, 233); and no. 2111 (vol. I, 99, and vol. IV, 232).

82 Cited by Baer, *loc. cit.*; see *Siddur R. Saadja Gaon*, 1941, 335 (Hebrew numbering). This poem begins with the words אז בעזבי מקרא דת מעת אל עת. The text is quoted here as it appears in the Meqitsei Nirdamim edition (Jerusalem 1941); this differs very slightly from that cited by Baer.

Here the day of the month is not stated explicitly, but in still another text it is given, and it is given there as 18, again, not as 8, Tebet.[83] Whether this is merely a slip cannot be determined, since both dates occur in our sources, but the date 8 Tebet may be preferable, for it was on that day, as has been seen, that the translation was actually marked in the calendar.[84] And it should be noted that it was marked with a fast. The translation is regarded as a disaster, it is associated in the calendar with other disasters, and its commemoration is unequivocally marked on this day with fasting not celebration.

From being regarded with great approval through many centuries, the LXX has now, by the later centuries of the first millennium, come to be regarded as a disaster of vast dimensions. This change was brought about by changes which had taken place in the relations of Jewry to the non-Jewish world, among these the alteration in the relation between Jews and Christians and the revolution in the character of the linguistic usage and behaviour of the Jews. The main result, from our present point of view, of this transformation in the way the translation was regarded was a parallel transformation in the way the event of the translation came to be represented. The story lost virtually all of its picturesque aspects; the only detail that was left was the desire of the foreign king to have the text of the Torah in Greek; shorn of the picturesque details of the original story, this desire now acquires a more sinister character. The miraculous nature of the changes was forgotten, and the alleged fact of the changes was all that remained, along, occasionally, with the identity of one or more (and occasionally of an entire list) of them. But in the nature of things, particularly in a Jewish world where Greek was rarely if ever now known, it was in general only such changes as could somehow be given expression in a way that did not call for knowledge of Greek that were retained.

[83] See Fleischer 1983:94–5 and n. 9. For much further material on the fast marking the translation, see Leiman 1983:esp. 178, no. 15; Goldschmidt 1977:35 (a poem by El'azar ben Qalir; see further on his work Zunz 1920:index s.nomine Kalir, and esp. 71ff.; Fleischer 1974:1–40 [Hebrew numbering]; Zunz 1865; and see also *EJ* 10 cols. 713ff.); Amram 1865:34b (= Amram 1971:91 §49); *Siddur Rashi*, תקמא; *Kol Bo*, §63; *Tur Orach Hayyim*, 580; *Shulchan Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim*, 580; *Halakhot Gedolot*, 193.

[84] In an (undated?) fragment from the Cairo Geniza in the collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTSL ENA 2893/1), the text offers different information about the date of the translation, attributing the attack by the "king of Babylon" on Jerusalem to 10 Tebet, and the Greek translation of the Torah by the Elders for Ptolemy to 24. This is clearly both confused and fragmentary. See also Margaliot 1973:141 where the text is published.

4

The Ptolemaic Changes

The list of so-called Ptolemaic changes that we find in our sources, in all its variety, is not imaginary or arbitrary. Although not all the instances of alleged changes made by the translators are found in our texts of the Septuagint, the apparatus criticus of the LXX shows that at least some of the passages cited by the Rabbis do indeed contain the readings mentioned or alluded to by them. Because we do not have all the Greek versions circulating in antiquity, we cannot be sure that more of these readings were not in fact part of some such version. But we have enough to show us that we are reading reports that contain information about texts actually current in antiquity. That the Rabbis selected from what was at their disposal some readings for mention in a list designed to register variants which are clearly approved of for some purposes (even if not accepted into the text) need not surprise us, nor should we suppose that there were not also readings of which the Rabbis might not have approved. But it is clear that what those who told the story and who listed the Ptolemaic changes had in front of them was a body of text(s) or readings that were not tendentious but exegetical and homiletic and, more importantly, approved for certain purposes. What is no less important is that the septuagintal text at the disposal of the Rabbis or of their informants, even where there may have been readings that did not interest them or that they did not approve, was not a form of the text that could have been considered by the Rabbis as being flawed by heretical or Christian interpolations or corruptions; the time for that could not have come yet when the Rabbis told, or themselves invented, the story of the miracle that happened upon the occasion of the translation. It was the story that was invented, not the lists.

It need not be thought that rabbinic approval of the LXX together with the changes allegedly introduced into it by the Seventy implied approval of or consent to tampering with what the Rabbis regarded as the received text. Rabbinic practice was sufficiently tolerant of *ad hoc* changes, for example, for homiletic purposes, to accommodate similar changes for similar purposes in a

translation which, in any case, was thought of as a kind of interpretation-exegesis rather than as the exact equivalent of the transmitted revealed text. A parallel phenomenon, the faithful preservation of many pairs of *qere* and *kethib* (cases where the text is read in a different way from the way it is written), displays precisely the same unwillingness to disclaim, let alone to abandon, any part of the transmitted material making up the raw matter of the sacred text. There are well-known examples where the undoubtedly correct transmitted text is not read, either for reasons of delicacy[1] or in order to avoid misunderstanding by a congregation that still preserved some familiarity with Hebrew and for that very reason was liable to misunderstand archaic or otherwise unusual forms of expression.[2] Indeed, there are cases in which we may be certain that the *qere* represents a correction by the Rabbis of what seemed to them an error in the text that was before them.[3] But even there the written text is not changed.

In any case, the rabbinic transmission of many scriptural passages in respect of which, on occasion, we are seemingly advised not to read what we find in our Hebrew Bible but some other reading (*al tiqre*)[4] surely does not mean that the Rabbis in those passages were engaging in what we should now call emendation in the exercise of textual criticism. On the contrary, while closely adhering to the transmitted text they were, in such cases (of *al tiqre*), allowing themselves the exercise of their freedom and of their imagination in order to see and extract from Scripture all that they knew was lying there to be discovered, including such meanings as could be extracted from the text only by momentarily reading something slightly different from what one ordinarily read there. A disciple of Hillel (or perhaps Hillel himself) gave graphic expression to the principle behind this exegetical exercise: הפוך בה והפוך בה דכולה בה "Turn it over again and again for everything is contained in it (i.e., in the Torah)".[5] This is as true of the Rabbis using biblical texts as pegs on which to hang halakhic innovations as it is of their freedom in occasionally daring, not only for homiletic purposes, to misread, from the point of view of the strict adherent of the masoretic text, the words in front of them. An admittedly extreme example of this is found in the rabbinic interpretation of Exodus 23:2, which is made the principal prooftext for the rule that a judicial decision must be arrived at by accepting the view of the majority of the judges: the biblical text reads "Thou shalt not follow a

[1] Cf. Deuteronomy 28:30, where our texts have ישגלנה, but the *qere* is ישכבנה. See on this and other similar examples Megilla 25 b and Tosephta Megilla 4, 39–41.

[2] Cf., for example, the *qere* קראת for the *kethib* קראתי in Jeremiah 3:4.

[3] See for examples Dotan 1972, from which the illustrations in the preceding notes have been taken.

[4] Perhaps the best-known example is found in a rabbinic comment on Isaiah 54:13: אמר ר׳ אלעזר אמר ר׳ חנינא תלמידי חכמים מרבים שלום בעולם שנאמד וכל בניך למודי ה׳ ורב שלום בניך אל תקרא בניך אלא בוניך ... BT Berakhot, 64 (et alibi).

[5] See the printed texts of Aboth V, 22 and of Tanna de-vey Eliyahu Zuta 17.

multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment". In rabbinic texts we find the rule itself not only enunciated and based on this biblical text, but incidentally accompanied by references to the possibility that one and the same text might be interpreted in many different ways.[6] That same freedom, they seem to have assumed, had been exercised by the Seventy in their translation, that is, their interpretation, of the Hebrew Bible.

It is clear that some of the changes that we can control, because they actually appear in our texts of the LXX, may be due either to misreading the Hebrew original used by the translators or to misreading and thus miscopying of an earlier model of that text by a copyist. It is possible that such changes were made deliberately either by the translators or by the scribe of the Hebrew text or by that of the earlier model of the Hebrew text in order to "correct" the written text that seemed to have a wrong reading.

The list is not what was invented; it was the addition of the miraculous element to the story that was invented. The list was compiled from existing material; whatever the origin of the variants in the septuagintal text read by the Rabbis may have been, these variants existed, precisely as there were available to the Rabbis variants in their own Hebrew text tradition. That is what we have in the *qere* and *kethib*. We have no reason to be surprised that these Rabbis, sometimes alleged to be blindly devoted to the deadening letter of the Law, allowed themselves, in order to arrive at the lifegiving spirit of the Law,[7] the freedom to interpret freely according to the need of the moment both the Hebrew original and the Greek translation which could not in any case be seen as anything more than an interpretation, an exegetical exercise, a kind of commentary, on Holy Writ. To this day we use words such as interpretation and interpreter interchangeably for translations and commentaries, translators and commentators.

Nevertheless, although the list is compiled at least in part from variations pre-existing in the textual tradition of the various forms of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it must be seen in the light of being found in intimate conjunction with the story that contains a miraculous element. In that story the list *as a whole* functions as an exemplification not of the textual character of any one version but rather as supporting the claim made in the story that the translators of the Law had worked under divine inspiration, for it is in their unanimous but uncoordinated agreement in these so-called changes that

[6] See, apart from the biblical passage, PT Sanhedrin 4, 2 = 22 a (the number forty-nine mentioned in this passage is, of course, a "round" or "typical" number and must not be taken literally).

[7] St Paul, who writes (II Corinthians 3:6) τὸ μὲν γράμμα ἀποκτείνει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζῳοποιεῖ, understood this very well. He was a disciple of the Rabbis and had learned this lesson at the feet of Rabban Gamaliel.

the miracle is seen to have worked more clearly than in the agreement in all the rest of the Pentateuch, in which only a practised translator would have been surprised that the wording was the same. The naive reader or listener, not practised either in translating from one language into another or even in reading at all, might well not be surprised by their using the same words or idioms. Philo addresses himself to a sophisticated audience; the Rabbis are more down to earth and use examples and illustrations that are enlightening to the most simpleminded audience: agreement *not in conformity with the original but in departing from it*; changes, unpremeditated, uncoordinated and unintended[8] – that is indeed miraculous.

The lists themselves demand some attention here. We begin with the numbers of items in the lists. We are not always told how many items there are in a list; and when we are told, there is not always much consonance between the number given and the number of items that actually appears. Thus BT lists fifteen items, but gives no total, whereas PT lists thirteen items and claims a total of thirteen (so too Massekhet Sepher Torah); Mekhilta lists thirteen items but claims no total. Tanhuma lists fourteen items but claims to list no more than ten.[9]

We have a neat example of the interchangeability of the numbers ten and thirteen in Ginzberg, who reports that God instructed Moses to make the Children of Israel bring thirteen different items for the construction of the Tabernacle.[10] He continues that to "these instructions, God added these words: 'But do not suppose that you are giving Me these thirteen objects as gifts, for thirteen deeds did I perform for you in Egypt, which these thirteen objects now repay'". The text then gives a list of these deeds, based upon the biblical text, but there are only ten items actually listed here in this text. The principal sources for this attractive story are Tanhuma and Tanhuma Buber. And Ginzberg adds that Yalqut Shim'oni counts only eleven items here.

If this example has something to teach us, it seems to be that we should not attach too much significance to explicit numbers involved as headings to the lists and that we should even hesitate to attach much importance to the totals for the items actually listed. The fact that BT, which has good claims to be seen as the closest to the original version of our story-plus-list, does not give a number for the total of items listed, offers support to the view that the original version of the story-plus-list did not cite a specific number of items but merely

[8] No. 15 (Leviticus 11:6 or Deuteronomy 14:7) may be exceptional in this respect because it seems to emerge from the text there that the translators were thought to have had a motive for the change that they allegedly introduced. But see ad loc.

[9] In fact, as Veltri (1994:226–27) points out, the figure 'ten' is the reading of the edition of Mantua (1563); the first printed edition, Constantinople 1520–22, has 'eight'.

[10] Ginzberg 1909:III, 152 and VI, 63, no. 322.

listed individual, specific items themselves without saying how many they were. The explicit assertion of a specific number will then have been a later addition to the legend.

A second formal aspect of these lists is the order of their contents: how closely do the contents of these lists conform to the order of the texts listed in their occurrence in the Pentateuch? How do any variations between the lists relate to each other? This is, or at least it should be, in essence a question of textual criticism. Study of the various texts that we have and of the manuscript and other variants that they present internally and among themselves, should enable us to identify the original form of the list, and possibly, as a consequence, also to advance from that to understand at least part of the history of the changes which have occurred in it. In this case, however, the ordinary difficulties of textual criticism are compounded by some special features.

First, we have few if any satisfactory editions of the texts in which our lists appear. Secondly, the texts in which our lists and their introductory passages are embedded are very difficult to date, both in absolute terms and in relation to each other. Thirdly, the text whose history is of concern here is primarily the list. The introductory section, whereas it is of importance is, by the nature of the variations which it presents, fairly easy to study. But the list, in all its rich variation, presents one peculiar difficulty; it is composed, almost entirely, of very short biblical passages. Sometimes these appear in shortened – or, more precisely, in shorter – form, and sometimes in longer. The words and phrases constituting these passages were well known, both because of the general fact that they were biblical and because of the more specific fact that they were biblical passages which presented particular sorts of problems or offered special opportunity for different kinds of interpretation. Thus the first three words of the Bible were known to arouse the question why Scripture did not begin with the name of God. To these two facts may be added a third, the tendency of Rabbis and scholars to quote allusively; the discourse of these students of holy writ was addressed to, took place among, audiences composed of people with a full and an attentive acquaintance with the text of Scripture. A word or two was usually enough to identify the passage being referred to; and the word or two thus cited need not even have been the significant words in the passage thus indicated. The habit of allusive quotation means that we should not always expect to find in such texts a full quotation of a passage referred to in justification of a particular statement, nor indeed even always a quotation at all. We may find no more than an allusion to a passage, or a word or two from it.

In general, furthermore, the texts containing these lists mention them neither to pass on information about the character of the Septuagint as a Greek text nor to inform us about translation technique in detail. The intention is, rather,

and cannot be other than (because throughout history most of the audiences of all the texts in which these passages are embedded knew no Greek), to refer to no more than the well-known *fact* of the changes, a fact which was well-known because, as has been seen, it formed part of the legend invented around the beginning of the second Christian century.

All this means that variation in the manuscript forms of the *extent* of a particular passage in our lists need not mean much for the textual history of the biblical passage in question in the list. Because everyone involved knew these passages by heart, simple allusion was enough to make the point. Variations in the manuscript testimony cannot, therefore, constitute reliable evidence for the inter-relationships of either the manuscripts of any particular text of the list or, for that matter, the different versions of the list itself. This is a major difficulty.

This does not render our task hopeless, but it means that we need to consider the textual history of these passages in different ways. Possibly the list, with or without the story, suffered from severe contamination in the course of its transmission or became a *lieu commun* of the homiletical tradition at quite an early stage in its transmission. The consequence of such a fate is that, although the overall shape and contents remained broadly the same, the precise form and even some of the contents of the text suffered considerably. The lists represent recognisably the same text, but we cannot be sure in respect of every specific detail that we do in fact have the original form of an original part of the text.

Nonetheless, the survival of the list, and of its story, despite all the changes and contamination that it certainly suffered over a thousand years and in widely differing areas of the Jewish dispersion, confirms the survival among Jews, whatever their attitude to this Greek translation, of the belief in some sort of divine intervention in its making. Because of the transformation of story and lists over time, it also offers us confirmation of the gradual intellectual enclosure of the rabbinical, as also of the more general Jewish, world, as Jews came no longer to know the Greek language and began to be sealed off culturally from a world dominated by Christianity.

The list presents a further problem. Its origin, or the historical moment of its creation, seems to be clear enough. It came into being together with the invention of the miracle, and it functions as part of that story. It has no reason other than that to explain its genesis (we are concerned here with the list, not with the individual items on it, nor with the later use made of it, nor yet with later changes in it). It should therefore be possible to explain the list, its character and its composition in terms of that background. Yet, because it presents major difficulties in all these areas, it remains stubbornly resistant to such explanation.

The list exists in a context of facts which can be expressed as follows. First, each of the items on the list in its original form must come from a pre-existing context; it was the story that was invented, not the list. The items existed before

the list and independently of the list. Second, each of them must have been at least plausible or acceptable as a change; that is to say, it must have looked as if it represented a septuagintal reading, and as if it represented one that differed from the Hebrew of the masoretic text. This does not need to mean that these readings must reflect an existing LXX text or reading, but it does mean that they must reflect something that is plausible as such. Third, all of the readings, as our context demonstrates, were regarded in a positive light by whoever invented the story; the list functions to illustrate the story, and the story functions to give a high legitimation to the Greek translation within a Jewish context. Fourthly, we may take it as a fact that the list, in at least most of the forms in which we have it, is probably contaminated. That is to say, not everything in the list now was necessarily in the list when it was originally put together. Lists have a tendency to grow, and they have a tendency also to suffer from different kinds of corruption and contamination.

There have been many attempts to explain the list, to discover whether certain parts of it are genuinely original or perhaps represent later additions, how far the contents have become corrupt, to relate it to existing or other versions of the Greek text of the Bible, to see in it rather an expression of early midrashic interpretation of the Bible than a reflection of Greek translation, and so on. We shall not rehearse here once again all the results of these attempts. Nonetheless, most of these try to explain the lists, in terms of their constituent entries, as needing explanation collectively and individually in the context of 'changes in a translation made for Ptolemy'. This formulation seems, however, to be misconceived. Every single element of this definition of the context within which these items, and their collectivity as well, need to be looked at is wrong.

The claim that the translation was made for Ptolemy is no more than a literary device used by Ps.-Aristeas. Because of that and because the Septuagint is clearly not a unity as a translation, we have no reason to imagine a unified, single translation, even of the Pentateuch alone, having been made at any one time. Nor is there any good reason to believe that there existed two thousand years ago a single, agreed, universally accepted version of the Septuagintal text of the Pentateuch (or, by extension, of the Bible as a whole).[11] And that being the case, we have no reason to think of the so-called changes, whether as a collectivity or as individual items, as actual changes that were inserted in any particular text of any specific translation. There was no specific translation (not only because Ptolemy was not involved and not only because there was probably never a single specific Septuagintal text); consequently, there were never any

[11] Given the nature of manuscript copying and transmission in the ancient world, it is difficult to imagine what exactly such a single, authoritative text might have been like, or, for that matter, how it might have been conceived or understood by people of the period, other than as the contents of a single, specific manuscript, as in the case of the translation mentioned in the *Letter*.

changes of the sort mentioned, whether for the patron of such a translation or for anyone else, and there was never a list of such changes. Our list of alleged changes is no more than a literary exercise. And it was created not in the third or second century B.C.E. by Ps.-Aristeas or anyone else in Alexandria but, as has been seen, as part of the story of the miracle which was invented in the period between, roughly, 80 and 117 C.E. and in completely different circumstances, for different aims, with a different audience in mind, with little real reference to the actual then-existing LXX, and on a basis of completely different attitudes to the text, understanding of text, and uses of the text.

Brought together, as a pendant to the story of the miracle that was invented between ca. 80 and ca. 117 C.E., the individual items in the list in its original form all existed in the religious life of the Jews before the list was compiled; they did not, however, necessarily exist as changes in the translation of the Bible into Greek. Even the fact that some of the items on what may be our core list do in fact appear in some of our septuagintal texts does not indicate that. Why then do these items appear on this list?

The items on the list(s) represent all sorts of ways of looking at the texts in the Pentateuch, but their common feature – the characteristic that they share with each other and with nothing else, the feature that qualifies them to be on this list – is somewhat paradoxical and not easy to identify.

A text in the Talmud, the Mishnaic tractate Abot, offers another list: it is in fact a list of lists. Chapter 5 of Abot is a well-structured example of how such lists work. It begins with a reference to the ten "Sayings with which the world was created".[12] This is then followed by other lists of ten items: ten generations from Adam to Noah; then a second ten generations, from Noah to Abraham; this is followed by other examples of ten, including ten "miracles that were wrought for our fathers in the Temple", ten things that were "created on the eve of Sabbath in the twilight". In all, nine sets of ten are here listed and some of them are actually given in detail. However, the character of this list, as a collection of things that come in tens, leads the compiler naturally to think of other such lists. The text goes on to tell us of the seven marks of an uncultured man, which are naturally paired with the seven marks of a wise man and just as naturally followed by other examples of sevens; these are, in their turn, followed by examples of lists of four items, and the lists of these in the end give way to further individual examples of the sorts of things mentioned in the last list of four which is mentioned. These include, almost by the way, a couple of trios, but they are included not so much for their character as threesomes but as fitting the mood of the group of individual items of which they form part. And finally

[12] It is a striking point about this particular example, which sets off a whole series of "tens", that it contains in fact only nine real items. (We have already seen other examples of this oddity.) See the valuable comments and notes of Taylor 1877: 92–93; Travers Herford 1962: 124–25.

we have a series of statements about the different things which one is ripe for at different ages, at the end of which we find the view quoted earlier in this book: "turn it again and again for every thing is in it" (scil. in the Torah).

What is striking and significant about all of these lists is that they are generally *not* exclusive or comprehensive in any special way, the items in them do *not* have a shared special character prior to being put in the lists, a shared special character which makes them as it were listable, a shared special character. Although the several items may, indeed do, exist chronologically prior to their being listed, their special shared character is not (conceptually) prior to their listing. Their special character is acquired through their being placed in the lists. And the special, shared and exclusive character that they thus acquire consists simply in their being in a list.

What this means is that we should in fact not be examining the alleged changes in our lists for the possibility that they might provide us with special information about the LXX text. Although they may occasionally tell us something about the state of the LXX text in ca. 100 C.E., they do so only incidentally – and what they tell us can in the nature of things only be testimony confirming what we already know or at least have good reason to suspect from other sources. They cannot be independent evidence of the nature of the septuagintal text(s) at that, or for that matter any, time. If we do know such material from other sources, then, whatever the list appears to tell us about the LXX, it is actually telling us about something very different – namely what someone, people, in ca. 100 C.E. thought was a good thing to put in such a list. In consequence, we should not be surprised to find items in our lists which appear to have no LXX text, no Greek, behind them. We should not be surprised to find such items not only because it is in the nature of lists, as of any text (but even more than other texts) to become contaminated, but also because of the possibility, indeed the probability, that our list may well have included, as early as the time when it was originally composed, items which did not in fact represent varieties of the septuagintal Greek text which were available at the end of the first century C.E. in Palestine. It may well be that, compiled in order to illustrate a miracle invented in order to give authority to the Greek text(s) circulating at that time and including items which, themselves representing real differences between Hebrew and Greek, were explicable, and explained, rather in homiletical terms than in terms of translation technique, the list included other items which were part of the larger homiletic corpus available at that time. And in that sense, many different sorts of material would have been acceptable for inclusion.

What we have in these lists is a collection of rather miscellaneous character. We have examples of differences between the Hebrew and the Greek which may reflect actual changes as between the Masoretic text and the traditions reflected in the received text of the LXX; we have cases where, for lack of evidence,

we may assume that there might well have been changes of that sort; we have examples of internal Hebrew exegesis interpretation; we even have the example of the alleged change of the word *arnevet* in order to avoid offending the Egyptian ruler – a case where it is very easy to imagine a homiletic background to the explanation or discussion of such a word in a Greek-speaking context, without, however, any need to see a genuine background in the work of translators of the third century themselves; and so on. Taken collectively, these do not point in the direction of illustration of actual changes made in a translation for king Ptolemy. Why should changes, these specific changes and not others, have been made, and why should they have been made in a translation produced for king Ptolemy; or why should they be associated with the tradition of such a translation? But with the exception of the item from Leviticus 11:16 there is nothing to tie the other items on the list, in all its forms, to King Ptolemy or to needs, homiletical, political, religious or tied to translation techniques and problems, in any way.

This difficulty, for it is a difficulty, can be explained in at least two ways. The first is to assume that the story contained in the *Letter* is in some sense authentic and further that the story of the "changes made for king Ptolemy" is also authentic and that the difficulties in our understanding of the lists derive simply from the undoubted fact that this list, any such list, must have suffered corruption and contamination in the course of transmission. Those items on it which do not fit into the Procrustean bed of "changes made for king Ptolemy" can simply be disregarded as later contaminants. But such insistence on the historicity of the "translation made for king Ptolemy" must, as has been seen, be rejected.

A second way of attempting to resolve this difficulty, one which seems preferable, is to try to look at the evidence in its context. The items belong to a list, and the list itself performs a specific function within a larger story, which itself has a function of its own. If we look at the items on the list in this light, then we can see that they do have a common feature, one moreover which would fit this context. It does not necessarily fit the context of an actual translation made into Greek for king Ptolemy, but it does seem to fit the context of the invention of a story about such a translation.

The common feature which is possessed by all the items on the list is very simply that they all present a difference, often slight, between the masoretic text and the form of the text that appears in the list itself or a difference between the masoretic text and the normal understanding of that text.

It is the fact that all the items offer visible difference from the masoretic text that seems to unite the items as members of a collectivity, of a list of changes that might, to an audience in around 100 C.E. in Palestine, have been presented as having been made in a translation made for king Ptolemy. This, however, is very different from differences between masoretic Hebrew text and existing Greek

version(s); and for that reason it is worth recalling that the context in which the story, and with it the list, came into being was not that of Alexandria in the second century B.C.E. but that of Palestine around the beginning of the second century C.E. There, true, Greek was not unknown, but it was far from being the major, let alone the only, language in which the Bible was studied and religious discussions were conducted. And there too, although the aim was to commend the changes it was so only as illustration of the story about the translation. That is to say, the aim was not to commend the changes in themselves but rather to commend the translation as containing these changes, which proved that a miracle had occurred. It was the miracle which was important in this context; the changes merely offered illustration of the fine detail of that miracle, and they were offered as illustrations, available individually and individually explicable, of that miracle. We know that the LXX text was available, and in use, in Palestine. And we know, equally, that at least some of these changes simply could not have been in it. Some of these latter may well represent late contamination of an older, genuine list, but that genuine list of alleged changes has no real need to represent genuine changes; it needs only to offer homiletically plausible differences between Hebrew original and Greek version. That is why we cannot reconstruct the oldest, genuine, original form of the list simply by assuming that it contained only actual changes made in the Greek and on that basis excise all those items that represent other forms of difference from the Hebrew. If we can explain the present form of the list (always allowing for some degree of exception due to contamination) satisfactorily, then, so we are told by sound text-critical method and editorial practice, we should not hasten to radical emendation. Any such change to a received text, in this case the list, should be solidly based in a full understanding of the character of the items as members of a list with a specific character of its own. That character, it seems clear, has little directly to do with the Greek translation of the Bible and a great deal, *voire* everything, to do with the religious, exegetical and linguistic character of Palestine around the year 100 C.E.

5

The Church Fathers and the Translation of the Septuagint

Among Christians, the legend of the translation grew and developed a great deal, but differently from the way it changed among the Jews. Principally this was because of the different status accorded to the Greek translation of the Bible itself among followers of the two faiths. Among Jews, the Greek version of the Bible gradually became less and less important. The invention of the legend of the miracle among Jews in the narrow space of time between 80 and 117 was a happy marriage of need and opportunity. The moment the invention of the miracle could serve any purpose passed almost as rapidly. Among Christians, on the other hand, things went the other way. The Bible was of vast importance from the beginning, the Bible in Greek almost as early. The genesis of the Greek version came to be seen as a matter of great importance too; the story of the origins of that Greek version became closely intertwined with and reflecting the history of that version itself.

The early Christians took over the Jewish legend, but they made changes to it; as will be seen, they probably needed to do so. Thus Origen (C.E. 185–254), who contributed more than any other ancient scholar to the investigation of the biblical text and its various versions, did his work in the first place for statistical purposes. He aimed at discovering the quantitative differences between the LXX and the Hebrew text in order to provide material for Jewish–Christian disputation. He was not interested in a revision of the Greek of the Septuagint, nor in emendation of the latter on the basis of comparison with the Hebrew original. But his attitude to the LXX went far beyond this; where quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament did not agree with the LXX text he preferred to assume a corruption of the New Testament text rather than to impute an error to the LXX. This is even more radical a position than that of modern upholders of the doctrine of the inspired Septuagint. They see in the septuagintal quotations in the New Testament evidence for continuing, progressive revelation of God's truth. Would any of these Christian scholars be prepared to put the authority of the LXX higher than that of the New

Testament text?[1] This positive evaluation of the Greek text of the Septuagint was related to a christianizing of the story concerning the production of that text. However, Origen does not relate the story as we find it in Ps.-Aristeas, although it was already known in Christian circles in his day, nor does he give us the christianized version of that story which had also already come into being. It is not strictly necessary for his view of the Greek text; indeed, it could be suggested that such a story, even in its christianized dress, might have tied the LXX text too closely for his taste to the Hebrew original.

Jerome looked at the LXX differently from Origen. He saw the link with the Hebrew original, and the tie with its contents, as integral to the accuracy and the authority of the Greek text, and of any Latin versions dependent on it.[2] It is true that the Greek Bible in the East did not, from the earliest Christian centuries, enjoy the near-monopoly held by the Latin Bible in the West for well over a thousand years, practically until the Reformation. In the East, from the early Christian centuries on, translations were made into oriental languages and these translations were read and used for liturgical purposes from antiquity to today. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the importance of the Greek translation. The Greek translation was the first Bible used by the new Christian Church in its proselytizing mission. It was used by the Byzantine Church, the dominant church in the East for many centuries, and, even more importantly, it served as the basis for virtually all the oriental translations and indeed for the Latin translation too; the Vetus Latina (or "Itala") was made from it, and the Vulgate as it left the hands of Jerome is not quite as "Hebrew" as Jerome might have made it. Although he planned to bring the Latin Bible as near as possible to the Hebraica Veritas, he understood that there were limits to what the Christian churchgoer could tolerate.[3]

This was at least as true in his day as it would be in the sixteenth century when the Vatican produced, in 1592, the so-called Clementine edition of the Vulgate. In the Preface to that edition we are told that Pius IV chose a team of cardinals and experts in Holy Writ and in the various languages concerned to check and revise the Vulgate text, using manuscripts in Greek and Hebrew as well as in Latin. But the preface goes on to tell us that despite their great investment of effort, several readings which seemed to demand change were left unchanged in order to avoid offence to churchgoers, and the author of the Preface reminds us that this was in accord with admonitions of St Jerome.

Jerome did not always succeed in freeing himself entirely from the shackles of the LXX background of the Vetus Latina, partly because the Greek Bible as translated into Latin had already undergone a process of christianization from

[1] See Kamesar 1993:1–28.
[2] Kamesar 1993.
[3] See his *Epist. ad Suniam et Fretellam*, and *Praef. Evang. ad Damasum*.

which there was no return. In some respects tradition had, by the time of Jerome, already sanctified some parts of the Latin text of the Vetus Latina to the extent that Jerome's so-called Hebraized version simply could not replace it. This is true, for example, of the Psalms. Their use in the liturgy of the Church had ensured for the so-called Gallican Psalter (itself the work of Jerome, who had around 392 revised the Old Latin version on the basis of Origen's text of the Septuagint) a popularity that Jerome's new version *Iuxta Hebraicam Veritatem* could not displace. It is this Gallican Psalter that is found in all the printed editions of the Vulgate and that has been obligatory in all post-Tridentine editions since the Clementine edition of 1592. This, rather than the "Hebrew" Psalter, until very recently was the version used in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. The "Hebrew" Psalter of Jerome was hardly known amongst Catholics for many centuries, and it fell indeed to a Protestant scholar (de Lagarde) to draw sustained attention to it in modern times.

Our principal concern here, however, is less with these attitudes themselves than with their influence on the shaping among Christian writers of the miracle story borrowed from the Jews. In the hands of the Christians the legend loses part of its character. The revised Jewish form of the legend found in the Baraitha in the Babylonian Talmud, as has been seen, included a miracle, and that miracle was made to consist not just in the unanimous agreement of the translators, despite their inability to communicate with each other, in every detail of their work, but also in something going far beyond that, unanimous agreement in the changes. It is this second, almost secondary, element of the legend as created in Jewish circles that was lost among the Christians. In Christian hands, although the miracle was retained, it was cut back: now the miracle consisted only in the unanimous agreement of the translators, despite their separation from each other, in the details of their translation alone. The element of the changes that, according to the rabbis, the translators had all introduced into their versions was dropped.

Why was it necessary or desirable to cut back the miracle like this? It was argued earlier that it was this extra element that made the miracle easier to appreciate for unsophisticated audiences – audiences such as we may imagine some of the early targets of Christian proselytizing to have been.

It may be that the total absence of any trace of this secondary part of the story in Christian sources should be seen as indicating a borrowing which travelled through a single channel only. Had it passed through more than one, we might reasonably expect to find some trace, or the remnant of some influence, of this part of the story in our sources from a Christian background. There is no trace of it in Christian sources although, as we shall see, there is something that at first sight might seem to be rather similar to such traces. It may also indicate something else, namely that the notion of the changes, as constituting extra demonstrative proof of the miraculous character of what had happened, and

also the list of such changes themselves, may not have been quite so attractive or for that matter quite so effective an element in propaganda for the Septuagint translation as we suggested in a previous chapter. The reason was probably that the early Christians were Jews; they knew Hebrew or enough of it to understand the point being made in the miracle story including the element of the changes and probably also the list and to see that here was a miracle with some meaning for them. As the Christian mission spread outwards, beyond the Jews, to peoples who had no knowledge of Hebrew, this element in the story must have lost at least most of its meaning, effect and function. Deprived of a reason for existing, it was dropped.

This major change did not come about all at once; it was the product of a long series of minor changes which took the story further and further away from the original form invented by Ps-Aristeas. A chronological approach to the surviving testimonies, so far as that is possible, will therefore be the most fruitful way of looking at these reports. What is striking about this process as a whole, in the Christian environment as against the Jewish one, is that among the Christians it took place among people who were well acquainted with Greek. They had access to the story, whether directly, in the *Letter of Aristeas*, or indirectly, via Josephus. Paradoxically, in this light, it is among them that the deviations are greater and the growth of embellishments far more imaginative and picturesque.

The change in the character of the story becomes visible as soon as the story of the translation first appears in Christian sources. Our earliest testimony to knowledge of the story occurs in the writings of Justin Martyr, who was martyred in Rome in around 165. A pagan from Palestine, he became a Christian when he was about thirty. Later, in Ephesus, he engaged in a disputation with a Jew, Trypho, his record of which, written down some two decades later, has survived. In this document, which is characterised by relative politeness and mutual consideration of the parties, compared with the mutual hostility which was to come, he refers in passing to the work of the Seventy (*Dial.* 68: "[the Jews] dare to say that the interpretation which your seventy elders who were with Ptolemy the king of the Egyptians gave is not altogether accurate"), and he even mentions (ibid., 71) Jewish attempts to provide a newer version in Greek. However, he devotes more attention to the Septuagint in another work, his *First Apology*, written just before the *Dialogue*. Here he relates the story of the translation by the elders, and introduces several changes:[4]

Now when Ptolemy, the king of the Egyptians, was forming a library and endeavoured to make a collection of all men's writings, he heard tell, among the rest, of these prophecies (προφητειῶν), and sent to Herod who was then king of the Jews

[4] Justin, *Apol.* 1, 31.

with a request that the books of the prophecies might be transmitted to him. And king Herod sent them, written in their native Hebrew tongue of which I have spoken. But, since the Egyptians were unacquainted with the things written therein, he sent yet again and requested him to despatch men to render them into the Greek language. This was done and the books remained with the Egyptians and are there to this day.

Several features distinguish this earliest Christian version of the story from the original. The most obvious is the introduction of Herod. The purpose of this seems to be to tie early non-Jewish interest in the Hebrew Scriptures to a figure strongly involved in the proto-history of the Christian mission to mankind. Here we can see the first stirrings of the attempt to show that the Scriptures, with their testimony to the future Messiah, were made available to non-Jews not only before the time of Christ but also despite the Jews themselves and even, in this version, through the agency of the worst individual Jewish enemy of the Christian message. The hostility of Herod to Christ and his pre-eminent position in the gospel story went far to compensate for the violence done to chronology by his inclusion in this version of the story. However, despite the attractiveness offered by the opposition thus created between the decree of destiny and the Jewish attempt to thwart it, Herod did not survive in the subsequent developments of the legend in the Christian tradition. Probably the chronological difficulty, at least in part, was responsible for this.

A second new feature of Justin's account enjoyed a far longer and more successful afterlife. This was the introduction of the second embassy sent by the Egyptian ruler, bearing a second request to Jerusalem for translators to render the Hebrew text into Greek. In fact this new feature is slightly more complicated, for the second embassy itself could only have been invented as a derivative of a further invention, namely that what the Jews in Jerusalem sent in response to the original embassy was neither a Greek translation of the Pentateuch (here, as noted, already generalised as "prophecies", προφητειῶν) nor yet a team of translators but merely a copy of the Hebrew text. The implication would be that the Jews were attempting to conceal from outsiders certain truths, especially prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, which they knew to be contained in their Scriptures. One can find support for this kind of interpretation of what the Jews sent to Ptolemy, namely that they sent a Hebrew text, in the Greek of the *Letter*, but it takes some effort and it calls for a degree of special pleading. Given the circumstances, it is hard to see what explanation could be adduced for such a scenario other than a *post eventum* christianizing attempt to attack the Jews.

We should see in these two changes an attempt to re-draw the form and the meaning of the original story. In this context the view of these changes expressed by Hadas seems slightly naive. He sees the two-fold embassy as no

more than a "natural expansion" of what is related by Ps.-Aristeas and the introduction of Herod as not remarkable, "for to a second-century Christian Herod would be the Jewish ruler *par excellence*".[5] Such changes cannot be seen merely as developments of a story; they carry significance as underpinning for the Christian mission to the world. What is striking here is that at this stage we still do not find the element of the miracle itself, in any form.

Two other changes were introduced by Justin. The textual identity of the Scriptures to be translated was obscured; from being the Law, the Pentateuch, of the Jews, it was generalized to the "prophecies" προφητειῶν. This may be explicable on the grounds that the entire LXX was available in Greek and no purpose was served by making a distinction between the Greek translation of the Old Testament as a whole and that of the Pentateuch alone. Finally, the number of the translators is not given in this version of the story although, as has been seen, Justin is aware of it. Like the preceding feature, this last element may not be of great significance, for the number of the translators, as we have seen before, seems to have carried little significance even among Jewish readers of the story.

Justin plainly does not know the story as it was changed in Jewish circles shortly before his own time. Had he known this version, he would certainly have made use of it. Its inclusion of a miraculous element, regardless of the precise nature of the miracle involved, would have made it too useful an element not to be employed by him. The subsequent use of the miracle in Christian writing demonstrates this. Justin's version of the story, despite its deviations, is clearly still that of the *Letter of Aristeas*. The new elements, whether introduced by Justin himself or borrowed by him from someone else, can only be Christian, and christianizing, additions to a base story and the base story involved here can be nothing other than that of the *Letter*. The story of the translation is in Justin's hands, whether deriving directly from the *Letter* or not, clearly on the way to full christianization.

Such a progressive change was not slow to proceed further. We have another work which used to be ascribed to Justin but is so no longer, in which a longer account of the translation is preserved. This work, the *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, seems to date from the second or third Christian century; it is argued by Puech that it is of the period 260–300, and the form of the story which it offers certainly seems to fit better with this comparatively late period.[6] We shall look at this in a moment. From the intervening period we have several other attestations of the story in various forms. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, all of whom died before the middle of the third century, have the story, and it will be useful to examine the variations and the differences between them in detail.

[5] Hadas 1951:74.
[6] Puech 1928–30:II, 215–17.

Irenaeus, who died around C.E. 200, is thought to have been a native of Smyrna, though he spent much of his life in the West. His main surviving work, *Adversus omnes Haereses*, is a comprehensive attack on Gnosticism; it survives complete only in a Latin translation, but some parts also survive in Greek. Eusebius preserves a passage of this work in which Irenaeus includes a short account of the translation of the Septuagint:[7]

Before the Romans had established their empire and when the Macedonians were still masters of Asia, Ptolemy son of Lagus (sic), in his ambition to adorn the library which he had built in Alexandria with the writings of all men, such at least as were of merit, besought of the inhabitants of Jerusalem that he might have their Scriptures rendered into the Greek tongue. And they, being at that time still subject to the Macedonians, sent of their number those who were most proficient in the Scriptures and in both languages, seventy elders, to Ptolemy to do his will [or: God having wrought that which He desired]. The king, desiring to make trial of them privily, and fearing lest by some mutual covenant they might through their translation conceal the truth contained in the Scriptures, separated them from each other and commanded the whole company to translate the same portion of Scripture; and this he did with all the books. Now when they were assembled together in Ptolemy's presence and compared every man his translation (with his neighbour's), God was glorified, and the Scriptures were recognized as indeed divine, in that they had all expressed the same things by the same phrases and the same words from beginning to end, insomuch that even the Gentiles who were present perceived that the Scriptures had been translated through the inspiration of God . . .

For it was one and the self-same Spirit of God, who in the prophets proclaimed what and in what manner should be the coming of the Lord and in the elders interpreted well what had been well prophesied.

Here we may note several features. Herod has disappeared; a second embassy is not mentioned. These two features which mark out the account of Justin are not present. We should note here the reiterated insistence on the dominance of the Macedonians. There is also the presence of the number seventy, for the translators. But we also have here the new element, known to us otherwise only from the Jewish strand of the tradition, of the miracle. Here, though, the miracle is different: the king fears "lest by some mutual covenant they might through their translation conceal the truth contained in the Scriptures", and in consequence determines "to make trial of them privily". And so he "separated them from each other and commanded the whole company to translate the same portion of Scripture", apparently repeating the procedure for each book of the Scriptures in turn. We should note here, in passing, that, as in Justin, it is no longer the Pentateuch that is at issue, but the whole of the Jewish Scriptures.

[7] Irenaeus, *Adversus omnes haereses*, III, 21, 2 (apud Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V, 8, 11ff.).

This is the first appearance of this idea of a miracle in surviving Christian literature. Here we have the story of a miraculous translation, in full-blown form: we have the desire to test the translators, for fear lest they conceal something of the truth contained in the Scriptures; we have the separation of the translators, in order to prevent mutual consultation; and we have the product of this exercise, identical translations produced by all of them. To these elements are added the detail of the procedure followed: all were given the same portion to translate at the same time, and this was maintained for succeeding books; their separate versions are compared with each other in the presence of the monarch himself; and in addition we have the description of the popular delight and the recognition of God's intervention in the result: "even the Gentiles who were present perceived that the Scriptures had been translated through the inspiration of God".[8] Christianization of the miracle, the purpose for which the story of the miracle was borrowed, is also provided for in a more explicit way, for we are told further both that the "coming of the Lord" was prophesied in the Prophets and that in the work of the translators this was "interpreted well".

Here, as can be seen, the story has entered upon a new stage in its development. Irenaeus died around C.E. 200; the original story of the miracle was invented in Jewish circles at some stage between 70 and 135. So the passage of the story from Jewish to Christian circles and its thorough christianization must be placed, at the outside, between 70 and 200 C.E.

It is striking that this particular Christian transmitter of the legend seems to be aware of the contradictions between, on the one hand, the later, miraculous story, which insists on the complete separation of the translators and their consequent inability to compare their individual translations and, on the other, the story told in the *Letter*, which emphasizes the collaborative effort of the translators who agreed on their common version by comparing their individual versions. Irenaeus makes quite sure to introduce a great variety of elements into his version of the story in such a way as not to allow the contradiction to become apparent. He combines elements of the *Letter* with Christian propaganda elements (suspicion on the part of the king lest the Jews attempt to conceal passages of Scripture) and reminiscences from Philo. The wording used to describe the meeting of translators at the end of the operation, when

[8] Hengel 2002:39 errs when he says, "The complete isolation of the translators is adduced here for the first time as evidence of the inspiration of this translation. In a certain sense, it can thus even be regarded as superior to the Hebrew text since any variations or instances of greater precision in relation to the original that may appear in the Greek version can be regarded as divinely legitimized through the agreement of the Seventy". It is precisely this element in the developing legend that was created by the Jews, in the story of "the changes made for Ptolemy", but this element in the story that was not taken over by the Christians (but see also Chapter 10).

they compare their versions to see that they are all identical, recalls that of Philo when he discusses the difficulty of translating from one language into another.[9]

Irenaeus is not the only early Christian writer to have this story, in this sort of version. Clement of Alexandria has it, and his version seems to bear some relation to that of Irenaeus.[10] Clement, born in Athens around C.E. 150, became head of the theological school in Alexandria in c. 190, and remained in that post until forced to flee, probably in 202. He died in c. 215. He has the story of the translation in his *Stromateis*:[11]

They say that the Scriptures, both of the Law and of the prophets, were translated from the Hebrew tongue into Greek under King Ptolemy, son of Lagus, or, as some assert, under him who was surnamed Philadelphus, Demetrius of Phalerum displaying the greatest zeal in this undertaking and carefully supervising the details of the business. It was in the days when the Macedonians were still masters of Asia that the king was fired with the ambition to adorn the library which he had founded in Alexandria with all manner of writings, and among other requests asked the men of Jerusalem to translate the prophecies in their keeping into the Greek tongue.

And they, being still subject to the Macedonians, selected from the most renowned among them seventy elders, skilled in the Scriptures and acquainted with the Greek language, and sent them to him with the sacred books. Each man in turn and apart translated each several prophecy, and all the translations when compared conspired together both in thought and diction; for the will of God had been attuned to Greek ears. And surely it was not strange that the inspiration of God who had given the prophecy operated to make of the translation also as it were a Greek prophecy.

Here, as before, we see that the miracle is present, in its Christian dress; like Irenaeus, Clement knows the number seventy; and, again like Irenaeus, Clement mentions, more than once, that the Macedonians were rulers of Asia at the time when this occurred. But there are differences at least of tone in the modes of expression adopted by the two writers, as well as differences in their knowledge. Clement is less sure, and rightly so, than Irenaeus of the identity of the Ptolemy who wanted the translation: he is aware of the possibility ("some assert") that Philadelphus might be the Ptolemy in question, and he also knows about the alleged involvement of Demetrius of Phalerum, two points which seem to

[9] Philo, *Vita Mosis*, II.7.

[10] For the relationship between the story as related in these two writers and the texts attributed to 'Aristobulus', see Chapter 2.

[11] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, I, §§148–49, p. 409 P.

indicate an acquaintance, direct or indirect, with the tradition deriving from the *Letter of Aristeas*.[12] And Clement, unlike Irenaeus, does not seek to test the translators; they are said to have carried out the work apart, but we are not told that the king separated them thus for a purpose. The miracle that results is not the product of any suspicion on the part of the king that the translators might wish to conceal something from him. It serves merely to point up the operation of the will and the inspiration of God in the translation of God's prophecy.

A similar but far from identical account is provided by Tertullian. A slightly younger contemporary of Clement (he lived c. 160–c. 225), he spent his life in Carthage, converting from paganism to Christianity before 197, the year to which his *Apologeticum* is to be dated. In this work he includes a short account of the translation. It is our earliest surviving account written in Latin and brings the story of the translation into a western environment for the first time. Tertullian's story is largely dependent on the material in the *Letter of Aristeas*:[13]

The most erudite of the Ptolemies, whom they surname Philadelphus, and one who was most deeply versed in all literature, when in his passion for collecting books he was, I suppose, emulating Peisistratus, among other records whose title to fame was due to their antiquity or some curious lore, besought the Jews also for their own literature, of which they were the sole possessors, in its native tongue. This he did on the suggestion of Demetrius of Phalerum, the most eminent philologist of his time, to whom he had entrusted the superintendence of the volumes. For at all times prophets had arisen from among them and had pleaded with them, as being a nation who in virtue of the favour shown to their fathers were God's own peculiar people. Those who are now Jews were once Hebrews, and consequently had their Hebrew characters (or: literature) and language. To guard, however, against misunderstanding, Ptolemy had further placed at his disposal by the Jews the services of two and seventy translators, whom even the philosopher Menedemus, the upholder of Providence, regarded with esteem on account of the opinion which they held in common with himself. You have confirmation of this in what Aristaeus has stated. Thus the king left the records in Greek (or: He [scil. Aristaeus] left records to this effect in Greek) and accessible to all. To this day the libraries of Ptolemy are shown in the Serapeum with the actual Hebrew documents.

It is clear that Tertullian had access either to the *Letter* or to another source dependent on that work. Virtually everything in this passage that is concerned with the translation itself is taken from what is retailed in that text. Unusually among those Christian writers whom we have looked at so far, he knows the number of the translators, correctly; and he is even acquainted with

[12] Thackeray 1917:104 suggests that Clement is here dependent on "Irenaeus, or a common source, and Aristobulus"; it seems clear from a comparison of the two accounts that Irenaeus cannot be the source of much of what Clement records; for 'Aristobulus' see Chapter 2.

[13] Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, c. 18.

Menedemus, whom Ps.-Aristeas refers to in the *Letter*. It is interesting that he spells the name of the supposed author of the *Letter* as does Josephus, Aristaeus; this, together with the reference to Menedemus, the description of Demetrius as the most learned philologist of his time, and the overall flavour of the phraseology which Tertullian employs, may suggest that his immediate source is not in fact the *Letter* but the long paraphrase from that text in the *Antiquities* of Josephus. The reference to Peisistratus is new. The most striking feature of this account, however, contemporary with or later than Clement and Irenaeus, is the total absence of any trace of the idea of a miracle. Dependent on Ps.-Aristeas, via Josephus, and living in north Africa, Tertullian does not know the Jewish invention of the miracle, and he is unacquainted with the borrowing of it as illustrated in the works of those two other writers of his own time. At the end of the third Christian century, the miracle, though already invented among the Jews and already borrowed from them, and christianized, by Christians, had not yet been incorporated into the Christian view of the Greek version of the Bible so as to form an integral part of the story.

The only elements that Tertullian adds to the story accord well with the material, literalistic approach with which he is usually credited: the first of these is the detail that the translation was still in his time ('*hodie*') in the Library in Alexandria. Clement and Irenaeus, concerned with the miracle and with the divine inspiration of the translation, as text, are little concerned with the fate of the actual manuscripts to which the translation was committed by the translators. The survival of these documents would not have constituted for them any sort of miracle or of testimony to a miracle. Justin, by contrast, who like Tertullian offers a more pedestrian account, has this same detail, as we have seen. Unlike Tertullian, however, he does not know the name of the place where the Library was situated. Tertullian did not find this detail in Josephus or in the *Letter*, for they do not have it, and we may wonder whether it is an addition by Tertullian himself. A second addition to the story by Tertullian is the detail that what was in the Library was not the translation alone but the translation together with the original Hebrew text of the Bible. This detail will recur. Again we have evidence here of a simpler and less sophisticated approach, but it is an approach that does not seek to illustrate a miracle; its concern is simply to add picturesque, realistic, illustrative detail to an account of a marvelous occurrence.

Irenaeus, Clement and Tertullian were all dead by about 225. From then until roughly the middle of the third century, a bare reference in Julius Africanus to the translation of the Old Testament, without any mention of the seventy translators or any other details, and a passage in Anatolius in which the name of Aristobulus occurs, identified as one of the Seventy (discussed in Chapter 2), are all the other data that we have relevant to the translation.

By the middle of the third Christian century, then, two distinct lines of approach to the translation of the Septuagint are apparent among Christian

writers. On one hand we have the seemingly historical approach of Justin and of Tertullian, expressive of little more than antiquarian interest, seeing in the story of the translation merely an important and useful account of the genesis of the Greek version of the Scriptures, and founded upon the details in the account provided by Ps.-Aristeas. On the other hand, Irenaeus and Clement offer us a version which has only indirect links with that of Ps.-Aristeas, finding its immediate source in the miracle story invented by Jewish rabbis only a couple of generations or so at most before their time. On this, once they, or their own immediate sources, have shorn away the parts which are not necessary or useful in a Christian context, they proceed to build a more elaborate edifice, embroidering for it Christian purposes. At this stage, these two strands or versions of the tradition were still relatively distinct. In the generations that followed, the relationship between them became more complex.

The *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, ascribed to Justin but not by him, is difficult to date. If it were by Justin, it would belong to the second century, which would make it of prime interest for the earliest history of the story of the translation in the Christian tradition, and for the adoption of the Jewish invention of the miracle by Christians into their own developing tradition. It is clear, however, that Justin is not the author, and it is thought nowadays that the work can be assigned to the period C.E. 260–300.

The fact that Ps.-Justin, as it is still convenient to refer to the author of this text, cannot be dated precisely is a problem, for it means that we cannot determine whether the *Cohortatio* is a source of others or alternatively draws upon them, but this by no means deprives this passage of significance as a link in our story. Here we have the following version of the story:[14]

Ptolemy, king of Egypt, formed a library in Alexandria and collected books from every quarter and filled it. Then, learning that certain ancient histories written in Hebrew characters (ἀρχαίας ἱστορίας τοῖς τῶν Ἑβραίων γράμμασι γεγραμμένας) had been preserved with scrupulous care, and being desirous to know what was written therein, he sent to Jerusalem for seventy wise men, who were familiar with the speech of both Greeks and Hebrews, and bade them translate the books. And, in order that they should be free from all disturbance and the sooner complete their task, he gave orders for their accommodation not in the city itself, but seven stadia away, where the Pharos was built, and that little cells, in number as many as the translators, should be erected there, to the end that every man should execute his translation apart by himself. He charged the attendant ministers to see that they wanted for nothing, but to keep them from communicating with each other, in order that their agreement might afford a further proof of the accuracy of the translation. When he found that the seventy men had not merely expressed the

[14] Ps.-Justin, *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, 13.

same ideas but had employed the very same phraseology, and had not so much as in a single word failed to agree with each other, but had written on the same themes in the same language, he was amazed, and, believing that the translation had been written by divine power, he recognized that they merited every honour, as men beloved of God. So he bestowed many presents upon them and bade them return to their own country; the books, as was meet, he held to be divine and laid up in his library.

These things which we declare unto you, men of Greece, are no myths nor fictitious history. We ourselves have been in Alexandria and have seen the traces, still preserved, of the cells in the island of Pharos, and have heard this story which we tell you from the inhabitants, who have had it handed down as a tradition of their country. You may learn it from others also, and chiefly from those wise and distinguished men who have written of it, Philo and Josephus, but there are many others besides.

This text marks the beginning of a new stage in the history of the tradition of the legend. A number of features stand out. First, although we are told the number of the translators, that number is given as seventy, not as seventy-two. It is very rarely indeed that the exact number, even when it is given, is seen by Christian writers as having any significance. The occurrence of seventy here, together with the reference at the end to Philo and Josephus, may indicate that the author knew the material from the *Letter* only in the version of Josephus, for that writer, although he mentions that six elders were chosen from each tribe, speaks of them collectively as the seventy, not the seventy-two. The first part of this account is little more than a summary of the account provided by Ps.-Aristeas and repeated by Josephus; after that, however, Ps.-Justin begins to add details which derive not from the tradition of the *Letter* but from that of the miracle and its embellishments. The king separates the translators and makes them work in seclusion. He builds "little cells" for them, and provides them with attendants to see to their needs. He discovers at the end that they had "not merely expressed the same ideas but employed the very same phraseology, and had not so much as in a single word failed to agree with each other, but had written on the same themes in the same language", and he recognises that the translation had been produced by divine power, all of this in language reminiscent of Philo.

Ps.-Justin uses other details from the *Letter*, notably the gifts with which the king favours the translators before their departure for home. He seeks to add a higher degree of verisimilitude to his own account by the addition of circumstantial detail: he assures his readers that none of this is invention: "We ourselves have been in Alexandria and have seen the traces, still preserved, of the cells in the island of Pharos, and have heard this story which we tell you from the inhabitants, who have had it handed down as a tradition of their country". Autopsy, the physical survival of the remains of the cells, the identification of

the place where the translation took place, not just as an "island" but as the island of Pharos, and the oral tradition of the local inhabitants, all are aimed at enhancing the believability of the miracle. It is the miracle that is offered here, but the miracle is essentially the miracle as invented and presented in the Jewish sources, shorn merely of the element of the translators' agreement in their changes to the text.

The king, in this version of the story, is motivated in his separation of the translators not by the fear that they might collaborate with each other but simply by the desire that "their agreement might afford a further proof of the accuracy of the translation". There is, however, no hint in this account of any christianizing tendency. Although the account occurs in an apologetic work, written by a Christian for Christian ends, all that we have here beyond the borrowings from Ps.-Aristeas (possibly via Josephus) and Philo is a set of borrowings from the Jewish miracle, with a small amount of embellishment. There seems to be no intention to make propaganda against the Jews or for Christianity. This might point, as other features of the *Cohortatio* as a whole have been said to do, towards a comparatively late date, in the second half of the third century, for the composition of the work, for this was a period when "l'Eglise jouit d'une paix à peu près complète", and had little need to attack the Jews.[15] However, this same point, both the absence of any attack on the Jews and the absence of any positively christianizing elements in this version of the miracle, together with the pristine character of the miracle as presented in this version, might be held rather to point to an early date, if not for the *Cohortatio* itself, then at least for the version of the story upon which the author of this text based himself in citing the story. If the *Cohortatio* is to be dated to the second half of the third century, the author of it could have obtained his knowledge of the miracle story from Christian or even Jewish sources of a century and more before his own time. He is himself unlikely, if he lived in the second half of the third century, to be the channel by which the story reached Christian circles.[16]

The detail of the little cells has often been regarded as a fantastic addition to the story by Ps.-Justin (it occurs again, as will be seen, for example in Epiphanius, in the fourth century). However, this feature, which functions in the Christian versions in which it appears as little more than picturesque detail added to enhance the image involved in the separation of the translators, is taken directly from the original version of the miracle in our Jewish sources. What is of relevance here is the fact that this original version of the miracle knows of the individual houses only as separate places whose existence is a necessary

[15] Puech 1928–30:II, 216.

[16] The attribution of the work to Justin and the use of the term Ps.-Justin to label the author have the effect of making us forget that the contents of this work, as of any other, have their own history and that that history has a relation to developments outside the text.

consequence of the idea that the translators were separated from each other and that the king had to go and speak to each individually.

As early as this primary version of the story in Christian sources we find that, although the cells are present, they are not integral to the form that the story has been given. However, they are made to appear integral to it. At the same time, integral or not, they are used to build up the picturesque side of the story. From being seventy-two separate places, one per translator, they have become seventy-two little houses. And these little houses then naturally call for seventy-two attendants to look to the needs of the translators, so that they need not bother about their day-to-day needs themselves. And these attendants, furthermore, are then locked in to the economy of the story more firmly, through being charged "to keep (the translators) from communicating with each other". And finally, as we have seen, the cells themselves are used by the author to provide him with the element of personal observation: "We ourselves have been in Alexandria and have seen the traces, still preserved, of the cells in the island of Pharos".

Our next witness is Eusebius. Writing probably not long after Ps.-Justin, he offers a great contrast to that author. He offers a pared down version of the *Letter of Aristeas*, giving this a christianizing interpretation but making no use of the accretions which had been added to the story by his time. He is totally unaware of the invention of the miracle but does see the translation as the work of divine providence.

Born c. 260, possibly in Palestine, Eusebius was ordained bishop of Caesarea in around 314, and died in c. 340. He refers to the translation in three of his surviving works. Early in his career, probably around the start of the fourth century, Eusebius compiled the *Chronicon*, or the *Canons*. This work, extant today only in Armenian translation and in a Latin version by Jerome, took the form of a tabular presentation of world history. Under the consular year 232 (= 278 B.C.E.) we find the following information relevant to the history of the translation:[17]

Ptolemy Philadelphus permitted the Jews who were in Egypt to be free, and, sending votive dishes to Eleazar the (High) Priest of Jerusalem, had the sacred scriptures translated from the Hebrew language into Greek by the Seventy translators. He held this (translation of the Scriptures) in the library in Alexandria which he had built for himself with all kinds of literature.

This version, the earliest in Eusebius, is also the shortest. Here we find the motif of the freeing of the captives, based ultimately on the *Letter*, as also the despatch of elaborate gifts (the expression *vasa votiva*, for all its oddity, given the situation,

[17] Eusebius 1857:497–98.

and the notion underlying the expression, has an unmistakable and deliberate aura of religious respect). The reference here to the Library of Alexandria has rather the air of a compressed version of earlier accounts; although it could also be a distant echo of what Irenaeus says, here, unlike in Irenaeus, the library does not fill any serious role in the narrative structure. The reference to "all kinds of literature" echoes many ancient accounts of that institution, and the absence of any further description shows that here this is little more than literary decoration. In Irenaeus, as quoted by Eusebius later in his career, we find no reference either to the freeing of captives or to the gifts. Here, in the *Chronicon*, unlike in the quotation from Irenaeus, we have no explicit request by the king for a translation, although that is perhaps implied by the despatch of the *vasa votiva*. Here, unlike in Irenaeus, we find no explicit suggestion that the Seventy actually came to Egypt, only that they carried out the work for the Egyptian monarch. Nor, most importantly, do we have any reference here, once again in this unlike the Irenaeus passage, to a miracle, and in consequence nor do we find any reference to testing of the translators by the king. The element of testing depends structurally on the occurrence of a miracle; because no miracle is mentioned here, there is no need for any testing of the translators.

In his *Praeparatio Evangelica*, a large work devoted to the refutation of heathenism which he wrote between 303 and 313, Eusebius tells the story of the translation at greater length and with more serious purpose than mere chronology. He borrows from the *Letter of Aristeas*, but he begins with a longish passage in which he locates the translation firmly in the context of the divine preparation for the coming of Christ:[18]

Before calling my witnesses, I think it necessary to explain to my readers how the oracles of the Hebrews passed into Greek hands, the manner of the translation of the divine Scriptures with which that nation had been entrusted, the number and nature of the translators, and the royal zeal which brought about the version into the Greek tongue. The narrative will not fail to contribute to my demonstration of the Preparation for the Gospel.

When the time was close at hand in which, under the Roman Empire, the salutary preaching concerning our Saviour was destined to shed forth its light upon all men, and there was thus an exceptional and imperative reason why the prophecies concerning Him and the life of the divinely favoured Hebrews of old and the lessons of their pious teaching, which for long ages had been veiled in their country's language, should now at length be transmitted to all the nations, who were to be introduced to the privileges of a knowledge of God, God Himself, the author of these benefits, anticipating that future with divine foreknowledge, providentially ordained that the predictions about Him Who was shortly to appear as Saviour of

[18] Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, VIII. 1.

all men and to become for all nations under sun the Teacher of pious worship of the one supreme God, should, by means of an accurate version deposited in public libraries, be revealed to the world and come to the light. It was King Ptolemy into whose heart He put it to fulfil this task, in preparation, it would seem, for the impending time when all nations would participate in these blessings.

For to those treasures which we should not otherwise have wrested from the Jews, who through envy of us would have concealed their oracles, to these we gained access through the translation, dispensed by divine providence and executed by men who for wisdom and learning in their country's lore were held in high repute by their nation.

The story is told by Aristaeus, a man of exceptional erudition, who moreover took part in the events which happened under the second Ptolemy, surnamed Philadelphus. For it was in his reign and through his zeal that the translation of the Jewish Scriptures was produced and deemed worthy of a place in the libraries of Alexandria.

But it is time to let our author speak for himself in his own words . . .

Here follow long extracts from the *Letter of Aristeas*, amounting to about one quarter of the text of the *Letter*. Some of these passages are directly concerned with the attempt to obtain the translation: thus we have in Eusebius the proposal by Demetrius that a translation be arranged (§§9–11 in the *Letter*); we have the memorandum on this subject which he presents to Ptolemy (§§28–33); we have the letter despatched by Ptolemy to Eleazar asking for the translators and the response of the High Priest, although without the list of the names of the translators themselves (§§36–46); and we have a few paragraphs from the end of the *Letter* in which the reaction to the public reading of the translation is described, and the declaration is made that no changes are to be permitted to be made in it (§§310–12; 314–16). The passage describing the public reading, however, is not included here. We also have a short passage (§§88–90) on the water supply of Jerusalem, and a very long extract from the middle of the *Letter*; this is the passage in which the High Priest delivers his well-known defence of the Law and of the monotheism of the Jews, providing allegorical explanations of the commandments about forbidden foods.

Eusebius, unlike Josephus (who had paraphrased those sections of the *Letter* that he borrowed), serves through his quotations as a valuable witness to the history of the text of the *Letter*. But the preface to his extracts is rather more illuminating than the extracts themselves. Here he is explicit in relating the translation to the preparation of the gospel. He points to the approach of the time when "the salutary preaching concerning our Saviour was destined" to appear; to the consequent necessity for the translation of the prophecies about Him, which had been "veiled" in the language of the Jews until that time. He assigns responsibility for this undertaking to God's providential forethought. He takes care to ensure that this should include the deposit of the "accurate"

translation in "public libraries", no doubt connected to his hope that "salutary preaching" will "shed forth its light upon all men". And he stresses that, but for the providential care of God, expressed in the work of this translation, "executed by men who for wisdom and learning in their country's lore were held in high repute", it would have been impossible to gain access to these "treasures" in the hands of the Jews "who through envy of us would have concealed their oracles". Here we have a total transformation of the cultural and religious context in which the story is supposed to have taken place. Other Christian writers changed the character of the story by adding details, changing central features, and so on. Eusebius changed little. Rather he provided a new interpretative context, one suitable to the Christian mission in his age and to the specific message of the work in which he chose to embed this set of borrowings, the preparation of the gospel.

It is instructive to compare Eusebius' use in this work of the story as it is presented in the *Letter of Aristeas* with his use of the version of the story given by Irenaeus. Here, in a work devoted to the preparation of the gospel, he presents a sober and apparently factual account of what is, for all its heavenly background, basically a terrestrial event. The story presented by Irenaeus, by contrast, as has been seen, has taken over the invention of the miracle and changed the nature of the story completely. It is that altered and adapted version that Eusebius chose to insert in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, written a few years later than the *Praeparatio*.

The three passages in Eusebius where we find this story are very different. If it is difficult to point to a precise direct source for the earliest one, that in the *Chronicon*, the other two, in the *Praeparatio* and in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, are far longer and more detailed and much easier to identify and locate in their sources. This is so in part also because of the different fates of the texts in which they occur; the *Chronicon* survived far less well than the other two works. Yet it is that work which, as we shall see later on, served as the conduit for the passage of the story, at least in part, in the oriental tradition.

Eusebius died around 340. In succeeding generations we have only a handful of witnesses to awareness of the Greek Bible and of a story about its genesis. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315–67), who wrote in Latin although he spent part of his life in the East and knew Greek, knows of the activity and the authority of the Seventy. He knows virtually nothing of the details of the story itself, whether in the form related in the *Letter* or in that of the christianized miracle. Nevertheless, he is explicit about the significance of the fact that these learned men carried out their work before the coming of Christ in the flesh.[19] The same concern with the fact that the translation took place before the coming of Christ is apparent in Pseudo-Athanasius, whose date is as uncertain as his identity. He is better informed, for he tells us that the first translation was that of

[19] Hilarius, in Wendland 1900:160.

the seventy-two, who were chosen, moreover, six from each tribe, and that they carried out their work for Ptolemy Philadelphus 230 years before the coming of Christ. If he makes little of these facts, they demonstrate, at the very least, that awareness of the history of the translation was still alive.[20]

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–386), who served as bishop of that city from about 349, is much more significant for our purpose. The main work by him to reach us is his *Catecheses*, a series of instructions for catechumens who were to be baptized on Holy Saturday. Such works enjoyed a larger than normal audience, one, moreover, which was likely to respond the more readily to, and to absorb, the story of the translation. Cyril's report may reflect something of a more general awareness of the story. We find in the *Catecheses* a useful résumé of the story:[21]

Ptolemy Philadelphus, a ruler devoted to learning, collected books from everywhere; at the suggestion of Demetrius of Phalerum, the director of his library, (he sought also to obtain) the legal and prophetic holy writings. . . . He sent rich gifts to Eleazar, then the High Priest, for the Temple which then stood in Jerusalem, and ordered that he send him six men from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to carry out the translation. Then, in order to find out whether the books were divine or not, and to prevent the envoys from conferring with each other, he assigned to each of the translators an individual house on the isle of Pharos opposite Alexandria, and bade each of them translate all the books. All of them fulfilled the task in seventy two days. He collected together all of their translations, which they had made separately without meeting one another, and found that they were identical not only in their concepts but also in their forms of expression. For the result displayed not only ingenuity and technical skill in human contrivances, but the translation of the divine writings uttered by the holy spirit was a product of the holy spirit.

The books which the king wants for his library are no longer merely the "Law" of the Jews, but the Law and the Prophets, a curious retrogression from the generalization of the interest outwards from the Law alone to the holy writings as an undifferentiated whole to which we have become accustomed. The Jews and their Hebrew language are not named here at all apart from the reference to the "twelve tribes of Israel". We hear of the despatch of six men from each of the twelve tribes, but the number seventy-two (or indeed seventy) is not spelled out. The king wants, in this version, to discover whether the works are divine and to that end prevents the sages from conferring with each other, but there is no explicit reference to suspicion of the possibility that the Jews might wish to conceal some of the contents of the holy writings from the king. This version has the detail of the separate houses, but, perhaps economising on detail here,

[20] Ps.-Athanasius, *Synopsis scripturae sanctae*, quoted in Wendland 1900:149.

[21] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, IV, 34 (= PG vol. XXXIII, col. 497), = Wendland 1900:138.

Cyril tells his catechumens little about the procedure followed by the king; he merely instructs the translators to deal with all the books without going into detail about the order or the method to be followed in the work. Curiously, the detail of the completion of the translators' task in exactly seventy-two days is retained; perhaps it was picturesque enough to be retained, even without being coupled to the number of the translators. And the Philonic detail of the identity of the seventy-two versions νοήμασιν καὶ λέξεσιν appears here, assigned to the interference of the holy spirit which had uttered the originals.

This text, addressed to catechumens, was designed to offer the story of the translation to a wide audience, not indeed at the highest level of intellectual or religious curiosity, but certainly to spread understanding of why the Bible, in its Greek dress, should be accorded the authority of divinely inspired holy writ. The version put together by Cyril includes elements taken from all the sources which were available to him as a Greek-speaking Christian. The king and Demetrius, his librarian, recall the *Letter* and Josephus, the houses built on Pharos and the christianized miracle point to the use of earlier Greek sources, especially Ps.-Justin.

Philastrius, bishop of Brescia, a younger contemporary of Cyril, had slightly different interests from him. Towards the end of his life (he died in 397) he wrote a work "On different heresies", catching both Christian and Jewish specimens in his net. Among these he included some concerning the acceptance or rejection of different Greek versions of the Bible. One of these deals at length with the Septuagint, which some reject, he says, in favour of that of Aquila:[22]

There are heretics who like the Jews spit out the translation of the Seventy Two saintly and wise men, and prefer to use the text of a certain Aquila, a man of Pontus, who spent many years producing (his version). . . . [Here follow examples of differences between the LXX and the version of Aquila] . . . But this, that is to say the translation of the Seventy Two, was published for all under Ptolemy who ruled the Egyptians after Alexander of Macedon. The Jewish people in Jerusalem were ordered, since not many Jews lived there (sic), but they were now placed in subjection to the Egyptian ruler, and they were asked by this Ptolemy to send translators to Alexandria.[23] When the Seventy Two wise and sage translators came, in accordance with the command of the king they translated the Hebrew language into Greek speech and published it in Greek letters. Now when the king Ptolemy had received these men at the start, wanting to find out whether what the Jews read was of divine authorship, he ordered that each of them be secluded in a cell and see

[22] *Sancti Filastrii Episcopi Brixiensis Diversarum Hereseon Liber*, ed. F. Marx, Vienna 1898 (CSEL), 113–15, no. CXIV (CXLII).

[23] The translation of the first part of this sentence is conjectural; possibly we could render "It was sent to the people . . ."; but this helps little. The text remains obscure. There is a similar difficulty, this time as to tenses, in the following sentence.

no one else except for a secretary who would take down his translation by dictation. Then taking the versions of all of them every day, he found that the versions of all of them agreed completely, and he ordered that (a copy) be made and placed in the temple, so that it should be available to all those who came from Achaea, and from Greece and from other provinces, philosophers, poets and historians, wanting to read.

This Christian text reflects the Jewish rejection of the LXX in favour of that of Aquila. We note also that the story is beginning to become detached from some of its alleged anchors. The identity of the Ptolemy who is identified as the patron is becoming vaguer, and it is not mentioned anywhere here that the translation of the LXX was produced before the coming of Christ. By this time the version of the LXX has an authority of its own which seems no longer always to need the added quality of its chronological priority to Christ to justify itself. The account of the Jews' political status seems to reflect a confused echo of Greek accounts of Macedonian rule in Palestine.

The cell (*cubiculum*) into which the king introduces each of the translators is by now a fixture of the story, but the secretaries who take down the dictation look like an innovation, developed out of the attendants who, originally themselves an innovation, had been provided in earlier versions (e.g., that of Ps.-Justin) to look after the needs of the translators. The daily collection of the translators' work in order to compare their results is perhaps an innovation growing out of that of the secretaries. It looks at first sight like a reminiscence of the account in the *Letter of Aristeas*, but the context in which it appears here makes it likely to be no more than a natural expansion of the story as Philastrius received it from his sources. Similarly the reference to a temple as the depository of the finished product probably reflects not so much a lingering memory of the nature or the location of the Library of Alexandria as simply an assumption by Philastrius about where a pagan king would be likely to place such a holy book in order to make it publicly available.

In this version the king wants to test the translators, but as is so often the case he is not interested in whether they are concealing something but concerned merely with testing their translation technique as a means to confirm the divine authorship of their text. The distinction that the writer seems to hint at between Greek speech and Greek letters is puzzling; this cannot be a reminiscence of anything in the *Letter* or for that matter elsewhere in the tradition, unless perhaps it echoes the idea of the difficulty encountered by the king when he found that the text originally sent to him was written in Hebrew. It is less likely that the Golden Letters in which the copy of the Torah sent from Jerusalem was written, referred to in the *Letter* (§176), should be seen as lying behind this feature of this text. But in this detail, as in the others which seem perhaps to echo such a distant source, the difficulties of such a link outweigh the attractiveness. What

we should recognize here is the beginning of the process by which the story acquires all sorts of fantastic elements and becomes totally detached from the sober reality of the *Letter of Aristeas*.

With Epiphanius (c. 315–403) this process receives even fuller expression. Like Philastrius, Epiphanius was very interested in heresies and wrote a large work in which he described as many of these as he could identify from the very beginning of the Church's existence. Among his other writings is a short treatise *On Measures and Weights*, ostensibly devoted to weights and measures in the Bible. Like so much in the writings of Epiphanius, it is badly constructed, unorganised, and confused, reflecting in this the man himself. Sprengling says of him "His quarrels and his writings show Epiphanius to have had a crabbed old single-track mind, and the track he covers is usually a sidetrack. He clearly knew too much for his limited understanding. His style is discursive; his thought is poorly organized. Good and bad information, important and unimportant matters, stand side by side and form a rather unsavory mess."[24] The treatise on weights and measures provides no exception to this judgement. We find here a large number of references to the Septuagint, some quite long, and even what looks like more than a single attempt to tell the story of its translation. Some part of the explanation for this apparent disorganization may lie in the suggestion that the surviving manuscripts of this work represent no more than an unrevised first draft of a work in progress, but what we know of his other writings suggests that this may be just a charitable interpretation.[25] The Greek text has not survived in its entirety, but the work has survived completely in Syriac translation, and the parts that concern the LXX have survived also in the original Greek. Like Philastrius, Epiphanius too is interested in the relative acceptability of the different versions of the Bible in Greek, and much of the work on weights and measures is devoted to various aspects of the difficulties of translation and the success of the different translators in their task.

The main sections that are specially concerned with the LXX are the following:[26]

§2: Here, in explanation of the use of the asterisk, Epiphanius points out that the Seventy Two, in their translation of Gen 5:5, unlike Aquila translate the sense of the Hebrew rather than the exact wording, saying that Adam lived "for nine hundred years", rather than, as in the original Hebrew, "nine hundred years and

[24] Sprengling, in Dean 1935:vii. Cf. also the entry on Epiphanius in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 464–65: "His unbending rigidity, his want of judgement, and his complete inability to understand any who differed from him were reflected in his writings no less than in his life".

[25] Dean 1935:7–8, quoting Lagarde.

[26] I take the translation from Dean 1935; the Syriac text is available in Dean 1935; I have compared the Greek where it is available, in the rather odd edition of Lagarde 1877–80.

thirty years"; his expression of this point is not altogether clear, but he says, of relevance here, that "the seventy-two translators, being Hebrews and having been carefully instructed from early youth in the language of the Hebrews as well as that of the Greeks, did not merely translate the Hebrew writing into the Greek, but also, translating with insight. . . ."

§2: In the same connection, Epiphanius adds: "now this seems to some to be an omission made by the seventy-two, while by Aquila and Symmachus and other translators it is translated without any omission. However, there has been no (real) omission by the seventy. . . . Therefore the seventy-two omitted the word "year" in one place".

§3: On the use of the obelus: And in the divine Scriptures it is placed by those words which are used by the seventy-two translators but do not occur among the followers of Aquila or Symmachus. For the seventy-two translators added these words of themselves, not uselessly but, rather, helpfully. For where they added words lacking in these (other versions), they gave clearness to the reading, so that we regard them as not disassociated from the Holy Spirit. For they omitted those that had no need of repetition; but where there was a word that was considered ambiguous when translated into the Greek language, there they made an addition. This may be surprising, but we should not be rash to bring censure, but rather praise that it is according to the will of God that what is sacred should be understood. For while they were seventy-two in number and on the Pharian island, but called Anoge, opposite Alexandria, they were in thirty-six cells, two in each cell. From morning to evening they were shut up, and in the evening they would cross over in thirty-six small boats and go again to the palace of Ptolemy Philadelphus and dine with him. And each pair slept in (one of) thirty-six bedchambers, so that they might not talk with one another, but might produce an unadulterated translation. Thus they conducted themselves. For, having constructed the thirty-six cells already mentioned, over on the island, and formed them into pairs, Ptolemy shut them up in them two by two, as I have said. And with them he shut up two youths to minister to them in preparing food and (in other) service, and also skilled scribes. Moreover, he had made no opening into the cells through the walls, but in the roof above he opened what are called roof windows. But while thus abiding from morning to evening shut in by locks, they were translating as follows. To every pair one book was given. That is to say, the book of the Genesis of the world to one pair, the Exodus of the Israelites to another pair, that of Leviticus to another, and the next book in order to the next; and thus were translated the twenty-seven recognized canonical books, but twenty-two when counted according to the letters of the alphabet of the Hebrews.

(Following a long digression on the numbers and identities of the books in the biblical canon, Epiphanius returns to the subject of the translators)

§5: In the way we have related they were translated. They were given to every pair of translators in rotation, and again from the first pair to the second, and from the second to the third; and thus they went, every one going around. And they

were translated thirty-six times, as the story goes, both the twenty-two and the seventy-two that are apocryphal.

§6: And when they were completed, the king sat on a lofty throne; and thirty-six readers also sat below, holding thirty-six duplicates of each book, and one had a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures. Each reader read alone, and the others kept watch. No disagreement was found, but it was such an amazing work of God that it was recognized that these men possessed the gift of the Holy Spirit, because they agreed in translation. And wherever they had added a word all of them had added the same, and where they had made an omission all alike had made the omission.[27] And there was no need for the omitted words, but for those they added there was need. But that what is said may be clear to you, how marvelously, under the guidance of God and in the harmony of the Holy Spirit, they translated harmoniously and were not at variance with one another, in order that thereby knowing and being assured you may agree with our statement, I shall give you a demonstration of these things by means of a brief quotation. [Here Epiphanius gives an example from Ps 141:1] . . .

§8: (In discussing the sign called the *lemniscus*, which consists of a horizontal line with a dot above and another dot below it, Epiphanius suggests, again not altogether clearly, that) "when there is found in rare instances in the translation of the seventy-two a dissonant word, neither subtracted from nor added to words similar to it, you may know, because of the two points placed by it, that this word was translated by one or two pairs."

§§9–11: And it is well for us also to explain the matter of the translators. For a knowledge of them will be helpful to you, since by the inclusion of their story it will be seen who and whence and of what race[28] each of them was, and what was the cause of their translating. And the first translators of the divine Scriptures from the Hebrew language into the Greek were seventy-two men in number, those who made the first translation in the days of Ptolemy Philadelphus. They were chosen from the twelve tribes of Israel, six men from each tribe, as Aristeas has transmitted it in his work. And their names are these [Here Epiphanius gives the names. As these agree largely with those in the *Letter*, differing in ways which are of no relevance to our argument, they are not repeated here. The names occur only in the Syriac of Epiphanius; they are absent from the surviving portions of the Greek text of his work]. . . . These are the names, as we have already said, of the seventy-two translators. We have told about the things concerning the asterisk and the obelus above, and in part about the other translators, that is, Aquila and

[27] It is clear that this is a (confused) reminiscence of the expressions forbidding such changes or additions at the end of the *Letter*; it has nothing to do with the rabbinic accounts of 'changes' made in the translation, discussed in earlier chapters.

[28] The original Greek here has τίς καὶ πόθεν καὶ πότε καὶ γένους ποίου. Lagarde 1877–80:161, line 70, with n. ad loc. (It is not wholly clear from Lagarde's apparatus what his signs mean; but none of his entries at this point is significant). What is of interest is the fossilised formulaic character of this expression, asking about people not only the standard questions so common in Greek but even, of a long list of Jews, asking 'of what race', γένους ποίου, each was.

Symmachus and the rest; we will here inform you also of the causes, O lover of the good.

After the first Ptolemy, the second who reigned over Alexandria, the Ptolemy called Philadelphus, as has already been said was a lover of the beautiful and a lover of learning. He established a library in the same city of Alexander, in the (part) called the Bruchion; this is a quarter of the city today lying waste. And he put in charge of the library a certain Demetrius, from Phaleron, commanding him to collect the books that were in every part of the world. And he wrote letters and made request of every king and prince on earth to take the trouble to send those that were in his kingdom or principality – I mean, those by poets and prose writers and orators and philosophers and physicians and professors of medicine and historians[29] and books by any others. And after the work had progressed and books had been collected from everywhere, one day the king asked the man who had been placed in charge of the library how many books had already been collected in the library. And he answered the king, saying: "There are already fifty-four thousand eight hundred books, more or less; but we have heard that there is a great multitude in the world, among the Cushites, the Indians, the Persians, the Elamites, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, and the Chaldeans, and among the Romans, the Phoenicians, the Syrians, and the Romans in Greece" – at that time called not Romans but Latins. "But there are also with those in Jerusalem and Judah the divine Scriptures of the prophets, which tell about God and the creation of the world and every other doctrine of general value. If, therefore, it seem good to your majesty, O king, that we send (and) secure them also, write to the teachers in Jerusalem and they will send them to you, that you may place these books also in this library, your grace". Thereupon the king wrote the letter, in these words:

§10: The letter of the king to the teachers of the Jews: 'King Ptolemy to the teachers of the Jews in Jerusalem: Much joy. After I had established a library and collected many books from every people and placed them in it, I heard that there are also found among you the books of the prophets which tell about God and the creation of the world. And, desiring that I might give them also a place of honor with the other books I have written that you may send them to us. For I am honorably desirous of such a thing and devoid of guile or evil intention, but in good faith and kindness toward you I make request for them, since from of old there has been good will from us toward you, as you know when you remember. For perhaps you recall how, when many captives had been taken from your place and brought to our place in Egypt, I let them go. With abundance of provisions and exercising unusual consideration toward them, I sent them away free. Moreover, those who were sick among them, after I had healed them, I likewise dismissed, and the naked I clothed. And now a table of gold, embellished with precious stones of great value, a hundred talents in weight, instead of the table that was taken from the holy place of Jerusalem, I have sent along, with gifts and valuable things for the

[29] Cf. the similar, if shorter, list in Philastrius.

priestly place. I have thus given a recital of these things that you may know that I have requested the books because of a vow of piety.' And the letter was despatched and the presents sent likewise. And when they had received and read the letter and saw the things that had been sent, they had great joy and without delay transcribed the books in Hebrew letters of gold. They sent those recounted by me above, the twenty-two of the (Old) Testament and the seventy-two that are apocryphal. But when the king picked them up and looked at them and was unable to read them, because they were written in Hebrew letters and in the Hebrew language, it was necessary for them to write a second letter and request translators who would be able to explain to him in the Greek language the things in the Hebrew. The letter was as follows:

§11: The second letter: 'King Ptolemy to the teachers of religion in Jerusalem: Much joy. As to the hid treasure and the sealed fountain, what profit is there in either of them? [A composite of Ecclesiasticus 20:30 and Song of Songs 4:12 in the Septuagint versions] Likewise also is the matter of the books sent to us by you; for since we are unable to read these sent to us by you, such a thing is for us of no use whatever. But consent to send us as translators such of your men as from youth have been specially trained in the language of both the Hebrews and the Greeks.' Thereupon the seventy-two translators above mentioned the teachers of the Hebrews chose and sent, according to the example that Moses once set when he went up the mountain at the command of the Lord, having heard: 'Take with thee seventy men and go up the mountain' [Exodus 24:1]. But for the sake of peace among the tribes, that he might not take five men from some and six from others and create discord among the tribes, he made up his mind rather to take seventy-two and to add to the number. And in this way, as I have said, they also sent these men who translated the Scriptures on the island called the Pharian (Pharos), as we have already said above, in the way we have described. And so the Scriptures, when they had been transferred to the Greek language, were placed in the first library, which was built in the Bruchion, as I have already said. And there arose in addition to this library a second up in the Serapeum, called its daughter. . . .

§13: So from the time of the translation by the seventy-two translators to the translator Aquila and the twelfth year of Hadrian is altogether four hundred thirty years and four months,[30] lacking nine days; and to the end of the entire (reign) of Hadrian four hundred thirty-nine years and four months, lacking nine days.[31]

§15: [Aquila] was moved not by the right motive, but (by the desire) so to distort certain of the words occurring in the translation of the seventy-two that he might proclaim the things testified to about Christ in the divine Scriptures to be fulfilled

[30] The Greek text of this passage apparently ends here. One is reminded of the 430 years in the list of the "changes" in Chapters 4 and 5.

[31] Hadrian died in C.E. 138, so this places the translation in around 300 B.C.E.

in some other way, on account of a certain shame that he felt (to proffer) a senseless excuse for himself.

§17: [In discussing Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion] who, moreover, were not together, but were remote from one another in both time and place; and there were not many, but only three, and yet they were unable to agree with one another. Or (was the truth) with the seventy-two, who were the first to translate, were at the same time, and were divided into thirty-six groups, according to the command of the king? And, furthermore, they did not converse with one another, but by the Holy Spirit they brought out the entire translation in absolute agreement; and where there was need for an addition in explanation of a word, it was the same among them all. Though they did not know what each one by himself was translating, they agreed absolutely with one another, and the translations were identical. And where they cast out words, they translated in agreement with one another. So it is clear to those who through love of the truth seek to investigate that they were not merely translators but also, in part, prophets. For the things for which there was no need they left out of the translation – the things which Origen later inserted in their places, with the asterisks.

In these passages we see the fullest flowering of the story in its Christian dress. A repetitive manner, overlapping versions and excessive interest in what is clearly invented detail point not to disorganization and confusion, rather to the discursive pattern which characterises Epiphanius generally. Our concern, the history of the translation of the Bible into Greek, is not his concern. It is not the subject of his book; the Septuagint, or, rather, the various Greek translations of the Old Testament, are very important for his book, but their genesis is not its prime focus. Despite the work's title, *On Measures and Weights*, this little text is actually concerned with a wide variety of biblical topics, and it is at base a sort of biblical handbook or encyclopaedia.[32] Epiphanius refers to the seventy-two, and to the story of their activities, when he senses a relevance to his immediate subject; because his immediate subject varies, they are relevant several times, in different ways, and they crop up again and again. Criticism of his lack of organization, at least on this point, seems a little harsh; a discursive style is not necessarily the same thing as disorganization. Epiphanius offers us plenty of material, and he shows wide knowledge and thorough acquaintance with the way in which the story had expanded by his time.

Careful examination of what Epiphanius tells us about the translation of the Septuagint leads to some surprising conclusions. First, it reveals that there is in fact no significant repetition at all. Such repetition as occurs is only what is necessary to resume the thread of an interrupted discourse. Secondly it shows

[32] Dean 1935:3.

that there are two levels in what this text tells us about the Septuagint.[33] On the one hand, we have the story of the translation and how it came into being; on the other hand, we have illustration and exemplification of the translation techniques and procedures of the translators. Occasionally these are mixed up with each other, but they are essentially two separate levels of literary matter and with care can be distinguished. The latter category is related to Epiphanius' concern with the relative qualities of the various Greek versions of the Old Testament; the first category, by contrast, derives from a different set of traditions and is concerned wholly with the pseudohistory of how one of these versions, the Septuagint, came into existence. Epiphanius is not uninterested in how the other versions came into existence and occasionally gives accounts of these. As can be seen from the extracts given earlier, he knows a story about Aquila and his motives for engaging in the translation of the Bible. But in the nature of things, it is not surprising that Epiphanius should have known more about the supposed history of the Septuagint version than about others and that he should have retailed much more on that topic too; he was interested in boosting that version and in doing down the others, he knew more about that version, and it could lay claim, above all, to a far higher status than the others.

All the references in this text to the story of the translation, as distinct from details about the translation techniques of the translators at their work, fall into the first category identified here. An attentive reading of Epiphanius reveals the presence in this work of a continuous account of the genesis of the translation. It is chopped up and re-arranged for use in contexts where the story as a continuous whole was not strictly relevant, but where its separate parts were individually of use to Epiphanius. This is the way of Epiphanius: sidetracks have their own role in his literary style. If we take all the relevant extracts and try to sort them into an order appropriate to a single account, we can see that Epiphanius has taken an entire account, cut it up, and integrated all of its parts into his text, in different places. Not all the parts of his source's text were equally relevant. For example, the list of the names of the translators does not have great relevance. This list is apparently found only in the Syriac version of the text and does not survive in the Greek (if it was ever there to begin with).[34] But Epiphanius would not be the first writer to have a desire not to waste good material.

[33] This should not be confused with what is suggested by Pelletier 1962:88 "Epiphane connaît deux états de la légende"; Pelletier seems to misunderstand the two "états" in question; he thinks of Epiphanius having resort to Ps.-Aristeas, and "pour le reste il lui préfère des traditions plus détaillées, sans beaucoup de critique". Pelletier seems to consider the details of Epiphanius' account in isolation, rather than in their contextual relations to each other, as is attempted here.

[34] The remark by Pelletier 1962:87, to the effect that the names appear "d'après le Syriaque mais en caractères hébreux', seems to be based upon a misunderstanding. Cf. Wendland 1900:87–89. See also Chapter 6.

As Pelletier points out, Epiphanius did borrow, directly or indirectly, from the *Letter*, for he says that the list of the translators' names comes from there. But Pelletier seems to be mistaken in thinking that Epiphanius is otherwise dependent on the *Letter*. Epiphanius could scarcely make such a claim about the rest of what he writes, for most of it does not come from the *Letter of Aristeas*. The list of names could easily have existed as a separate item of antiquarian lore, isolated from its literary birthplace in Ps.-Aristeas. It actually occurs like that in the Syriac *Book of the Bee*, without any connection to the *Letter of Aristeas* at all.[35] There is no other reference to Aristeas by name in the works of Epiphanius, and his account here shows no necessary acquaintance with the version of the story as given in the *Letter*. This seems to exclude direct acquaintance, and to imply that Epiphanius took this information along with the rest of his account from a single source.

By far the most important feature of this version is its introduction of the division of the translators into pairs, with the consequent reduction of the number of cells for them to work in, from 72 to 36. It has long been noticed that this probably reflects Luke 10:1 "After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them *two and two* before his face into every city. . . ." (The received text of the New Testament has "seventy" in this passage, but many early manuscripts contain the variant "seventy-two".) Another set of details surrounds the completion of the translators' task. The scene described here, with the king sitting on a lofty throne, the demonstrative examination of the thirty-six versions, by means of a public reading of their entire contents, and the inevitable outcome of that examination – all this replaces what we find in earlier versions of the story. There we had merely collection of the translators' work and checking of it for differences between their individual versions. Now a ceremonial aspect of great impressiveness has been added to the story, one designed, like other aspects which have gradually accumulated, further to magnify the status of this translation of the Greek Bible.

This version of the story is by far the richest and most highly developed of all. It is a Christian, and a christianizing, version, and it takes its place in a long list of such accounts. But we can see, in the form that the story has now acquired and in the way, moreover, in which it is used by Epiphanius in this little work, that the aim which the story now serves is rather different from earlier ones. At the start, it served the interest of the Christian Church over against a Jewish concern with the text, the contents and the meaning of the Bible as divine message; now, that emphasis has changed somewhat. With the

[35] Budge 1886:120–21 (although without any mention of a connection with Aristeas): "[Ptolemy Philadelphus] asked the captive Jews who were in Egypt, and seventy old men translated the Scriptures for him, from Hebrew into Greek, in the island of Pharos. In return for this he set them free, and gave back to them also the vessels of their temple. Their names are these. . . ."

triumph of Christianity, the Church is more concerned with matters internal to the institution and the doctrines of the Church itself. The status of the LXX version of the Bible was now more a matter for discussion within the Church, as other versions demanded the same status. Thus is it that Epiphanius is concerned to describe the other translations of the Old Testament as inadequate, and to show the significance of this version. In the same way, his version of the story serves similar purposes. Its new description of the procedure, with its Christian division of the translators by pairs and the royal examination of the final product of their labour, belongs entirely to a context in which Christianity is a dominant force in society.

After Epiphanius, the legend of the translation survived for many centuries, but its character changed further. It is almost as though, having grown and changed and absorbed so many new, or at least varied, elements, the story suddenly collapsed or fell apart. We have a large number of accounts of the septuagintal version in succeeding centuries, but they are characterized by brevity, by confusion, by the mixing of elements from different strands of the tradition and, more generally, by an apparent absence or loss of direction. Until Epiphanius, as has been seen, there was usually clear purpose to the use of the story in all its forms; we can see motive in the introduction of new elements and some degree of care in their employment. Thereafter, things settle into a different pattern. There is little new; novelty is expressed rather by re-arrangement of existing patterns; motive and design are lacking and their absence seems to point to a lack of necessity for them. All this has nothing to do with Epiphanius; the richness of his description is not the reason for later poverty. Indeed, he is not necessarily the source of many later reports. But the Septuagint was now wholly a Christian text, and its defence, or its justification, now faced different challenges.

A few examples, out of the dozen or more that we have, illustrate the new context in which the story functions. First, though, we have a reaction against the extravagant turn that the story had taken. Jerome (c. 342–419), who was of course concerned with the accurate text of the Bible because of his own translation work on it and who also knew well the sources out of which this story had grown, protested against the newest forms of the legend:[36]

I do not know who was the first lying author to construct the seventy cells at Alexandria, in which they were separated and yet all wrote the same words, whereas Aristeas, one of the bodyguard of the said Ptolemy, and long after him Josephus have said nothing of the sort, but write that they were assembled in a single hall and

[36] Jerome, *Praef. in Pent.* (PL, XXVIII, 181). Trans. from Thackeray 1917:115–16, slightly changed. Note the reference to prophesying, which we have seen before. We shall meet this comparison between being inspired, like a prophet, and merely translating, 'interpreting', again, in the twentieth century.

conferred together, not that they prophesied. For it is one thing to be a prophet, another to be an interpreter.

Jerome himself is not free here of innovation, for the hall (Latin: *basilica*) which he mentions seems not to be found in other sources, but he is refreshingly and almost uniquely commonsensical. He is also aware, as he shows elsewhere, that the translators dealt only with the Pentateuch, not with the entirety of the Old Testament.[37]

Jerome's healthy and informed scepticism was taken up later, but not by many. Among the few who followed his view was Hugh of St Victor, in the twelfth century. In an account of the Scriptures, of their contents, editions and translations, he tells us that the Old Testament books were originally in Hebrew:[38]

Afterwards Ptolemy, who was called Philadelphus and was the second to hold the throne of Egypt after Alexander the Great, had the library (*bibliotheca*) of the Old Testament translated into Greek from Hebrew by seventy translators, whom he received from Eleazar the High Priest (*pontifex*). And, as some say, in order not to be deceived by them, through false translations, he split them up, so that by sitting (alone) in individual cells they should be apart from each other. But they translated everything by the Holy Spirit in such a way that nothing was to be found in one codex which was not to be found in the others in similar form. On account of this, theirs is a single version. But Jerome says that no credence should be given to this matter. And after the ascension of the Lord, as the apostles preached the gospel, this same translation was found among the gentiles, and the sacred scriptures began to be read by the churches of Christ at first in accordance with it. But later on, since it was proven that there were lacking from this version some things which the authority both of Christ himself and of the apostles in their preaching had announced were in it, others undertook to translate the holy scriptures from the Hebrew tongue into the Greek.

But this interest in hard fact, so far as it went, was isolated. John Chrysostom, at about the same time as Jerome, was peddling the old story.[39] His references to its background and to the preservation of the books still in his own day seem to echo our earliest Christian source, Justin, but may simply be a borrowing from more recent versions of that account. Rufinus (ca. 345–410), who had been a friend of Jerome but became a bitter opponent later on, also retained the motif of the unanimous version inspired by the Holy Spirit.[40]

[37] Jerome, *Quaest. in Gen.* (PL, XXIII, 985); *Comm. in Ezech.* 5, 12 (PL, XXV, 57C); *Comm. in Mich.* 2, 9 (PL, XXV, 1227D).

[38] Hugh of St Victor 1879:17.

[39] John Chrysostom, *Homil. in Gen.* IV, 4 (PG, LIII, 42); *Adv. Iud. Hom.* I, 6 (PG, XLVIII, 851); *Hom. in Matth.*, V, 2 (PG, LVII, 57).

[40] Quoted in Wendland 1900:162.

Augustine, too, falls in line with the bulk of ancient writers and offers what had by now become an orthodox version of the story:[41]

By what dispensation of divine providence were the sacred writings of the Old Testament translated from Hebrew into Greek speech, so that they might become known to all mankind! The Ptolemy called Philadelphus permitted all those whom he had taken captive to go free; in addition he sent royal gifts to the Temple of God and requested of Eleazar, then the (High) Priest, that he be given those scriptures of which he had heard tell that they were divine and which on that account he wished to have in the wonderful library which he had made. When that priest had sent them to him in Hebrew, he asked also for translators; and seventy two were given, six men from each of the twelve tribes, very learned in both languages, Hebrew and Greek. Their translation has become known as the Septuagint. It is reported that such wonderful and amazing, indeed divine, agreement was found in their words that, although they sat down to this task separately (for in this way did it please Ptolemy to test them), not in so much as one word with the same meaning or the same significance or in the order of the words did they differ from each other. But as though there were but one single translator, what they all translated was one single version, since of a truth there was a single spirit in all of them. And they had received such a wonderful gift of God, that the authority of those Scriptures was in this way commended not as human but, as they really were, divine, to be of benefit to the nations when they came to believe – which is as we see now what actually happened.

We note here particularly the motif of the despatch of the Scriptures in Hebrew, and of the consequent request for translators. This is no longer a structurally necessary part of the story. The original reason for its employment, as has been seen, was to call forth the request for the translators; but the translators were originally in the story anyway, and the need to ask for them again was created by the desire to suggest that the Jews were hiding something. This was part of the process of christianization. Now this process was complete, and degeneration was setting in. Augustine also retains here the by now otiose element of the release of the captives, and in this he is echoed half a century later by Basilius of Seleucia (died ca. 459), who knows very little indeed of the story but does connect the original request by Ptolemy Philadelphus to Jerusalem with the release of the captives.[42] Another writer of the same period, Cyril of Alexandria (390–444), similarly, is not quite sure that it was the Pentateuch that the seventy-two translated, including in their work also "the holy prophets".[43]

We also have a longer account in the anonymous *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, a work which it is difficult to date but whose composition seems to

[41] *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 42, quoted in Wendland 1900:163–65 (my translation).
[42] Quoted in Wendland 1900:149.
[43] Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum* (PG, LXXVI, 521), quoted in Wendland 1900:148.

belong at around this period.[44] Here we find a version which is at first sight very familiar.

For Alexander the king of the Macedonians when he was dying transferred his kingdom to his four foster-brothers – I mean Antiochus, and Philip, and Seleucus, and Ptolemy. This Ptolemy, living in Egypt, was a man much given to learning, and he built a library in this island of Pharos, where he collected books of all sorts (? in every language), of Greek and other histories, and written texts from all the nations (of the world). And he importuned all other rulers and governors, and obtained their books; and he appointed a librarian by the name of Demetrius. Now the king asked him "How many books have we collected, do you know?" He replied, "There are already some tens of thousands; five and a half more or less". And Demetrius said to him (further), "We have heard that there are many more in Egypt, and in Thebes (of Egypt), and Ethiopia, and Persia, and Syria. But in Judaea too, we have heard, there are books concerning God and the creation of the world; and if my lord the king were to send to the priests and to the High Priest in Jerusalem, they would send you their books, and my lord the king, by examining them, would obtain great benefit". For this Demetrius was Hebrew by race.[45] Then the king despatched men to Jerusalem, to the man who was then High Priest, Eleazar by name, writing him and the other priests a letter, in which he said the following: Ptolemy the king, to the teachers of piety much joy! I have built a library in the island of Pharos and collected exceedingly many books there. I have heard that you possess books concerning God and the creation of the world. Now I wish to place all (books) in the library which I have made. So bear in mind, please, that there took place a captivity from your homeland to ours; and all those whom I found (here in captivity) I have sent back, with supplies for the journey; those who were wounded I returned to health, those who were naked I clothed, and sent them back to you with provisions for the journey. I say all this, not to offer you a reproach, but so that you should know that I desire the books not to make fun of them nor to make a mockery of them; certainly not, but in order to benefit from them. Now I have sent you gold and silver, and a golden altar-table; and I have sent you vessels for the temple of your God. You will receive the gifts.

When they received the gifts and the altar-table and the vessels they rejoiced greatly. They did not neglect the affair, but copying out the scriptures in golden Hebrew letters and language, sent them off to him thus. He received them, and unrolled them, and found them written thus in Hebrew letters and language. Not being able to read them, he was compelled to send them a second letter, which said the following: A fountain sealed up, and a treasure hid,[46] what benefit is there in either? So is it with what you have sent me. For the letters and the language alike I do not understand. Please therefore send me men who know well the language

[44] Conybeare 1898: 90–91 my translation (DJW).

[45] This seems to be the only place where Demetrius is made into a Jew.

[46] In Epiphanius this expression is inverted.

of the Greeks and of the Hebrews, so that they may copy them out and interpret them in Greek. Then the 72 translators were sent, six men from each tribe.

So Ptolemy built for them 36 little houses on the isle of Pharos. And closing them up thus in pairs, in each one he made them translate the entire scripture [ἐνδιάθετον]. And he did not allow windows in those little houses, so that they should not contact each other and corrupt the scriptures. But he did allow skylights in the roof of the houses so that they could have light. And if anywhere they left out an expression which was superfluous, one pair leaving out words, then the other thirty five pairs also left it out and if one pair added a single word, as the context demanded, then they all did so. So that the Holy Spirit spoke through all of them together.

This is clearly a version of the account offered to us by Epiphanius. Conybeare, who published the text in which this occurs a century ago, noticed the similarity, and suggested that at first sight this, and other passages in the *Dialogue* which he published, were "extracts from the tract of Epiphanius".[47] He noted that the "language is largely the same, and nearly all the peculiar features of Epiphanius' narrative recur in the dialogue." However, he recognized that "on comparison the latter is seen to be drawn not direct from Epiphanius, but from some source" which he and this dialogue had in common. Conybeare subjected these and a number of other texts to detailed study, and came to the conclusion that the *Dialogue* is joined by a "thread of identity" to a number of other sources, Epiphanius, the *Chronicon Paschale*, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Eusebius and John Malalas.[48] He concludes that what "probably . . . underlies all these parallel sources" is the work of Ariston of Pella, a historian of the second century, whose *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus*, between a Jew converted to Christianity and a Jew loyal to his faith, sought to prove the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies in Christ. Certainty on this point probably remains out of reach, but the differences of language and of detail between these two accounts are as striking as the similarities, and call for further investigation.

Detail is now becoming very fragile. Cosmas Indicopleustes, early in the sixth century, seems to identify the librarian of Ptolemy as one Tryphon, for whom we have no other record; he also knows that the translators were seventy in number, and thinks that the king placed the translation in his private library.[49] Malalas, later on in the sixth century, has little detail but he assigns the motive for the translation to Ptolemy's desire "to read the meaning of the Jewish scriptures in the Greek language".[50] Isidore of Seville, early in the seventh century, in Spain, who remembers one of his predecessors' interest in a comparison with Peisistratus, has a strong, if ultimately barren, interest in numbers: he knows

[47] Conybeare 1898:xxiv–v.
[48] Conybeare 1898:xxxiii.
[49] Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Topographia Christiana*, XII (PG, LXXXVIII, 460), quoted in Wendland 1900:156–57.
[50] Malalas 2000:148–49; English trans. in Malalas 1986:104.

that there were seventy thousand books in the library, and that there were seventy translators, and that they lived in seventy (not thirty-six, nor thirty-five) little houses, but he knows nothing as to the number of days that they took to complete their task. He has them produce versions identical both as to content and as to word order, "through the Holy Spirit".[51] The *Chronicon Paschale*, which as we have seen may have a connection with the Epiphanius tradition and the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, is confused, like Cosmas, about identities, making the High Priest a man called Onias Simon, a brother of Eleazar, but the author is a little more cultivated than some: he knows of the Homeric connection of the island of Pharos with Proteus; he knows the correct number of the translators (seventy-two), but he divides them into seventy-two groups, each in a separate dwelling; and he makes them complete their work in, astonishingly, seventy days.[52] George Cedrenus, in the twelfth century, seems to belong to a similar branch of this involved tradition, for he believes that there were one hundred thousand books in the Library and that the translators took seventy-two days to complete their work, but unfortunately he thinks that there were only seventy of them. Like the author of the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, this writer is aware of the nations whose works are represented in the Library, for he refers to the presence there of Hellenic, Chaldaic, Egyptian and Roman works. Whether he had any idea of what these were is of course another matter.[53]

Later writers in this strand of the tradition are scarcely better. George Syncellus, a historian writing around the end of the eighth century, depends very heavily on Josephus in general, but a glance at what he says on this topic shows that he is in fact somewhat influenced by the Epiphanius tradition too, for he splits the translators, now reduced to seventy, into pairs, who carry out their task, producing identical versions, in seventy-two days. We are reminded of Cedrenus. The numbers involved – seventy, seventy-two, thirty-six, thirty-five – have by this time lost all significance. Syncellus also thinks, no more reliably than most others on this topic, that there were one hundred thousand books in the holdings of the Ptolemy's library.[54]

[51] Isidore 1911:VI, iii, 5–VI, iv, 2. We find the same information also in Hrabanus Maurus (776/784–856), *De Universo*, Book 5, ch. 4 ("On libraries"); Hrabanus Maurus 1852:121. Interestingly, St Julian of Toledo, later in the seventh century, knew much more of the ancient material, especially Epiphanius and Augustine, and discussed it at greater length, in order to justify reliance on the Septuagint against the Hebrew for chronological purposes: the Hebrew text allowed a shorter time than the Septuagint from Creation to the time of Jesus, and hence the Jews could argue that the time for the arrival of the Messiah was not yet here; Julian of Toledo 1976:201–05 (= *De comprobatione aetatis sexti*, bk. III, 16–21).

[52] *Chronicon Paschale* 1832: 326–27 (PG vol. 92, col. 425). A sentence later, it is true, he speaks of seventy-two days.

[53] George Cedrenus, quoted by Wendland 1900:135.

[54] George Syncellus, *Ekloge Chronographias*, ed. Dindorf, I, 516 (quoted in Wendland 1900:133–35); see also Adler and Tuffin 2002:396–97. See on this author also Huxley 1981.

Similarly, Nicetas, a theological writer working in the late ninth to tenth centuries, produced an account of the translation in which he calls on both Philo and (Ps.-)Justin for material but succeeds both in mis-reporting and in confusing them; he tells us that the translators occupied little houses, "in pairs, as the Jew Philo says, or individually as the divine Justin relates". He calls the High Priest Azaria; and he thinks that the translators produced versions not only of the Pentateuch but also of the Psalms.[55]

Nicetas lived and worked in the East. As we have seen, the story circulated also in the West. Isidore was a source for many Christian writers of all sorts for many centuries, and some read also earlier works. Remigius of St Germain (c. 841–c. 908) goes back to Jerome but gives somewhat confused information. He appears to think that the Seventy came before Ezra, but then he tells us that[56]

Although St Augustine affirms that these Seventy were shut up in individual cells as they did their work of translation, St Jerome gives this little credence, saying, If they were shut up, they should not be called translators, but rather prophets. And it is known that they acted under compulsion, for it is reported by some that king Ptolemy himself worshipped the one God just like the Hebrews, and indeed from love of Him ordered that the scriptures of the Hebrews should be translated into his own tongue.

Remigius here reports from Jerome Ptolemy's love of the one God as the explanation for his interest in the Jewish scriptures. This is uncommon in our sources. Even when there is no reference to the library, and hence no obvious reason why a great king should be interested in the Hebrew Bible, we do not generally find such an explanation as this. It does not appear more widely in Christian sources. Berno of Reichenau, in the first half of the eleventh century, takes this explanation up at greater length. He seems to derive at least some of his information from Hrabanus Maurus, and he resembles others in his ability to confuse it, but he is still more explicit than Remigius about Ptolemy:[57]

And a little earlier, when [Jerome] mentions those things which were left out by the Seventy, he says: the Jews say that it was done by wise counsel, lest Ptolemy, a worshipper of the one God, should discover even among the Jews (evidence of) a double god. This he did especially because he was thought to fall into the dogma of Plato. So wherever there was anything in the sacred Scriptures testifying to Father and Son and Holy Spirit, either they translated it otherwise or they kept completely silent (about it), so that they might both satisfy the king and not reveal the secrets of the faith.

[55] Nicetas, *Catena in Psalmos*, PG LXIX, 700, quoted in Wendland 1900:158–59.

[56] Remigius of St Germain 1884:143.

[57] Berno of Reichenau 1880:1132. Berno (d. 1048) was a German Benedictine who served as abbot of Reichenau, enriching its library and promoting the school there. Most of his writings concern liturgical music.

This, still more than Remigius, serves to christianize the text and the process of its translation into Greek and its transmission thereby at a later stage to the gentiles. What better way to do this than to make of Ptolemy himself not merely an instrument of the divine will in this matter but a worshipper of the one true God, in effect a Christian *avant la lettre*?

As was seen in the introduction, all of this christianization serves a double purpose. It does not simply serve to make of the LXX, and of its contents, a Christian book; it also serves to demonstrate that the Bible, and the Christian message which it allegedly contained, had been available to others besides Jews before the time of Christ; its translation, and its translation by Jews at that, before the time of Christ, served to show that the prophecies about Christ which were said to be contained in it were not simply later *post eventum* inventions of Christian propaganda, with no historical basis. Jews, of all people, who were the most vociferous in their opposition to the claims made by the Christians, were shown to be the witnesses to what they themselves denied: their own texts, produced by their own interpreters for the Egyptian ruler hundreds of years before Christ's appearance, contained the prophecies about the "coming of the Lord". These changes in the story are literary devices necessary for the purposes for which the christianized version of the story came to be used.

The Christian use of the story about the Greek translation of the Bible goes far beyond that of the Jews. Among the Christians, as has been seen, Greek survived, Greek was the language of the Church in the east and of the Bible there: the Greek Bible was indeed the only Bible many Christians there knew. The story both suited urgent needs of the Church over against Jewry and provided material to justify claims of tampering with the text of the divine message.[58] The concept of a translation, as against the original language of the word of God, was wholly acceptable from the beginning as containing the divine message, so a story about such translation at, indeed before, the very start of the Christian mission could without difficulty have a central place in Christian thinking about the Bible. It also fitted well into a framework in which a number of translations existed in competition with each other, as it provided a good, the best, argument in favour of one as against the rest of these translations. The story, thus firmly rooted, could only grow and acquire new detail, branching out in various directions, mixing different strands of the tradition and enriching the detail of what became a foundation story of more than passing interest.

[58] On the notion of tampering with texts of Holy Writ, this time in the Islamic context, see Lazarus-Yafeh 1992; Adang 1996, *passim*.

6

Among the Christians in the Orient

The rise of Islam caused profound changes in the whole of the Near East. The one most relevant for our concern here is the linguistic. Within some three hundred years of the initial conquests of Islam, the principal language, literary and to a great degree also spoken, over most of the Near East was Arabic. This transformation affected both Muslims and non-Muslims, though in different ways. For Christians, it meant a gradual distancing from the cultural equipment of the Hellenic–Christian past. As this heritage was expressed mainly in Greek or in Syriac, the move to Arabic meant that only those elements in it that were translated into that language, or otherwise capable of cultural and linguistic transformation, could survive. For Jews, it meant the addition of yet another linguistic dress to those of the past, and they lost little or nothing of the literary corpus expressed in other languages. Indeed, the addition of Arabic to their linguistic armoury, like other such additions in the past, made possible cultural openness which proved of immense benefit to Jewish culture in many ways. Among Muslims, themselves largely descendants of pre-Islamic Near Eastern Christians, the use of Arabic for literary expression meant that the cultural baggage inherited from earlier times and other cultures faced the twin needs of translation and reformulation. The Bible did not have, could not have, the same status or the same meaning for Muslims as it did for Christians and Jews. Our concern in this and succeeding chapters, therefore, although it is mainly with the new force of Islam, will of necessity, because of the overarching nature of the cultural and linguistic changes brought by the expansion of the faith, the culture and the polity of Islam, be also with the two great pre-Islamic religious traditions in the east and with the ways in which their ideas and knowledge about the origins of the Septuagint all fed each other over several centuries.

We begin shortly before the rise of Islam, with Christian sources, with an author whose identity is almost completely hidden from us. And even the text which we possess seems to have a very shadowy identity and existence.

Zacharias of Mitylene composed an ecclesiastical history around the beginning of the sixth century, completing it probably between 491 and 518. He wrote in Greek, but in that language his work is completely lost. It was used heavily, however, in the composition of a Syriac work later in the sixth century, and that work is itself attributed to Zacharias in part of the manuscript tradition. The Syriac work seems to be borrowed from the work of Zacharias only in respect of books 3–6.[1] The rest of the books of the *Chronicle* seem to belong to the Syriac epitomator himself, an anonymous monk of Amida, in Mesopotamia, who finished his work in 569, and to his own independent sources.[2]

Our story comes at the very end of the twelfth book, in Chapter 7, and follows on from the author's more sober historical narrative:[3]

The seventh chapter treats of the map of the world which was made by the diligence of Ptolemy Philometor, king of Egypt.

Now Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, as the *Chronicle* of Eusebius of Caesarea declares, two hundred and eighty years and more before the birth of our Lord, at the beginning of his reign, set the Jewish captives in Egypt free and sent offerings to Jerusalem to Izra'el, who was priest at that time; and he assembled seventy men learned in the law and had the Holy Scriptures translated from the Hebrew tongue into Greek; and he stored them up and kept them with him; for in this matter he was indeed moved by God, in order to prepare for the calling of the nations who should attain to knowledge, that they might be true worshippers of the glorious Trinity through the ministration of the Spirit.

In the following sentence, the author indeed goes on to treat of the map of the world attributed to Ptolemy Philometor, a hundred and thirty years later than Philadelphus; there seems to be no explanation for the incorporation of this story here. Its presence seems nevertheless not to be an accident, for the following sentence is knitted together with this one, saying "Yet again about the space of one hundred and thirty years after him. . . ."

This is not the only curious aspect of this passage. Internally, too, it presents difficulties. The identity of the priest, Izra'el, offers a problem: we have met the priest so far under the name Eleazar. Izra'el is presumably just a corruption, but may it perhaps represent testimony to a different tradition? It is not to be found in Eusebius, identified here as the source of the story. Beyond that, we note the number seventy, rather than seventy-two, this by now almost a normal feature of the story, and the date, some 280 years before the birth of Jesus. Seventy accords

1 Hamilton-Brooks 1899:2.
2 Allen 1980:472.
3 I use the English translation of E. W. Brooks, in Hamilton-Brooks 1899:325; there is a Latin translation by Brooks in Brooks 1924:137. The Syriac is in Land 1870:III, 327.

with what we find in the *Chronicon* of Eusebius, and the date also accords with what that text reports, though it is expressed there, as we have seen, in the form of a consular date, 232. More significantly, the whole motif of the library, along with those of the king's interest in learning and in books, that of the separation of the translators from each other, the cells in which they were housed, and of the miraculous aspect of the translation that resulted – all of this is absent here probably because it is absent from the version of the story that he provides in the *Chronicon*. There, as has been seen, Eusebius provides a very short and brief account of the translation, which lacks all of these characteristics.

The use of Eusebius' *Chronicon* here, rather than of his *Historia Ecclesiastica* or *Praeparatio Evangelica*, with their far fuller and more embellished versions of the story, may seem odd. That oddity is all the greater when we consider the explicit aim of the story here, as expressed at the end, to explain that the king was "indeed moved by God, in order to prepare for the calling of the nations who should attain to knowledge, that they might be true worshippers of the glorious Trinity through the ministration of the Spirit". We should not assume that this means that those other works were unavailable in the orient, or in oriental tongues, for as will be seen there is evidence of dependence on those works in the east at a later date than Ps.-Zacharias.

The story also reaches outwards, beyond the boundaries of the near east, to the Caucasian world. Here we find the church father Epiphanius. We have already met him, in an earlier chapter, but in Syriac and Greek. Now we find him in Armenian. The order of the material of the story in the Armenian differs little from that in the Syriac. Langlois, who translated it into French in the nineteenth century, claimed that the story exists as an independent short work in Armenian, whereas in all the other versions that survive the story exists merely as an anecdote, within other texts. As the whole story is very short, no more than a couple of pages, Langlois perhaps made a mistake about this. If he is correct, however, then this marks an interesting new departure for the story.

That there may be something to his suggestion emerges from several further facts. First, we have in two manuscripts of the tenth century (although both of them apparently from the same hand) a text entitled Τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐπιφανίου περὶ τῶν ὅ ἑρμηνευτῶν καὶ τῶν παρερμηνευσάντων, "Epiphanius on the Seventy Translators and those who mis-translated [scil. the Scriptures]". And secondly, as we saw in the last chapter, on the basis of the material in the *de Mensuris ac Ponderibus* of Epiphanius, we can reconstruct just such a text, complete in itself, which takes up all the relevant material in the *de Mensuris*. The text in these two manuscripts is different from the sort of text that I suggest here, for it takes up only some of the passages about the Seventy, and it also includes passages about other, later translators and their faults from

Epiphanius' text.[4] Nonetheless, taken together, these two facts support Langlois' notion of the existence at one time of a short independent text on this subject.

Langlois' argument is further strengthened by the survival in Georgian of a version of Epiphanius' *de Mensuris*, including the broken-up and distributed version of the story from that text.[5] From Van Esbroeck's work it emerges that we can date this version very early, possibly to the seventh century, with a background even earlier. The existence of this text in such languages testifies to the ability of Christian nations in the Caucasus to gain access to a wide range of texts from the Christian tradition of the Church Fathers.[6] In this case, the early conversion of the Georgians may help to account for their interest in such a story, but the linguistic and cultural distance separating them from the Greek version of the Bible must make us wonder about their interest in the genesis of the Greek Bible.

There is, however, much more to this Georgian text than these observations allow. Van Esbroeck's study demonstrates the likelihood that the Georgian is translated neither from the Greek nor from the Syriac and that it may well predate the Armenian. It may actually be either our earliest witness to Epiphanius' work or an independent witness to the structure of that work. Van Esbroeck has found Armenian material in Ananias of Shirak, writing in the seventh century, and use of similar material by Vardan Vardapet, another Armenian writer, this time of the thirteenth century, connected to this work.[7] All this not only offers much help with the history of this little text and what is emerging as its very complex structure but also confirms the wide diffusion and long history of the story even in these far-off regions. Beyond this, the Georgian text that van Esbroeck publishes seems to support the suggestion (see Chapter 5) about the existence, possibly before Epiphanius, of a separate, independent short work on the translation of the LXX. If this is correct, then this is a very exciting development, one with considerable ramifications, both for the history of Epiphanius' own text and, more broadly, for the history of our legend and its role in the world of the first few Christian centuries.[8]

That the story made some impact in Armenian circles too, whether as an independent text or just as a piece of anecdotal stuff, seems clear from the fact

[4] Epiphanius, 1864:III, cols. 373–74.

[5] Epiphanius 1984.

[6] In this they resemble another nation on a periphery, the Irish. See, for example, McNamara 1975; D. Wasserstein 1988.

[7] For Ananias of Shirak, see the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 84–85; for Vardan Vardapet, the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 2153 (both by Robert W. Thomson).

[8] For more on Epiphanius in Georgian and the Georgian version of the Bible, beyond what van Esbroeck has, see Tarchnišvili 1955:313–27, 359.

that we have at least one further reference to it from Armenian sources, in the important historian Moses of Khorene. This scholar is now generally placed in the eighth century. At the beginning of his *History of Armenia*, Moses tries to explain why he depends deliberately on Greek rather than 'Chaldaean' and 'Assyrian' sources in his work, even though these others contain fuller information. Part of his justification is that the Greek kings were always interested in patronising translations of foreign works into Greek "as did that Ptolemy Philadelphus who wanted to have the books and the histories of all nations translated into Greek".[9] Here more than the miraculous element in the story of the translation has been forgotten. Philadelphus is remembered here simply as a patron of literary endeavours, especially translation. From being a detail in the framework of the story of the translation, Ptolemy has become the story itself. We note in passing that the king's ambition, "to collect, if possible, all the books in the world" (*Letter of Aristeas* §9) has, by what is probably a normal process of slippage, given the background against which the story is now seen, become that of wanting "to have the books and the histories of all nations translated into Greek". We never in fact hear, in our real sources for the Library and its contents themselves, of any other works being translated for the king or of his wanting any other texts beyond the Hebrew Scriptures to be translated.[10]

Syriac writers are more helpful. Isho'dad of Merv was an Eastern Syriac, Nestorian bishop, with his seat in a place called Hedatta ("New" Town), near Mosul in Iraq. In the introduction to his commentary on the books of the Old Testament, he has a short passage on the Greek translations of the Old Testament, which includes the following brief account of the LXX:[11]

> The first (Greek version of the Old Testament) was made under the patronage of Ptolemy Philadelphus king of Egypt on the island of Pharos near Alexandria by seventy two elders of the Jews, who were very well versed in the Hebrew and the Greek languages from their youth.

This has the bare bones of the original story. The passage has all the character of a catalogue entry, the first in a series of accounts of the ancient versions. What is puzzling, however, is that when we turn to the other entries in the little list that follows we find Isho'dad waxing more eloquent there and giving more detail and greater flavour to his tale. Here, despite, or perhaps because of, the

[9] Moses of Khorene, French trans., Langlois 1869:II, 54; see also 55.

[10] It is difficult, on the basis of this rather bald report, to know where Moses might have found this information about Ptolemy. Topchyan 2001 discusses his sources and comes to the conclusion that he knows material that is not in Josephus, and that it is probable, if not demonstrable, that his source for such material is Julius Africanus.

[11] Vosté 1945:183–84 (text), 192 (translation); Isho'dad 1950:1; 1955:1.

apparent dependence on Epiphanius, we are left to wonder about the relatively unimportant status of this Greek version of the Bible for such an author.

Isho'dad is not alone in this. Other Syriac writers take a similar line. If we turn from an Eastern, Nestorian writer to a Western, Jacobite one, then the picture is the same. Not long after Isho'dad, who can be dated only to somewhere around the middle of the ninth century, we find Moses bar Kepha (c. 815–903), a Mesopotamian, who served some forty years as bishop of Mosul. In his many writings, there are at least two references to the Septuagint. The first occurs in his Introduction to the Psalms:[12]

This translation by the Seventy arose in the following manner: Ptolemy the king of Egypt who was called Philadelphus loved wisdom and collected many books from many places. And he sent to the Hebrews as well and had the books of the Old Testament brought from them. And he summoned seventy two men of the Hebrews who knew the Hebrew and the Greek languages very well. And he had the Old Testament translated, and they translated it from Hebrew into Greek.

This is a little fuller than the version we have just seen. But it shows its dependence on Epiphanius more clearly than that version, through the reference to Ptolemy's love of learning and collecting of books from everywhere.

Moses bar Kepha has a second reference to the LXX, in his Hexaemeron commentary, a work dealing with the six days of Creation. Here he also mentions the various translations of the Old Testament into Greek. He begins in exactly the same way as before and includes the whole of that earlier passage, but he adds a little to it:[13]

. . . He assigned each of them a separate cell to live in, in order to see whether they agreed with each other or not (in their translations). And it turned out that all of them agreed with each other very exactly.

Here, unlike in Isho'dad, we can see traces of the miracle story; however, this is not Epiphanius' division of the translators into thirty-six pairs, each pair working together as a team, but separation of all seventy-two translators each one on his own. This is the version of the miracle story which we find in Ps.-Justin and is probably, not only on chronological grounds, to be seen as the original Christian version of the miracle.

In these writings by both Isho'dad and Moses bar Kepha, we can identify in the received text of Epiphanius sentences from which the bits and pieces making up these short passages are probably taken. However, these are scattered over a number of pages of that received text, and we wonder how and why a later writer, to say nothing of two or more later writers, and especially two

[12] Diettrich 1901:108–09; see also Vosté 1929:227.
[13] Schlimme 1977:168.

from different Christian communities, would have bothered to extract just this handful of phrases as a précis of the story. The likeliest explanation for this oddity is that the dependence of these writers on Epiphanius, open and acknowledged at different places in their work, comes either via some sort of abbreviation of that writer's text or, possibly, from a version of the text in a different order from the one we have now. Given the messy character of the textual tradition of the *Weights and Measures* of Epiphanius, both in Greek and in Syriac, which we have seen earlier, either possibility seems acceptable. In either case, this confirms once again the popularity of the work itself and of this little story in it in wide circles of Christians towards the end of the first Christian millennium.

Moses bar Kepha does not just report this little version of the story. His report occurs, as we have seen, in a listing of the ancient translations of the Bible into Greek. Bar Kepha adds here a short note to the effect that the version of the LXX is the best, "according to Philoxenus of Mabbug, as is proven by the fact that it is this that Our Lord and his disciples quote in the New Testament . . . The same Philoxenus also says: the version of the LXX was made long before the appearance of Our Lord thanks to Ptolemy king of Egypt. So the Jews had neither reason nor pretext to be moved by envy (to corrupt the text); but in the other translations the relevant passages were corrupted through the envy of the Jews".[14] The fact that the Ptolemaic translation was made before the lifetime of Jesus means that the Jews could not have known about the passages prophesying his advent; the quotations from the LXX in the New Testament confirm the accuracy of that version; because the other translations date from after the time of Jesus, the Jews did know about him and hence could have been moved by envy to alter them, thus the argument of Philoxenus.

This Philoxenus (died 523) was a Persian-born Monophysite saint and theologian who served as bishop of Hierapolis-Mabbug from 485 until c. 518. He played an important role in the disputes between Monophysitism and Nestorianism in Syria and was, in the end, exiled from there by the emperor Justin I. He seems to have been something of a linguistic nationalist, writing only in Syriac and, most interestingly, also commissioning a new translation of the Bible into Syriac because, he claimed, the Nestorians had "falsified" the current Syriac version.[15]

Given the acquaintance of Philoxenus and of the two writers whom we have just met with the writing of Epiphanius and hence with the story of the LXX, it is perhaps surprising that we should not have any evidence of a Syriac version or adaptation of the story of the Greek translation into a Syriac environment. We might have expected a story about how the Syriac version of the Bible

[14] Diettrich 1901:112–16; Vosté 1929:227.

[15] See the entry on him (by Timothy E. Gregory) in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1664, with refs.; also Abramowski and Goodman 1972:xxxi, for this and for discussion of the use made of him by Shahdost.

came into being, perhaps also with divine help. Everything we know of the life-stories of Syriac saints in the centuries around the rise of Islam encourages such a hope. On the contrary, however, all the stories of Syriac versions that we have are prosaic, even dull, accounts of normal translation enterprises, with nothing of the miraculous about them.

The most exciting report that we have occurs in a fragmentary text to be found in a manuscript collection of extracts from the Fathers copied apparently in the middle of the thirteenth, or possibly the fourteenth, century.[16] This is a short christological passage by a Nestorian Christian called Shahdost, otherwise known as Eustathius, of Tarihan, who lived in the middle of the eighth century. The surviving passages from his writings show him to have been quarrelsome and disputatious, "not at all above the manufacturing of corrupted quotations".[17] He also knows the story of the LXX but, curiously, not in the by now normal version of Epiphanius. He knows it in the version of the *Cohortatio ad Graecos* of Ps.-Justin, which we examined earlier and which we also saw was known to Moses bar Kepha. He incorporates it in a discussion of the natures of Christ. His version of the story is as follows:[18]

. . . the seventy elders whom Ptolemy, the king of Egypt sent for, summoning them from Jerusalem, in order that they might translate for him the books of the prophets from Hebrew into Greek. In order that these might be free from all disturbance, and translate rapidly, he commanded that there should be built for them small lodgings corresponding to the number of them, not in Alexandria, but at (a distance of) seventy stadia, so that each one of them should complete his translation by himself alone. And it was commanded the attendants who were stationed with them that they should meet every need. They should prevent them from talking with one another – so that it should be possible that the accuracy of their translations would be manifestly known, through the conformity of their words. Now because he knew that these seventy men employed not only the (same) sense but also the (same) words, and had not deviated among themselves in a single word from the conformity of words, but had written there the same (words), and about the same matters, then he believed that the translation had been made by the power of God. And he knew that they were worthy of all honours, as men who love God. He gave instructions that they should return to their own land with many gifts.

There is also a marginal note in the manuscript telling us "And this took place 300 years before the epiphany of our Lord and 7 years after the return (conducted) by Zerubbabel".[19]

[16] For the date and other details, see Abramowski and Goodman 1972:ix–xxvi.

[17] Abramowski and Goodman 1972:xxxi.

[18] Abramowski and Goodman 1972:text volume 56–57; translation volume 35–36.

[19] The manuscript in question is actually a modern copy of an old, possibly medieval, manuscript now lost. It is thus not clear whether this marginal note in the modern copy reflects a marginal note in the original from which this copy was made or was omitted as he wrote by the modern copyist and inserted thus later.

This is a Christian version of the story; the note about the date serves to show this, and the miracle story helps this if it does not make explicit any Christian need for the miracle. The number of the working teams, seventy, not thirty-five, again, as before, points to the *Cohortatio* not to Epiphanius as the source for this material. But these are details about sources.[20] What stands out here is the reference to the books which were translated. The original story had concerned only the Pentateuch. Later on, by a natural process of generalisation, it had come to refer to the whole of the Old Testament, and we have seen a number of references to "the Pentateuch and the books of the prophets", and the like. This, however, is the first time that we find a reference to the translation which completely omits all mention of the Pentateuch. Here nothing but "the books of the prophets" is mentioned. The story comes from Ps.-Justin's *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, and we must wonder whether Shahdost knew it in the original or in a Syriac translation. It is also striking to find this almost isolated example in Syriac of the story of the translation from a source other than Epiphanius. At all events, in the original of Ps.-Justin we do not find such a reference to the "books of the prophets". Interestingly, we do find another odd reference to the books which were to be translated. Ps.-Justin does not mention the biblical books by name. What he refers to in his version of the story is "certain ancient histories written in Hebrew characters". This does not explain why Shahdost, who understood very well what was being talked about here, did not refer to the Old Testament as a whole nor yet to the Pentateuch, but it helps us to understand why the otherwise odd reference to the "books of the prophets" is here in his text as an improvement on the original used by him here.

The small number of versions of our story in Syriac is perhaps understandable when considered against the background of the different status of the Greek language in Syriac Christianity by comparison with its status in Greek culture. In a Syriac religious context, Greek was of little import. Moreover, Greek was identified with the East Romans of Byzantium who had for centuries ruled the Syriac Christians and frequently tried to impose their form of Christian orthodoxy on them. The Septuagint, and hence the story of its genesis, may simply not have been of compelling interest to Christians who were users of Syriac.

From the seventh century, Arabic became an important language in the Near East, and subsequently we find numerous Christians of all denominations who write in both Syriac and Arabic, though it is often the Arabic that survives rather than the Syriac as these Christians gradually but definitively move over from the

[20] The *Cohortatio* makes the distance from Alexandria seven stadia, whereas here we have seventy. A slip?

one language to the other. Christians, and Jews, in centuries to come demonstrate that there were no walls between languages and their literatures. Among writers of all religions using Arabic we find our story alive and thriving.[21]

Eutychius is our first Arabic-writing witness for the story. Born in 877, Eutychius, also known as Sa'id b. al-Bitriq, served as Melkite patriarch of Alexandria from 935 until his death in 940. He is the author of a long chronography in Arabic, on the Byzantine model, which deals with the history of the world from Adam until the year 938. The work has suffered much from editorial intervention and expansion by later Melkite writers, with the result that we cannot be absolutely certain of the attribution to Eutychius of the entirety of this work. However, this passage seems to be reliably attributable to him:[22]

And after him reigned a Ptolemy named Alexander (Arabic: *al-Iskandar*), and he was also called Ghalib Ur, for twenty seven years. And in another version it says twenty one years. And in the twentieth year of his reign he sent to Jerusalem (Ar. *Urshalim*) and summoned from there seventy men of the Jews to Alexandria (Ar. *al-Iskandariyya*) and he ordered them to translate for him the Torah and the books of the Prophets from Hebrew into Greek, and he placed each one of them in a house alone, on his own, so that he could see how the translation of each of them would be. And when they had translated the books, he looked at their translations and the translation was identical (lit. single), with no difference(s) in it. And he collected the books and sealed them under his seal, and placed them in the temple of an idol called Serapion (Sarabiyun).[23]

And among the seventy was a man whose name was Sam'an al-Siddiq who took our Lord the Masih from the Temple.[24] And when Sam'an translated the Torah and the books of the Prophets from Hebrew to Greek, whenever he translated a word (Ar. *harf* = word, letter of the alphabet) in which there was a prophecy about the Lord the Masih he would deny that in his heart and say "This is what cannot be". But God made him live long so that he lived three hundred and fifty years until he saw our Lord the Masih. And when he saw him he said "Now, O Lord, release Your servant in accordance with Your word, in peace, for my eyes have seen Your redemption, which You prepared before all the peoples".

A number of features of this earliest of our Arabic sources call for notice here. We note that the number of the translators is now seventy, as distinct from

[21] See D. J. Wasserstein 2003.

[22] Eutychius 1906:85.

[23] Note here the use of the Serapeum. This motif is found among our Christian writers in Latin and Greek only in Tertullian and Epiphanius.

[24] The Arabic could also mean "whom our Lord the Masih took out from the Temple". We know which is right, but it is not self-evident that any medieval reader of this text would have known. 'Masih', an arabicisation of the Hebrew 'Mashiah' (whence 'Messiah'), is no more than an alternative name for Jesus in Arabic.

seventy-two, but that there is no special reason for their numbering seventy; they do not carry out their task in any specific time; and that task itself is not the translation of the Pentateuch (i.e., the Torah) alone, nor of the Bible as a whole, but rather of the Pentateuch plus the "books of the prophets", leaving aside all mention of the Hagiographa, or "Writings". We note the presence of the little cells for the translators, here called *houses* (Arabic *bayt*, which can easily bear the meaning of "room" as well), and we note at the end of the translation process that the king checks the translations and finds them identical. Beyond that, there is a small, but interesting, change: the king also "sealed them under his seal". By thus sealing them, the king confirms the identical character of all the seventy versions; perhaps by so doing he also ensures that no change may be made in them in the future. There is here, in addition, a change in the location of the place where the books were deposited by the king afterward; instead of the Library of Alexandria, which we might have expected, we find "the temple of an idol called Serapion".[25] Not only one copy of the translation but also all seventy identical copies of it were deposited in the temple.

This version of the tale introduces a new character, Sam'an al-Siddiq. He seems here to be a composite. The primary element in his identity must be the passage in Luke 2:25–35 about Simeon who, when Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the Temple following his circumcision, took him in his arms and said "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" ("Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace . . . "). The Arabic version of this is very close to the biblical text.

According to Luke, Simeon "was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ". This feature naturally raised the question not only who he might be but also of when he lived. Just as naturally, it seemed right that someone who would "not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" could not be a normal contemporary of the birth of Jesus. Consequently, the identification of the Lucan Simeon, in our text, is more complex. Here he is identified as one of the seventy translators. This particular element in his identity here is very easy: among the seventy-two names supplied by Ps.-Aristeas there are three men called Simon, one each from the "second", the "fifth" and the "sixth" tribes. So far Eutychius, or his source, has established, at least to his own satisfaction, a link between someone who lived at the time of the translation (who better

[25] Is this an echo of the reference to the Serapeum in Tertullian? But Tertullian knew seventy-two translators, not seventy.

than one, or for that matter three, of the translators themselves?) and the Simon in Luke's account. As our text says, he had lived for three hundred and fifty years, taking us comfortably from the supposed date of the translation in around 280 B.C.E. to around the date of the crucifixion in ca. 30 C.E. and allowing forty years for the man to have lived before starting work on the translation.

The form "Sam'an al-Siddiq" is also merely an Arabic version of the Hebrew Shim'on ha-Tsaddiq. Our character is identified here not only as Simeon, but also, perhaps in deliberate echo of the New Testament phrasing, as "just". However, in the New Testament, the word occurs purely as a descriptive adjective: "And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout".[26] Here the epithet has been transferred to his name. This must be an attempt to identify him with the well-known Jewish character Shim'on ha-Tsaddiq, himself a complicated identity. As a High Priest he may be either Simeon I the son of Onias I (310–291 or 300–270 B.C.E.), or Simeon II the son of Onias II (219–199 B.C.E.). Here both the priesthood and, in the first case, the date stand out. However, we also learn that "Many statements concerning [Shim'on ha-Tsaddiq] are variously ascribed by scholars to four different persons".[27] One of these is Simeon ben Gamaliel. This man served as president of the Great Sanhedrin in the last two decades before the destruction of the Temple.[28] Sam'an al-Siddiq in our story here thus has a rich and various identity. Eutychius is almost certainly not the first to use this complex information in this way – he could scarcely have enjoyed access to the sources necessary for its construction, and the account that we have here seems to imply a pre-history too – but he does seem to be the first to use him in this way in the context of an account of the translation of the Seventy.

The introduction of Shim'on ha-Tsaddiq is a remarkable addition to the corpus of material about the Seventy. It is wholly Christian, serving purely Christian polemical aims. It is therefore all the more remarkable, especially given the importance of Eutychius in the oriental Christian literary tradition,

[26] Luke 2:25 καὶ ἰδού, ἦν ἄνθρωπος ἐν Ἰερουσαλήμ ᾧ ὄνομα Συμεών, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβής. Note, by the way, that the NT gives the name in the form Symeon, while the *Letter* calls the three men all Simon.

[27] *JE*, XI, 352, art. 'Simeon the Just'.

[28] It is reported of this Simeon that he "held that no rule and regulations should be imposed upon the people that they were unable to follow. Once, when poultry was very dear at Jerusalem, so that the women obliged to bring their offering of doves were hardly able to bear the great expense, Simeon issued a decree permitting a woman who ordinarily would be obliged to offer five pairs of doves to offer only one pair; in consequence of this decree the price declined to one-fourth" (*JE*, XI, 347, art. 'Simeon II (ben Gamaliel I.)'). This is striking because, at Luke 2:22–35, the story of Simon occurs in the context of Mary and Joseph bringing Jesus to the Temple in order to redeem him, as a first-born offspring, by the sacrifice of "a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons".

that we find it taken up only by three others, two in Arabic and one in Ethiopic, among our Christian witnesses. We have more than a dozen Christian sources in the east, of whom Eutychius is the earliest who was active under Islam. But as will be seen, only Ibn al-Rahib and al-Makin, writing in Arabic, mention this, and Ibn al-Rahib simply refers to it in passing. It is odd that more was not made of what looks as though it should have made very dramatic ammunition for inter-religious polemic.

Agapius (known also as Mahbub ibn Qustantin) (d. after 941 C.E.) served as Melkite bishop of Hierapolis, or Menbij, about halfway between Edessa and Aleppo. He composed a universal history, in Arabic, called, somewhat strangely, *Kitab al-'Unwan*, or "Book of the Title". Not all of it has survived, but the surviving sections include a version of the story which is of very great interest here.

Agapius offers a much longer story than almost any that we have outside the *Letter of Aristeas* itself. He also puts the story to a use which is radically at odds with its origins. The story began its post-Aristean history with adjustments designed to show the miraculous character of the translation and hence its unchangeability. Now we find it used to demonstrate both that the Jews introduced alterations into the text and that the alterations in question were far from innocuous. In Agapius the story is inserted almost bodily into a larger framework, that of accusations of Jewish tampering with the text of the Bible in order to conceal the presence in it of testimonies to the advent of the Christian Messiah. We may sense here a link, or a parallel, to the introduction of Shim'on ha-Tsaddiq as an early, pre-Christian witness to the Christian truth that we found in Eutychius. The date and location of Agapius are not without significance here. He lived in the tenth century, and Menbij was on the border with Byzantium and in the tenth and eleventh centuries was frequently conquered and re-conquered by Christians and Muslims. We have here a mixed background in which Muslim accusations against the Jews (and, incidentally, the Christians too) of tampering with their scriptures in order to conceal evidence of the identity of Muhammad may have played a part in preparing the ground for similar Christian accusations against the Jews, such as we find here.[29]

Agapius includes a more or less complete version of the story of the translation:[30]

[29] This is not to suggest that the Muslim accusations are the source of the Christian ones; the motif is found among Christians otherwise and far earlier too. See, for example, Evetts 1948:169–70 [71]–[72].

[30] Agapius 1909:641 [85]–645 [89]; the fuller account is at 636 [80]–667 [111] and 110 [238]. My translation differs from that of Vasiliev, notably in the division of sentences, with consequences for the overall structure of the tale. The differences result from the character of the Arabic in our text.

At that time there reigned Ptolemy Philadelphus, about whom we have mentioned that the Books were translated (or: interpreted) for him; and he reigned over Egypt for 38 years, and he freed one hundred and thirty thousand of those who were prisoners of (all) the nations in his kingdom, among them thirty thousand Jews. And the first part of his story concerns books: it is written about him that one of the kings and (one of) the great men of the West[31] called Ptolemy (Ar. *Batlamiyus*) Philadelphus (Ar. *F.l.y.'.dh.l.f.s*), who is (our) subject (now), was the peer of Alexander (Ar. *al-Iskandar*) in his power and surpassed him in knowledge and wisdom and philosophy; all his interest and his pleasure was in wisdom and in reading books and all the sciences and learning their secrets. And he sent out (people) to collect them in all countries and far-off regions, until he had collected them all, namely the sciences which we have described: astronomy and astrology and geometry and arithmetic and others that we have mentioned. And it is written in his story that he collected these sciences and he prepared for them the house of wisdom,[32] and he served them and knew their causes[33] and their secrets. And it is written that, after this, this king Ptolemy thought about what would help his reputation after his death,[34] and he gathered all the captives of all the nations who were in his kingdom and counted them. And he found that their number was 130,000 people, of whom thirty thousand were Jews. So he offered to let them return to their country, and the Jews were delighted by this and were very joyful and happy, and offered him many blessings and much thanks on that account.

The reason for the Seventy's translation of the ancient books

So [the king] said to them: I am doing this for you, but I have a request [to make] of you by which you can complete this [expression of] your thanks. So they said to him: What is it, Your Majesty? He replied: My request is that you give me, via my messengers who will go with you, the books of the wisdom of your country. And they agreed to grant him that and they swore to carry out their [promise]; and the Jews said: We possess there, Your Majesty, wonderful Hebrew books which no other nation has. These are books of revelation which came down from heaven to the prophets, containing the statutes and laws and orders and commandments of

[31] Ar. *magharib*: Vasiliev understands this as a reference to "étrangers", that is to say foreigners (scil. to Egypt) from the same Arabic root, *gh.r.b*, which might suit the sense better. However, the word *magharib*, which is what our text has, does not usually bear this meaning (see Lane, 1863–93:2244); and, perhaps worse still, the notion of the Ptolemies, or indeed of any rulers of Antiquity, as "foreigners" to the states that they ruled is probably as much an anachronism in respect of the period of these rulers themselves as it would have been in respect of the period when Agapius wrote. See also later, on al–Makin.

[32] Ar. *bayt al-hikma*; the term recalls the *bayt al-hikma* of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun, of a century and more before the time of the author. Is this a deliberate echo?

[33] Virgil, *Georgics*, II, 490?

[34] The Arabic is obscure here, but I follow Vasiliev and accept that this seems to be more or less the sense.

permitting and of prohibition,[35] and what is [now] and what is to be in the future. And what they said about this amazed him and he was pleased by their behaviour and he gave them excellent provision for their needs for the trip as far as their country and ordered that they be permitted to travel as far as their dwelling-place and their governors and their leaders, and he sent with them gifts for them, and clothing[36] and he wrote to them about his request. And because of their joy at what had happened to them they went out, when they heard of the arrival of their fellows, to greet them, to the edges of their country where the [two countries] border [each other], and when they had read his letters they made haste to reply to his request and they collected for him the books of the Torah (Ar. *al-Tawriyya*) and all the books of the Prophets,[37] and they sent them to him with his messengers, along with a letter[38] in Hebrew written in gold; and with them they wrote an answer to his letter. And when the books in Hebrew reached him he was perplexed by them and he could not manage to do anything with them, so he sent the messengers back to them and he wrote informing them of that and asking them to send [him] some of their men [who were] possessed of learning and knowledge so that they could interpret these books for him in his language, and he promised them in connection with that whatever they wished. And when his letter reached them and they read it they made haste and quickly set out towards him, out of desire for his gifts. And then injustice and quarrels broke out among them about this and [eventually] they sent six men from each of their tribes, and their number came to seventy two men. And they arrived and when they came he welcomed them handsomely and gave them fine hospitality and he prepared for them thirty six cells (Ar. *firqa*, literally section, division) and he separated them according to their tribes, and he assigned a man to each cell to prevent them from meeting and to look after their welfare and to transfer the books whose translation was finished from cell to cell until the Torah and all the books of the Prophets were completed, and [at the end] he had thirty six copies in Greek, and he distributed them in all the provinces of his kingdom, and he sent one of them each to the city of Rome (Ar. *Rumiyya*) and to Ephesus and the land of Byzantium. And during their stay, and because of his repeated visits to them he learned to write in Hebrew and became more skilled than they in reading their books. And after they had finished, he gave them fine gifts and provisions and sent them [back] to their fellows, and he sent his messengers with them with gifts for their governors and clothing [for] their chief the priest Eleazar and for their fellows. And he wrote to them praising what they had done. And the wise men who had performed the translation asked him for one of those copies so that they

[35] Ar. *al-amr wal-nahy*, the well-known Muslim formula.

[36] Scil. robes of honour: is this an example of Islamic styles of gift-giving, or does it represent some sort of ancient survival?

[37] Note here, as before, the assimilation of all non-Pentateuchal biblical texts under the general heading of 'Prophets'.

[38] This is what the Arabic seems to say; what it seems to mean, on the other hand, is that they sent the books to him written in letters of gold. The Arabic could almost bear that too.

could take pride in it among their fellows, and he granted them that. That was the command of God because of his foreknowledge and his prior awareness of the wickedness that was to be done by their priests and governors Anan and Caiaphas and their fellows to the Masih when he appeared . . .

The story here begins with a short introduction, in which Agapius summarises what is to come, concentrating on the captives perhaps a little more than their role in the story warrants. There is nothing new here; everything in this introduction is taken from the text that follows. In the story itself, we note at once the comparison with Alexander. From being merely a member of one of his successor dynasties, via some writers who credit him with an interest in books and learning, our Ptolemy is now Alexander's peer, and more, in learning and much besides. This suits both the popular image of Alexander and the image of the ruler that is being drawn here, and the combination serves both sides in the comparison. As the Ptolemy is a lover of learning, interested in a wide range of sciences, we are given something that we have not met before, a list of some of the fields covered by his interest. Although this is an Arabic text, it is noteworthy that all the sciences named here are given their Greek names, in Arabic transliteration. The fields in which the king is interested are all mathematical (or quasi-mathematical) and are typical of those foreign sciences which the Arab Muslims imported into their culture after the rise of Islam.

The king is presented here as a patron of learning and as a man of personal intellectual interests.[39] At the end of the story we are reminded that the king has visited the translators frequently throughout their stay; he has also profited from their presence and their work in order to learn to read Hebrew. And we learn that he can actually read this language better than his Hebrew-reading and Hebrew-speaking guests themselves. On one hand, it is natural that a king who sets himself to such a task, to any task, should turn out to be better at it than any mere subjects – but it is striking that this should be so of such a task as learning to read and write a foreign script and language. It fits well one image of the ruler in Islam, and it fits also, though less perfectly, the image of themselves as rulers that the Ptolemies tried to project.[40] From the point of view of the story which is purveyed here, it is all the more striking because it is wholly unnecessary to the development of the plot. That could be advanced from start to finish with a

[39] At Agapius 1909:636 [80] we are told that the first to introduce books and the sciences – astronomy, arithmetic and the rest – was a king who ruled in Egypt named Antutis. A connection between this ruler and our Ptolemy appears probable.

[40] We now have proof (presumptive if not conclusive) of the ability of one member of the Ptolemaic dynasty to write. The Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung in Berlin possesses (P. Berol. 25.239) a document endorsed by, apparently, queen Cleopatra. This papyrus was displayed at the exhibition 'Cleopatra of Egypt, from History to Myth', at the British Museum in London in 2001, and is illustrated, with Cleopatra's endorsement enlarged, in Walker and Higgs 2001:180; it is item 188 (of the year 33 B.C.E.) in the catalogue. See also van Minnen 2000.

ruler who was just a patron, without any direct, personal interest in the activity of the translators.

If we turn to the housing required for the books, then we note another new feature: in the *Letter of Aristeas*, the narrative need, or desire, for the Jewish scriptures arises, *inter alia*, out of the existence of a collection of other texts, which are housed in a library. It is the library whose needs are to be catered for by the story of the translation of the Jewish books. Now, in this version of the story, we have a reversal. In this version, it is the king's interests in learning, and the resulting assembly of books, that cause the need for a library in which to house them. And that library and its workings are described for us here in terms which recall much more the *Bayt al-Hikma* of Baghdad, and its patron, al-Ma'mun, than Ptolemy and the Library of Alexandria.[41] In the original story, in the *Letter of Aristeas*, the king visited the project once, perhaps more than once, and was interested to know what was going on, but he was not very closely or very directly involved in the day-to-day work of the institution. Here the king is presented, in a way which recalls al-Ma'mun, as taking a more than regal interest in cultural activities. Given the new political and cultural context, these changes are scarcely surprising. The Jews now, in this version of the story, are tacked onto the library, its books and the king's love of learning. The library and the Jews' books are now two widely separated elements in the narrative. They are knitted together very well, it is true, but this cannot disguise the fact that the new narrative pattern is radically different from that of the *Letter*. It is all the more strikingly different when we notice that the Library is completely forgotten at the end of the story; when the king has his translation, he does not do with it what we might expect and place it in his Library. He sends copies of it to different places all over the world. The one place about which we do not hear is his own Library.

Although the number of books in the library has disappeared from the story, the number of the captives remains. But where the *Letter* told us of more than a hundred thousand captives, all of whom were Jews and of whom some thirty thousand had been impressed into Ptolemy's army, the story now reports some one hundred and thirty thousand captives in total, of all ethnic backgrounds, among whom thirty thousand were Jews. The reason for this change is not clear: it seems to weaken the narrative value of this element in the story rather than anything else, especially because a close reading of what we are told here suggests that the other captives were freed without being asked for anything in return for their freedom. The Jews, by contrast, were asked for their books. But the whole thrust of this element of the story seems to be that the Jews are receiving special treatment.

[41] For the *Bayt al-Hikma* see especially Balty-Guesdon 1992; Gutas 1998.

This brings us to the next striking part of the story. The Jews are not asked by the king for their holy books, something of which he has been told, but rather, much more generally, for "the wisdom of your country". It is only when he says this to them that they tell him that this consists in a series of holy books, "wonderful Hebrew books which no other nation has", and this arouses his interest. What they then send him is not the Pentateuch, the Torah, but "the Torah and the Prophets", an expression which we meet in other contexts too and which, in a very general way, presumably is intended to include also the Hagiographa. Perhaps things are expressed this way, under influence from the Muslim environment, as reflecting the idea that holy books come from heaven via prophets.

As in a variety of other texts, we find the king having to write to Jerusalem a second time in order to obtain translators. In this version, however, we find that there are quarrels over who should go to the king, with the result that six men of each tribe are chosen. We are not told how this number is arrived at, nor is any use made of the number seventy, or seventy two, save that the translators, on arriving in Egypt, are divided into pairs "according to their tribes" and given the thirty-six cells to live and work in during their stay.[42]

Here we have several problems. The development of the story makes it clear that the seventy-two are necessary only to generate, by division into pairs, thirty-six copies of the translation, which, apart from the one given to the Jews at their request, are then distributed in various, unnamed, places. But no specific number is required by the story. The older Christian meanings given to these numbers have been lost. It is quite unclear what, if anything, was intended by the division of the translators "according to their tribes" in this version of the story. This is clearly just a narrative element designed to heighten an image, or an illusion, without worrying too closely about literal exactness of detail. The obvious intention is to show that the translators were being prevented from meeting. But, confusing things still further, the whole point of the division, and of preventing of the translators from meeting each other, is then lost as we are told explicitly that the attendants had the job of transporting the finished parts of the translation from cell to cell, thus apparently making consultation part of the actual working process.

This becomes clearer still when we move to the result: thirty-six copies of a translation. In other versions of the story, we have seen that the king needs to generate a number of copies in order to be able to compare them and discover that they are all identical. Here they are not compared at all, and nothing is made of their being identical. Their abundance becomes an element in a different scenario: now the thirty-six copies (thirty-five if we exclude the copy

[42] At the point where the six men from each tribe are mentioned the story tells us that their total was seventy-two, but otherwise it refers to seventy.

given to the Jews) are available for distribution over different cities, under the king's rule and elsewhere.

At the very end of this long account, Agapius reminds us once again why he has told us the story: "That was the command of God because of his foreknowledge and his prior awareness of what was to be done by the [Jews'] priests and governors Anan and Caiaphas and their fellows. . . . " The story has here a narrative function going far beyond itself, and in what follows we are given an even more lengthy account of how these priests introduced fabrications into the biblical text, shortening the periods of time described there in order to demonstrate on the basis of a forged biblical text that the time for the appearance of the Messiah was not yet come. This is all introduced earlier on:[43]

[Anan and Caiaphas] hid the translation of the Torah (Ar. *Tawrat*) which the seventy translators had made from their fellows, together with the books of the prophets they had translated for the king Ptolemy Philadelphus in the city of Alexandria and they changed in the books of the prophets all the prophecies about the Messiah that they could. But everything that they changed and corrupted – what was in the books of the seventy was its opposite, clear and obvious, with details of our Lord the Messiah. This deed of theirs took place after the resurrection of the Messiah, and the translation of the seventy translators was about 300 years before the coming of the Messiah.

The priests were prevented from succeeding in this trickery thanks to the appearance of another Christian hero, the emperor Constantine. Agapius tells us in great detail how the trickery was found out by this ruler. His presence in this story at this point ties this version to another story – with a greater kernel of historicity. This is the account of how the emperor Constantine requested of Eusebius around 331 C.E.[44] fifty copies of the sacred writings, to be used in the churches of Constantinople:[45]

Victor Constantius Maximus Augustus, to Eusebius: In that city which bears my name, by the assistance of God our Savior's providence, a vast multitude of men have joined themselves to the most holy Church. Whereas, then, all things there receive a very great increase, it seems quite necessary that there should be more churches erected in that city. Therefore do you most willingly accept what I have

[43] Agapius 1909:637 [82].

[44] The exact date is a matter of some discussion; see Robbins 1989, with references. Robbins 1989:91, at n. 2, prefers the date 331, whereas Gamble 1995:79, prefers the date 332.

[45] Eusebius, *de Vita Constantini*, 4.36, quoted (in translation) at Gamble 1995:79. See Robbins 1989:passim, with further references, and Gamble 1995:79–81, with notes, and Barnes 1981:102, 124–25, with notes, 336 and 345, Barnes 1993:39–40, with notes, 251; also McCoull 1984:6, n. 26, referring to Crum 1902. A. S. Atiya, in *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 1991, art. 'Bible text, Egyptian', mistakenly suggests that the fifty copies were ordered for distribution among the Christian churches of the empire, rather than of Constantinople; there is no hint of this in the source.

determined to do. For it seemed fit to signify to your prudence that you should order fifty copies of the divine scriptures,[46] the provision and use of which you know to be chiefly necessary for the instruction of the Church, to be written on well-prepared parchment by copyists most skillful in the art of accurate and beautiful writing, which [copies] must be very legible and easily portable in order that they may be used. Moreover, letters have been dispatched to the chief financial officer of the diocese giving instructions that he should take care to provide everything necessary in order that the said copies might be completed.

There is more to this story than the mere fact of the ordering of the copies. Robbins draws attention to the fact that, for some scholars, the commission to Eusebius represented also a major step in the process of canonization, or fixing, of the Christian scriptures. The idea here is of the listing of the books of the Christian canon, rather than of the internal fixing of their text, but the latter idea is also present in our story. If Agapius (or his source) has discarded it from the story of the translation itself, it turns up again in the longer tale, of the discovery by Constantine of the trickery of Anan and Caiaphas. When the emperor, in this story, comes to Jerusalem to obtain the relics of Jesus, he is made to ask the Jews there also for the sacred scriptures[47]:

. . . so that he could take them and benefit from them; so the Jews gave him all the books and among what they gave him was the corrupted book of the Torah (Ar. *tawriyya*); and before that there was no discord among them, from any of those who feared that the confirmation of the Messiah and of what He brought would appear.[48] So these men (sic) insinuated themselves close to the king Constantine and informed him of the corruption of the Torah (Ar. *al-tawrat*) which they had given him, and of their deceit of him in this; and [they told him] that the copy which the seventy translators had made beforehand was hidden but that transcripts of it were in the city of Alexandria and in Rumiyya and in the cities in between. So he sent to the priests of the Jews and told them what he had heard, and they denied it and rejected his information. So he had them sent to prison and he sent his messengers to Alexandria and Rumiyya and elsewhere, to bring him the copies. News of this reached the priests in their prison and they feared for their lives, so they smuggled that copy [scil. the Greek one given to the translators by Ptolemy at their request] to some of their atheistic elders, and asked them to tell the king Constantine about the matter, after getting from him a pardon for them. So they did that and brought him the copy a few days later, and he ordered that the priests be released from gaol. And the copies of it [soon] reached him from Alexandria,

[46] The meaning of this expression – copies of the entire Bible, gospel-books, and so on – has been the subject of much discussion (see previous note).

[47] Agapius 1909: 647 [91]–648 [92].

[48] The logic of this and the following sentence is not perfect; the Arabic is not sufficiently clear at this point. Vasiliev has solved the problem by translating what he wants the text to say, but it does not actually say it.

Rumiyya and the other places, and he compared them all together and found them all the same in wording. Then he ordered the corrupted Torah to be brought and he found that it was plainly and obviously corrupt, . . .

Here the detail of the comparison, for which the groundwork was so carefully laid at the beginning of this version of the story, finally comes into its own, but in curious fashion, without care being taken to ensure that the versions are identical at the time of the Ptolemy himself, and without fully tying up all loose ends even in the assimilation of the source: "these men", in the passage just quoted, requires an antecedent which is not in the text.

The overall similarity between the Constantinian story and the Aristean story in its Agapian dress is very impressive, and the fact that we find the story in a writer who was himself a Melkite, owing religious submission to the Church in Constantinople, makes the possibility of some influence, whether direct or indirect, appear all the greater.

Michael the Syrian (1126–99) was Jacobite patriarch of Antioch from 1166, and author of an important *Chronicle*. This work depends heavily on a number of earlier Greek and Syriac sources, many now lost. These include Agapius of Menbij. The *Chronicle* survives in Syriac, in a number of manuscripts of an Arabic translation, and in an Armenian version, which exists in numerous manuscripts. The Armenian version was made available, in French translation, by Langlois in 1868, but the original Syriac text was found only some twenty years later and was published with a French translation by Chabot at the turn of the century. The Arabic remains upublished. The work is structured and physically laid out in an unusual way, with a principal text occupying the central one of three columns on each page, whereas the other two are occupied by so-called canons, in which various types of information not directly related to the main stream of the narrative are detailed. These are concerned with religious and ecclesiastical topics, with secular events and with extraordinary occurrences. They depend heavily on earlier texts, with the canons of Eusebius prominent among them. Chabot thought to identify this Eusebian work as the source underlying what Michael reports on the Seventy, but, as will be seen, things are not so simple.

Michael refers to the Seventy three times, in three successive chapters of Book VI of his long *Chronicle*. His central text refers directly to the Seventy only once, more or less in passing, but the canons do so twice, once at much greater length.[49] First, in Chapter IV of Book V of his central narrative, discussing the reigns of the Ptolemies, Michael has the following:

[49] I have not had access to the Syriac text published by Chabot 1899–1910 and depend here only on his French translation.

In the seventh year of this same [Ptolemy] Philadelphus, Antigonus began reigning over the Macedonians, for 36 years. And, in this same year, the [holy] Books were translated on the isle of Cyprus.[50]

Brief as it is, this report is of compelling interest. It tells us only two things, and both are new: first, it gives a date, rather than simply a period, for the translation; and secondly, it names the place where the translation was carried out as Cyprus, and not Alexandria, or the island of Pharos. We shall have occasion to return to these details.

Our next report in Michael comes in Chapter V of Book V and concerns the same time, although we cannot be sure that it assigns the event to exactly the same year:[51]

Seventy two learned Hebrews went up to Alexandria and translated the [holy] Books. Ptolemy, on seeing the books brought from Jerusalem, which were written in letters of gold, was taken with great admiration.

Chabot here assigns as a source the canons of Eusebius, under the year 1736, but a glance there (see Chapter 5) shows that that work cannot have served as the only source for the information offered here, as Eusebius's text is much sparser than what is related here. Eusebius knows nothing, for example, of letters of gold. But it will be recalled that Agapius is acquainted with them.

The third reference is far longer and comes in Chapter VI of Book V of the Chronicle:[52]

Ptolemy of Alexandria gave freedom to the Jews who were captive in Egypt and sent offerings to the High Priest Eleazar.

In the 5th year of his reign, which is the 33rd of Seleucus, in the CXXVth Olympiad [Chabot reports in a note, ad loc., that the MS here has CV, not CXXV], the first year of Antiochus Soter, in the 10th indiction, the king Ptolemy Philadelphus sent to find the High Priest of the Jews, Eleazar, who sent him all the books of the Hebrews and men who knew Hebrew and Greek, to the number of seventy two. The king established them on the island of Pharos; he had built for them thirty six cells – one for every pair – and warned them not to change anything. They translated the books in seventy two days. Each pair translated all the books, and there were thirty six copies; when they were compared with each other, they were as though they had been translated by a single person. The king placed these copies in the library, in his library (Chabot: dans la librairie, dans sa bibliothèque) in Alexandria. From

[50] Chabot 1899:I, 117.
[51] Chabot 1899:I, 118.
[52] Chabot 1899:I, 123–28.

that comes the version which is known everywhere under the name of Septuagint. Here are the names of the seventy two men who translated the books . . .[53]

When the king saw the books come from Jerusalem, written in letters of gold, he was struck with admiration. After having been carefully transcribed from the Hebrew language into the Greek language, after being diligently compared and having been found correct, they were preserved by the action of the finger of God in the library of Alexandria, until the time when the divine economy shone. It is thus that, by the providence of the Lord, the books of the Old Testament have been preserved and have not perished.

We have here a curiously dry and sober version of the tale. It is not devoid of the miraculous, but it sticks fairly well to a sensible story line: we have some historical context, names of rulers and lengths of their reigns, a date (though reference to an indiction, several centuries before that system of dating was introduced, is a decided anachronism), the freeing of the Jewish captives, now reduced from some specious numerical specificity to a general reference to those Jews "who were in captivity in Egypt". We have the request sent to Eleazar, the Books written in gold ink, the seventy-two translators, their expertise in the two languages, their division into pairs, and their installation in cells. However, here, as occasionally before, we find the relationship between motives and results just a little lacking; the men have been separated into pairs for a purpose, so that they may not communicate with each other. But instead of telling us this, Michael reports merely that the king tells the translators not to change anything. This is not the same as preventing them from communicating with each other. Then we learn that they manage to complete their task in seventy-two days (an unusual reappearance of this detail of the story here), producing thirty-six copies which, when compared, are found to be identical, and are then all neatly placed in the king's library. Any proper reason for the division into pairs, as for the separation of the pairs, is absent and we are given no explanation of why the king might have wanted to acquire the translation in the first place. Michael also used Agapius as a source, but in his version of the story we cannot see evidence of concern with the chronological concerns of his source. Nor is he interested here in the potential of this story for confirmation of claims that the Jews had tampered with the biblical text, whether at the time of the translation or at the time of Christ himself. Although he was a man of the church, Michael

[53] Here Michael gives the names. I omit them, as they are not germane to the argument here. The list of names is not found everywhere, and it is striking to find it here. It seems to derive in this text from the same tradition as the other lists found in Syriac as it gives the names of the tribes from which each group of translators comes, unlike the Greek tradition of the *Letter*. However, it is by no means identical to the other lists. See Cohen 1976, 1984, but she does not know the Syriac tradition (cf. Cohen 1976:110, n. 67).

here was more narrowly historiographical than polemical. At the end he tells us simply that "It is thus that, by the providence of the Lord, the books of the Old Testament have been preserved and have not perished". This is the bibliographer and librarian speaking, not the Christian apologist.[54]

The story of the Seventy is known also more widely in the oriental churches of the Near East. We find it referred to in the Syriac *Book of the Bee*, of a certain Shelemon (= Solomon), a native of Armenia, who became Nestorian bishop of Basra in about 1222. His book is a religious history of the world and includes, like so many of these texts, a section on the kings of Egypt after Alexander. Here he tells us:[55]

> Ptolemy Philadelphus,[56] 38 years. In his third year the fifth millennium ended. This (king) asked the captive Jews who were in Egypt, and seventy old men translated the Scriptures for him, from Hebrew into Greek, in the island of Pharos. In return for this he set them free, and gave back to them also the vessels of their temple. Their names are these . . .[57]

There seems to be some confusion here about the structure of what happened. It seems as if the king asked the Jews who were captive in Egypt to provide him with translators; the people named are nevertheless identified as coming six from each tribe – we must suppose some extreme good luck in the way the learned men among these captives were representative of their background. Similarly, the freeing of the captives is said here to be a reward for the work of translation; if we take the words of Shelemon very literally, it also seems that he did not set free any others than the seventy. And even the detail about the gifts, the vessels for the temple, is slightly changed here too. Instead of new vessels for the temple, to replace ones which had been taken away by earlier conquerors of Jerusalem, here we are told of the return of the very vessels which had been taken from there. Whereas the story has retained the core elements of translation by seventy (or seventy two) men, the interest of the king and the location on the isle of Pharos, it has changed most of the other details and has as a result lost

[54] The most important Syriac writer of the middle ages, Abu al-Faraj Gregory Bar Hebraeus (1226–1286), takes the story from Michael and inserts it with scarcely any change in his world history (Bar Hebraeus 1890:37–38 (Syriac text); Budge 1932:I, 40–41); there is also an Arabic translation made by the author just before he died.

[55] Budge 1886:120–21 (English), 136–37 (Syriac).

[56] Budge 1886:120, notes that the MSS have Ptolemy *son of* Philadelphus.

[57] Here Shelemon gives the names. I omit them, as they are not germane to the argument here. See n. on the list in Michael, *supra*. This list is apparently quoted in the unpublished *Book of the Light of the Darkness and of the Clear Explanation of the Liturgy (Kitab Misbah al-Zulma fi Idah al-Khidma*) of al-Mu'taman Shams al-Riyasa b. al-As'ad Abu al-Barakat Ibn Kabar, a Coptic writer, servant of Baybars, who died in c. 1324; Abu al-Barakat 1974:598[24]; see also A. S. Atiya, art. Ibn Kabar in the *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 1991, 1267–68.

much of its narrative coherence. The story does not seem here to bear much real significance for the author or for his strand of Christianity. The peculiar importance and special significance of this translation for Christians in the eastern Mediterranean region has been forgotten in a world, in the thirteenth century, where even Syriac is in its turn giving way to the all-conquering force of Arabic.

A pair of Pentateuchal manuscripts in Arabic, in Leiden, and a number of others in a variety of libraries, are our next witnesses. They preserve two different but closely related narratives that are best considered together. In both the account is embedded in a longer narrative, constituting an introduction to a Pentateuch catena, or running commentary on the biblical text. Their presence in such manuscripts is striking, for we are necessarily reminded of the way in which the *Letter of Aristeas* survived from Antiquity: it is found exclusively in manuscripts of Octateuch catenae.

The first of these manuscripts was copied in 1528. It contains the following version of our story:[58]

And this is an account of what happened to the noble Torah. Usbiyus,[59] author of *Maktab al-Zaman*,[60] says under the year 19 of the reign of Batalmiyus son of Batalmiyus the king (that) he ordered that the elders of the Children of Israel assemble together and bring before him the book of the Torah, and that each one of the two of them[61] should show him what he had clarified of its meanings. So the elders came, and the Torah with them. And he ordered that each of them should explain the book of the Torah to him. And the interpretation differed in what the elders transmitted, so he ordered that they be put in prison and in fetters, and he took the book of the Torah and cast it into a pit and threw fire and ashes upon it for seven days. Then after that he ordered them to put the filth of the city into that pit in which was the book of the Torah. And the pit was filled up to the top. And the Torah lay underneath the refuse in that pit for seventy years and it was not destroyed, and not a single letter of it went missing. And in the year 21 of the reign

[58] Text in de Lagarde 1867:I, 3–4. The manuscript is no. MMCCCLXIV (Cod. 230 Scaliger).

[59] Usbiyus = Eusebius. Unfortunately, as de Goeje 1873:76–77 points out, this is one of many silent emendations made by the editor in an attempt to improve the text. The manuscript has Armiyus, seen by de Goeje as = Hermaeus. The difficulty is that we do not know of any Hermaeus. Eusebius seems to be a sensible attempt at understanding. But see following note.

[60] If the author's name were indeed correctly identified as Eusebius, then this would be a recognizably acceptable Arabic equivalent for that writer's *Chronicle* or even for his *Ecclesiastical History*; unfortunately again, the story related here is not to be found in these works as they exist today. It seems unlikely that it ever was there.

[61] Sic: Ar. *minhuma* for *minhum*. The phrasing suggests that this is a shortened version of a text in which, originally, the translators were divided into pairs.

of Afiyanutus[62] the king they removed the book of the Torah from the pit and not a single letter of it was missing. And after the *masih*'s ascent to Heaven the king Titus son of Asfasiyanus,[63] king of the Rum, came to Urushalim (= Jerusalem) and besieged it, and destroyed it, and (this) was after the building of the second House (i.e., Temple), which the Children of Israel built following the return from Babel. And when Titus the king conquered Bayt al-Maqdis (= Jerusalem) he slew all the Jews who were in it and the Banu Sahyun (Sons of Zion); he destroyed it, and since this exile[64] the Jews have been dispersed among the nations, and they no longer have assemblies in the city of Urushalim (= Jerusalem), or festivals.

The second Leiden narrative was copied in 1240 by a Jacobite Christian from Mardin.[65] Although it does not contain the story of the translation, it does contain much of the introductory material which the other Leiden manuscript has, and it uses it as a preface to the claim that

. . . when the Jews were dispersed in the (four) corners (of the world) the children of Dawud made a deletion in it (scil. in the Torah), and sent it to every group. Now the high priests Hanan and Qayafa, before the captivity of Titus, had agreed on the dropping of 1,000 years from the dates (or: histories) of the ages of the fathers so that they rejected (or: could reject) the appearance of the Masih, and they said (or: could say) to the Jews that the time when the messiah (Ar. *masih*) would come had not yet been fulfilled; and they have remained in their error up to our present time. And in God alone is success.

The mention of Annas and Caiaphas (Hanan and Qayafa) here, like a further reference to them in the other Leiden manuscript, confirms the Christian origin of both texts; in each they come at the end of a chain of high priests and others who transmitted the biblical text from Moses down to the time of Christ. The chain authenticates the contents of the Scriptures and hence the references which Christians saw there to the coming of the Messiah.

The last two in the chain introduced the corruptions into the chronological data. The story of the translation has now acquired a new character. In all our

[62] Who could this be? If it is a real Ptolemaic ruler who lived seventy years after the event just described (which is not to be assumed, for the Arabic does not quite impose it), then we might think of someone like Ptolemy III Euergetes (regn. 246–221 B.C.E.) or Ptolemy VIII Euergetes (lived c. 182–116 B.C.E., reigning at various dates). The transliteration does not work easily, however, and these are the closest among the Ptolemies.

[63] That is, Vespasian.

[64] Ar. *j.l.w.a* = Heb. *galut*; this seems to be a transliteration-borrowing from the Hebrew rather than an Arabic word (*jilwa* as an Arabic word, from the cognate root, refers to the uncovering of a bride on her wedding night).

[65] See de Lagarde 1867:I, iv (introduction) and 2–4 (text); the manuscript is no. MMCCCLXV (Cod. 377 Warn.). See also de Goeje 1873:V, 77. See also at 76, the entry for MS no. MMCCCLXIV (Cod. 230 Scaliger), with similar contents.

other versions of the story, the king sees, by inspection or otherwise, that all the translations produced by the learned Jews agree. In this version alone, they are seen to differ, with the result that the Torah is discarded and tossed aside into the filth of the city refuse dump, to languish there, buried under the dirt, for seventy years, only to be found miraculously intact at the end of that time. The seventy translations are not referred to again. Presumably they were simply discarded once their lack of divine authority had been demonstrated.

There seems to be a link between this story in the first manuscript and the story in Agapius, about how Constantine forced Annas and Caiaphas to disgorge the text of the Torah which they had hidden and compared it with the corrupted translations, finding the true text as a result. At least for this element these two texts probably depend on a common narrative source, or emerge from a shared narrative complex.

No narrative date can be assigned to the end of the seventy years mentioned here, because it is not clear what name the king bears, nor is it clear from what is said that this event was supposed to occur seventy years after the nineteenth year of the reign of the Ptolemy who ordered the translation. In any case, the number seventy is taken from the story itself as a topical number, and whoever invented this version of the story is not likely to have had much knowledge of Ptolemaic chronology.

The miraculous element has now been transformed. As the versions of the translation now differ from each other, there is no room here for any miracle. If there is to be a miracle it must be elsewhere. It is found in the survival of the pristine biblical text, uncontaminated, under the filth.

It is clear from this account that we are meant to understand that it is contempt on the part of the king that causes the Torah to be cast there. This is different from the other reference that we have to such a temporary fate for the Torah:

> Nebuchadnezzar came and energetically set to killing and capturing the Israelites. He carried them off to Iraq, and also took the Torah, the books of the prophets and the chronicles of the kings that were kept in the Temple of Jerusalem. . . . Now the king of the Persians married a girl from among the Israelite captives.[66] After she had borne him a child, he sent the Israelites back home. . . . The Israelites dug up the Torah from the pit, and their affairs came in order.[67]

[66] Is this a conflation of the Esther story with that of Cyrus' return of the Jews to the Holy Land?

[67] Mas'udi 1966–79:I, 68 = trans. Mas'udi 1962:I, 49, quoted in Adang 1996:231. Adang points out (1996:231, referring to Mas'udi 1966–79:I, 58 = trans. Mas'udi 1962:I, 41) that before the building of the Temple, the *suhuf* ("writings", "books" and so on) of Moses had been placed in a copper vessel and deposited in a cavity which miraculously opened in the rock on the Temple Mount and just as miraculously closed up afterwards. We have no information on how, if at all, these writings were recovered. This passage seems to derive from the same source as the longer and much more detailed story in Ya'qubi 1960:I, 65f. (on Pharaoh the Lame, mentioned in that passage, see D. Wasserstein 1998:85–86). See also Adang 1996:226f.

Along the way, we conveniently lose sight of the most remarkable aspect of all: in the nineteenth year of the Ptolemy we had an unidentified, but large, number of copies of the translation of the Torah, all differing from each other. At the end of the seventy years, just one single copy of the Torah is retrieved from the pit, in perfect condition, presumably, although this is not made clear for us, the original version, not a translation. There is a serious narrative problem here, and it is not resolved. As textual corruptions and stories of textual corruptions go, this one is quite remarkable. Perhaps this is why it seems to have had no influence outside the small circle of the manuscripts of the Pentateuchal catena which contain this little text itself.

There is another feature of the story that provides a link with other developments. In the story contained in Leiden Scaliger 230, from which the story from "Usbiyus" was quoted earlier, we find also the claim that the Bible was originally "sent down upon [Moses] in the Syriac tongue, the *targum*, and the seventy translated it into Hebrew in the tongue of His people and the language of His nation".[68] This is a strange idea, but it is clearly connected with other notions tending to deny the primacy of the Jews in respect of a relationship with God, hence in respect of the holy books and hence in respect of the first language of mankind. It is also connected, if less directly, with much later claims by many nations to be the speakers of the first language of mankind.[69] We may compare with this specific suggestion the claim attributed to "Theodore the Commentator" (perhaps Theodore of Mopsuestia, c. 350–428) preserved in the tenth-century Muslim work the *Fihrist* that

God . . . addressed Adam in the Nabataean dialect, which was purer than the Syriac one. The people of Babil also used to speak it. Then when God made a babel of tongues, the nations being scattered to their districts and localities, the language of the people of Babil was unchanged, but the Nabataean spoken by the villagers became a broken Syriac incorrectly pronounced.

And the same work attributes to "another" source the claim that "In one of the Gospels or some other Christian book, an angel called Saymurus taught Adam the Syriac writing as it exists in the hands of the Christians of our own day".[70] The implications are clear: God's language is not Hebrew, it is Syriac or some related dialect such as Nabataean, a language which the first man is taught to

[68] A Bible manuscript in St Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai (MS no. 3 Arabic), copied in 1358 C.E., begins with the following sentence: "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. We begin, with the help of God, may He be exalted, (copying) the books of the book of the Torah (Ar. *tawrat*), the five books which God sent down to Musa the prophet the son of ᶜImran [i.e., Moses the son of Amram], in the Syriac tongue, the Targum, and which the Seventy elders translated from Syriac to Hebrew". The Arabic is crabbed.

[69] See, for example, Katz 1981.

[70] Al-Nadim 1970:22.

write by an angel cannot be anything but the first language of mankind. And for a Christian, at least, that language is naturally enough the language of the Christian who creates or transmits the story. These claims are countered by, for example, the Karaite Ya'qub al-Qirqisani, whom we shall meet again. He records, "When it became clear to [the Christians] that alterations and changes had been introduced into the translations of our books, impudence led them to claim Syriac as the primeval language".[71] Qirqisani discusses the matter at greater length in the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch, written around 940, where he argues, in a surprisingly modern-sounding and philologically based way, for the primacy of Hebrew, against Aramaic.[72] A contemporary of his, al-Mas'udi, whom we shall also meet later, displays similar interest in the matter, although with less polemical intent. On one hand, he tells us that the Psalms were revealed to David in Hebrew, which seems to imply that this was the first language.[73] But on the other hand, he also reports that Syriac "is the original language, that of Adam, Noah, Abraham and other prophets, as is taught by the people of the books. . . . It is said that the first to speak Hebrew was Abraham, the Friend of God, after he had left his village. . . ."[74] These latter writers are at work, however, very early, in the ninth and tenth centuries. Codex Scaliger 230 was copied in 1528; we cannot, as yet, know the history of its contents in any greater detail. For that date the claim has still stronger interest.

Our next witness, Nushu' al-Khilafa Abu Shakir ibn al-Sana' al-Rahib Abu al-Karam (or Abu al-Majd) Butrus ibn al-Muhadhdhib, known generally as Ibn al-Rahib, was a Copt, and "the leading encyclopaedist of the golden age of Christian Arabic literature".[75] Born shortly after 1200, he lived almost to the end of the century. His principal work is a massive encyclopaedia, the *Kitab al-Tawarikh*, or *Book of Histories*, recently identified in three manuscripts. It is divided into some fifty chapters. The first forty-seven are devoted to astronomy and chronology, the next two to world history and the history of Islam. Then follows a chapter on the history of the Church (which, in the context, means the history of the patriarchs of Alexandria) and on the ecumenical councils of the orient. The work was translated into classical Ethiopic, Ge'ez, in the sixteenth century. Texts in that language, related to it and bearing the name of Abu Shakir, later acquired considerable eminence.[76] The space devoted to such

[71] Nemoy 1939:37; see also Chiesa and Lockwood 1984:130, with no. 102 on 175.
[72] See Hirschfeld 1918:24.
[73] Mas'udi 1966–79:I, 62 = trans. Mas'udi 1962:I, 44 (quoted in Adang 1996:125).
[74] Mas'udi 1894:78 = trans. Mas'udi 1896:113 (quoted in Adang 1996:126).
[75] So Adel Sidarus, in *EI*, 2nd ed., Suppl., 1982, 396, art. Ibn al-Rahib. See also Sidarus 1975.
[76] But note that Neugebauer 1988:9 points out that the "traditional story that 'Abu Shaker' had significant influence on the Ethiopic computus is completely unfounded and should be laid to rest for good". See also Neugebauer 1988:118.

topics as chronology and the calendar, as well as to the history of the patriarchs of Alexandria, explains both the translation into Ethiopic and the success the work had in that language, given the Ethiopian church's strong interest in topics related to chronology and its close formal dependence on the Egyptians until the twentieth century.[77] Ibn al-Rahib also has a version of the translation story:[78]

94. Batlamiyus, called also al-Iskandarus; and it was he who summoned seventy two elders of the elders of the Children of Israel. And two of them died on the way, so that there remained (only) seventy. They interpreted (Ar. *fassaru*) for him the book of the Torah (Ar. *tawrat*) and the prophets; and among them was El'azar, whom Antiyakhus slew when he did not bow down to his idol (Ar. *li-wathanihi*); and also among their number was Sam'an *al-kahin* who carried our lord (Ar. *sayyidana*) in his arms.

This version is very brief and contains little hard fact. It is nevertheless of relevance here because this writer exercised considerable influence on the later historiographical tradition. He was used extensively by the next source whom we shall encounter, al-Makin and, apparently through him, by two Muslim writers as well: al-Maqrizi and Ibn Khaldun. The relationship among all these writers, together with Eutychius, is extremely complicated. Our story does not appear in all of them – Maqrizi does not have any version of the story at all, and Ibn Khaldun has a different account from this. This is strange in itself, given the breadth of al-Maqrizi's interests, to say nothing of Ibn Khaldun, but Ibn al-Rahib's version is different from that of Eutychius, and we shall see below that it differs also from the later writers, like al-Makin.

The version offered by Ibn al-Rahib, despite its brevity, has the new detail that two of the original 72 translators died on the way to Egypt, leaving only seventy men to carry out the translation. Such a piece of information, almost euhemerising in its attention to something that had not worried anyone for almost one and a half millennia by this time, answers a clear, if somewhat literalistic, need in the story as it had filtered down to the author's time: why should a work translated by seventy-two men be known as the Seventy?

[77] The relationship between Ibn Rahib in Arabic and the texts associated with his name in Ethiopic is complex. We have a translation of his work into Ethiopic and also, under similar names, a series of works concerned with the Ethiopian computus, calendrical questions surrounding especially the fixing of the date of Easter according to the Ethiopian and other calendars. Neugebauer 1979, 1988 and 1989 deal with these and related issues at length, though without clarifying the textual relationships, and Sidarus 1975 also considers the relationship between the Arabic original and the Ethiopic translation, although not in detail. As Neugebauer points out, however, no real progress can be made on most of these questions until we have scholarly editions of the texts in question.

[78] Ibn Rahib, 1955 (1903):1, 34 (Arabic text); for Latin translation see 2, 38.

This version also includes a reference to Eleazar and Antiochus, which is new to us: "and among them was El'azar, whom Antiyakhus slew when he did not bow down to his idol". This Eleazar is not the High Priest of that name who occurs in the story in the *Letter*, but presumably one of the translators whose names appear in the *Letter of Aristeas*.[79] The name Eleazar is not at all uncommon in Jewish history. As in the case of Simeon, who is identified with the man mentioned in Luke 2:25–35, the intention is to find an identification with a suitable homonym. Eleazar is here also identified with a martyr of the Jewish resistance against Antiochus IV Epiphanes (regn. 175–163 B.C.E.). His story is found in the Books of the Maccabees. There we learn how the aged Eleazar refused the order of Philip, the governor appointed by Antiochus, to eat swine's flesh that had been offered in sacrifice to pagan gods.[80] He stuck to his refusal even under torture, and when several of those around him suggested that he eat permitted meat of his own preparation and merely pretend that it was of the official sacrifice in order to save his life, he refused all the more strongly to abandon the charges of his faith. The story of his martyrdom, full of detail, was greatly admired in the early Church, and especially in Antioch, where the story is situated. It is discussed by some of the early Church Fathers, like Origen and Chrysostom. It is not known how the story found its way from these early Christian sources in Greek, some of which survive only in fragmentary Latin translation, to this Coptic Christian, Arabic-writing writer of the thirteenth century in Egypt.

Ibn al-Rahib's version also includes a reference to the story of Simeon and to his carrying Christ in his arms, but it mentions this in an abbreviated version, suggesting that the reference is to a well-known story. We have seen the story of Simeon already, in Eutychius, and we shall meet it also in al-Makin. The story must be well-known, for the anachronism of Simeon, active as a translator three hundred years before Jesus, holding Him in his arms, would have called out for explanation.

This version is very short but tantalisingly full of information. It shows the story retaining life and the capacity to generate new detail for itself. It does not, for all that, show us the story acquiring or developing significant new meaning. If anything, quite the contrary is happening. Although we find here detail which clearly comes out of a background where it had meaning, it is difficult to discern in this version significance beyond the sheer accumulation of detail for its own sake. Even the reference to Simeon and to his carrying of the Christian Saviour has lost its original meaning; like the reference to Eleazar, in this context it seems to be no more than a curious link between one historical

[79] In §50.

[80] II Maccabees 6:18–31. The story occurs also in IV Maccabees 5 and 6, but there the name Philip does not appear.

event and another. The same man just happens to have been involved in two historical events.

Jirjis al-Makin Ibn al-'Amid was a Christian (b. Cairo, 1203 or 1205, d. Damascus 1273) who, like his father, served the Ayyubids as a civil servant. He wrote a large universal history, called the *Blessed Collection*. This was used by Maqrizi, an important Muslim historian of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as a source for his information about the Christians.[81] Al-Makin's work also includes a passage on the history of the Septuagint translation:[82]

94. Batlamiyus called also al-Iskandarus; and he had the nickname Ghalib Ur. He reigned over Egypt and Alexandria and the western lands for 21 years; and thus say Ibn Bitriq and Ibn al-Rahib. And as for al-Munajjim[83], he says 38 years; and he was called Batlamiyus Philadelphus, that is lover of his brother; and this king was a lover of wisdom and he desired to read histories and he heard about the laws and the precepts and regulations that the prophet Musa and the (later) prophets had brought, and about the signs and wonders that they had performed; so he sent to Jerusalem and summoned 72 elders of the elders and learned men of Israel, among them Sam'an the priest (Ar. *al-kahin*); and the king Batlamiyus ordered them to interpret the Torah and the books of the prophets, and they translated them from Hebrew into Greek. And he placed each of them in a place on his own.[84] And when that was done he ordered that the versions be compared and they were seen to be identical, and he sealed them with his seal and placed them in the house of his gods; and he treated these elders well, and freed for them the prisoners whom they had (viz., belonging to their nation) in Egypt. And Sam'an *al-kahin*, whenever he translated something of the Torah and the books of the prophets and the prophecies which they contain about the appearance of the lord Messiah, this would hurt him in his heart, and he would say When will this be? And he asked God, may He be exalted, to lengthen his life so that he could see the lord Messiah; and God, may He be exalted, did lengthen his life, and he lived 350 years, until the Masih was born and they brought him over to the Temple, and Sam'an placed him on his arms and said Now, O Lord, release thy servant in peace, for my eyes have seen thy salvation, and he died at once. And one of the seventy elders was El'azar, whom Antiyakhus the king slew when he did not bow down to his idol (Ar. *li-sanamihi*), and El'azar's age when he slew him was 90 years. And Yusuf ibn Kuriyun al-'Ibrani says in the

[81] See *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, art. "Makin" (by A. S. Ehrenkreutz), for references and bibliography. Interestingly, however, Maqrizi, who was a man of wide interests, does not seem to have any reference at all to the story of the translation.

[82] Leiden Ms Or. 125, ff. 120–121a.

[83] The MS is unclear, but this seems to be a possible reading. Unfortunately, what follows does not agree with the version of the story which we have from Ibn al-Munajjim (see Chapter 7).

[84] ? Ar. *bi-maghuradihi*? The Arabic makes no sense. My translation is what is demanded by the sense of the passage.

first part of his book that at that time there was a man of the people of Macedonia (Ar. *Maqaduniya*) called Talmay, who lived in the land of Egypt, and the Egyptians made him king over them(selves) and he loved the sciences with great devotion and affection, and he summoned from Jerusalem (Ar. *Yarushalim*) 70 elders, and they translated for him the Torah and the books of the prophets, and took them over from Hebrew to Greek, and he released for them the Jewish prisoners. And there was in Egypt Zadoq the priest (Ar. *Saduq al-kahin*), who lived 45 years and Batlamiyus died after 65. . . .

As can be seen, this comes from several different sources. Fortunately, the author identifies some of them for us. The first ones he mentions are Ibn Bitriq/Eutychius and Ibn al-Rahib. As we have just seen, Ibn al-Rahib says so little that we cannot see him as the source of much more than the very beginning of what we find in al-Makin. However, Ibn al-Rahib is also our only other source (with the exception of Yosippon, on whom see later) for the material on Eleazar and Antiochus; alas for simple lines of transmission, this passage is fuller and more detailed than that in Ibn al-Rahib. Where does it come from?

Eutychius clearly contributes far more to the version in al-Makin than does Ibn al-Rahib. But how much? The king's sealing of the translations seems to come from him. He seems also to be the source of the material on Simeon and his relationship to the baby Christ. But things are not all simple. Eutychius called him Simeon the Just, al-Makin calls him Simon the priest (as does Ibn al-Rahib). He may well have been both just and a priest, but where does al-Makin get his epithet from, and how has he lost the other? Can we see here a contamination from Yosippon, who is actually quoted here in this very passage, referring to Zadoq the priest? But there are clearly problems with such an approach. Zadoq himself remains also rather an obscure figure, and we may wonder whether, rather than the word *priest* having contaminated the story of Simeon here, the name Zadoq in this passage in Yosippon is itself not a confusion for Simeon.

In addition, there is a far greater difference between the two references to Simeon, in this passage and in Eutychius. In Eutychius, we see Simeon pained in his heart at the predictions of the coming of the Messiah which he is translating in the Pentateuch, saying, "This cannot be" (Ar. *hadha ma la yakunu*), after which the text goes on at once to tell us "So God lengthened his life . . . " so that he could see Christ on earth. Here in al-Makin, by contrast, the wording of the passage as a whole is very close to that in Eutychius, but it is also fuller, and we see him, not saying "This cannot be", but asking "When will this be?" (Ar. *mata yakunu hadha*), and praying to God to let him live long enough to see Christ on earth. Here we have a sentence that is not in Eutychius, "And he asked God, may He be exalted, to lengthen his life so that he could see the Lord Messiah". It looks as if this latter request, so similar to the sentence in effect

granting the request, "So God lengthened his life . . ." may have dropped out of the source which gave us Eutychius but survived to be quoted by al-Makin.

So far this is just textual history. But it also has narrative effect. In al-Makin, the narration that we have shows us a man of faith praying to see his faith justified by events. The account in Eutychius, by contrast, tells a different story. Here we have the sentence "This cannot be", not followed by any request by Simeon to God to lengthen his life but rather by the bald statement that God did so. The impression given is that God is making Simeon live very long indeed and presumably suffer the effects of extreme old age, almost a Jewish Tithonus, not in order to reward Simeon with the fulfilment of his desire to see the earthly Christ but rather in order to show him how weak was his faith.

Coptic and Ethiopic have retained virtually nothing of the Aristeas legend and its successors. There is one glaring exception to this statement. It concerns Simon the Just, his participation as one of the seventy-two translators in the production of the Greek version of the Bible in Alexandria and his survival to hold the infant Jesus in his arms in the Temple in Jerusalem nearly three centuries later. We have encountered this motif already, in Christian writers in Arabic. The Coptic version occurs in a Synaxarium, a church calendar of fixed feasts with appropriate lections indicated for each one, containing also short accounts of the people or events commemorated on each day.[85] It occurs both in the Synaxarium of the Coptic Church and, as we shall see, in that of the Ethiopians.[86] The two works are closely related, though there are also significant differences between them.[87] The texts appear to be quite late, though it is likely that their contents have a long prehistory, and, in the case of this particular story, we may assume that its prehistory in one sense represents the general historiographical vacuum among the Copts.

The Coptic redaction of the Arab Jacobite Synaxarium has the following account:[88]

The eighth of Amshir the blessed [= 2 February]

On this day occurred the entry of the Lord the Masih into the Temple, forty days after his glorious birth. And the righteous Joseph who was a servant in this mystery presented him, together with the holy Mary, his mother, so that there should be fulfilled what He, may He be magnified, imposed on the Israelite people. And the two of them lifted up the sacrifice ordained by Him in the Law. And Simeon the

[85] The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., 1331, and the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1991 (art. by Robert F. Taft and Nancy Paterson Ševcenko) have useful entries on this term, unravelling some of its complexities.

[86] See *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 2171–73, art. "Synaxarion, Copto-Arabic", especially part 1, Editions of the Synaxarion (by René-Georges Coquin). Part 2 of this article (by Aziz S. Atiya), 2173–90, is a List of Saints.

[87] See Guidi 1911, Colin 1988.

[88] Basset 1916:[769] 803–[771] 805.

priest bore him in his arms – and this Simeon was a righteous man; and when Ptolemy the conqueror[89] ruled in the year 5204 since our father Adam, he ruled also over the Jewish people, and he sent to the city of Jerusalem at the instruction of God and summoned seventy men from among the learned men of the Jews, and their judges and rabbis, and ordered them to interpret for him all the books of the Law and to translate them from the Hebrew language into the Greek language. And this was the instruction of God, that the Law should be translated for the Christian nation which was to appear after many years. Then he ordered that they be separated by pairs in different places, and that they be watched and that they should not be permitted to meet each other, in order that they should not act in concert over what they wrote, and not collude. And this was known to the Jews. And when they all translated the whole of the law, Simeon the Just struggled with the words of Isaiah [7:14]: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son"; he was afraid to write "a virgin shall conceive", lest the king make fun of him, and not accept what he had written, and think that he was misleading him in what he wrote; so he wrote, in place of "virgin", "girl". Then he had internal doubts and he said (to himself), that a virgin should give birth is something that cannot be. And while he was thinking this, God sent drowsiness down upon him, and he slept. And (in his sleep) an angel of God appeared to him and said to him, This is the one about whom you doubted that you would see death before you saw the *masih* who is born of a virgin.[90] And he lived after that for nearly three hundred years, until the Lord Masih was born, and he went up with him (sic) on this day to the Temple; and Simeon was blind, and when he took him in his arms he (was able to) see, and the Holy Spirit told him that "this is the one for whom you are waiting", and he blessed God and said Now, O Lord, release thy servant, for He because of whom I have been bound to the life of this world that passes away has come, and I have seen Him, so release me that I may go to eternal paradise, for my eyes have seen Your deliverance which You prepared before all the peoples as a light made manifest to the nations, and a glory for Your people Israel. Then he said to His mother, This (child) is made for a fall and for a rising of many of the Children of Israel, meaning the fall of those who did not believe and the rising of those who did believe. Then he told her what would help her heart with its pain and its doubt about the state of the people, and he said The lance of doubt will enter your heart; and when he had completed everything that the Law commanded, he passed away in peace.

At first sight, this is just another version of the story about Simeon and his long sleep, waiting for the birth of Jesus. It has many of the features that we are already acquainted with from this story and the story of the translators. Thus we find Simeon both a priest and a member of the translating team sent to Alexandria;

[89] Ar. *al-Ghalib* – this is an echo of the (still unexplained) form *Ghalib Ur* that we find elsewhere; the addition of the Arabic definite article seems to represent an attempt to make sense of the expression as Arabic.

[90] The Arabic is involuted, but this is what it says. What it seems clearly to mean, per contra, is that the angel is telling him that before he dies he will see the *masih*, born of a virgin.

we find the basic story of the translators in Egypt, guests of Ptolemy, separated by pairs so that they should not communicate with each other. At the same time, certain features are lacking, most significantly any sense of why the translators should be separated from each other and why it is that they should be prevented from communicating with each other, beyond a vague sense of the possibility that they might try to deceive the king in their translation.

The point of the story is spelled out in the speeches put in the mouth of Simeon at the end. He is to bear witness to the messiahship of Jesus; it is for this that he has lived so long, and now, after speaking to Mary and explaining to her the pains and doubts which she will feel in the days to come (The reference to the 'lance' of doubt is intended to remind us of the lance that pierced the side of the crucified Saviour), he can die. He has fulfilled his destiny on this earth.

One feature of this story is dramatically different from all our other versions. This is the section of the narrative concerning Simeon's work as a translator. Here we are told that

> . . . when they all translated the whole of the law, Simeon the Just struggled with the words of Isaiah [7:14]: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son'; he was afraid to write a virgin shall conceive', lest the king make fun of him, and not accept what he had written, and think that he was misleading him in what he wrote; so he wrote, in place of 'virgin', 'girl'.

We have seen the protoype of this story before. It forms the core of the original miracle story invented by the rabbis in the first or second century. There, it will be remembered, it had nothing to do with Jesus; and it had just as little to do with the book of Isaiah. In the first and second centuries, the rabbis were not concerned about Jesus, and the story of the translation was concerned only with the Pentateuch. But the structure of this story is exactly that of the story of the rabbis. There we saw that the rabbis invented a story in which the translators not only produced seventy (or seventy-two) separate versions of the pentateuchal text, which were all identical and agreed in every particular, they also agreed in that they all differed from the original in a number (varying according to our source) of small details, and they all agreed with each other in every one of those differences from the original. Here was the real miracle – not agreement in their version of a known text, but agreement in their changes to the detail of that text in their translation. As we have seen, both the idea and its construction could not, apparently, be taken over into Christianity. We do not find it anywhere among our Christian sources for the story of the translation by the Seventy.

Here, however, we find the story suddenly appearing, and we see in it the most extreme christianization that can be imagined. We have one of the translators, not just any one but Simeon, who is to live for three hundred years and see the Saviour; we see him having his doubts, as we have met him elsewhere. But here we also find a good reason for these doubts supplied by

our text; at the verse where the virgin birth is prophesied by Isaiah, one of the central texts in the Christian polemic against Judaism, we find Simeon having altogether natural doubts about such a possibility. But these doubts are answered; God sends him to sleep and despatches an angel to tell him of what is to happen. And then it does happen, exactly as we know it to have happened from other versions of the story.

This version of the story is the fullest that we find. It is also the only one to include the story of Simeon's introducing a change into the text of the Bible as he translates it. Here, it is true, there is no mention of a miraculous agreement among the translators to change, simultaneously and together, a passage of the Bible, but we do find the change of the text, just as we did in the original story. And more than that, driving home the similarity to the original story, the change is identified for us here as one made in order not to vex Ptolemy. This is the element that ties this little story here most closely to the original story of the Ptolemaic changes. This is the element that marks one of the changes out from the rest in the original story; all the rest were made simply as part of the miracle, but one single change in the original list was made in order not to vex Ptolemy. That was the change in the translation of the word for hare, or rabbit, which would have produced the Greek word λαγώς, which, because of its similarity to the name of the father of the founder of the dynasty, so it seems to be claimed, might have offended the Egyptian monarch. Here, a rather different type of item in the biblical text might, so it is suggested, have irritated him: the notion that a virgin might give birth to a child. The change of the text thus altered from a pentateuchal one to one from Isaiah is forced upon the narrator here by its content. Isaiah 7:14 is the locus classicus of the Christian polemicist. The alternation between 'virgin' and 'girl', between the christianising interpretation of this verse and the traditional Jewish one, was well known and had a long history; the Pentateuch had no single immediately obvious verse available for this purpose, and the centrality, even exclusivity, of the Pentateuch to the translation story in its original form had in any case long been lost. What had been a change of no more than anecdotal importance in the original story becomes here a change with relevance for the messianic mission.

The Ethiopian synaxarium is basically a translation of the Arabic text of the Jacobite synaxarium attributed to Abba Michael, bishop of Athrib and Malig.[91] It differs from the Melkite synaxarium, which we have just considered, which retained the Greek tradition of the orthodox church. The Ethiopian text is fuller than the Jacobite Arabic on which it is based, containing more saints' lives, and giving fuller detail in the texts that it offers. Guidi suggested that the

[91] See especially Zotenberg 1877:151–78, the whole of the entry on manuscript 126; *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 2190–92, art. "Synaxarion, Ethiopic" (by René-Georges Coquin), and Guidi 1911.

Ethiopian synaxarium is a translation basically of the fifteenth century.[92] But he recognised that our evidence is open to a variety of other interpretations, and even if we accept his dating, we must still allow for some considerable flexibility, especially backwards.

The Ethiopic synaxarium tells us, under the date 8 Yakatit (the sixth month of the Ethiopic year), something similar to its source, which we have just looked at, with some minor variations.[93] First, the Ethiopic refers only to rabbis and elders at the start of the passage, when telling us of the king's summons to the Jews of Jerusalem; the Arabic here has a reference also to judges. This might not matter so much, but the next difference is rather odd: the Arabic told us that the number of the elders who went to Egypt was seventy, whereas the Ethiopic does not at this point mention any number. The Arabic, with a reference to seventy, then proceeds to relate the story of the division into pairs and their separation (The division into pairs and their separation play no further part in either of these two versions of the story). The Ethiopic tells us at this point that the translators were divided into a total of thirty-six pairs, "for they were seventy two in number". We wonder where these details come from. The next difference concerns the phrase in the Arabic "and this [scil. the reason why the king separated them into pairs and prevented them from communicating with each other] was known to the Jews". The Ethiopic text offers the following: "[that they might not] change the words of the Law; in fact it is known that the Jews are cheats". Later on, when the angel is speaking to Simeon, he tells him not only, as in the Arabic, that he will see the child born of the Virgin but also that he will carry him in his arms.

This all makes the Ethiopic look like a fuller text. Does this indicate a text that has been filled out and expanded by the Ethiopians or possibly a text which has been translated from what was originally a fuller Arabic? The latter possibility does not impose itself, but it is certainly attractive. The suggestion that the Jews are cheats, as an Ethiopic alternative to the Arabic "and this was known to the Jews" in particular supports such a view for the Arabic, as noted, is awkward at that point, and the sense which it offers does nothing for the development of the story.

One further detail is of relevance here. As has been seen, this story, both in Arabic and in Ethiopic, tells us that Simeon, wishing to avoid the king's scorn, changed the word "virgin", in Isaiah 7:14, to "girl". In Arabic the story tells us that he replaced the word *'adhra'*, "virgin", with the word, *fatat*, "girl".[94] We still do not have good editions of the medieval Arabic versions of the Bible so

[92] Guidi 1911:756.

[93] Text and translation in Colin 1992 [58] 502–[61] 505.

[94] Zotenberg 1877:176 is a little misleading in his account of this, suggesting that the Arabic has *'adhra' fatat* in place of *'adhra'*.

that seeking to know how this verse in the Bible itself was rendered in Arabic is not likely to help us greatly. In Ethiopic, however, we have some editions, albeit not scientific, and all of them, as well as commentaries both in Ge'ez and in Amharic on the Ethiopian Bible, universally have the text as *walata*, "girl", not as *dengel*, "virgin".[95]

This does not tell us anything about the history of the translation of the Bible into Ge'ez, nor can it be held to explain anything about what the word representing "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 of the *Vorlage* of the Ge'ez Bible was or about how it was rendered in Ge'ez.[96] Nor should it be able to tell us anything about the Arabic Bible versions. However, it repeats what is in the Arabic version of the Synaxarium, and we may suppose that in Arabic it is also as distant from at least the general run of Bible versions of Isaiah 7:14 as it is in Ge'ez. We are left, therefore, with a story in a Synaxarium, that is to say, in a text which was in some degree of common use, which tells of an alteration in the Biblical passage, which has no relation at all to what that Biblical passage actually says.

We might, on this basis, still have expected the Ethiopians to develop other independent stories parallel to that of the translation of the Bible into Greek by the LXX, with reference to the translation of the Bible into their own language, Ge'ez. Christianity came very early to Ethiopia, and Ethiopian Christianity always had close ties with the near east, both before the rise of Islam and afterwards. Ethiopian Christianity, for all its formal dependence on Egypt, was also ever aware of its own history of contact with the Holy Land, going back to the visit of the Queen of Sheba to that country, her marriage to Solomon, and the subsequent descent of Ethiopian rulers from the offspring of their union. Ethiopians were also very much aware of themselves as continuing a religious tradition brought into being as a result of that visit and therefore older than those of the nations round about them. Despite this, the translation of the Bible into Ge'ez does not seem to have been the occasion for the development of an independent local narrative tradition, giving that translation special meaning and status. All that we have are scattered fragments, which amount to little more than echoes of the Aristeas story.

We begin with a testimony from the Ethiopian Synaxarium for 21 Nahase to the effect that the Scriptures were translated into Ge'ez from Arabic:[97]

On this day died Abba Sälama, the translator [of the Scriptures] . . .
Greetings to you, root of the tree of faith,
Upon whom the commandments of the Law and the Gospels have been poured;

[95] I am grateful to Edward Ullendorff for checking this for me.

[96] As to the background and sources of the Bible in Ge'ez, it is well to note Ullendorff 1968:55, "It has been said before, and must be reiterated once more . . . , that no views on the time, authorship, and *Vorlage* of the Ethiopic Bible translations can lay claim to any measure of finality".

[97] Ullendorff 1968:32, correcting the date given by Zotenberg 1877:194.

Sälama, how your memory has abided with us!
By your lips sweeter than the scent of myrrh and aloe
Have the Scriptures been translated from Arabic into Ge'ez.

The Ethiopic text, "by your lips", may suggest oral rather than written translation, or at least an oral method of translation, although Abba Sälama is in fact known as having produced a written work. More interestingly, these lines suggest an Arabic source for the biblical text in Ge'ez; Ullendorff points out, however, that the work of Abba Sälama was concerned rather with revision than with translation. Ullendorff also relates a longer story about Biblical translation into Ge'ez:[98]

. . . and as to the books of the O.T., they were translated from the Hebrew into Ge'ez in the days of the Queen of the South who visited Solomon. Hence the interpretation (rendering) of the prophetic books extant in Ethiopia was faithful, as the population were of the Jewish religion before the birth of Christ. However in the translation after the birth of Christ the crucifiers distorted the true word into a testimony of falsehood. . . . As to the books of the N.T. of our country Ethiopia, they were translated from *romayesti* into Ge'ez before the appearance of the Nestorian faith and before the creation of the doctrine of Leo and before the assembly of the Council of Dogs (i.e. the bishops of Chalcedon). Hence the Ethiopian rendering of the Old and New Testaments was pure as gold and proven as silver. . . .

Ullendorff understands *romayesti* here to mean "Latin?", but Greek seems more likely on all counts.[99] The passage implies that the *Vorlage* of the Ethiopic version of the Old Testament was a faithful Hebrew text; the reference to what is described as the "translation after the birth of Christ," which was "distorted" by the "crucifiers", that is, the Jews, must reflect a confused reminiscence of ancient Christian accusations against the Jews that they had deliberately falsified the Hebrew text of the Old Testament or its Greek translation (or both) in order to eliminate references to Christ.

The chronicle of the seventh century writer John of Nikiu also has a reference to the translation by the Seventy-Two. It is considered here, and not along with our Greek sources, for several reasons: because this text survives only in Ethiopic, not in the original Greek or in Arabic, the language which served

[98] Ullendorff 1968:31–32, slightly adapted. Ullendorff refers here also to the remarks on this passage of Rahlfs (Rahlfs 1965a; originally written in about 1916, and published posthumously).

[99] Based on the Arabic meaning of the word *Rum* referring to the old Roman empire in the east, that is, Byzantium. Leslau 1987:472, s.v. agrees with Ullendorff, but with reference to different material. Cf. Budge 1896:I, 85, II, 154, 155, and 154, n. 3, pointing out that the word *romayesti* = the Syriac *ywny'*. But in the New Testament in Ge'ez, at Luke 23:38 and John 19:20 (where the Ge'ez changes the order of the languages referred to), the word refers to Latin (I am grateful to Simon Hopkins for pointing this out to me). Here, at all events, the meaning seems to be Greek.

as intermediary between the original and the surviving versions; because the text itself is in deplorable condition; and because we cannot know to what degree its present contents reflect the original and how far the text may be interpolated with new material. At all events, it contains, in its account of the work of translation, a reference to seventy two translators, of whom two died "before they had completed the translation".[100] This recalls the somewhat literal-minded reference in the work of Ibn al-Rahib, known in Ethiopia to two translators who died on the way to Egypt, reducing the number of translators to seventy. If we find this detail, even thus altered, in the Ethiopic text of John of Nikiu, therefore, we cannot be sure whether it was in the original or entered the text in Ethiopia, via a translation of Ibn al-Rahib in an altered form. If so, this would place it very late, for the Ethiopic version of John of Nikiu, which survives only in two late manuscripts, was made, from the Arabic, in 1602.[101] Could it have entered the text of Ibn al-Rahib from the lost Greek of John of Nikiu?

We have looked at roughly a thousand years of Christian writers in the orient, from Pseudo-Zacharias of Mytilene in the sixth century to Bar Hebraeus on the borders of Azerbaijan, and the Ethiopic version of the Synaxarium deep in Africa. We began with a pseudonymous writer and we end here with a translation whose background and history remain puzzling. Along the way the story has acquired, by importation from other stories, a number of new features, some of which are long-lived; others, like the list of the names of the Seventy, which flit in and out leaving but a shadow behind; and still others like the story of Simeon and the translation of Isaiah 7:14, which seem quite extraordinary in the way in which they marry Jewish and Christian elements of the oldest versions of our legend.

Two features characterize and dominate the history of our story in these Christian writers of the orient. On one hand we see a steady degeneration of the story and of its details through a process of atomisation and splintering which makes of the individual details themselves narrative units that can be borrowed, developed, combined with other material, employed for different purposes from the original ones, even wholly detached from their primary context.

On the other hand, we also see a different process at work, taking a single aspect of the original story as it had developed before the coming of Islam, and transforming it utterly so as to make it useful in the age-long polemic with the Jews over the charge of tampering with the biblical text. The original story had had no miracle, and the first translation described therein was a product of consultation which might not be altered. This developed into a story with a

[100] Charles 1916:48 Chapter LX.
[101] See *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1066, *s. nomine* (art. by D. W. Johnson).

miracle, a single text with a small number of independent identical alterations of the original Hebrew common to all the translators' versions. Part of this last element in the miracle, the identity of the alterations, was lost in the ancient Christian tradition, but the notion of alteration, detached from any idea of a miracle, was taken over and greatly developed in the service of Christian claims to prefigurations of the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the oriental Christian tradition, as we have seen, it was developed still more so that it became the major ingredient in the story as it survived in that strand of the overall history of the story. As will be seen in Chapter 7, among the Muslims it came into contact with a related notion and flourished mightily there too.

7

The Muslims and the Septuagint

Muslim writers who mention the Septuagint are not numerous. They are only about a dozen in number, spread out over a period of some eight centuries, from the ninth century to the seventeenth, from the time when Arab Islam was at its expansive height until after the decline of Arab culture, a period when the Islamic world had already long begun to close in on itself. Nearly all our Muslim writers who use the story borrow it from Christian and Jewish sources, not directly but via loans from each other. The only significant exception is Ibn Khaldun, in the fourteenth century, and even in his case the difference is more apparent than real.

As a group, these writers differ from the Christians in that fewer of them write, at least in relation to the Septuagint, on religious subjects. They deal with the story in a variety of ways but most fall into a single group, concerned with the chronology of the pre-Islamic period.

For Muslims the Bible, in whatever form, whether that of the Christians or of the Jews, and in whatever language, did not enjoy very high status. Despite Islamic recognition that God had sent divine messages to both the Jews and the Christians, Muslims never fully accepted that the texts regarded as holy by followers of these two faiths in fact represented God's message faithfully. On the contrary, that some degree of tampering with the sacred texts had taken place is a commonplace of Muslim polemic against the followers of these two faiths and finds its origin in the Qur'an itself. But to argue that these texts had been corrupted involved some degree of recognition of their holiness. Because translations were difficult of access for most Muslims who had any interest in the matter (not many, for most Muslims were quite content with their own scriptures) the status accorded to these texts was never very high. Stories about the translation of one particular version of such texts, therefore, did not have the same resonance in the Islamic context as among Jews or Christians.

Our first Islamic version of the story of the Seventy comes in a writer whose own work has been lost; fragments are, however, preserved in later works. The writer is Abu ʻIsa al-Munajjim, a member of a famous family of prominent intellectuals and associates of several of the ʻAbbasid caliphs of Baghdad, who lived in the middle and the second half of the ninth century.[1] He was the author of a chronography entitled *Kitab al-Bayan ʻan Ta'rikh sini zaman al-ʻalam ʻala sabil al-hujja wal-burhan*, "the book of the clarification of the history of the years of the world by means of proof and demonstration", a typical example of the rhyming style of book titles in the high period of classical Arabic literature. The surviving fragments of the book are preserved in the main in the historical work of Abu al-Fida', whom we shall meet later, and in a collection of apophthegms known as the *Siwan al-Hikma*.

The man and his work were the subject of a special study by Stern, who claimed to have collected all the surviving fragments of the chronography of Abu ʻIsa, but he seems to have missed this one.[2] This is our earliest Islamic source for the story and that it should be preserved for us in a writer who lived some four centuries after the time of Abu ʻIsa himself exemplifies the multi-layered character of the Arabic historiographical tradition. The story as Abu al-Fida' reports it from Abu ʻIsa is as follows:[3]

An account of the translation of the Torah and of other books of the Prophets from the Hebrew language to the Greek language. From the book of Abu ʻIsa. He says: When Alexander ruled, and vanquished the Persians, and the kingdom of the Greeks grew mighty, the Children of Israel and others came under their rule, and the kings of the Greeks ruled one after another in succession to Alexander, and each of them was called Ptolemy, as we shall relate, if God Almighty will, in the third chapter. But we shall report about them here (only) what the subject calls for. So we say: when Alexander died there ruled after him Batlamiyus b. Laghus (i.e., Ptolemy the son of Lagos) for twenty years. Then after him ruled Batlamiyus the Lover of his Brother (i.e., Ptolemy Philadelphus), and he is the one for whom the Torah and others of the books of the Prophets were translated from the Hebrew language into

[1] See *EI*, 2nd ed., VII, 558–61, art. "Munadjdjim, Banu 'l-" (by M. Fleischhammer).

[2] Stern 1972. Stern died in 1969. It is but fair to note that Stern's article was published posthumously, and we can assume that that scholar would have noticed this gap before publication had he lived.

[3] Abu al-Fida 1831:54–56. Fleischer gives a facing Latin translation of this Arabic. The work of Abu al-Fida' was abridged and continued by a younger contemporary, Ibn al-Wardi al-Maʻarri (1290/1292–1349), who also includes the passage from Ibn al-Munajjim. See the entry in *EI*, 2nd ed., III, 966–67 (by Mohammed Ben Cheneb). Ibn al-Wardi 1970:13, 47–48. Abu al-Fida' himself also refers a couple of other times to the Seventy, but not in ways which add to our knowledge here.

the Greek language. I say: and the translation of the Torah was after twenty years had passed from the death of Alexander. Abu 'Isa says: When this Batlamiyus the Second the Lover of his Brother came to rule he found a whole lot of prisoners from among them, around thirty thousand souls of the Jews, and he freed all of them and bade them return to their country; and the Children of Israel rejoiced at this and gave him many blessings and thanks, and he sent a messenger with gifts to the Children of Israel who were in Jerusalem (Ar. *al-Quds*) and asked them to send him a number of learned men of the Children of Israel to translate the Torah and other (books) into the Greek language, and they hastened to obey his command. Then the Children of Israel competed with one another over going to him, and each of them kept on choosing that and they were at odds with each other (about it). Then they agreed to send him six individuals from each of their tribes and their number came to seventy two men, and when they came to this Batlamiyus he gave them a very hospitable reception and placed them in thirty six groups and separated them by tribes and ordered them to translate for him thirty six copies of the Torah, and Batlamiyus compared them with each other and found them identical, they did not differ in any significant way, and Batlamiyus distributed these thirty six copies in his towns (or: in his country). And after they had finished the translation he gave them many gifts and fitted them out well for the[ir return] to their country. And these (men) asked him for one of these copies and he gave them a copy. And these (men) took it and returned with it to the Children of Israel in Jerusalem (Ar. *Bayt al-Muqaddas*) and the copy of the Torah translated for Batlamiyus at that time is the most accurate and the best established of the copies of the Torah; and I have referred to this copy and to the copy which is in the hands of the Jews now and to the copy of the Samaritans in the Introduction to this book, so that there is no need to repeat (myself).

Abu 'Isa seems to provide a date for the translation. He tells us that it was 'after twenty years had passed from the death of Alexander'. Unfortunately, closer reading shows that this apparently solid datum simply means that it took place during Philadelphus' period of rule, for his predecessor, Alexander's successor, ruled for just twenty years. Apart from this, he has the figure of 30,000 Jewish captives in Egypt that we have already encountered. He also records quarrelling among the Children of Israel over who should be allowed to form part of the team of translators sent to Egypt. We note that they are separated into pairs by tribes, and ordered to provide the ruler with thirty-six versions of the holy scriptures. Following examination, these are found to be identical, and the ruler distributes them in cities under his rule, giving one to the translators as a gift.

If this all seems familiar, it should do so. Apart from the last sentence, we have met all this material before, though not in quite the same words. In fact the whole text looks very like an abbreviated version of the content of what we have met already, in Agapius. The ending is different, for there, in accord

with the Christian tradition, Agapius tells us that 'That was the command of God because of his foreknowledge and his prior awareness of the wickedness that was to be done by their priests and governors Anan and Caiaphas and their fellows to the Masih when he appeared'.[4] Here our Muslim writer, an academic type, reports more prosaically that this is the most reliable version of the text available: "the copy of the Torah translated for Batlamiyus at that time is the most accurate and the best established of the copies of the Torah".

Leaving this sentence aside, however, we are faced with an interesting problem here. In this earliest of our Muslim sources we seem to have an abbreviated version of a text which we find in a Christian source which can be dated, at its earliest, a couple of generations and more *after* the death of this Muslim writer. Agapius died after 941, whereas Abu 'Isa lived in the ninth century. This means that the version in Agapius must have existed before that writer's time, in consequence that he borrowed it from another writer, and that Abu 'Isa and Agapius must share a common source who is both Christian and available in Arabic. We cannot yet identify this writer. As will be seen, Abu 'Isa, although the earliest, is not the only Muslim writer to have such a report, nor the only one whose interest derives from a scholarly interest in chronology.

Our next Muslim witness is Mas'udi (ca. 893–956), an important littérateur and historian of the first half of the tenth century. Born in Baghdad, Mas'udi travelled widely throughout the Islamic world of his day, between Egypt in the south and the Islamic Caucasus in the north, and eastwards as far as the borderlands of India, dying back in Egypt again. He may have been a Shi'i, and he seems to have been interested in a wide range of subjects, though with a special leaning towards different religious beliefs and practices. His numerous writings covered many subjects, as was normal among medieval Muslim writers, but his two surviving works fall into a broader category combining history with general knowledge. In his *Kitab al-Tanbih wal-Ishraf* Mas'udi has two references to the Septuagint. The first occurs in an account of the rulers of Egypt after Alexander the Great:[5]

The fourth [ruler of Egypt] was Ptolemy Alexandros who ruled for 22 years, and he it is for whom the Torah was translated. Seventy two rabbis translated it in Alexandria in the land of Egypt, from the Hebrew language into the Greek. And a number of (people) both early and late have translated this version into Arabic, including Hunayn b. Ishaq; and it is the best version of the Torah in (the view of) many of the people [scil. of the Jews].

[4] Agapius 1909:[88] 644–[89] 645.

[5] Mas'udi 1894:112–13 (one manuscript has *tawriyya*, not *tawrat*, for Torah – cf. below, Abu al-Ma'ali).

Mas'udi tells us little here beyond the number of the translators and the identity of their patron. He is aware that this biblical version is highly regarded for its accuracy, and he also tells us that the most famous translator of the Arab-Islamic world, Hunayn b. Ishaq, had translated it into Arabic. Alas, his version is lost. It would be wonderful to have a version of the Bible from the hand of this prince of translators. But the Septuagint is mentioned here almost in passing and functions simply as part of a more general collection of information about the various translations of the Bible into Arabic. As a Greek version it is simply a waystation for the text as it came from the original Hebrew into Arabic. It has little significance beyond that for Mas'udi.

The second passage includes a cross-reference to the first one. It occurs as part of a much longer discussion of the differences introduced into the understanding of world historical chronology by the competing versions of the Bible circulating among different religious groups:[6]

And the total (number) of years from the Fall of Adam, upon whom be peace, from the Garden up to the Migration of the Prophet (Muhammad), . . . according to what is required by the Torah which seventy two of the rabbis of the Jews translated for Ptolemy the king into the Greek language in Alexandria in the land of Egypt – and they agree about its accuracy as we said earlier in this book in the accounts of the kings of the Greeks – was six thousand two hundred and sixteen years; and between th(is number of) years and what the Hebrew Torah requires there is a great divergence.

Here we see the earliest example of a concern which will re-appear several times among the Muslim writers interested in the Septuagint. As we have already seen, one of the charges made against the Jews from an early stage by their Christian rivals was that they had tampered with the text of the Bible in order to make it appear that Jesus' coming was not that of the Saviour whose arrival could be predicted on the basis of biblical chronology. This charge was founded on the presence of differences between the Septuagint translation and the Hebrew text, in particular over the ages of the early patriarchs. For the Christians, this proved both bad faith on the part of the Jews and that the Messiah had come at the time predicted, in the person of Jesus. For Muslims, the issue was simpler, for Jesus' arrival had no messianic significance for them. The issue was much more simply, as it would be also for seventeenth century European scholars, one of calculations of the age of the world, and occasionally, depending on that, calculations of the end of the world. Mas'udi is writing here as a historian, and he is in effect describing and assessing the sources available to him.

This is very different from the *Fihrist* of al-Nadim. As the subtitle of Dodge's English translation indicates, this is a medieval Islamic survey of contemporary culture. Its author, al-Nadim, or Ibn al-Nadim (c. 935–c. 990 C.E.), was

[6] Mas'udi 1894:212–13.

a bookseller with genuinely encyclopaedic knowledge. His book offers us an extremely wide and well-informed survey of the books in all fields that were available to the Muslim Arabic reader of the day, telling us much about works that are otherwise now lost, and providing a remarkably detailed picture of Islamic Arabic culture in its metropolitan heyday. At the start of the seventh section of his book, in which he discusses the works of the ancients, al-Nadim relates the following story, using it to illustrate a point about the great numbers of books composed by the ancients and about large collections of books in the pre-Islamic world:[7]

Ishaq al-Rahib[8] relates in his history that when Ptolemy Philadelphus, who was one of the kings of Alexandria, reigned, he made a search for books of learning, placing a man named Zamirah in charge. According to what is related, he collected fifty-four thousand one hundred and twenty books. Then he said, "Oh, king, there are still a great many more [books] in the world, in Sind, India, Persia, Georgia, Armenia, Babylon, al-Mawsil, and among the Greeks".

We note at once a number of important differences from the story told in the *Letter of Aristeas*, indeed in all of the sources we have examined in earlier chapters. In the first place, there is no reference here at all to the translation or even to the holy books of the Jews themselves. The story of the conversation between the king and the librarian about the total number of books in the library was originally invented as an introduction to, and a preliminary justification for, the story about the making of the translation; here, however, we find it cut off and acquiring a character of its own.

Perhaps this is in fact not an abbreviated version of the original story from the *Letter of Aristeas* but rather a new story, invented independently in order to tell us something about large collections of books? Against this view, the structure of this little story as a whole, the detail (even if mis-remembered) of the number of the books and the response of the librarian all come together to argue for simple borrowing. Further, we note that the king is said to have tried to collect "books of learning", not all the books in existence, as suggested by the account in the *Letter* (§9), though the answer of the librarian here does seem still to echo that original desire. That response, too, seems to be, in form at least, a response to a question not asked or a remark not made. All of this strengthens the view that this is a shortened version of the beginning of the original story from the *Letter*. The awkwardness in the logical flow of the account suggests that the shortening has not been very well done. And this in its turn indicates that although we may easily recognize the aim of the story here, we can also still recognize both the origin from which it is derived and the filter through which it has passed to acquire its present form.

[7] Al-Nadim 1970:II, 576.
[8] See Stern 1972:442, where that scholar describes Isaac as a "shadowy" figure.

The list of places where there were still more books, according to the librarian, seems, in its inclusion of Sind and Georgia, Armenia and Babylon, to reflect an Islamic rather than an ancient, pre-Islamic context for this version of the story. Al-Mawsil (Mosul) especially wears a clearly Islamic appearance. The name of the librarian, Zamirah, is a little odd, as it seems that it must derive from Demetrius of the *Letter*, but any such derivation must be at several removes. This list, together with the story itself, recurs elsewhere in our Islamic sources, and it is this story, shorn of the connection with the translation, that we have in each case.

Our Islamic sources come from all over the Islamic world; that world was even more extensive than the Mediterranean world of Graeco–Roman antiquity or the Christian world that succeeded it. We turn now to two figures in the eastern half of the Islamic world. The first of these is al-ʻAmiri (d. 992), a philosopher who spent most of his life in Khurasan, now part of northern Iran. He also spent some years in Baghdad, where he enjoyed good relations with the famous vizier Ibn al-ʻAmid and probably had access to his fine library as well. Few of his numerous works have survived. *Al-Amad ʻala al-Abad* is devoted to the afterlife and the justification of philosophy and how it concords with the religious sciences. In the early sections of the work, al-ʻAmiri mentions the various eras used in the different religions and provides some account of their origins and background. This brings him, like other writers, to the history of the Septuagint:[9]

6. The companions of Solomon son of David had known from their prophets of the coming destruction of Syria and its subsequent return to prosperity; for God says, "And we decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book, 'You shall do corruption in the earth twice' " (Qur'an 17:4). So when they learned that Bukhtanassar was on his way to Syria, they emigrated and took refuge in Egypt with its king.[10]

7. Now one of the kings of Egypt was a lover of learning, and having heard about the Torah and that it was sent down from heaven, he issued an order to find out who of the men of Solomon son of David remained among the Jews in Egypt. (When he had located them,) he treated them well. And he permitted them to return to Jerusalem after the land of Syria had returned to its former prosperity, and sent out an envoy with them to escort them. And he said, "I have a request to make of you, and if you grant it to me, you will have fully repaid your debt of gratitude to me. The request is that you send me the Torah." They agreed to do what he asked, and swore to him that they would fulfil it.

[9] Rowson 1988:62 (Arabic text) 63 (English translation).

[10] This is presumably, here and in other texts where it turns up, a distant echo of II Kings 22:26, "And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose, and came to Egypt: for they were afraid of the Chaldees".

8. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they made haste to fulfil his request. They wrote the Torah and sent it to him. But then he wrote to them to send him some people who were proficient in Hebrew, to translate for him what they had sent him; for he did not understand Hebrew. And he promised to reward them richly for it.

9. So they chose six persons from each of their twelve tribes, the total coming to seventy-two rabbis. When they arrived, the king gave them an extremely generous welcome. Then he divided their party into thirty-six groups, and assigned a man to each group to see to their well-being and to prevent them from meeting one another until each group by itself had produced a translation.

10. So there were produced thirty-six texts of the translated Torah. The king collated them and found that they differed in no more than the matter of the placement of a word. Then he bestowed generous presents on them and equipped them well (for the return journey). The translators asked him to give them one of the copies so that they might show it off to their friends. This he did. And this is the Torah which suffered no alteration at all.

The relationship between this text and several other Muslim sources is close. Rowson discusses the question in detail and notices especially that they do not tell a single story, in identical versions. They are clearly related to each other, but small differences demonstrate that they do not simply copy from each other or from a single source. In this case, it seems likely that the first paragraph quoted here comes from a different source. Though Rowson does not suggest this, he notices that it refers to an otherwise unknown group, the "companions of Solomon"; otherwise the information given in it is not entirely new to us. Bukhtanassar (the biblical Nebuchadnezzar) does not appear often, but, as we have seen, he does crop up in Mas'udi, and what we have here, including the destruction of "Syria", seems to fit well with what that writer reports. This entire section looks to have been invented in order to provide an explanation for the presence of Jews in Egypt. It is found in the biblical destructions of Nebuchadnezzar and explained further on the basis of a Qur'anic passage. Without this passage, it would be hard to understand the presence of Nebuchadnezzar in our passage from Mas'udi. However, the present passage goes further, for what is described in the story that follows is a correct biblical text. Naturally, the people who are responsible, even indirectly, for its production must be seen to be good Jews, so we are told also that they foresaw the coming destruction, and thus left ahead of time for refuge in Egypt. The rest of the story is essentially what we know from related sources.

Also in the east we find al-Biruni (973–1048), one of the great polymaths of classical Islam. He was born in central Asia, and several modern states claim him as their own. A man of wide-ranging interests and immense learning, he was interested in India and Indian religion and culture, on which he wrote a large surviving book. He also wrote a great deal on scientific matters, including

astronomy. Biruni mentions the Septuagint more than once. He tells us the following about its genesis:[11]

So I say that among both the Jews and the Christians there is a version of the Torah which agrees with the statement of its adherents. Now the (version) which the Jews have they claim is the furthest removed from confusion, and what the Christians have is called the "Torah of the Seventy" and that is because a group of the Children of Israel, when Nebuchadnezzar raided Jerusalem and destroyed it, was exiled from there and took refuge with the king of Egypt and stayed close to him until Ptolemy Philadelphus reigned, and this king heard about the story of the Torah and its descent from heaven and he enquired about this group until he found them in a town, about 30,000 people, and he received them well, and brought them close and treated them gently and gave them permission to go away to Jerusalem; now Cyrus the governor of Bahman over Babel had built it and returned culture to Syria (Ar. *al-Sham*). So they went out, with a band of his servants to protect them, and he said to them, I have a request to make of you if you permit me, for your thanks to me are completed, and it is that you permit me to have a copy of your book the Torah. And they answered him positively about that and swore to him that they would fulfil it. And when they came to Jerusalem they carried out their promise by sending a copy of it to him but it was in Hebrew and he did not understand it and he wrote back to them with a request for someone who knew both Hebrew and Greek who could translate (it) for him; and he promised them rewards and gifts. So they chose from their twelve tribes seventy two men, six from each tribe, of the rabbis and the priests, and their names are known among the Christians. And they translated it into Greek after he had separated them and placed over every pair of them someone to take care of them until they completed the translation of it and he had in his hand thirty six translations and he compared them with each other and did not find in them any (difference) except the sort of difference of expression for identical notions that is inevitable. So he fulfilled what he had promised them and gave them good preparation and they asked him to grant them one of those copies to take pride in and to boast about among their fellows and he did that and it is the one which the Christians have and no changes or corruptions have been introduced into it, they claim. But the Jews say something different from that, and that is (that) their hatred of its translation and their tolerating him about that (came about) through fear of power and evil following agreement over alteration and confusion; and in what they say – even if we believe them – there is nothing which might remove (our) doubt, but it (actually) strengthens the grounds for it.

Al-Biruni shows himself here as well informed as ever. He knows both a Christian and a Jewish version of the story, and he takes care to show that they are separate and different. He also points out which he prefers. The reference

[11] Biruni 1923:20–21 (English translation in Biruni 1879:24).

to Nebuchadnezzar as the cause of the presence of Jews in Egypt is found elsewhere in Muslim sources, as we have seen, and so, too, is the number of Jews, thirty thousand. The fact that in this version they are not captives, but guests, or refugees, in Egypt makes it just a little awkward that the king now permits them to return to their own country – captives might need release, but guests? Biruni is quite right to note that the names of the translators are "known among the Christians," for indeed they occur in the *Letter* and in a number of other sources that depend on that document. They occur nowhere in the Jewish tradition.

Like other Muslim writers, however, Biruni seems not properly to understand why the king should have been concerned about possible Jewish changes to the text. He retails the story about the king's care to divide the translators into pairs and then to separate the pairs from each other. The result is that the versions are identical, "except the sort of difference of expression for identical notions that is inevitable". Put like this, we assume that this was some sort of classroom exercise. It is indeed inevitable that there will be some "difference of expression for identical notions" in a number of translations of an identical text. But that was not the point of the separation. He does not make a connection with the separation of the translators even when he gives, in what follows, a Jewish version of the story and reports that the Jews had been reluctant to provide the king with the text and agreed to do so only once they had agreed among themselves to make a number of changes.

Al-Biruni also mentions the Septuagint elsewhere in his works. This time it is in a work called *al-Qanun al-Mas'udi*, so-called because it is dedicated to a ruler called Mas'ud.[12] Like so much by al-Biruni, it deals heavily with questions of chronology and astronomy. Here he tells us the following:[13]

As for the appearance of the darkness and the fast on account of it, they claim that its cause is in Q.l.ma[14] the king of Egypt who compelled them to come to translate the Torah from Hebrew into Greek. So the air grew dark for three days; and the story has the additional detail that Philadelphus gave them a copy of it when he freed them in Egypt and honoured them and sent them back to their land; and the translation was undertaken by seventy men from among their priests and (so) it is known as the version of the Seventy; and this is one of the reasons for the confusion and the corruption in the Torah.

[12] Mas'ud b. Mahmud of Ghazna (in Afghanistan), reigned 1030–40.

[13] Biruni 1954–56:I, 201–02.

[14] See Chapter 9 on the form of the name Ptolemy in the Samaritan version of Abu al-Fath. Because Abu al-Fath and Biruni are the only sources outside the rabbinic Jewish tradition to mention the fast-day, and given the similarity between the forms of this name in these two sources, do they share a source? Abu al-Fath cannot depend on Biruni here as he has more material than Biruni; and Biruni seems, as we have seen, to abbreviate a longer source.

We learn here, uniquely among the non-Jewish sources, about the earth growing dark for three days as a consequence of the translation and about a fast-day being instituted as a result of this. Biruni uses a strange expression here, "the story has the additional detail . . . "; this suggests some sort of abbreviation of a longer narration. But he does not tell us what that was. Could this also explain why, in the first passage that we looked at, Biruni reports seventy-two translators, whereas here he refers only to seventy? Curiously, given the first passage, his last remark about the Septuagint here, that it is "one of the reasons for the confusion and the corruption in the Torah", goes against what he says there. It argues for fuller information than we are used to among Muslim writers. This should not surprise us, for Biruni stands out both for the catholicity of his interests and for his ability to discover unusual sources.

We have one version of the story from the east also in Persian, in a short work called *Kitab Bayan al-Adyan*, another rhyming title, meaning the Book of the Clarification of the Faiths, dealing with the different beliefs and practices of a variety of religious groups, both Muslim and non-Muslim, written by a little-known author, Abu al-Ma'ali. He seems to have composed it at the court of Mas'ud of Ghazna (*regnavit* 1089–99), in today's Afghanistan, possibly in the year 1092. Abu al-Ma'ali seems also to have been a Muslim of Shi'i sympathies, although this is not certain.[15] The story as he gives it is as follows:[16]

The Bible (Per. *Tawriyya*) of the Eighty: (the story of) this Bible is that one of the kings of the Jews assembled eighty of the rabbis and pious (men), and wished them to make a translation of the Torah (*Tawriyya*), and for this (task) he placed them in separate locations from each other, and when the translation was complete each of the eighty (versions) was identical (lit. content) with the rest and there was no difference (between them). And this they named the Torah of the Eighty, and they consider it great and make great oaths with it.[17]

This is clearly a very distant relation of the original story; it has lost much of its detail and confused much of what remains. The king here is a king of the Jews. We have no explicit location for the story at all; if one was intended, it must be in Judaea. There is no indication of the original language of the "Tawriyya" nor of the language of the translation. There is little understanding of the meaning of the word Torah/Tawriyya. And most strikingly of all, the number

[15] See Christensen 1911. See also Vajda 1931:67–68; and Massé 1926, who translates this passage into French at 33, whence it is quoted by Vajda. See also Pizzi 1902–03.

[16] The text is apparently published only in Schefer 1883:I, 143 (Vajda 1931:68, n. 1, remarks that according to Massé the manuscript upon which Schefer's edition is based is "très fautif".). The text as printed by Schefer (following the manuscript?), makes no difference between the Persian letters *kaf* and *gaf*, printing them both as *kaf*. The translation here is my own.

[17] The reference to the swearing of oaths here is a little puzzling, but presumably it is to be understood as a description of how Jews swore when giving evidence. See Goldziher 1902.

of the translators has increased, unaccountably, to eighty. Not all, however, has been lost. We still find in this version the identical character of the translations produced by the translators working in isolation from each other. Strangely, however, this is not remarked on as miraculous by our author, who seems to do no more than use this as the explanation for the great respect which the Jews accord to the "Torah of the Eighty" (*Tawriyyat al-Thamanin*).

When we consider the distance of Abu al-Ma'ali from the original site of the translation and from the historically significant centres of Judaism, it is perhaps not so surprising that the story should have become so corrupt. The story of the translation can have had very little meaning in such a Muslim environment.[18] We should indeed perhaps consider it remarkable that even this has survived. Yet al-Biruni, too, wrote at a similar distance from the centres of Jewish cultural life. He had access to more detailed and accurate sources of information about Jewish customs and history, including not only information about the Septuagint but also, and especially, some quite surprisingly detailed information about the Jewish calendar. This suggests that his information, like this shred of a longer story, may be a remnant of much more abundant information, now lost, about medieval Jewish communities and life in eastern Iran and beyond.[19]

Our most colourful version of the story in Muslim circles comes from the heartlands of Islam. Born in Egypt, Ibn al-Qifti (1172–1248) was a scholar and member of a family of senior civil servants. He spent many years as a student in Jerusalem, where his father was working at the end of the twelfth century. Later he worked for years in Aleppo, in the financial administration, and after that as a vizier. Both then and afterwards, he devoted himself to scholarship too and produced a series of works dealing with the political history of his own times and with intellectual history. Of his two surviving works, one is devoted to the biographies of doctors, philosophers and astronomers, of the ancient world and of the early Islamic period. It preserves many passages from Greek texts which are otherwise lost.[20] It also includes, in a longer account of what purports to be the story of the destruction of the famous Library of Alexandria, at least part of a version of the story in the *Letter of Aristeas*. It

[18] On the Bible in Persian see Fischel 1952.

[19] One manuscript (copied in 1678–79, from another copied in 1201–02) of Shahrastani's important work on sects apparently contains a note, at the end of the chapter on the Jews, saying "La Torah des gens (*Tawrat al-nas*) est celle que trente pontifes réunirent pour un roi de Byzance (*al-Rum*), afin que n'importe quel ignorant n'y touche pas en ce qui concerne les préceptes" (Shahrastani 1986:605, n. 59). The editors suggest that this may be a "Lointain souvenir de la version grecque du texte hébraïque de la Bible". Given its date, the note may go back to Shahrastani himself, who died in the first half of the twelfth century; the work in which this note is found was apparently composed in 1127–28. But the editors also note (28) that some of the material found only in this manuscript looks like interpolations.

[20] See A. Dietrich, art. "Ibn al-Qifti", *EI*, 2nd ed., III, 840.

occurs in the biography of John the Grammarian, Yahya al-Nahawi in Arabic, also known as John Philoponus. In that biography, following a few lines about the life and contentious career of this Christian cleric, we find the following passage:[21]

And he lived until ʻAmr b. al-ʻAs conquered Egypt (Ar. *Misr*) and Alexandria and he came to ʻAmr, who knew his rank in learning and his belief(s) and what had happened to him with the Christians, and ʻAmr honoured him and gave him respect (Ar. *wa-ra'a lahu mawdi'an*) . . . .Now ʻAmr was intelligent, a good listener and an honest thinker (Ar. *sahih al-fikr*). So he stayed close to him and almost never parted from him. Then one day Yahya said to him, You have won possession of the revenues of Alexandria and have taken over all the produce that is to be found there; now I have no argument with you about those things that you (can) derive benefit from; but as for that from which you (can) derive no benefit, we are more entitled to it. So order that that be released (to us). And ʻAmr said to him, And what do you need? He said, The books of wisdom in the royal stores, for you have placed them under guard and we need them, while you have no benefit from them. And he said to him, And who collected these books and what is their story? And Yahya said to him, When Ptolemy (Ar. b.t.l.w.ma'us) Philadelphus (Ar. *Filadh.l.fus*), one of the kings of Alexandria, ruled he loved learning and the learned and he sought books of learning and he ordered that they be collected and he set aside stores for them, and they were collected, and he gave them into the charge of a man known as Zamira (var. Damira), and he set to enthusiastically, collecting them and getting hold of them and paying enormous prices for them, and encouraging traders in books to bring them (? Ar. *fi naqliha*; could this here = translate them?). So he did that, and in a (short) time there were collected fifty four thousand one hundred and twenty books. And when the king learned that they had been collected and had ascertained their number he said to Zamira, Do you think that there remain in the world any books of learning which are not in our (collection)? So Zamira said to him, There remains a good deal in the world, in Sind, and in India (Ar. *al-Hind*), and Persia, and Jurjan, and Armenia (Ar. *al-Arman*) and Babylon (Ar. *Babil*) and al-Mawsil and among the Rum (i.e., the Byzantines). And the king marvelled at that and said to him, Keep at it, getting hold of (books). So he kept at it until the king died, and these books remained protected, preserved, being looked after by all the kings who ruled (Egypt) and their successors up to our own time. So ʻAmr wondered greatly at what Yahya told him and admired it. And he said, It is impossible for me to give any order about the(se books) until I have received approval from the Commander of the Faithful ʻUmar b. al-Khattab. So he wrote to ʻUmar and informed him of Yahya's words which we have reported, and asked his instructions about what should be done with the (books). And ʻUmar's reply came back, in which he said, As for the books which you mention, if they contain matter

[21] Ibn al-Qifti 1903:354–56.

which is in accord with the book of God, then the book of God contains matter which renders them unnecessary; and if they contain matter which is in disaccord with the book of God, then there is no need of them (at all). So destroy them. So ʿAmr b. al-ʿAs began dispersing them among the baths of Alexandria and burning them in their ovens. And I was told the number of the baths at that time but I have forgotten it, but they say that they were consumed in a period of six months. So hear what happened and wonder.

This is the famous story attributing the destruction of the Library of Alexandria to the Arabs at the time of their conquest of Egypt in the seventh century. That there is no reason to accept a word of it has been shown numerous times in the last three centuries, and this aspect of the story need not detain us here.[22] Let us note merely that the story of the library's foundation and background was still alive when Ibn al-Qifti's source for the story was composed. As can be seen, the story of the translation here sticks quite closely to that in the *Letter of Aristeas*, with a couple of important differences. The most striking of these is of course the total absence of any reference whatever to the translation. Here the Library takes centre stage, and the translation has been forgotten. Here we see, as in the *Fihrist* several centuries earlier, that atomising of the Aristean story into variously usable elements that characterises the history of the story again and again. For the Jews of rabbinic times, the Library was an irrelevant element of the Aristean story; what was important for them was the translation. A link with a great king was useful, but his Library was of no interest. As a result, the Talmud and other texts mention Ptolemy, and tell us that the translation was made for him, but they make no mention of his Library. Here, by contrast, the translation is of no interest or relevance to the authors concerned but the Library is.

We do not know Ibn al-Qifti's source for his story, but the Library element in the story has travelled quite far from its origin by now. The principal differences in Ibn al-Qifti's story concern the number of books in the collection when the king enquires, and the places where the librarian suggests that more books could be obtained. In this detail we note an interesting slanting of the story; in the original, the king's question is designed to lead to the response that the Jews possess special books which should be in the collection for it to aim at completeness. Here, by contrast, the answer is simply that there exist plenty of other books beyond those that have been collected already, with the implication that collecting in a general way should be continued. This has little or nothing to do with universalist ambition as in the case, say, of the modern Library of Congress, and more to do with continuing collecting activity as part of a narrative thread building a library with a collection of books that is truly enormous.

[22] See, for an outline of the history of this topic, the letter by B. Lewis in the *New York Review of Books*, 27 September, 1990, following on the review in that periodical on 14 June 1990, by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, of one of the more recent works to deal with this subject, Canfora 1989.

The story of the library of Alexandria and its destruction is not in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadim, but the assertion (historically quite unfounded) that Philoponus survived until the Muslim conquest of Egypt and was honoured by the conqueror is there.[23] Both texts give us the same form for the librarian's name and for the number of books said to be in the library as well as identical lists of places where there are said to be more books; all of these details confirm that these two texts must share a common source.

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1382), probably the best-known of our Muslim authors, reports twice on the translation, in his great historical work, the '*Ibar*, once in a version taken from Yosippon, to be discussed in the following chapter, and once in a manner reminiscent of others of our Muslim sources:[24]

> And after him ruled his son Philadelphus. And he freed the Jewish captives in Egypt and returned the vessels to the Temple and presented them with a vessel of gold and ordered them to hang it in the mosque of Jerusalem (Ar. *masjid al-quds*); And he assembled seventy of the rabbis of the Jews who translated the Torah for him from the Hebrew tongue into the Greek and Latin tongue(s) (Ar. *al-lisan al-rumi wal-latini*. Then Philadelphus died after thirty eight years of his rule.

Ibn Khaldun was a very well informed scholar and writer. He had travelled in Christian Spain, met Tamberlane in Syria, and enjoyed access to a wide range of sources about non-Muslim topics. The reference here to a translation into Latin as well as Greek should therefore probably be seen as a slip. Nevertheless, as with other small changes in Islamic versions of the story, this may derive from the lower status and meaning of the Greek translation of Scripture among Muslims. God's word could have been expressed, in a divinely inspired translation, in but a single language. Reference to two languages here reveals a different understanding of the significance of such a version. This in its turn derives from a different attitude to the languages themselves, caused by a sea-change in the real status of Greek following the Muslim invasions. Not only did Greek (and Latin) die out for all practical purposes quite rapidly in the Islamic world but these languages also became completely unknown to Muslims and ceased to be part of the world of active, creative culture in the Islamic world very quickly.

As time goes on, the story of the Seventy survives in Islam in more and more degraded form. At the western end of the Islamic world, in al-Andalus, Islamic Spain, the story occurs in the work of Abu 'Ubayd al-Bakri.[25] Al-Bakri was a bibliophile who looked after his books carefully, keeping the more valuable

[23] Al-Nadim 1871–72:I, 254.
[24] Ibn Khaldun 1936:I, 285.
[25] See D. Wasserstein 1985:88 and index, *s.nomine* Bakrids.

manuscripts in coverings of fine fabric, but although he wrote on theological topics he also had the reputation of a confirmed drinker (in an Islamic society where alcohol is forbidden). He is famous for a number of works, mainly on philological or geographical topics, characterized by the precision and detail of his use of a wide range of sources.[26] In one of these, we find a reference to the Septuagint translation. Speaking of the Ptolemies he says:[27]

And [Ptolemy Philadelphus] is the one who freed the Jews captive in Egypt; and it is he who chose seventy translators who translated the Torah (Ar. *al-tawrat*) from Hebrew to Greek.

Comparison with passing references in the work of Ibn Hazm, al-Bakri's eminent older Iberian Muslim contemporary, shows that al-Bakri does not derive his information from him. We note that whereas most of the story has gone, one element is retained: the freeing of the Jewish captives. The text here also says that the king "chose" the translators. This is at first sight a major deviation from what we remember of the story, as it also seems to be a practical impossibility, given that Ptolemy was in Egypt and the translators were in Jerusalem. However, as with the freeing of the captives, we should probably see this as a corruption due to a severe shortening of the story, not as a deliberate change in its structure. Al-Bakri is known to have had access to Arabic versions of some Christian Latin works in Spain, and we may wonder whether this confused account of the translation owes something to such a source as this.

The Seventy are also mentioned a couple of times by Qalqashandi (1355–1418), a civil servant and scribe in Mamluk Egypt and author of several works of great importance on the scribal profession, in his enormous and valuable *Subh al-A'sha*. First, in a short account of the kings of Egypt, he mentions the Ptolemy under whom the translation was carried out:[28]

Then there ruled after him Ptolemy Philadelphus (lit. Ptolemy the lover of his brother), forty years, and it is said (viz. as an alternative) 38 years; and he it is who translated the Torah from Hebrew into Greek.

The second reference is essentially a repetition of this. These last passages, from the fourteenth century and later, are almost the end of the road for the story in the world of classical and medieval Islam. As they show, the story has been pared down to its essentials as a carrier of bare fact or assumed fact; a translation was made for Ptolemy Philadelphus. Nothing else of the story has survived.

Hajji Khalifa is a fitting person with whom to close this survey of our story's history among the Muslims. Like Ibn al-Nadim centuries before, he provides

[26] See *EI*, 2nd ed., I, 155–57 (art. "Abu 'Ubayd al-Bakri", by E. Lévi-Provençal).
[27] Bakri 1992:302–03, no. (475).
[28] Qalqashandi 1987:III, 476; see also V, 361.

a survey of literature in Arabic at a critical moment in time. Ibn al-Nadim had written his *Fihrist* ("Index" or "Catalogue") of what was then available in Arabic at a high point in the development of classical Islam. By the time of Hajji Khalifa, six centuries and more later, Arabic had been largely supplanted as a major vehicle of Islamic literature by Persian and Turkish. Although Arabic never ceased to be written, especially in topics connected with religion, it was no longer the language of the ruling social and political elites of the Islamic world, and this was increasingly true also of the cultural elites.

The son of a soldier, born in Istanbul in 1609, Hajji Khalifa himself also spent many years as a soldier and a bureaucrat in the service of the Ottoman Empire, but he found time to study, and with the help of a legacy was able to devote the last decade or so of his life entirely to writing. He is said to have been a good-tempered man who enjoying varied company, although he was taciturn, and lacked humour. Neither a smoker nor a drinker, he was interested only in scholarship, but he also, more attractively, enjoyed growing flowers. He died in 1657, having written a large number of works over a range of subjects. They include, unusually, several translations from Latin, produced with the help of a French convert to Islam. His best known work is undoubtedly his *Kashf al-Zunun*, a vast bibliographical compendium of books, arranged in alphabetical order of their titles. As the work lists some 14,500 separate works, alphabetical arrangement represents an organizational advance. The *Kashf al-Zunun* not only gives book titles but also supplies information about the authors of the works listed, sometimes telling us a lot about their lives and the contexts in which they worked. Under the letter *ta'*, at number 3722, we find an entry for *al-Tawrat*:[29]

3722. al-Tawrat: one of the divine books which have been revealed. It was revealed by God to his mouthpiece Moses, peace be upon him, in the Hebrew language, but the Jews altered (it) after him, and tampered with it, in particular in their alterations of the Arabic translations (?) in it. It exists in three versions, differing in expression but very close to each other in meaning, except rarely. One of these is called the Torah of the Seventy and it is the one upon which seventy two of their rabbis agreed. This was when one of the kings of the Greeks asked one of the kings of the Jews to send him a group of specialists[30] in the Torah. So he sent him seventy two rabbis; and he isolated every two of them in a house and he assigned to them scribes and translators[31] and they wrote the Torah in the Greeks' language. Then he compared their thirty six versions and they were different in expression but identical in sense,

[29] Hajji Khalifa 1835–58:II, 458–59, no. 3722.

[30] Ar. *huffaz*; this word has a specialised meaning in Arabic, referring to those who know the Qur'an by heart.

[31] Ar. *kuttaban wa-tarajimatan*. Fluegel mis-translated these two words as *librum et interpretationes*, apparently having mis-read or misunderstood the first as *kitaban*, which then led him to understand the second as *tarajima*.

so he knew that they were right, and honest. And these versions were translated afterwards into Syriac, and then into Arabic.

The text goes on to speak of the other two versions of the biblical text, that in use "among the Karaites and the Rabbanites" and that of the Samaritans; the author does not seem to identify the Rabbanites, or indeed any others, with those who sent the first version to the "king of the Greeks"; nor does he seem to realize that his "first version" is, presumably, also to be identified with his second version. The first version is after all, in this account, no more than the background to a translation. After the passage quoted, he continues, mentioning corruptions introduced into the text of the Bible and identifying the different sects among the Jews, and he also gives a descriptive list of the various books in the Bible.

The most striking aspect of this story is the way in which it treats the miracle strand. It retains the structural elements necessary to the miracle: the separation of the translators into pairs, the comparison of the results of their work by the king afterwards, and his discovery that "they were right, and honest", scil. they had not altered the biblical text in what they had translated for him. But Hajji Khalifa tells his readers that the Jews did make alterations in the biblical text, although he does not indicate when, or where, they did this. Even though he refers to such changes, he does not make clear when these changes might have been introduced. But this is a very minor problem in comparison with what comes next. Here the real core of this miracle story has been lost. Now we have thirty-six translations which, on inspection, are seen to have all more or less the same sense but not all the same form. This is what we might expect if we took any text and entrusted it to thirty-six teams of translators. This is perhaps recognised by Hajji Khalifa himself, for he tells us that the king, on checking the versions and finding them thus, "knew that they were right, and honest". As a man with experience of translating – a most unusual accomplishment and a very rare activity after the high period of classical Islam – Hajji Khalifa is perhaps the only one among our Muslim sources who could understand something of all this. As a sober reporter, he was not interested in miracle stories or perhaps could not see any miracle in what his sources told him. By now the miracle has completely disappeared. Islam had no use for a miracle in this story and, in consequence, it has degenerated into mere historical detail.

8

Yosippon and the Story of the Seventy

Around the turn of the Christian millennium, there are major changes in the way our legend is treated among the Jews. These derive from a new text, that known under the name of Yosippon. Most of the other texts of Jewish background up to the sixteenth century that we shall consider here are touched by Yosippon in one way or another, reflecting the position of importance, even dominance, which that work attained in Jewish literary culture.

Sepher Yosippon (Josippon), the *Book of Yosippon*, was produced probably in the tenth century, perhaps in southern Italy, originally in Hebrew, though this may not be true for all of it. It pretended to be a Hebrew version of the work of Josephus.[1] (Hence the name Yosippon, a Hebraisation of that name.[2]) We have no idea of the identity of the author. The text covers some of the same ground as Josephus and uses authentic material from that writer. It is less of a real history, tending more to the fantastic and the fanciful. Versions of this work are known in many and varied languages, including Arabic, Ethiopic, Old Russian, Latin, German, French, English, Czech, Polish, Yiddish and Ladino.[3] Those into Arabic, Ethiopic and Old Russian,[4] unlike the rest, antedate the age of printing. We still lack editions of these versions; the textual relationships between these and other texts are unclear, and matters are complicated still further by the fact that the work, like that of Josephus himself, became early the object of special interest among Christians in Europe because of alleged references in it to Jesus.

[1] See Flusser 1978–80. For the background of the work and its sources see also Bell 1987; Flusser 1987.

[2] For more on the relationship between Josephus-Yosippon in the Byzantine environment see Bowman 1987.

[3] For details of these see Flusser 1978–80:II, 60–63, with further references.

[4] For the Old Russian see Flusser 1978–80:II, 61–63. What we have now in Old Russian does not include the story of the Seventy, but as Flusser says the matter awaits further investigation, especially of the Russian versions of Josephus.

The Hebrew original of Yosippon tells us the following:[5]

[Chapter 12: the Translation of the Seventy]
And Ptolemy (Heb. Talmai) the Macedonian who had been made king over the kingdom of Egypt (was) a wise and intelligent man, who loved to read books. And he commanded two of his ministers (Heb. *sarim*) to collect many books. These are the names of the ministers: the name of the one was Aristaeus and the name of the second was Andreius. And they collected books – the books of the Medes and the Persians, and the books of all the languages. And the king said to them: how many books have you (collected)? And they said to him: Nine hundred and ninety five. And Ptolemy laughed (or: joked) and said: Let's add another five and make up a thousand! And Aristaeus and Andreius said to him: May it please my (sic) Lord, in vain have we worked (to collect) these books, for there is no benefit in them. If it seems good to the king, let him write to Jerusalem, to the Priest, and let him send to you from among the wise men who are in Jerusalem (men) who know the Greek language and let them translate (or: explain) for you their Torah, for that is the holy writing; but all the writings and books which we have written,[6] they are (but) vanity.

And the king did thus, and sent letters and a gift to the priest who was in those days and asked him about this matter. And the priest sent him seventy (or: the seventy) priests and also El'azar at their head – that is El'azar who was tested in the days of Antiochus and was killed for the sake of the Lord his God. And it came to pass, when El'azar and the seventy priest-interpreters came to Egypt, Ptolemy gave them seventy houses and he separated each man from his companion(s) and he set together with each one of them scribes who knew how to write, and the priests translated the whole of the Torah and the Scriptures (Heb. *miqra'*), twenty and four books which the seventy elders translated from the Holy Tongue into the Greek language. And El'azar brought their writing(s) before the king, and the king read the writing (*miqra'*) that each one of them had translated, and, behold, one mind and one translation from all of the translators.

And the king rejoiced greatly and brought out silver and gold in abundance and gave (it) to El'azar and to the seventy elders, and he sent them (back) to Jerusalem. And further he set free on that day of Judah a hundred and fifty thousand and he gave to each one of them a hundred and fifty drachmas of gold. And he sent a gift to the house of our God, a table of pure gold, a thousand talents in weight, and he engraved on it the land of Egypt and the river Nile (Heb. Shihor), the Nile (Heb. Ye'or) which is in Egypt, and the likeness of how it goes out and waters all the land of Egypt, and he enclosed on the table all (kinds of) precious stones; nothing like this table had been seen in all the land. And the king Ptolemy sent it as a gift to the house of the great and mighty God, God of the world.

[5] Flusser 1978–80:I, 64–66; see also Flusser 1978 (photographic reprint of the manuscript, Jerusalem 8°41280):74–75.

[6] The narrative logic here demands "collected", but the text has "written", perhaps echoing some idea about copying of texts, perhaps simply a slip.

The story as we have it here is clearly a mélange of elements taken partly from the Talmud and other texts in Hebrew and Aramaic but more from the Greek tradition of Josephus, Philo and the *Letter of Aristeas*. In isolation, without regard to the language of this text, such a mixture might not surprise, but in a Jewish text composed in Hebrew in the ninth or tenth century, the use of elements that can come only from a Greek linguistic background is striking.

Any links with ancient Greek sources are not direct, for the differences between them and this text, both in structure and in detail, show that the author of this text has confused a good deal of the original. The description with which the story begins, of the Ptolemy's love of learning and interest in books, has appeared frequently already, in the early Christian sources and elsewhere, providing a plausible background for the story to come. We note the loss of Demetrius as librarian and his replacement by Aristaeus and Andreius, whose function in the original was that of bodyguards. The number of the translators is here seventy, not seventy-two; the correlation between the twelve tribes and the number of six translators from each has been lost; similarly, the identity of El'azar, as High Priest, has been lost, and he is now represented as leader of the translators, making a total of seventy-one.

The narrative strand concerning the collection of books for the library here is also different from the Christian sources and closer to the *Letter* and Josephus. In those texts, as also here, the king's collection is not intended to encompass all the books in the world but rather to be a fine collection without any such universal ambition.[7] The king's joke is a new element, built upon or invented for the change in the number of the books reported as collected so far for the library. Now the total falls a mere five short of a round thousand, and the king's joke is, can be, only intended to serve as the introduction to the proposal to acquire the Five Books of Moses: nine hundred and ninety-five plus five gives a round thousand.

The change in the number of the books in the royal collection is lost as the story progresses, for we learn nothing of five books being translated; instead we learn of the Torah and of the Scriptures as a whole, explicitly making a total of twenty-four books added to the royal collection. Not only is the point of the joke lost in this way but a careful reading of what follows shows rather more; the two librarians in this version of the story bring in a completely new consideration when they point out to the king that "in vain have we worked (to collect) these books", because "there is no benefit in them". So they offer

[7] The remark about the books of the Medes and Persians is of course biblical, but although the biblical reference was to laws, here the implication is rather that of books of the great civilizations. The following phrase "of all languages", certainly hints at the idea of universality in the task of acquisition of books, but the new narrative elements of the king's joke and of the relative value of the different texts show that this hint at universality is no more than a literary flourish here.

a solution to this new problematic aspect of the library, namely that he should "write to Jerusalem, to the Priest", with the aim that the Priest should send him a book that is worth reading. This is a very different aim from that implied by a collection which is simply five short of a round thousand volumes.[8]

The identification of El'azar with the (quite different) El'azar who was tortured and martyred later has no background in the earlier material from Jewish sources, though it is found twice in earlier Christian sources. As we saw in Chapter 5, the story is well known to early Christian authors who knew it from the apocryphal Books of the Maccabees. How did Yosippon, whose author was certainly a Jew, find access to texts which formed part of the Christian tradition?

Again, the freeing of the captives follows the sources, but with differences. Here they are freed after the completion and as a consequence of the translation, their number is far greater than we have heard before, and the sums of money they are given are much greater too. Here we are, even more than in earlier sources, clearly in the realm of romance. And the table which the king sends as a gift to the Temple is clearly taken from the table in the *Letter* and in Josephus, as it is found scarcely anywhere else in our sources.

In the present story the king separates the translators, places each one in a separate house along with a scribe, and then compares their results; the result is "behold, one mind and one translation from all of the translators". Here we have not only the notion of the miracle, which, as has been seen, is not present in the early Greek sources at all, but also a feature on which that element depends, the separation of the translators. This element is wholly absent from Josephus, as also from the *Letter*. There seems to be an echo here rather of the Philonic tradition, with such expressions as "all alike used the same words and phrases, as though some invisible prompter whispered in the ears of each". This is a Jewish version, but one which lacks acquaintance with the most Jewish elements in this narrative tradition (Philo of course survived outside that tradition). The most striking illustration of this is the absence here of any reference to the changes which the translators are alleged to have made in the text that they produced for Ptolemy.

Flusser, in his edition of this text, determined that the source of this story in Yosippon is not the *Letter of Aristeas* but the version of the story in Josephus. However, it is worth stressing that as a source, the text of Josephus, whatever its

[8] The number of volumes mentioned by the librarians is very low. Most sources that give a figure for the size of the collection give a vastly greater number. Is this an echo of the situation in the territory where this text was composed and a reflection of the sizes of libraries there? Our large figures come from ancient Egypt and classical Islam; there we know of libraries with very large holdings. In late antiquity and Christian western Europe, by contrast, libraries seem to have been much smaller. In Byzantium things may have been intermediate, but if this text comes from a Greek linguistic environment, then this detail seems on this account all the more interesting. For some figures see D. Wasserstein 1990–91, with further references.

overall relation to Yosippon, is not a direct source here, nor is it by any means the only source. The confusion of motives behind the desire to acquire the Jewish scriptures identified here shows that there is very likely to have been at least one intermediate source between Josephus and this text. The librarians' attitude to the value of the nine hundred and ninety-five non-Jewish works already in the collection has been added to the existing tale and the knitting of the details is not perfect.

As just mentioned, the Yosippon text was translated into various other languages in the middle ages. Two of these translations are into Arabic.[9] Sela shows that there were two basic versions of Yosippon in Arabic: one including only the sections related to the Maccabees, whence the title under which this version is known, the Book of the Maccabees (not to be confused with the apocryphal Books of the Maccabees), and another, longer version in which essentially the whole of the Hebrew Yosippon is reflected, which she calls the Book of Joseph bin Gurion. The text of the Arabic Book of the Maccabees has the following:[10]

An Account of the Translation of the Four and Twenty Books for T[h]ulmai the king of Egypt from the Hebrew language into the Greek language. And he is Butlimus.

There was a man of the people of Macedonia called Thulmai, and he was a man of learning and understanding and he lived in Egypt. And the Egyptians made him king over the land of Egypt, and he grew in love for the search for learning and collection of all the books of the wise of every place. And he wanted to possess the four and twenty books. So he wrote to the High Priest (Ar. *al-kahin al-akbar*) to Jerusalem (Ar. *al-bayt al-maqdis*) that he should send him of those who were learned in these books seventy elders. And he sent the letter together with a gift to the priest. And when the letter of the king came to the priest he chose seventy learned men and sent them with a man called El'azar who was possessed of excellence in his religion and his learning and his culture (Ar. *adab*) and he went to Egypt. And when the king knew of their coming he vacated for them seventy dwellings and ordered that they should be lodged therein. And he ordered that a scribe should be (given) to each of them to write down from him the translation of these books in Greek script (Ar. *al-khatt al-yunani*) and in Greek language. And he made sure that none of these seventy should come into contact with the others, so that there should not occur any agreement among them about making any changes in it. So the scribes wrote down from each of them a version (Ar. *nuskha*) of the four and twenty books. And when the versions were complete, El'azar brought them to the king. And he set about comparing them in his presence. And they were compared and they were found to agree. And the king rejoiced at that and ordered large

[9] See Wellhausen 1897; Sela 1991.

[10] Sela 1991:101 (modern Hebrew translation ibid., 178). The text is printed in Walton's *Polyglot* of 1645:4, 112f.

(amounts of) money to be distributed among the people. And he gave El'azar an enormous reward. And he freed on that day the rest of the captives who were in Egypt of the people of Judah and of the people of Benjamin,[11] so that they might return to their land of al-Sham (Syria). And their total came to about a hundred and thirty thousand. And he ordered money to be distributed to them in such a way that many dinars should go from him to each of them. And they took (the money) and they went to their land. Then he went on to order that an enormous table should be made of pure gold, containing a picture of the land of Egypt in its entirety and a picture of the Nile from the start of its path to there and its splitting up in all of it, and how it waters the whole of the land. And he ordered that it should be inlaid with many jewels. And this table was made and the picture was made firmly on it. And the jewels were inlaid in it and it was carried to the city of Jerusalem (Ar. *Bayt al-Maqdis)* as a gift to the great house (= the Temple) and it arrived safely and it was placed in the House as the king had ordered. And the people had not seen its like for beauty of shape and skill of workmanship.

This is far from a literal version of the Hebrew text that we saw earlier. It has very close links with that text, but there are also some curious differences between the two. These come out better if we look also at the version of the story found in the other Arabic translation of Yosippon, identified by Sela in her edition as the Book of Joseph bin Gurion. This is as follows:

An account of how Ptolemy the king ordered the translation of the Book of the Torah and the Prophets, the twenty four books, from the Hebrew language to the Greek language so that his people could understand it in their own language.

The author of the book says: at that time there was a man of the people of Macedonia called Thalmai. He loved wisdom and the sciences and cared for them greatly and was devoted to them and he lived in the land of Egypt. And the Egyptians made him king over themselves. And when he was king, he grew in love for learning and eagerness for it and was interested in all books and sought them from every nation and every place. (Some manuscripts add: And it is related about him that there did not remain a single book in the world but he got hold of a copy of it. And one day he said to one of his companions called Demetrius, "Is there in any place, far or near, a book which I have not got hold of?" And he answered him, "Yes, Your Majesty. In the land of the Jews are books which some people claim came down from heaven and those, Your Majesty, are not with us". And when he heard that his soul desired them.) And he was told about the twenty four books of the Jews and his soul desired them and he wanted to acquire them and he wrote to the High Priest (Ar. *al-kahin al-kabir*) who was in Jerusalem (Ar. *Bayt al-Maqdis*) at that time and asked him to send him seventy elders from among the learned and wise men of the Jews. And he sent him a magnificent gift. And when the gift and the letter

[11] That is, the two tribes usually identified as those which were not taken away into permanent exile.

reached the High Priest (Ar. *al-kahin al-akbar*) he selected seventy of the learned elders of the Jews and sent them to Thulmai king of Egypt, together with one of the priests called El'azar. This was an outstanding man, respected among his people for his learning and his religion. And when Talmai the king learned of their departure from Jerusalem (Ar. *Bayt al-Maqdis*) he ordered that seventy dwellings should be vacated for them; and when they reached Egypt he ordered that they should be welcomed and honoured and that each man should be lodged in a separate dwelling, with none of them meeting his fellow. And he did that purely in order that they should not act in concert to change anything in the book which they were translating. Then he ordered that a Greek scribe should be attached to each of them, to write down from him what he translated from the Hebrew language to the Greek, until the twenty four books were (or: so that the twenty four books might be) translated into the Greek language. (Some manuscripts add: And he swore that if in a single one of the versions he found any difference or distortion or addition or taking away he would execute them with terrible cruelty. And when they knew what he planned and understood his intention each of them set about his task with the greatest precision and accuracy.) And when the versions were completed, that is seventy versions, El'azar the priest brought them before Thulmai the king and he ordered that they should be compared with the (original) book from which they had translated, and the comparison was made and all of them were in agreement, not differing in anything. And he was delighted at that and he thanked the people, and he ordered that they be given much money, and he ordered a (special) gift for El'azar and he freed all the Jewish captives who were in Egypt and he ordered that they be given much money and he gave them permission to return to their land and he ordered that a great table be made of pure gold and that upon it there should be made an image of the whole of the land of Egypt and an image of the Nile and of how it flows in it so as to water all its estates; and the table was made wonderfully and inlaid with precious jewels. And when it was complete he ordered that it be carried to Jerusalem (Ar. *Madinat al-Quds*) as a gift to the House of God (i.e., the Temple), may He be mighty and glorious. And the table was carried to the House of God and was there, and the people had never seen its like for beauty and perfection and excellence of workmanship.

There are a number of differences between these two versions and their Hebrew original. The most obvious is the absence of the king's joke in the Arabic versions. Another difference is more substantial. In the Hebrew version, the miraculous agreement of the translators has lost much of its significance. We hear there that the king "separated each man from his companion(s)", and that he "set together with each one of them scribes who knew how to write"; the seventy carried out the translation, and "the king read the writing (or: text; Heb. *miqra'*) that each one of them had translated, and, behold, one mind and one translation from all of the translators". This is indeed something like a miracle, but it is not our original miracle story. We are not told here explicitly

what the king's motive was in separating the translators, nor are we given any reason why he might have thought it expedient or useful to do so. And when their work is completed, all the king does is "read" them, not compare them. As a result, his delight at finding "one mind and one translation from all the translators" is nothing more than the reaction of a man pleased with the product of an exercise given to a number of experts. There is a miracle in the Hebrew only if we know the story before we read it. In the two Arabic versions, by contrast, all is restored, if with minor variations.

There are other differences too. These can be summed up as a progressive diminution of circumstantial detail as we go from the Hebrew version through the Arabic Maccabees to the Book of Joseph bin Gurion. In the Hebrew, we have the two ministers, but these disappear in both Arabic versions. The Hebrew has a reference to the Medes and Persians, in the context of the collecting of the books ("And they collected books – the books of the Medes and the Persians, and the books of all the languages"); the two Arabic versions lack this. Although we do find references to the Persians in some of the versions of our story, we never find the Medes referred to. This is scarcely surprising, given how little an impression the Medes left on history. But they are part of the Jewish tradition, known to all from the reference to them in the book of Daniel (6:8 "Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not"), and the reference to them here, for all its incongruity in a context of libraries, can come only from a Jewish, and perhaps also a Hebrew, background.

Further comparison shows that although all the versions know El'azar, only the Hebrew associates him with the El'azar who was tortured by Antiochus. The Hebrew has the exact number of the captives who were freed by the king: 150,000; the Book of the Maccabees has a different number, 130,000, and the Book of Joseph bin Gurion has no number at all. Only in the Hebrew do we learn how much money was given to each of the captives when he regained his freedom, 150 drachmas; both Arabic versions simply report a gift of an unspecified amount of money. The Hebrew gives two (originally Egyptian) names for the river Nile, both of them known only in Hebrew, from the Bible, and both of them found only in this version of the story, whereas the Arabic versions use the simple Arabic version of the Greek name, al-Nil.

On the other hand, the first Arabic version (which is generally fuller than the second) refers to the captives who were freed as belonging to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, unlike the Hebrew and the second Arabic version; similarly, it records the name of the country to which they returned, al-Sham (Syria). And the second Arabic version, at least in some manuscripts, refers to the story of Demetrius. This is more complex than merely a matter of variety as between different versions, for it could not easily have appeared in the Hebrew, in the company of the two ministers and the joke, without creating structural

difficulties. Have we to do here with an interpolation of some sort, and, if so, of what date?

Some of this extra material, like that connected with the name of Demetrius and the reference to Antiochus, descends in some way from ancient sources, even if it has become corrupted and confused along the way. If the Hebrew is indeed a production of the Byzantine world, then the easier availability of Greek texts there suggests a route by which such materials could have entered the textual transmission. Similarly, it might help explain the absence of such details from the Arabic versions of the story in this text. The inter-relationships of these three versions are clearly not simple, and the likelihood must be that contamination has occurred between them. In the present state of our knowledge it is impossible to draw a simple chronological scheme including all of them.

Another version of the story of the LXX, taken explicitly from Yosippon, is found in Ibn Khaldun.[12] His version is different from those that we have elsewhere in the Yosippon tradition:[13]

Ibn Kuryun says: Then the Torah was translated for the Greeks, and this was as follows: Tilmay was king of Egypt after Alexander, and he was of the people of Macedonia, and he loved the sciences, was devoted to wisdom and the divine books. And he was told about the four and twenty volumes of the books of the Jews, and his soul longed to get hold of them. So he wrote to the (high) priest of Jerusalem about this, and he granted it to him, and he chose seventy of the rabbis and learned men of the Jews, among them an important priest called Eleazar, and he sent them to them (sic), together with the volumes. And he gave them an honourable reception, and treated them most hospitably, and he assigned to each one a scribe to whom he could dictate what he translated for him, until the volumes were translated from Hebrew into Greek, and he checked them and released the rabbis and allowed those Jewish prisoners who were in Egypt to go away with them – in the region of one hundred thousand – and he made a table of gold upon which was engraved a picture of the land of Egypt and the Nile, and he inlaid it with precious stones and gems, and he sent it to Jerusalem and it was placed in the Temple.

The text goes on to tell us that, following the death of Tilmay, Antiochus conquered Syria and Egypt, and ordered people to worship idols. The Jews refused to do so. He sent a new governor to Jerusalem, with orders to compel them to bow down to his idols, to eat pork, and to give up observance of the Sabbath and the practice of circumcision. It then tells us,[14] "And Eleazar and the priest who had translated the Torah for them were killed when they refused to bow down to his idol and to eat his sacrifices."

[12] See also Fischel 1956; 1954.
[13] Ibn Khaldun 1956:228–29.
[14] Ibn Khaldun 1956:230.

Ibn Khaldun tells us here explicitly that he is using "Ibn Kuryun", that is, Yosippon, as his source. The Arabic version to which this quotation is a witness seems to be different from those that we have just looked at. This is in itself of significance for the history of that text. In relation to Ibn Khaldun, however, what is of greater moment is the fact of his citing from this Jewish source at all. That he could know it is not so very surprising, given the existence of at least two Arabic translations. But his knowledge of it is testimony to the breadth of his learning and of his interest in a society where texts of Jewish background, even the Bible itself, did not tend to attract large readerships.

Even without the explicit acknowledgement of his source by Ibn Khaldun, we should have been able to see that he had borrowed from a source written originally in Hebrew. The use of the form Tilmay for the name of Ptolemy is sufficient to show us that this is a translation from the Hebrew. This, with minor variations, is the regular form in Hebrew. Texts written in Arabic use forms, like Batlamiyus, closer to the original Greek for this name, as we have seen. The number of the captives released by Ptolemy, by contrast, one hundred thousand, is surprising: on the one hand it does not conform to any of the figures which we find elsewhere in the Yosippon material, whereas, on the other, it is precisely the number which we find in the *Letter of Aristeas* (§19). This does not, however, indicate acquaintance with the *Letter* on the part of Ibn Khaldun; rather, simply how the text of Yosippon is full of minor variations in detail of this sort.

We also have an Ethiopic version of the text of the Yosippon, made from the Arabic, under the title *Zena Ayhud*, and there too we find the story. The Ethiopic text, a very literal translation from the first Arabic version, was published by Kamil in 1937.[15] Kamil tells us that the earliest surviving manuscript of this version of the text comes from the end of the sixteenth century, but he suggests that the execution of the translation should be dated to the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, the high period of translation into Ethiopic. He also suggests that the translation may have been made in order to satisfy a demand for the Books of the Maccabees in that language. Until the end of the sixteenth century, there was no Ethiopic translation of these books of the Apocrypha, and the Arabic version of Yosippon in question here bore the title *Book of the Maccabees*. If he is right, and the translation was made in the thirteenth century, this means that we have in Ethiopic by the end of the sixteenth century two versions of the legend: Yosippon and the text by Ibn al-Rahib similarly translated from Arabic.

The Book of Yosippon enjoyed enormous, and in terms of its historical reliability quite unjustified, popularity among medieval Jews. We see its traces in a

[15] Kamil 1937:49–51.

number of other texts of the middle ages. Historiography in general was not a popular or an important literary genre among medieval Jews, so it is not very surprising that this romanticised version of the story should crop up in texts where it serves purposes more of entertainment than of history *stricto sensu*.

Yosippon has a complex textual and manuscript history, which even the authoritative researches of Flusser have not completely clarified. Among the lesser difficulties associated with the work are two related to our story. The first concerns another work of obscure textual history and extremely variegated contents, the so-called *Chronicles of Jerahmeel*. This work, published in English translation by Gaster as long ago as 1899, appeared in print in its original Hebrew only as recently as 2001, in an edition by Yassif.[16] He has sorted out many of the difficulties connected with the text and its composition. The text appears to be a composite made by one Eleazar ben Asher Halevi, in the fourteenth century, in his *Sepher ha-Zikhronot* ("Book of Memories"), of a work of the late eleventh or early twelfth century called *Sepher Toldot* ("Chronicles") of Jerahmeel ben Solomon. Beyond what we find in the text itself, nothing is known of either of these writers. Much of the contents of both works is legend, much too is borrowed whole cloth from earlier writers. Among the borrowings in the *Sepher Toldot*, taken over into the *Sepher ha-Zikhronot*, is a word-for-word set of extracts from Yosippon, and these include our story.[17] This demonstrates that the story was known in the period between the tenth and the fourteenth centuries. We have no other witnesses to the story at all (leaving aside the Ethiopic one just mentioned) in this long period, and this raises a question to which we shall return.

The second problem connected with the history of the Book of Yosippon concerns a short Byzantine chronicle which shares its manuscript history, in Hebrew, in part with that work. It is published by Flusser in his edition of Yosippon, and a version occurs also in the edition by Kazis of *The Book of the Gests of Alexander of Macedon*. This latter work is a medieval Hebrew version of the Alexander Romance. It is preserved in more than one manuscript but usually without any indication of the name of the author. However, it was also preserved in a manuscript once in the Royal Library in Turin which was apparently destroyed by fire. There, according to a published version of the first page of the manuscript, it was described as the *Sepher Toldot Alexandros ha-Makdoni* ("The Book of the History of Alexander the Macedonian") and ascribed to someone called Immanuel ben Jacob Bonfils. The text of this Hebrew Alexander Romance does not have anything of relevance here. But a manuscript of the work in Parma also contains other material with some relevance to Alexander, and that includes a Hebrew version of a short Byzantine chronicle, just a couple

[16] Jerahmeel 1899, Jerahmeel 2001.
[17] Jerahmeel 2001:286–87.

of pages long. It is a summary of events from the death of Alexander to Pompey's capture of Jerusalem. Apart from the Parma manuscript, it occurs in the Paris manuscript of *The Book of Gests* and as an interpolation in Yosippon, and it apparently represents a translation of a Greek source based originally on the *Chronicon* of Eusebius. According to Flusser, this short text is an "organic element" of the Hebrew Alexander Romance, and he deduces from the smoothness of the transition from the one to the other that the same Greek writer was responsible for both original texts.[18] Because the *Chronicon Paschale* seems to be an intermediate step between the *Chronicon* of Eusebius and the author of this little text, and because the *Chronicon Paschale* belongs to the seventh century, we seem to be able to place the original composition of the Greek original of this short Hebrew text somewhere between the seventh and the tenth centuries. We cannot know with any certainty when it became so closely associated with the Alexander Romance. The text given by Flusser in his edition of Yosippon offers the following:[19]

Then there ruled Iptolomeius (i.e. Ptolemy) called Philadelphus son of Iptolomeius Ulugus (i.e., Lagos), thirty eight years, and he built the Pharo which is in Alexandria. And he brought the books of the Jews to the land of Hellas (sic) and placed them in Alexandria. And then Eleazar the brother of Simon became High Priest. And then the Jews who were captive in the land of Egypt went out free. And then this king sent to Jerusalem and took Eleazar the priest to explain and to interpret for him all the books of the Jews in the tongue of the Greeks.[20]

As can be seen, there is so little in this short passage that we might be forgiven for wondering whether it really is some kind of rehearsal of the original story. But the presence of Eleazar and the captives suffices to confirm its background, whereas the presence of Simon reminds us of the influences from external, non-Jewish sources acting on the development of the story in later times. The real importance of the passage here, in the context of the Alexander Romance rather than in that of Yosippon, lies elsewhere.

As we have seen, the story of the Seventy occurs in all sorts of texts. It occurs among Rabbanite Jews, Karaites and Samaritans. Among all of them, it is striking that we have virtually nothing in texts composed between the tenth century and the second half of the fourteenth century. Much the same seems to

[18] Flusser 1978–80:II, 241; and see more generally 236–48.

[19] Flusser 1978–80:I, 484–85.

[20] The second sentence of this version ("And he brought the books of the Jews to the land of Hellas (sic) and placed them in Alexandria") is not in the version published by Kazis (Alexander 1962:107 of the Hebrew text; 174 of the English) and seems odd both because of the presence in it of the place-name Hellas and because it seems to break up the narrative logic of the text. Flusser (1978–80:I, 485, n. 5) explains that the original, taken from the *Chronicon Paschale* (173a), said "to Greek", but that the translator misunderstood this as = "to Greece".

be true of the world of Latin Christendom. The first exception is the word-for-word quotation of the Yosippon version in the *Chronicles of Jerahmeel*, which we have just considered. The second is this little summary, even echo, of the story in the textual morass surrounding Yosippon and the Hebrew *Gests of Alexander*. We cannot be confident of the date of this work, but Kazis suggested that we should identify the author of the romance (more accurately perhaps translator from "the language of the Christians") as Immanuel ben Jacob Bonfils.

This Bonfils was a physician and scholar who lived in southern France and was active between about 1340 and about 1356. He wrote and taught in Tarascon on mathematics and astronomy. Apart from this translation we have a number of works by him on mathematical and astronomical topics. He was one of the earliest writers to discuss decimal fractions, but the most famous of his works, *Sheshet ha-Knafayim* ("The Six Wings"), written in 1365, is a set of astronomical tables. These are based on an earlier work, of the ninth century, in Arabic, but they are adjusted both for the latitude and longitude of Tarascon and to the shape of the Jewish calendar. They were widely influential in Europe, were translated into Latin (in 1406) and Byzantine Greek (around 1435), and remained in use as late as the seventeenth century.[21] If the attribution of the Alexander Romance text to this Bonfils is correct, and if the dating for him is also correct, then this little passage seems to be our earliest Jewish example, other than the quotation in Jerahmeel, of the legend of the Seventy in Christian Europe in the second Christian millennium.

The Yosippon version or versions continued to travel onwards. We find yet another occurrence in a text attributed variously to two of the descendants of the great Moses Maimonides. Members of his family inherited some of his aura and greatness, and for several generations also the mantle of his authority, bearing the honorific title of Nagid among Jews in Egypt and Syria, now under the rule of the Mamluks. Among them were his grandson David b. Abraham b. Moses (1222–1300) and that grandson's own great grandson, David (II) b. Joshua b. Abraham (II) b. David b. Abraham b. Moses (ca. 1335–1415).[22] The story occurs in a set of homilies, called *Midrash David ha-Nagid*, attributed to the earlier of these two figures. Unfortunately the work is also attributed to the later one, this man's great-grandson, David (II) b. Joshua.[23] We cannot be sure that either actually composed the book. The *Midrash* is a collection of Sabbath homilies, and their appearance and language encourage the supposition that we have not to do here with a regular work of literary form and composition. The fact that the work is a collection of homilies for the Sabbath has led some

[21] *EJ*, vol. 4, cols. 1207–08.
[22] There is a handy genealogical table at Fenton 1987:44.
[23] See Katsh 1957–58; Goitein 1965; Hurvitz 1966; Fenton 1984; 2000.

scholars to propose that the text that we have here represents notes taken down after the Sabbath (when writing is forbidden) by one of the disciples of the man who had uttered them, whether a descendant of Maimonides or another. There is little way of deciding the matter. The character of one element in our text, of central significance for us here, is such that some sort of oral transmission would offer a convenient explanation of part of the complex of problems surrounding this text.

This text is in Judeo-Arabic; it is unpublished in the original but survives in a number of manuscripts, and a modern Hebrew translation of the text as it is preserved in one of these manuscripts, in Moscow, was published in Jerusalem in 1964.[24] In the section of the collection of homilies dealing with the Sabbath portion *Mi-Qets* (Genesis 41:1–44:17; this is usually read around the time of the feast of Hanukah), this text has the following account:[25]

And so Talmai the king loved the house of God (i.e., the Temple) greatly, and he was a man of qualities (Ar. *fada'il*) from the start. And when he ascended the throne, he also came to love learning and desired to acquire it and he gave orders to collect all books and to seek them from every country. And when they told him about the Torah and the Prophets he sought to find out about them, and he sent a letter to Jerusalem to the High Priest together with great and wonderful gifts and asked him to send him seventy elders from among the great and excellent and wise men of the Jews. And when the letter and the gifts reached the High Priest, he selected for him seventy elders, from among the most learned of those in Israel, and he sent them to him, together with Eleazar the priest, leader of the priests, who was a man of superior quality, very worthy, an excellent man of great wisdom and religion and manners (Ar. *adabihi*). And when Talmai heard about their qualities, he ordered that seventy dwellings be vacated for them and that they be received with honour and glory, and that they should lodge each man of them in a separate house, and that none of them should (be allowed to) meet his fellows. And he did this only in order that they should not make an agreement among themselves to change anything in the books which they would translate. Afterwards he ordered that to each one should be assigned a scribe from among the Greeks, who would write down the explanation (or: translation; Ar. *tafsir*) of the Torah in Greek, so that each of these scribes should write down the explanation (or: translation; Ar. *tafsir*) which the elder would dictate to him, in all twenty four of the books of the Bible, in Greek. And when the seventy copies were complete, the priest [scil. Eleazar] brought them to the king Talmay and he ordered that they be compared

[24] David 1964. Sela 1991:I, 63, with 78–79 n. 3 refers to the passage in David ha-Nagid but does not discuss this narrative element in it directly.

[25] See David 1964:195–96; I have made several corrections to this version in rendering it in English by comparing it with the original in the collection of the Institute for Microfilms of Hebrew Manuscripts in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem (the manuscript is Moscow Guenzburg 1033).

with each other, and they examined them against each other and found them all in agreement without any difference between them even in so much as a single letter. [This was so] even though all of them had agreed to change thirteen places in the Torah which were capable of a different interpretation, in order that the Torah should not be interpreted in a way opposed to its real meaning.
For example:

[1] 'In the beginning God created' (Gen 1:1): they wrote 'God created in the beginning'.
[2] 'Let us make man in our image after our likeness' (Gen 1:26): they wrote 'in the image and likeness'.
[3] 'Male and female' (Gen 1:27): they wrote 'male and pierced'.
[4] 'And God complete (His work) on the seventh day' (Gen 2:2): they wrote 'And God completed (His work) on the sixth day'.
[5] 'In their anger they have killed a man' (Gen 49:6): they wrote 'In their anger they have killed an ox'.
[6] 'And the hare (Heb. *arnevet*)' (Lev 11:6): they wrote 'And the young-legged', for his wife was called Arnevet and they feared lest he should think that they did this craftily, and thus made a link between her and this animal which is unclean in the Torah.

And even though the seventy elders had not come to any agreement earlier about this, God, may He be exalted, inspired them so that their minds agreed as one without their making any prior agreement about any of this, for their minds agreed as one and there was no difference between them even in so much as a single letter.

And when Talmai found that they were all in agreement about everything, he was happy and rejoiced about this and he thanked them and gave them much wealth and he gave to Eleazar the priest a huge gift, and the honour of Israel grew in his eyes and he gave orders for the liberation of all the Jewish captives who were in his kingdom. And they numbered more than one hundred thousand people, (both) men and women. And he gave them much wealth and sent them to their land with honour and riches. And afterwards he ordered the making of a great table of pure gold and that they should draw upon it the likeness of all the land of Egypt entirely with upon it the shape of the Nile, and how it divides and passes through the land to water it. And the making of the table was carried out such that no man had seen its like for excellence and beauty and perfection of manufacture, and it was decorated with precious and valuable stones. After that he ordered that it be brought to the house of God, may He be blessed, and it remained in Jerusalem (? the Temple; Judeo-Arabic *fi al-maqdis*) until the time when the Greeks seized it and took it. And so too all the rest of the kings of Greece were at first respectful of the house of God, may He be blessed, and carried gifts to it.

Flusser, in his edition of the Hebrew Yosippon, compared the modern Hebrew translation of this passage with Yosippon and confirmed that our text is indeed based on that work. He did not however investigate the differences or ask what

their origins might be. It is easy to see, even via translations, that there is indeed a close link between the text here and that of Yosippon. That link is made closer still if we compare this text, not with the Hebrew text of Yosippon but with the two Arabic versions that we have looked at. But there are also differences.

Most importantly, while David ha-Nagid has the story of the changes and the list of them, the Arabic version of Yosippon lacks this element of the story completely. A verbal comparison between the Arabic versions of Yosippon and the text of David ha-Nagid, while it shows the closeness of David ha-Nagid to the second Arabic version, also shows that he is borrowing from elsewhere too.

We shall see that the element of the changes, with or without the list, crops up in different places in the material associated with Yosippon several more times, and on every occasion it raises problems which are very difficult or impossible to solve. In this case we must leave the problem for a while.

David (II) ha-Nagid lived and worked in Egypt and Syria. Among those he taught and inspired there was Joseph ben Eliezer ben Joseph Bonfils (in Hebrew Tov 'Elem), probably not related to the Bonfils whom we looked at earlier. He probably lived in the second half of the fourteenth century and came from Spain. From there he moved to the east. In Damascus in 1370, with the encouragement of the *nagid* himself, David (II) b. Joshua, he composed his great super-commentary, *Tsofnat Pa'aneah*, on the Pentateuch commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra. As we saw it is possible that the authorship of the text which we examined earlier may be attributed to his patron, David (II) b. Joshua, and not to his great-grandfather. In this work, which is distinguished for its exhaustiveness and precision, Bonfils writes:[26]

Know that Ptolemy (b.t.l.m.y.w.s) king of Egypt, who is Talmay the king for whom our teachers wrote the Torah in Greek, was the deputy of Alexander of Macedon and both of them were pupils of the learned Aristotle the Greek; and Talmay was wise, great in the learning of the stars and the constellations, and in this learning there has been none like him, before or after, until today, as is testified to by R. Abraham (ibn Ezra) at the beginning of his *Sepher ha-Luhot*. And this Ptolemy made instruments and studied with exactness the positions of the seven servants (i.e., planets) and the positions in the eighth circle of each of the great stars which are known, 1,022 (in number), and found that in 100 years these stars move one degree from west to east. . . .

Bonfils mixes up two completely different people here. He is right to see that "Talmay" is simply the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name "Ptolemy". But the name Ptolemy, in whatever form it occurs, can be borne by more than one person. Here, we have Ptolemy Philadelphus who is the king of Egypt associated with the Septuagint translation. He lived in the third century B.C.E. The

[26] Bonfils 1911:84.

description of him as deputy of Alexander is incorrect but derives clearly from a conflation of him with his father, the founder of the dynasty, who was both an associate and a friend of Alexander. The association of Ptolemy Philadelphus with Aristotle is also not uncommon but completely ahistorical, given that the philosopher died in ca. 322 B.C.E., and Philadelphus was born only in 308 B.C.E. That the father should have known Aristotle is probable. The second Ptolemy here is Claudius Ptolemy, who flourished in the first century C.E., in Alexandria, and was an astronomer, mathematician and geographer whose works exercised enormous influence down to the Renaissance and beyond.[27] The confusion is not uncommon, both in Hebrew and in Arabic texts, but the passing reference to our Ptolemy here shows how far the degeneration of the story has carried the identity of the king, to give him a minor walk-on part in the historiography of science in the middle ages.

This is still not the end of the story for Yosippon. So far we have looked at versions of our story very much in an eastern Mediterranean, culturally Islamic context. For our next version we move to the Christian side of the Mediterranean. Samuel Usque, born probably in the year of the forced conversion of the Jews in Portugal, 1497, was brought up as a New Christian. He knew Latin, Greek and several modern European languages, and he acquired Hebrew too. He read widely in all of these languages, and this is reflected in his writing, where we find echoes of Latin and Greek writers in addition to acquaintance with the Bible and numerous Jewish sources. The latter he can hardly have studied in Portugal, and he must have read them after his exile from that country.

Usque left Portugal only around 1531, when the Inquisition was established there, and we find him in succeeding years in Naples and Ferrara, where many of the Spanish and Portuguese exiles found refuge. He may have travelled further east, to Constantinople and the Holy Land, but at the end of his life he seems to have returned to Italy, to Ferrara, where his *Consolaçam as Tribulaçoens de Israel* appeared in 1553.

The work's aim was indeed to offer comfort to the Jews, especially the exiles from the Iberian peninsula, in the face of their sufferings. Written in Portuguese, it recounted all the persecutions of bygone generations. All the other medieval Jewish texts that we have looked at so far are written in Hebrew or Judeo-Arabic, but this one was aimed at a special kind of Jewish audience: secret Jews, forced converts to Christianity who clung to their Jewish faith, and converts who had been able to escape from Portugal and Spain and find refuge on more welcoming shores, where they could return to the faith of their fathers. These Jews, in particular, needed the comfort of such a book, but they also needed that

[27] Steinschneider, the great Hebrew bibliographer, says of him that "like Amerigo [Vespucci] he had more the luck than the merit to lend his name to a system" (1893:519).

help in a language that they could understand. The more time passed, the less did the forced converts of 1497 retain the language by which Jews were most identified. Hebrew, like everything else reminiscent of Judaism, was proscribed in Portugal, and the establishment of the Inquisition there in 1531 made it all the more dangerous for converts to try to preserve a Jewish identity. The great importance of the *Consolaçam* was, therefore, that it provided those who needed it with material in a language that they could actually read. They might not have access to it in Portugal but they could read it in countries to which they might escape. The first edition of the work appeared in Ferrara and the second, shortly afterwards, in Amsterdam, two of the main centres of the exile of the Portuguese Jews in the sixteenth century.

The book is cast in the form of a dialogue on Jewish history, and we find there, among much else, another long version of the story of the translation of the Bible into Greek:[28]

When Alexander the Macedonian died, four princes followed him as rulers of the empire. One of these, Seleucus [was king in Syria], and another, Ptolemy, was king in Egypt. Ptolemy asked Jerusalem to send him men who could teach him the Law. Seventy priests were sent, and with them, a distinguished man named Eleazar. These teachers expounded the Law to Ptolemy, and they translated the twenty-four books (of the Holy Scriptures) from Hebrew into the Greek tongue. The king separated them when they began to translate, and they altered several passages so as not to confuse his understanding; yet when each one's work was later examined, it was discovered that they were in agreement in everything they had changed, by a miracle of the Lord. The changes were as follows:

The passages which were changed by those who translated the Law

Where it says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1.1), they translated "God created in the beginning," so that it should not be presumed that there was anything first except the Lord.

"Let us make man" (Gen. 1.26), they changed to "I will make man."

[And the passage telling of the building of the tower of Babel], "Let *us* go down and let us there confound their language" (Gen. 11.7), they changed to: *I* will go down and *I* will confound," so that this statement should not lead to the inference that there were many gods.

"Sarah laughed within herself" (Gen. 18.12), they translated "Sarah laughed speaking with those near her," so that the king should not say, "Who told you what went on inside her?"

They translated: "In their anger they slew the ox, and in their self-will they broke the crib" (Gen. 49.6), so that the king should not object, "What relationship is there between a man and an ox?"

[28] Usque 1906:II, vi verso–vii recto; the translation is taken from Usque 1977:117–18 (with some slight adaptation and correction), with notes 34–40, pp. 310–11.

They translated: "And Moses took his wife and his sons and set them upon (an animal) that carries man" (Ex. 4.20), so that the king should not mock Moses, master and giver of the Law, for riding "on an ass."

They translated: "Now the period of time that the children of Israel were in Egypt *and in all other lands* was four hundred and thirty years" (Ex. 12.40). The children of Israel were in Egypt only two hundred and ten years, from the time Jacob said, "I went down there";[29] and the Hebrew letters of these words, "I went down," add up to two hundred and ten years. But their reckoning of four hundred and thirty was from the year of the birth of Isaac, who was Abraham's holy seed.

They translated: "And on the young of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand" (Ex. 24.11); for if they had said "on the big ones," as Scripture says, the king might claim that the adults escaped while the young did not.

They translated: "Nothing that was desirable did I take from them" (Num. 16.15); for if they had followed the Scripture which said, "I did not take an ass," the king would claim: "But he took another gift or present of greater value."

They translated: "For the Lord your God divided them [i.e., the planets of the sky] (that they might give light) to all peoples" (Deut. 4.19). For if they had followed what Scripture says, "The holy and blessed Lord divided them for all peoples," he would think that the Lord gave the people permission to worship the stars.

"He has gone and honored other gods whom I did not command him to honor" (Deut. 17.3): they added "to honor" so that the king should not say "you have already called them to the cult of strange gods."

For "the hare," they used the metaphor "small of foot" (Lev. 11.6; Deut. 14.7); for Ptolemy's[30] mother was also named "Hare," and lest he might think, "The Jews are mocking me", they added 'short of foot'.

In short, they changed all these passages since they understood from the wicked Ptolemy that his intention was to carp on something to divert them from the service of God. But after he saw how all their translations were miraculously in accord, his attitude improved somewhat. He sent them back to Jerusalem with lavish gifts and he freed a hundred and fifty thousand Jews who had gone to live in Egypt, that they might accompany the others back home. In addition he sent a table of pure, solid gold, weighing a thousand talents, to the Temple of the Lord. On it was etched a lifelike picture of the entire land of Egypt and the Nile River, which

[29] I give Cohen's translation. However, as he points out, in n. 37 ad loc., p. 310, this expression is not found in the Bible. Cohen's attempt to explain this, however, seems misplaced. The Portuguese here, *decendey ahi* (and, repeated, *decendei*), shows that the reference is to the biblical passage where Jacob, speaking to his sons, tells them to go down to Egypt, using the imperative plural (Genesis 42:2). The sum of the numerical values of the letters in the Hebrew word *redu* ("go down") is indeed two hundred and ten, as Usque says. This understanding of the Portuguese is confirmed not only by the absence of the word "go down" in the first person singular perfect from the Bible but also by the presence in the Bible (at Genesis 42:2) of the passage cited by our author and by the Hebrew text to be discussed later.

[30] The Portuguese has Seleucus, but this is clearly an error.

runs through it and supplies it with water. Ptolemy also sent various precious stones whose appearance and design were so unusual and marvelous that their like has never again been seen in the world.

Unlike virtually all the other versions of the Septuagint story that we have studied in this volume, this one not only tells us that the translators made changes and lists the places where the changes were made but also tells us what the translators wrote instead of the passages that were changed, and why.

Martin Cohen, the translator of this work into English, tells us that Usque makes heavy ("slavish") use of Yosippon, and suggests that in this passage too Yosippon is Usque's source.[31] Yosippon, however, at least as studied by Flusser, does not have the list of changes. Cohen offers an explanation: "Which of the different versions of the *Yosippon* [Usque] utilized is difficult to determine, for of the various early editions available to him (Mantua, *a.*1480; Constantinople, 1510; Worms, 1529; Basel, 1541), not one contains all the *Yosippon* material found in the *Consolaçam*". He adds, however, first, that the edition of Yosippon published by Sebastian Münster in Worms in 1529 was the edition used by Usque, and secondly, that he himself has used the Basle edition of 1559.[32] Unfortunately, these publications add more difficulties to the Yosippon material than they resolve.

Sebastian Münster (1489–1552) was a prolific and distinguished Hebrew scholar. Born a Catholic, he became a Protestant, and taught Hebrew in Basle from 1529. He studied under the famous Jewish scholar Elijah Levita, and counted Calvin among his pupils. He published a great number of works on Jewish subjects, including some anti-Jewish tracts. His Hebrew Bible, which appeared in 1536, was the first complete edition to be prepared by a Christian, and he also published a Hebrew translation of the Gospel of Matthew in 1537.

Münster's edition of Yosippon appeared in Basle in 1541, among the earliest of the many editions of this work. It claims to be based on the Constantinople edition of 1510. This does not, however, contain the list of changes. It contains the traditional story of the translation as we saw it above, a version which lacks any reference to, far less any list of, the changes. Moreover, despite what Cohen says, there does not seem to be any edition of Yosippon, by Münster or by anyone else, published in Basle and dated 1529 or 1559. There is, however, another book published in Basle in 1529, which includes the name of "Iosippus" on its title page, and it seems also to include material taken from the genuine (if one may use that word in connection with such a farrago) book of Yosippon. Although it does seem to include material from that work, it is not an edition of Yosippon. That is why Flusser ignored it in his edition of that work.

[31] Usque 1977:310, n. 36, with Appendix B, p. 271.

[32] I have also not been able to see the 1529 edition, nor the *editio princeps* of Mantua, of 1480.

The title page of the work proclaims that it contains "Iosippus de bello ivdaico", along with several other items of minor but related interest. "Iosippus de bello ivdaico" is the very first item in the volume, reading from the right-hand end, where Hebrew books normally begin; a page or so from the start it has the following:[33]

Now we shall say that Alexander the first king of Greece when its power grew, died when still young. And his kingdom was divided among his four deputies, as it is written (Daniel 11:4) "And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven". And the king left a small son called Hercules (? Heb. Irkolas) and when the deputy who was his foster-father saw that he was growing up he gave him fatal poison to drink. The deputies also fought among themselves and one of them was Talmay for whom the Torah was written in Greek. He was mistreating and quarrelling with Israel, and seeking a pretext in their Torah in order to expel them, for (Psalms 129:1) "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say". And 70 elders wrote it. Talmay the king separated them from each other, and placed each of them in a separate house all to himself. And the opinion of each of them agreed, to change for him 13 places, and a miracle was performed for them and the opinion of them all agreed to a single opinion. And these are the 13 changes:

1. "God created in the beginning" (Gen 1:1): so as not to place anything before the name of God. And because in the Greek language what comes first is the subject and what comes afterwards is the object,[34] so that it should not sound as though "In the beginning" is the creator and "God" what was created.
2. "Let me make man in the image and the likeness" (Gen 1:26): so that it should not sound as though He was taking counsel with others.
3. "And God finished on the sixth (day) and He rested on the seventh day" (Gen 2:2): so that it should not appear as though He did something on the seventh day and completed it then.
4. "Go to, let me go down and there confound their language" (Gen 11:7): so that it should not appear in the plural.
5. "And Sarah laughed speaking with those near her" (Gen 18:12): so that the king should not maltreat them and say Who told you what was inside her?
6. "And in their anger they slew an ox, and in their self-will they destroyed the crib" (Gen 49:6): so that the king should not make fun of them and say What has a man to do with an ox?
7. "And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon a carrier of man" (Ex 4:20): so that the king should not mock Moses our Teacher, riding on an

[33] Lepusculus 1559:2–9.

[34] The Hebrew has the word *po'el* both for *subject* and for *object* here (unless it should be understood as *po'al*, *verb*, in the second case), but what follows seems to exclude that. The translation adjusts this to take account of what is being argued.

ass, and so that the king should not say How could an ass carry one woman and two sons? This is nothing but wretchedness and disgrace.

8. "Now the sojourning of the Children of Israel who dwelt in Egypt and in the other lands was four hundred and thirty years" (Ex 12:40, with an addition; see Chapter 3 earlier on this): for those in Egypt sojourned there only 210 years. And this is what Jacob their father hinted to them (when he said, in Gen 42:2) 'Get you down thither' (i.e., the sum of the numerical values of the letters of the Hebrew word *redu*, 'get you down', is 210), and the sum of 430 years is (to be calculated) from the year of the birth of Isaac who was the holy seed of Abraham.
9. "And upon the young of the Children of Israel he laid not his hand" (Ex 24:11), in other words, even[35] upon the young among them he did not lay his hand, so that it should not be said The nobles escaped but the youth of the Children of Israel did not escape.
10. "I have not taken one ass from them" (Num 16:15): so that it should not be said An ass he did not take, but he did take some other gift.
11. "Which the Lord your God hath divided to give light unto all the nations" (Deut 4:19, adapted; see Chapter 3 on this): so that it should not be said See, the Holy One blessed be He, has divided them for all the nations and given them permission to worship them.
12. "And he has gone and worshipped other gods which I have not commanded (him) to serve" (Deut 17:3): so that it should not be said You have already called them to the worship of strange gods.
13. And the hare they called "Hairy-legged" (Lev 11:6; Deut 14:7).[36] For the wife of the king was named Arnevet ("hare", "rabbit"), so that she should not say The Jews have made fun of me, come and see how much they sought to avoid the decrees of Greece but they were unable to do so.

And this Talmay honoured the 70 elders with royal clothing and great gifts, and sent them back joyful and happy, and he rejoiced greatly in their wisdom and sent with them sacrifices to our God.

It is obvious that there is a close relationship between this passage and the passage in Usque. Usque seems to have borrowed his material here from this work. However, as we have seen, this, despite its title, is not the Yosippon that we know. In fact what we have here is a publication by Münster, under the name of Josephus/Yosippon (at that stage we can be sure that no one was aware of the distinction between the two), of an abridgement of Yosippon made around 1161 by Abraham ibn Daud.

Abraham Ibn Daud (ca. 1110–ca. 1180) was a Spanish Jew who lived in Toledo in the first generations after the Christian reconquest of this city from the

[35] Reading here *afilu*, for the text's *afim*, which makes no good sense.
[36] The text has "young-legged". On the textual crux here see D. Wasserstein 1998.

Muslims in 1085. Toledo's Jewish community was large and played an important role in the translation movement which brought many texts from Arabic, often via Hebrew, into Latin. Ibn Daud himself was the author of a number of works, including especially the *Sepher ha-Qabbalah* ("The Book of Tradition"), written around 1161. In this work, he sought to demonstrate that the authentic tradition of ancient Judaism had been handed down in an unbroken line of transmitters from one generation to the next, ending with the Rabbanite Jews in Spain.

Sepher ha-Qabbalah, however, is one part of a tripartite work. The second and third parts, not usually printed together with *Sepher ha-Qabbalah*, are less original and less interesting. The second deals with Roman history ("Zikhron Divrei Romi", "An account of the history of Rome"), whereas the third ("Divrei Malkhei Yisrael u-Vayit Sheni", "The history of the kings of Israel and the Second Temple") looks at post-biblical Jewish history up to the Romans. This third section of Ibn Daud's book, in Gerson Cohen's words, "consists almost exclusively of an abridgement of the pertinent sections of *Josippon*". And he adds that "Ibn Daud . . . followed *Josippon* almost slavishly, even against rabbinic tradition".[37] Here it would be natural to expect to find a reference to the Seventy. However, what we find here is not the story that we have seen in the texts of Yosippon but the story just quoted, with the reference to the changes, the list of those changes, and even the explanations for the changes that are so striking here by their presence.

Ibn Daud did not borrow this from Yosippon as part of his so-called slavish dependence on that text. It is not in Yosippon. So how did it enter Ibn Daud's text and, from there, those of Usque and Sebastian Münster? What we have, in fact, is a cluster of works, all of them connected somehow with Yosippon and all containing versions of the story plus the list. They include not only these works but also that of David ha-Nagid. The links joining them appear clear, but the differences of time and space separating them make those links more worrying than informative.

This is still not, quite, the end of the line for this obscure version of the story of the changes. As we have seen, Münster's Latin translation of the story in Ibn Daud and Usque's Portuguese version of that together bring the story into western Europe and, for the first time, into Latin characters. This apparent version of Yosippon, itself apparently a version of Josephus, seems to have been very popular and, in an English translation, became an almost instant bestseller. Peter Morwyng (a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford) translated it into English and we find editions of it appearing in 1558, 1561, 1567, 1575, 1579, 1593, 1596, 1602,

[37] Ibn Daud 1967:xxxv, and n. 91 there.

1608 and 1615, 1652 and 1662.[38] The 1652 printing, put out under the editorship of James Howel, a well-known royalist writer, fits in well to the general atmosphere of the day, with its concern over such questions as whether the four hundred year old ban on Jews living in England should be repealed.[39] But this is not all. As we have seen, Martin Cohen, Usque's translator, claimed to have made use of an edition of Münster's 1529 publication which appeared in 1559. This is not altogether accurate. Although very similar to Münster's book, the book that appeared in 1559 actually amounted to a very near plagiarism. It has the same title as Münster's book of thirty years earlier and it has essentially the same contents, but it claims to be by someone completely different. It describes itself in the following terms: "Iosippus de bello ivdaico Deinde decem Iudeorum captiuitates & Decalogus cum eleganti commentariolo Rabbi Aben Ezra. Hisce accesserunt Collectanea aliquot, quae Sebastianus Lepusculus Basiliensis colligebat . . . Omnia Hebraicolatina" – "Josephus on the Jewish War. Then the ten captivities of the Jews and the Ten Commandments with the elegant little commentary by Rabbi Ibn Ezra. To which are added some materials collected by Sebastian Lepusculus of Basle . . . Everything in Hebrew and Latin".

Sebastian Lepusculus (1501–1576)[40] was a Swiss scholar and Roman Catholic priest. Born in Basle, he had a varied career. He seems to have been a slow starter for his MA came only in 1541, remarkably late for the period. But he was already teaching, and he had also begun the process of becoming a priest (he would rise by 1560 to the rank of archdeacon). In 1549, after a period spent in Augsburg, he returned to Basle, as professor of Greek, and in 1556 became professor of Hebrew there. The publication of 1559, whatever its relation to Münster's work of 1529, may have been made in order to justify the appointment of 1556. Lepusculus does not seem to have published anything else in the fields of Hebraica or Judaica. The work is not very important, except insofar as, like the English versions which we have just noted, it illustrates the popularity of Yosippon outside Jewish circles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But the most interesting aspect of Lepusculus is his name. Like many authors of the day, he latinized his name for scholarly purposes. Lepusculus means "little hare", and the man's real name was in fact Sebastian Haeslein, which also means "little hare". It is hard not to recall the presence on the list of changes of the Hebrew word *arnevet*, 'hare', which the translators were said to have changed out of fear of the reaction of the wife of Ptolemy, whose name that allegedly was, a name that meant 'hare'.

[38] See Reiner 1967–68:128, n. 10. Reiner (142) also notes another edition, in 1819, in Bellow Falls, Vermont; and there are others in the New World.

[39] Reiner 1967–68:140–42; Katz 1982.

[40] The information that follows is derived from Jöcher 1750:II cols. 2390–91 and, with corrections and expansion, from Adelung-Rotermund 1810:III, col. 1665.

Yosippon is more than just another link in the tradition of the legend. For nearly a thousand years the Christian and the Jewish arms of the tradition had developed independently, neither of them influencing the other, neither taking from the other. Change had come from within. In Yosippon the Jewish versions of the legend came into contact once again with their roots, in Josephus, Philo and the *Letter of Aristeas* itself. The popularity of Yosippon in its turn ensured that the versions of the legend which this text and adaptations of it purveyed also spread out very broadly. We have seen it in Hebrew, probably from southern Italy, in three versions in Judeo–Arabic, in the Arabic of the Muslim Ibn Khaldun, in Ethiopic, in Portuguese and Latin and English. This is probably the most widespread and broadly influential version of the legend of the Seventy.

9

Karaites, Samaritans and Rabbanite Jews in the Middle Ages

Among medieval Jews the legend of the Seventy enjoyed much currency. We know that the rabbinic texts discussed earlier, with their accounts of the genesis of the LXX, were in wide circulation among Jews both in the Islamic world and in the developing communities of Christian Europe. And we have a number of new witnesses to the tale from writers among the Jews of the medieval world themselves. These surprise both by their range and by their content. In addition to the numerous authors influenced by Yosippon examined in Chapter 8, we have testimonies from the sectarian Jewish communities of the Karaites and the Samaritans as well as from the mainstream Rabbanite Jews. The Karaites see the story as laden with potential in their polemics against the Rabbanites. Similarly, the Samaritans take their knowledge of the story from rabbinic sources, but use it to attack those sources. Among the Rabbanites themselves, however, although the miraculous element in the story is not forgotten or questioned, the legend as a whole is incorporated into the historical and pseudo-historical works that are now beginning to appear.

For reasons which remain obscure, the Karaites separated themselves from the bulk of Jewry, probably in the ninth century. Somewhat like the Samaritans, they claimed that they followed only the sacred texts of Scripture and rejected such later writings as the Mishnah and the Talmuds. As a Jewish sect, however, they remained culturally very close to the majority rabbanite Jews, and much of their own writing is devoted to polemicising against them. The conflict between these two groups was among the strongest fertilizing agents of medieval Jewish culture. One of the most prominent of Karaite exegetes was Ya'qub al-Qirqisani, who flourished in the first half of the tenth century. He lived and worked in various places throughout the Muslim middle east of his time and had wide learning both in Islamic and in Jewish material, including talmudic and midrashic texts. His *Kitab al-Anwar*, *Book of Lights*, in

Arabic,[1] is a large and valuable work in which, among many other things, he gives an account of the Jewish sects (as one of whom he counts the Christians), not always in the strictest spirit of impartiality. In the course of his discussion of the Rabbanites, he says the following:[2]

They [scil. the Rabbanites] surpass the Christians in nonsense and falsehood, for the Christians rely in many of their teachings on nonsense and obstinacy for they recognize and admit the truth of the Jewish religion and at the same time renounce it. When it became clear to them that alterations and changes had been introduced into the translations of our books, impudence led them to claim Syriac as the primeval language. Cyprian[3] and his like are the authorities for this. Many of them argue that no alteration or change has been introduced into the translation because King Ptolemy, having assembled seventy elders of the Jews, divided them up and placed every pair in a separate place and then he ordered them to translate for him the twenty-four books; which they did, and when their translations were compared, no difference was found between them. This is what they call the Edition of the Seventy. The Rabbanites confirm this story, giving the king in question the name of "Talmai", but claim that the great and glorious Creator dictated to them so that they wrote the same thing; but they changed ten things in the Scripture, and wrote them not as they are in the original.

These are: "God created in the beginning" <Gen. 1,1>; "I will make man in an image and likeness" <Gen. 1,26>; "Male and female created He them" <Gen. 1,27>; "And on the sixth day God finished His work and He rested on the seventh day" <Gen. 2,2>; "And in their self-will they destroyed a feeding trough" <Gen. 49,6>; "And Moses took his wife and sons, and set them upon a carrier of men" <Exod. 4,20>; "No valuable of theirs" <Num. 16,15>; instead of "hare" <Lev. 11,6; Deut. 14,7> they wrote "the small-footed"; "Now the sojourning of the Children of Israel which they sojourned in Egypt, and in all lands" <Exod. 12.40>; "Which the Lord thy God hath divided to enlighten the nations" <Deut. 4,19>.

Thus they attribute to the great and glorious Creator misrepresentation and *suggestio falsi*: which is corrupt to the last degree, in that he who inspires or suggests falsehood is a maker of lies, and a maker of lies is a liar. This is an argument against anthropomorphism. If the great and glorious Creator did so only because the things which He prompted them to change or alter were of an ugly appearance

[1] Although it seems likely that the work was composed in Arabic and originally written down in Arabic characters, it remains unclear whether Hebrew quotations in it were written in Hebrew or in Arabic characters.

[2] Nemoy 1939:37–39, I.4.16. The translation is taken from Chiesa and Lockwood 1984:130–32 (with notes, 175–76), with adaptations.

[3] The manuscript has קפרי, the editors have قوفري Chiesa and Lockwood suggest Cyprian. Could there be some link to the Arabic *qubrusi*, Cypriot, with reference to Epiphanius, who was a bishop in Cyprus?

such as would, if translated accurately for the king, have given offence and been prejudicial to their author, then He should have altered all such passages. For, if He changed "in Our image, after Our likeness" <Gen, 1,26> because it suggests anthropomorphism, then He should have altered what is like it, *e.g.* "For in the image of God made He man" <Gen. 9,6>, and "In the likeness of God created He him" <Gen. 5,1>. Yet they do not admit that they altered these passages. Similarly, He ought to have changed all the places in Scripture in which God is described as having members, such as eye or ear or mouth. Which is more proper, to alter "In the beginning God created" <Gen. 1,1>, which contains nothing unseemly or improper either in its exterior or its interior; or the passage "With him will I speak mouth to mouth" <Num. 12,8>, which suggests that God spoke to Moses with His mouth? There are countless such texts in Scripture and indeed some which are more gross and palpable than this, *e.g.* "I am weary to bear" <Isa. 1,14>, which suggests inability; or "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee" <Ps. 50,12>, which suggests hunger; or "But thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities" <Isa. 43,24>. This is like what they say about the "Corrections of the Scribes",[4] which we will mention later. Furthermore, their lying is clear from the fact that these things which they say were changed or altered are found among the Christians in a different state from what they report, and in fact just as we have them and without any alteration. This is proved by the fact that the Christians quote against us, so as to prove their teaching that God has a body, the text: "In Our image, after Our likeness" <Gen. 1,26>. We shall speak of this when we come to deal with the argument of the Christians and the answer to them. With them the Torah begins with the words: "In the beginning God created". The same is the case with everything which they say about them. Is any untruth more frigid or weak, profitless or useless?

This version of the story is taken in the main from the Rabbanite Jewish background. It is unusual in several ways. First, it seems to be acquainted, at least at second hand, with the Christian version of the story going back to Epiphanius, for it reports something very close to that, including the name of the king as "Ptolemy", in order to add that the Rabbanites "confirm" the story although they call the king "Talmai". It then reports the claim of divine inspiration, adding however "but they changed ten things. . . ."

Secondly, it regards the story of the translation as applying to the whole of the Bible, referring explicitly to "the twenty four books". This reflects a fairly late version of the story in the Jewish tradition.

Qirqisani knows the story of the translation in two versions, one Christian and the other Jewish, though he does not tell us where he gets his knowledge from. He does not denounce the story itself as an invention or a fiction; on the contrary, what he says about it implies that he accepts the notion contained

[4] These are the Tiqqunei Sopherim, discussed in an earlier chapter.

in the story, to the effect that the translators did somehow manage to insert changes into the version they produced. If he rejects the idea of a miracle, of divine intervention, he does not reject the idea of changes in itself. Strikingly, by a simple glide at the end of the passage quoted here, he seems to accept that, though separated from each other, the translators nevertheless succeeded in inserting identical changes into their seventy versions of the biblical text. He needs to do this because he needs the story, at least insofar as it refers to changes, for his attack on the Rabbanites.

The list of changes is not found anywhere at all outside the Rabbanite Jewish tradition. This fact demonstrates Qirqisani's dependence on and closeness to the Rabbanite stream in the Jewish channel of the tradition. It also illustrates a fundamental element in the character of the culture developed by Karaites over against Rabbanites; the very basis of Karaism lay in its difference from, its opposition to Rabbanite Judaism. Although much of the genuine vigour which we can see in the cultural life of the Rabbanites in the early middle ages seems to be attributable to the spur provided by the conflict with Karaism, Rabbanite Judaism did not need Karaism to justify its own existence, far less in order to survive. Karaism, by contrast, needed Rabbanite Judaism to explain why it existed, and without the conflict with Rabbanite Judaism, like many such movements which find the justification for their own existence in opposition to an existing establishment, it had little to offer beyond that. Thus Qirqisani's interest in and use for the list.

As we saw in an earlier chapter, the alleged changes listed by the rabbis are largely examples of inner Jewish exegetical problems which are more or less conveniently brought together in a list for purposes essentially separate and different from the exegetical needs or aims of each individual member of the list. Qirqisani, however, maintains that the Rabbanites "attribute to the great and glorious Creator misrepresentation and *suggestio falsi*", and he justifies this accusation by recourse to the alleged changes. He tries to confute the explanation for the changes offered by the Rabbanites by turning the explanation for the first of them back onto the Rabbanites. His argument is that if God inspired these changes "because the things which He prompted them to change or alter were of an ugly appearance such as would, if translated accurately for the king, have given offence and been prejudicial to their author, then He should have altered all such passages". (This is of course a version of the argument offered by the Rabbis about the word *arnevet*, 'hare', allegedly so similar to the name of the Ptolemy's wife.) In one sense it is a good point, but it is also merely a characteristic example of a certain type of debating style. Moreover, Qirqisani chooses to offer his counter-examples only in one case. He says that if the first item "In Our image, in Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26) might be taken to suggest anthropomorphism, then the same is true of many other passages, which he then proceeds to mention. These include Genesis 9:6, Genesis 5:1, Genesis 1:1,

Numbers 12:8, and also, from outside the Pentateuch, Isa 1:14, Psalms 50:12, and Isa 43:24. Again Qirqisani sees the story of the translation as applying to the whole of the Bible, not only to the Pentateuch. But he does not then go through the entire list of alleged changes. One item is sufficient for his polemic against the Rabbanites.

The Samaritans constitute a separate sect from the Jews. They separated themselves from the mainstream some centuries before Christ. Unlike the Jews, the Samaritans tended not to move outside the Holy Land, though communities did exist at various times in Damascus and also in Egypt. They were very numerous in the ancient period, perhaps even as numerous, in the Holy Land itself, as the Jews, but by the middle ages their numbers were greatly reduced, and references to them become scarcer and scarcer. From a religious and cultural point of view, the Samaritans constitute a subgroup of the Jews of the Islamic world. Their beliefs are very similar to those of the Jews; their holy books are formed by the five books of Moses together with the book of Joshua. They reject the other biblical books, which date largely from after the supposed date of the separation between the two groups; and they also, by extension, reject other later works like the Talmud. They write the Bible in Hebrew, though using an older script, but for other writings during the middle ages, when they were subject to the rule of the Muslim Arabs, they generally made use of Arabic.

Among the Samaritans the story about the translation of the Seventy occurs, very late, in a historical work written in the fourteenth century. It is strange, in one sense, that we should find the story among the Samaritans at all for the event of the translation post-dates their separation from the Jews. Further, although the original story relates only to the Pentateuch, which the Samaritans accept as holy writ, it should not have had any significance for them, as they could not have had any interest in a Greek version of these writings. It is therefore not surprising that we find the story among them only in a late text, where it fulfils needs proper to the author's time.

The text in which we find the story, *Kitab al-Ta'rikh* ("The Book of History") is by Abu al-Fath b. Abi al-Hasan al-Danafi, who belonged to the Danajas, a prominent family of Samaritan scholars and scribes.[5] According to the introduction to his work, he was born in Damascus and in 1352 went from there on a pilgrimage to the Samaritan centre in Nablus, where he was encouraged to write a history because of the way in which texts and historical knowledge were disappearing among the Samaritans, then as so often in severe danger of demographic collapse. Abu al-Fath tells us that he did not undertake this task at once, but a few years later, in 1355, he set about the task, making

[5] See art. "Abu al-Fath", in *EJ*, II, col. 179; and art. "Abu l-Fath ibn Abi l-Hasan", in Crown, Pummer and Tal 1993:8.

use of a number of earlier works, including the other famous Samaritan historical work, the *Tulida*.[6] The result is one of the longest and most valuable of the small library of Samaritan historical texts that we have and constitutes part of a minor renaissance of Samaritan letters at this time, both in Nablus and in Damascus.

In Abu al-Fath's *Kitab al-Ta'rikh* the story is relatively long, by comparison with other versions and, although it comes from sources external to the Samaritan tradition, reflects influence and reshaping by the Samaritans themselves:[7]

And in the days of this High Priest (Ar. *imam*) Dalya there arose a king called Falatmah,[8] who loved learning and wisdom and was eager for collecting books about them and took great care for them and desired them and devoted effort to acquiring them. And when the Egyptians saw him following the path of justice and going in the way of truth they chose him as king over them and they sent to him (telling him) to come to them and (saying that) they would make him king over them. So he went out and came to them and they made him king over them and he knew that the reason for that was his love of learning and his eagerness for it and his walking (the way of) justice, so he devoted himself to this all the more and sought it all the more and devoted himself to collecting books of (learning) and he collected books and sought them from every land and place so that he might be known for learning. And in the tenth year of his reign he learned of the difference which exists between the Samaritans and the Jews about the Torah and about the fact that the Samaritans are not allowed to accept any other book which claims to be from the hand of a prophet except the Torah, and he wished to understand that, so he sent to the Jews and asked them for a number of elders (Ar. *mashayikh*) and he made a similar request of the Samaritans. And from the Samaritans there went a man named Aaron (Ar. Harun) together with a group of the Samaritans including Sawmaka[9] the

[6] See Tulida 1999.

[7] Abu al-Fath 1865, pp. 94–6. There is a translation in Stenhouse 1985:128–39, but the new edition of the text promised there has not appeared. I have translated the text afresh from Vilmar's edition (Abu al-Fath 1865).

[8] The deformation of the name Ptolemy leaves it unrecognisable; it does not look like a corruption of the normal Hebrew form of this name, Talmai. It is a deformation of the Arabic *B.t.l.m.y.w.s* and helps to show that this text is influenced by an Arabic (not necessarily a Muslim) *Vorlage*. When the Samaritans took this story over the Arabic letter *ba'* must have been transliterated as a Samaritan *bet*. This letter closely resembles the Arabic *fa'*. When the Samaritan version intermediate between the Arabic and this Samaritan Arabic text was re-transliterated into Arabic script, this Samaritan *bet* was simply misread as the letter *f*. The second and third letters are just inverted, and the ending has been dropped. Florentin (Tulida 1999:x) suggests that Samaritans only began writing Arabic from the eleventh century onward. The *Tulida* itself, which does not contain the story of the Seventy, does refer to the astronomer Ptolemy (1999:59); here the name is spelled more accurately.

[9] Identified by Stenhouse as possibly a confused reference to Symmachus. Regardless of the possible correctness of this, Sawmaka and Yahudtah seem also to echo distantly the two courtiers, Andreas and Aristeas, who are mentioned in the *Letter of Aristeas* (§43).

learned and Yahudtah, and of the Jews there went a man called Eleazar and together with him also a group (of others). And when Falatmah learned of their arrival in Alexandria – for at that time it was the centre of learning – he ordered houses to be vacated for them according to their number in the place which is called al-Ruwaq[10] and that each of them should be lodged apart from his fellow(s). Then he ordered that along with each one of them there should be a Greek scribe to write down what each one of them translated. And the Samaritans translated the Torah and the Jews translated the Torah and the books which they have, and it is said that the world was darkened for three days, and when the king learned about that he looked into the Torah which was in the hands of the Samaritans at what was not in the Torah of the Jews, and he found the bulk of the texts which we had more perfect than what was among them. So he asked about the reason for this difference and whether it concerned something that the law made obligatory or whether it was complete without it and could do without it. So the Samaritans said that the Qibla[11] was one of the fundamentals of the faith and one of its supports and that it was impossible, something that could not be maintained, that Moses, who had given the Law, should have died without talking about it and arranging its direction for the people. Among us it is the seal of the Ten Commandments because the first of them is the prohibition that they should have any object of worship other than God, then there is the recital of commands and prohibitions, then the ten (commandments) are sealed for the appearance of the effects of His glory and His dignity there (?). Now the Jews have no clear expression of (any of) this but they maintain that Moses died without knowing (or: telling them) of the place. But he bade us and them offer sacrifice every year at the place as it says "year by year"(Dt 15:20) . . .

The text continues with a lengthy explanation and justification of ancient Samaritan differences from Jewish traditions and observance. The author is particularly concerned, in accordance with Samaritan tradition, to demonstrate that Mount Gerizim, in Nablus, is the correct site of the Tabernacle and the place to which the Bible commands sacrifice to be brought every year. In a following section, he argues that the Samaritans' doctrine of resurrection and of reward and punishment after death is correct, over against the Jewish views

[10] Among the meanings of this Arabic word is that of porch, or portico. Should we see in this word here a confused reminiscence of the other name which is often attached to the island of Pharos, Proteus? On the link of this Proteus with Pharos see Fraser 1972:I, 17–18, 568; II, 810–11.

[11] *Qibla*, the Arabic word for the direction of prayer in Islam, is here used rather loosely by the Samaritans to indicate both the place, the location, of their prayer, on Mt. Gerizim and, as the word *jiha* ("direction") at the end of the sentence shows, direction too. When Abu al-Fath wrote in the fourteenth century, Damascus was still a major centre of Samaritan life and the direction of prayer was as much a matter of concern for Samaritans as its location.

of these matters. Finally, he quotes several lines of a Samaritan hymn, in Arabic, on this subject. The king is impressed by their words:[12]

And when the king understood their teaching and considered their arguments, he knew that the truth was in their hands and the complete, perfect Torah was the one which was with them. So he said to them What do you say about these (people) who the Jews claim are prophets, given that they have these books? And they answered, As for these (people) we do not recognise their prophethood, nor (do we recognise) their books, for they, Your Majesty, have come down either by the hand of prophets or not by (the hand of) prophets. Now if it was by the hand of prophets then the Mosaic Law forbids that there should arise any prophet after Moses when it says "And there did not arise any prophet in Israel like unto Moses" (Dt. 34:10). And if we were to press them about their claim, although (the Law) forbids (this) as far as we are concerned, then we should find there something exactly like what is in the Torah (already), in which case there is no need of it; or (we should find there something) less than what is in it, in which case it is more obligatory to follow the fuller (version); or (we should find there) something greater than what is in it, in which case the Law has forbidden us and them (alike) to accept it when it said "You shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Dt. 4:2), meaning that it is a perfect law; or (again we should find there) something that is not (even) in it, in which case that would be abrogation (Ar. *naskh*), and abrogation is not permitted to us.

This account seems to derive from at least one Jewish source.[13] It is nevertheless an extremely anti-Jewish text. It maintains the anti-Jewish polemical tradition of Samaritan religious, political and cultural identity going back for well over a thousand years before Abu al-Fath.

We cannot say always where this material comes from. Thus, for example, we have here a date for the translation: it occurred in the tenth year of Ptolemy's reign. This detail does not seem to occur elsewhere, and we can only guess at its source. Other elements in this version are very widespread. The most striking element in this story, however, is the detail "and it is said that the world was darkened for three days". This detail comes from a Jewish context, for only there could the translation have been seen as a disaster of such cosmic proportions. And indeed, as we have seen, the detail is found in a number of Jewish sources.[14] Are these the sources of the detail here? Possibly, but it is found, once, also in a non-Jewish source, Biruni (see Chapter 7), who because he is in Arabic may

[12] Abu al-Fath 1865:99–100.

[13] It also seems to have other connections, beyond those explored here. Some of the material immediately preceding and succeeding this in the text of Abu al-Fath is to be found also in the Muslim writer al-Maqrizi (who died in 1442), discussing the sects of the Jews. But this particular story seems totally absent from him. Its specifically Samaritan concern seems to be the explanation for this. But did Maqrizi know Abu al-Fath? Or did they use a common source?

[14] See Chapter 3.

well have been accessible to the Samaritan writer of this Arabic text. However, Abu al-Fath is probably using Jewish sources here, for the version of the story which he gives is very similar to those in the Jewish sources, both as to basic structure and as to fullness of detail.

The Samaritan, however, like the Karaite before him, moulds and adapts the story for his sectarian needs. Thus we learn that the king desires to acquire a translation of the Bible, but not for the reason implied by the introduction, because he is a lover of learning. Now that basic tendency in him is extended: he hears that Samaritans and "Jews" differ about the Bible, with the Samaritans accepting only the Pentateuch and the Jews recognising the entirety of the Hebrew Bible, so he wishes to find out why. Accordingly, he invites both to send him groups of translators. The Samaritan translators are led by a man called Aaron, a telling name, for the Samaritans have always been led by High Priests claiming descent from the biblical Aaron, and we hear of a couple of others whose names may reflect a confused memory of the two courtiers mentioned in the *Letter of Aristeas*. Among the Jewish translators we hear only the name of Eleazar, whom we know from so many other sources. The adaptation of the story continues, for when the translators arrive in Egypt the two groups are kept separate from each other as well as being separated individually and given each a Greek secretary. These latter elements now lose their relevance completely, for the story moves on in a slightly, but significantly, different form: the two groups of translators produce two versions of the holy text, one Samaritan and one Jewish. The earth is darkened for three days as a result. The king enquires into what has happened – it is not clear from the text whether he is puzzled at the darkening of the earth or whether he is simply interested in the existence of two rival versions of the same text. It is clear from what follows, however, that the statement made a few moments earlier by the author, to the effect that the Jews have a longer holy text than the Samaritans, has been forgotten. The king now discovers that the Samaritan version is better than the Jewish one: "he found the bulk of the texts which we had more perfect than what was among them". But when he asks about the reason for this, we do not learn about textual differences, or changes made by one side or the other in the translation, or about the historical roots of the differences between the two sects of the Jews. Instead, we find succinct expressions of standard Samaritan positions on such matters as the correct direction of prayer, the correct location of prayer and sacrifice, and the like, the central matters on which Samaritans differ from Rabbanite Jews.

The Samaritan version that we have here – and it is the only version of the story so far known among the Samaritans – clearly derives principally from Jewish sources, but Islamic material and ideas may also have influenced its development. The absence of certain features from it, like the accusation against the Jews of tampering with the text of Scripture, is all the more curious in that

it is a common feature of Islamic polemics against the Jews, as also against the Christians. But, as with the Karaites, the most striking feature of the Samaritan report about the Greek version of Scripture is its close dependence on Jewish materials and its even closer tie to the Jews. The story is not only taken from the Jews; it is taken from them and adapted and re-cast in order to be used against them. Like so much else in the literary heritage of Samaritans and Karaites, its raison d'être seems to derive entirely from the quarrel with the Jews, and, among them, with the Rabbanites.

We return to the West, and to the Rabbanites. These are the normative Jews of the original tradition of our story, but although they create and preserve the central line of our tradition here, it should not be forgotten that there is interaction and exchange all the time between them and members of the other divisions of Jewry, as well as with Christians and Muslims. We have already considered the Book of Yosippon, the most influential, and probably the earliest, of the Rabbanite, indeed possibly of all the medieval Jewish, versions of the story. Among the Rabbanites the story now acquires a new character, whose earlier beginnings we saw in the versions of Yosippon. Romanticising, exoticism and narrative for narrative's sake now mark the story, and the version of the biblical text whose genesis it exists to describe now has less and less real meaning for Jews who no longer know its language, have access to it, or see it as significant for them, even as a text to be opposed.

Chronology is a difficulty here, for certain of our texts are very difficult to date. Among Jews in the West, we have a sudden growth in interest in the story in the late middle ages. Before then, in the four hundred years from Yosippon to the middle of the fourteenth century, we have nothing apart from Jerahmeel and the short Alexander text to show that Jews knew and used the story.

The texts which we shall look at here offer versions of our story which are, for the most part, related to each other, and they retain far more of the form of a real story and of the detail which we remember from the past. All of these texts have another feature in common; they are all historical texts or texts which see themselves as examples of historical writing. This is quite unusual, both in Jewish literature generally and in the broader context of the works which we have been concerned with so far in this book.

Jews in the middle ages did not write much history. Although all medieval Jewish writing shows itself closely concerned with the past, historiography is conspicuous by its absence among Jews in all periods before modernity.[15] We have a total of some half a dozen or so historical works altogether from the medieval period, during a period of nearly a millennium, and much of their contents, particularly in the later works, is copied from earlier texts. Strikingly,

[15] For discussions of this see Kochan 1977, Yerushalmi 1982.

moreover, most of these works cluster in the century or so from the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 to the end of the sixteenth century. It is likely that the impetus for the examination of the Jewish past and for reflection on its meaning derived in large part from the shock of the Expulsion.

The first work to be considered here is by Abraham Zacut (or Zacuto, 1452–1515), a child of the last generation of Spanish Jews. He had a distinguished career as a scientist and astronomer in royal service in Spain and, after the expulsion of 1492, also in Portugal, before having to flee from there too. He went first to Tunis, but the invasion by Spain in the early years of the sixteenth century forced him to move on again, and he ended his days in Constantinople. Among his writings is *Sepher ha-Yuhasin* ("The Book of Genealogies"). It includes a curious mélange of information about the Septuagint:[16]

And then the aged and pious Eleazar was beaten, and his soul went out to the world to come. This aged Eleazar was one of the 72 elders who copied (i.e., translated) the Torah for Ptolemy (Heb. Talmai), king of Egypt and king of Greece. And they changed eighteen things, as we see in Megillah; and in Massekhet Sopherim (it says) that five elders wrote the Torah for Talmay in Greek. And again: He assembled seventy elders and they changed thirteen things for him. And this Talmay was wise and pious and he gave many gifts to the wise men and to the Temple. And in the Histories of the Christians (we find it written) that there were three hundred thousand books of (all) the sciences, and that his wise men said to him, 'All the books which you have, they are all stories and nonsense. And the main thing is that you should copy (= translate) the divine Torah of the Jews. And then he sent at once to Jerusalem for the aged Eleazar and 72 elders and did them great honour and rejoiced greatly. . . .

Here we meet the story of the Seventy in connection with the history of the Jews and of their encounter with the Greeks. Eleazar is part of this story as a leader of the Jews, and the report of his death leads naturally into a short account of who he was, with a reference to his having been one of the Seventy Two. But, perhaps in accord with the new spirit of enquiry that is characteristic of the sixteenth century, more probably reflecting the availability of different versions of the story, we find here also a reference to the alternative rabbinic version of the story of the translation, according to which the translators numbered

[16] Zacut 1857:12. There are two principal editions of Zacut's work. The first, of Cracow in 1580, was the work of the great rabbi Moshe Isserles (c. 1520–1572), who provided the text with additions and notes, so that it is not always clear what is due to Zacut and what to Isserles himself; the second is by Filipowski, three centuries later, and is based on a manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, which is an autograph of the author. It is this edition which is followed here, because of the character of the manuscript. But it is clear that work is needed to establish the relationship between the two editions both for this story and in wider terms, to establish the significance of the additions by Isserles. See Chapter 10.

only five. As Zacut points out, this comes in Massekhet Sopherim. In fact, the whole passage given here, from the words Massekhet Sopherim to the end of the following sentence (" . . . thirteen things for him") comes from Massekhet Sopherim. There are some minor verbal differences between the two versions, but there can be no doubt that Zacut is using that text as his source here for both versions of the story. The only difference between the two versions that is of any substance is the reduction here of the larger number – Seventy-two in Massekhet Sopherim to seventy in Zacut – although in the first part of this passage he tells us the number seventy-two correctly.

The passage also contains an explicit reference by Zacut to "Histories of the Christians". This is not, yet, an indication that a learned Jew has direct access to such works, but it is an indication of a new openness by Jews to the contents of such works and, possibly, also of availability of such works to them. The number of books cited from these "Histories", three hundred thousand, need not indicate a particular source, given what we know of how numbers tend to vary from one source to the next in medieval times. But the story that follows, about Ptolemy's wise men telling him that all of these books contain nothing but nonsense, is clearly a reminiscence of that in the Yosippon text. However, the borrowing is clearly not direct, because of the differences, at least between this text and the version of Yosippon that we have, for there we had only nine hundred and ninety-five books in the king's collection.

It is obvious that this mixture of elements is taken from a variety of sources and that the knitting between them is not perfect. We are, nonetheless, still in the medieval Jewish world where acquaintance with materials from outside the Jewish tradition is rare and suspect. A writer like Zacut can refer in passing to "Histories of the Christians", but he will not do so to excess nor will he admit their testimony as having as much authority as material from Jewish sources. The boundaries between the two cultures are not yet so permeable as they will become later on. For that, however, we do not have too long to wait. By the sixteenth century, the mingling of peoples and cultures was beginning to bring educated Jews out of the ghetto and make them part of the new world of the renaissance.

Gedalya ibn Yahya was born in the year of Zacut's death, in 1515, and died around 1587. He was the author of an important Hebrew historical text, *Shalshelet ha-Qabbala*, first published in 1587. The title means "Chain of Tradition" and is meant to echo the titles of such works as *Sepher ha-Qabbala* ("Book of Tradition") of Ibn Daud, the Spanish Jewish historian of the twelfth century whom we met earlier. The aim of these texts, as of other medieval Jewish historical works, was to stress the descent of the authentic Jewish tradition of belief and learning through a chain of rabbinic and other authorities from the earliest times to the time of the author and, in so doing, to stress the orthodoxy of the writer himself and the particular tradition of which he formed

part. This book, however, is different from most of its predecessors, and that may explain why another Jewish scholar is said to have called it a "chain of lies".[17] The reason probably lies in the character of the work.

Unlike most earlier Jewish writers of the middle ages, including perhaps even the author of Yosippon, Gedalya ibn Yahya was well acquainted with foreign, non-Jewish languages. Most of the texts we are concerned with here are by Jews living and working in the Ashkenazi, European environment of Christendom. Here was a situation quite unlike that in the Muslim world: there Jews often knew and quoted and used the literature of their neighbours. That literature was largely written in a language that Jews themselves knew, Arabic, and Jewish literary culture there for hundreds of years can be seen as a subsection of the culture of Arab Islam. Christian Europe, by contrast, offered a background in which Jews were generally closed in upon themselves intellectually as much as socially. Although we know that Jews might know and use the languages of their surroundings, we rarely find them well versed in the cultural products of Christian societies. Latin, during the middle ages the most important language of Christian literary productivity, was essentially a closed book to Jews. Exceptions are rare and throw into high relief the division between the two cultures of the Jews and their neighbours. But Gedalya ibn Yahya lived in Italy. Italian Jews, from Antiquity down to our own times, have been able to combine close ties and loyalty to the traditions and cultural forms of the Jewish past with assimilationist tendencies encouraged by a certain social openness and tolerance as well as the riches of cultural life in the Italian peninsula.

Gedalya ibn Yahya spent most of his life in various cities in Italy, before moving to Alexandria in 1575. The passages quoted by him demonstrate wide reading both in Jewish and, much more significantly, in non-Jewish literatures. We shall see the names of Aquinas, Aulus Gellius, Orosius and, closer to Gedalya's own time, of Antonio de Guevara, as well as references to a certain Alexander of Imola and to Juan Luis Vives, whom we shall meet in the following chapter, in addition to Augustine. We cannot be sure that Gedalya actually read Orosius and Aulus Gellius and did not simply quote them via other works, but even without these two the extent of his reading as illustrated by these short paragraphs is impressive.

Shalshelet ha-Qabbala is in three parts. The first is a history of the Jews from the Creation. The second consists of chapters on miscellaneous topics, such as the formation of the embryo, the manufacture of paper, and ghosts. The third is devoted to another history from the Creation, this time with an emphasis on the non-Jews. The work is composed in Hebrew for a Jewish audience, with aims which go beyond those normal in Jewish historiography of the middle ages.

[17] See the entry on Gedaliah Ibn Yahya in *EJ*, VIII, cols. 1208–09 (by Joseph Dan), citing Joseph Solomon Rofe of Kandia.

The author includes much from non-Jewish sources, much that did not fall into the regular categories of Jewish writing; the history of non-Jewish peoples, except when it impinges on Jewish history, is a completely new subject in Jewish historiography, and the presence of scientific topics in a historical work is also alien to the genre, if not to the language and the culture. Gedalya ibn Yahya is the first example that we have in medieval Jewish writing of confident openness to the outside world, of someone able and willing to bring that outside world within the confines of Jewish culture.

We find references to the Seventy both in part one and, more briefly, in part three of his work:[18]

Joseph (sic) ben Joezer the man of Tsereda and Jose b. Johanan the man of Jerusalem received (the tradition) from Antigonos (of Socho) in the year 3,500 of the Creation, which was the 32nd year since the building of the Second Temple.[19] In his (sic) days lived the aged Eleazar the High Priest, to whom Ptolemy (Heb. *Tolomeo*) the king of Egypt wrote, (saying) that he should send him elders to translate (Heb. *le-ha'atiq*) the Torah from Hebrew to the Greek language. And the Christians have recorded this entire deed in a book all to itself and have included it in the canon (Heb. *Minyan*) of their Bible (Heb. *Biblia*), and they called it/him (Heb. them) Aristeo, and I have chosen to present it before you very briefly so that you can see the high rank of the Torah of Moses.

. . .

Aristo, one of the ministers of king Talmay Philadelphus, the son of Tolmeo son of Lago king of Egypt, wrote down everything connected with the translation (Heb. *ha'ataqa*) of the Torah of Moses in this manner and this is a very short (version of it). The exile of Israel to Egypt at the hands of the king Tolomeo son of Lagi (*sic*) father of the king who took them from Jerusalem and Asshur and the cities of Edom, except that at the start they came with the king Psammetichus: the strong young men among them, altogether some thirty thousand, were taken to be in our wars and their old men and women and children were given as gifts to the hirelings and were sold from one person to another and they held them as slaves and maidservants. The king at that time ordered that all of those Jews should be brought to Egypt and he bought them – who were more than 100 thousand – and he gave them freedom, to go back to their land. And some of them from among the young men he chose to be faithful to him and he placed them in charge of the whole of his kingdom, so that they should be faithful guards against his enemies. And this was part of the gift (Heb. *doron*) which the king sent to Eleazar the priest in Jerusalem. And he

[18] Ibn Yahya 1877:31–33.

[19] This sentence derives from the structure of the type of historical text to which *Shalshelet ha-Qabbala* belongs. The "chain of tradition" consists of the reception of the tradition by one man (or, often, pair of men) from predecessor(s) in the previous generation. The model (and for relevant periods much material) for this is provided by the Mishnaic tractate Abot.

also sent him a table all of solid gold two cubits in length and one cubit wide and one and a half cubits high; and two talents of solid gold and two talents of silver and two cups of solid gold, and on all of them there were beautiful and awesome pictures such as had never been seen before. And in the pictures there were fixed beautiful and wonderful precious stones, large and medium and small as necessary in accordance with the pictures; never had their like been made, for he assembled all the artists in these crafts from all over his kingdom and supervised them all the time to ensure that they should do it in the most beautiful way possible, in such a way that there went into these things more than five thousand pieces of precious stone, worth five times more than the vessels (?). And all of that he sent with his letter by his messenger as a gift to Eleazar the High Priest in Jerusalem, entreating him to send him the Torah of Moses with 72 (people to) translate it from the Jewish language to the Greek language. And this Aristeo was one of the messengers and he wrote an account of the position of Jerusalem

. . .

Eleazar the High Priest sent 72 wise and intelligent elders with the Torah to king Talmay and with them his important letter and acceptance of the gifts and greetings; they brought the Torah before the king written in letters of gold on parchment (leaves) joined together in such a way that it was impossible to discern where they were joined together. And the king received them with joy and ordered that they should eat with him for 7 successive days, and on each day he asked them for the solution of riddles and puzzles, as is written in his book at length, and all of them answered as was fitting and in accordance with the will of the king, who wondered greatly at their wisdom. Afterwards they were brought to a certain island by way of the shore, about a mile distant from Alexandria, and to each of them they gave a room and every day they would come at the morning watch to greet the king and to bless him and after returning to their rooms and praying they would eat and translate (Heb. *ma'atiqim*) until the ninth hour. Then they would go out into the fresh air to relax, for what they had there was a kind of Garden of Eden, and everything they needed there was prepared for them in abundance.

And they completed the translation (Heb. *ha-ha'ataqa*) in 72 days and afterwards Dimitrio the librarian (Heb. *sar ha-librario*) summoned all the translators together to him and all the Jews who were in the cities of the kingdom of this Tolmoy (sic) and others too, and he read out to them the text of the translations (Heb. *ha-ha'ataqot*) and they all thought it was good and they said It is very good, so let us make many copies of it with a command that no one should add (to) or take away from the text of the copies. And he (the king) sent the elders back with many gifts and much gold and silver to offer sacrifices in his name in Jerusalem.

And I have seen chapter 3 of (Tractate) Megilla in the Talmud Babli, and in the same place in the Jerusalem (Talmud), it says We are taught: A story of Talmay the king who assembled 72 elders and they introduced, etc. And similarly I have seen in Mekhilta the chapter on the Torah portion Bo el Par'o. And Midrash Parashat

Shemini in Massekhet Sopherim, P"Q (?), where it says Five elders wrote for Talmay the Torah and that day was as hard as the day of the making of the Calf, etc. And at the end of Megillat Ta'anit it says On the 8th of Tebet the Torah was written in Greek in the time of Talmay the king and darkness came to the world for three days, and it is clear that we can say that out of their great fear the Jews made fasts and prayers and they blackened their faces as they did in the days of Haman. And I cannot decide whether it is right to ask if this translation was that of the Pentateuch alone or the whole of the Bible. And also about this I do not know for sure because I have not found anything clear about it, for there are indications this way and that. For we find sometimes that for our sages, may their memory be for a blessing, "Torah" refers to the whole of the Bible and sometimes it refers to the Pentateuch alone, and from what this Aristeas says, and also from the words of Yosippon and Philo the Jew and the words of the greatest wise men among the Christians it seems that it was just the Pentateuch.

And about the history of how the text of this translation developed (Heb. *hishtalshelut*), truly and faithfully I have seen their wisest man, in the book *The City of God*, book 15, chapters 11 and 13, who says it is right to judge that at the time close to the true translation, the Egyptian Greeks of that time hated the Israelites completely, so that maliciously, or perhaps (just) by mistake, they forged some things and from that came the differences which are in all the translations (Heb. *ha-ha'ataqot*) which exist among them. But the version which is in the hands of the Hebrews today is the best of them all and thus he wrote in book 18, chapters 43 and 44 and the commentary to Psalm 40, and thus wrote (also) the wise (Thomas) Aquino in the commentary to the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, chapter 9, and thus (too) Alexandro of Imol (?), himself a very learned man in the history of the Caesars, in Part 6, section 233. And know that the wars were made between the emperor Caesar (Heb. *tsesar ha-qesar*) and Ponpeio, and the men of the army burnt that entire academy (Heb. *bet ha-midrash*) which they had in the days of the Talmay, seven hundred thousand kinds of books, and among them this true version (Heb. *ha'ataqa*) (made) by the elders. Truly thus wote Ablugilay and Orosio, faithful writers as everyone says.[20] And know that some say that the elders translated the Torah which they had in use among them in Aramaic into Greek, while others say (that it was) from the holy tongue which is (what) we have today. And I have seen it written in the writings of Don Anto(nio) de Guevara[21] the Spaniard that the Torah of Moses was translated many times as you can find it (written) at length in part 3, In this generation that it was translated 9 times.

[20] These are Aulus Gellius and Orosius. The figure of 700,000 for the contents of the Library is found only in Aulus Gellius (vii.17.3) and in Ammianus Marcellinus (xxii.16.13), which confirms the identification of Aulus Gellius here. See also Orosius vi.15.31–32. Cf. Fraser 1972:I, 334, and II, 493–94, n. 224.

[21] Antonio de Guevara (1480–1545), bishop of Mondognedo. See on him, and on his relevance here, Rossi 2001:66, n. 56.

This is not the only place in his text where Ibn Yahya refers to the Septuagint story. In the third section of his work he mentions it again:[22]

In the days of Jose ben Joezer and Jose ben Johanan . . . some 3,500 years from the Creation and 92 years from the building (of the Second Temple) Tolomeo Filadelpho reigned over Egypt and caused the translation of the Torah from Hebrew to Greek by 70 elders as I described in Part One of this composition. And this king Tolomeo was the first in the world to begin to collect together many books of all sorts and of all languages and of all subjects, and they say that there was not and will not be another collection in the world as big as this one, and this because there were collected there together more than 700,000 books. While he gave out huge amounts to bring them and to copy them, and much time to assemble them from the four corners of the earth, after some time the kings of Persia plundered them and brought them to Persia, and some of them were burnt and some were brought to Babylon and some to Rome. And some say that they were all burnt in the wars of the Caesar Tsesar against Pombeio by the mercenaries and the soldiers against his will.

And once again a little later:[23]

And I have seen in the writings of Don Antonio de Guzmara (sic: clearly an error for Guevara) the Spaniard that the Torah of Moses was translated many times, and this is what he says word for word: In the year 130 from the building of the Second Temple Tolmeo had it translated by 72 elders from Hebrew to Greek and in the course of their translating whenever they saw something about the coming of the Messiah and they did not understand it they would leave it without a translation (Heb. *perush*) or they would place a sign there. . . . [24]

Gedalya's is among the longest versions of the story of the Seventy that we have. It is also among the most detailed and the closest Jewish version to what we know from outside the Jewish tradition. Although it refers to the Jewish sources for the story, they do not provide the spine of the narrative here. Quite the contrary, they are brought in as extra information, to illustrate and to offer contrast to the content of the story. That story is culled from the Christian tradition, however, as is easily seen; within that tradition it comes from a text of Jewish origin, the *Letter of Aristeas*.

Even if we did not have the forms of the names (Aristeo, Dimitrio, etc.) to help us, we could see very easily that the version of the story offered here must depend almost entirely on the Christian tradition of the translation. What we have here is, very explicitly, a précis of the earlier work. The fact that the work

[22] Ibn Yahya 1877:141.
[23] Ibn Yahya 1877:142.
[24] The text continues to give a list of a further eight versions or sets of versions, making a total of nine, conforming to what is said in the first passage quoted earlier from this writer.

is said to form part of the canon of the "Bibbia" confirms what the contents of the passages given here demonstrate. The *Letter of Aristeas* survived, as we have seen, only in the Christian literary tradition; it did so by virtue of the character of its contents, as providing the authentic history of the process by which the Greek translation was made, with divine help, and it did so by being associated in manuscripts from at least the sixth century onwards with the Biblical text itself. That is what Gedalya means when he says that it forms part of the "canon" (Heb. *minyan*) of the Bible.

How did Gedalya b. Yahya know of it? How did he get access to it? Was it by means of an already existing abbreviation? Or did he perhaps shorten it himself? In either case, what was the language of Gedalya's source? The *Letter* was by his day available in at least two Latin and one or two Italian versions. It seems likely, given the forms of the names that he gives, that he made use of an Italian version. If so, then it was probably that published by Lodovico Domenichi in Florence in 1550, or perhaps an earlier one, by Bartolomeo della Fonte, from which Domenichi's work was plagiarized.[25]

Gedalya's summary is biased in its concerns and occasionally confused. Little real attention is paid to the translation itself and to how it was made. Readers of the original *Letter* cannot be surprised at this, for there too, as we saw at the start of this enquiry, the story of the translation attracts curiously little attention from the author, serving rather as the frame-story for a longer work whose main concern is quite different. Here, however, Gedalya summarises the *Letter* quite explicitly in a context whose central concern is the translation. Gedalya was not very efficient or sufficiently concentrated on the issue at hand.

Before we enter fully into the world of renaissance thinking about meaning and sources, there is one last text which we need to look at which takes us very far back indeed, in style, in manner, and in the use that it makes of ancient sources. This is *Sepher ha-Yashar*.

Sepher ha-Yashar is not ancient at all. But scholarly debate has not known where to place its composition, how to date it and to whom to attribute its authorship. Joseph Dan, who produced an edition of the text, has pointed to the fact that we have no manuscripts of this work which come from before the age of printing, indeed none from before the date of printing of the first edition of this work, 1625.[26] The book contains an account of the Seventy.

And we find it written in the Book of the Hasmoneans which has come to our hands that in the days of Ptolemy (Talmay) king of Egypt he commanded his servants to go and collect all the books of the religions and all the books of history which they could find in the world, so that he might acquire wisdom from them and enquire

[25] Cf. Vaccari 1952:18–19; Rossi 2001:4–5, with notes.
[26] Dan 1974, 1977.

and study from them matters of the world and compose from them a book about the judgements of things and faith and judgement (Heb. *dat ve-din*) concerning all the needs of the world to do justice properly. And they went and collected for him 965[27] books and brought them to him. (He said) to them that they should go out again and search, to complete one thousand books, and thus they did. And after that there stood before him some of the oppressors (Heb. *peritsei*) of Israel and said to him: Our lord the king, why are you bothering with all this, send to Jerusalem to the Jews, and they will bring you the book of their Torah which was written for them by God by the hands of their prophets, and from it you will be able to gain wisdom and to judge from it every case (Heb. *din*) and everything according to your will. And the king listened to their words and sent to the Jews about this, and they sent him this book for they could not give him the book of God, for they said: We cannot give the book of the Torah of God to a gentile. And when this book reached the hands of Ptolemy he read it and it impressed him greatly,[28] and he studied it in his wisdom and enquired and found in it his desire and he abandoned because of it (? Heb. *me'alav*) all the books which they had collected for him and blessed those who had advised him (about) this thing.

After some time the oppressors of Israel sensed that Israel had not sent the book of the Torah to the king, so they came and said to him: Our lord the king, Israel has made fun of you for they have not sent you the book of the Torah which we mentioned to you, but they have sent you another book which they had. But send to them (again) and they will send you the book of their Torah, for from it you will find your desire far more than from the book which they have sent you. And when the king heard their words he became very angry indeed against Israel and his anger burned within him, so that he sent to them a second time, (ordering them) to send him the book of the Torah, and he was afraid lest they make fun of him again, so he devised a means to trick them and sent for seventy of their elders and he placed them in seventy houses to write, each one of them, a (copy of) the book of the Torah without there being any difference (between them). And the holy spirit was over them, so that they wrote for him seventy books for seventy elders, and all of them were a single version without any addition and without any subtraction. And then the king rejoiced greatly at this and honoured the elders and all the Jews, and sent offerings and gifts to Jerusalem, as is written there.[29]

And when he died the Jews found a way to trick his son, and took the book of the Torah from among his treasures and this book they left there, and did not take it, so that every king ruling after him should know the wonders of God, may He be blessed, and that He has chosen Israel from among all the nations, and that there is no God apart from Him, may He be blessed. So this book is still in Egypt, to this

[27] Heb. *tet me'ot, samekh, heh*, using the numerical values of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

[28] Heb. *va-yishar be'einav me'od*; should we understand a play on words between the expression *va-yishar* and the title of the book, *Sepher ha-Yashar*?

[29] The word *there* suggests an earlier reference to the source of the story, but there is none.

very day. And from that time it (this book) spread out in the whole world until it reached our hands, in our exile and in our expulsion today, in the city of Naples which is under the rule of the king of Spain.

Here we have what is in effect the last gasp of the medieval version of the story of the Seventy. This is very unlike the version of Gedalya ibn Yahya, where we saw an attempt, if not to compare different versions, at least to notice their existence. And even in Usque, we could feel new and exciting influences, most notably the openness to ideas and facts coming from, or via, Christian sources. Here by contrast, although we seem to be in the early seventeenth century, the atmosphere, the material, the shaping of the material, the construction of the story, the aim of the narrative all belong to the middle ages.

We note at once the dependence on Yosippon. The detail of the number of the books, nine hundred and sixty-five, can come only from there. The reduction, from nine hundred and ninety-five to nine hundred and sixty-five, is inexplicable, except as a corruption, but it also carries with it severe loss of narrative effect, for along with it disappears the possibility, as well as the point, of a joke about adding five books to make up a round thousand volumes in the library. And indeed, what we find is that the librarians are simply told to go out and collect enough books to make the total up to one thousand. This is then followed without any link in narrative terms by the arrival of the "oppressors", who advise the king to obtain the Torah of the Jews.

We have lost the librarians as effective characters in the story, but, in their place, we gain the "oppressors" of Israel. We seem to have a Jewish story about Jewish wiliness, about how the Jews submitted to the king's pressure and let him have the Torah but then, after his death, tricked his successor and got it back, leaving the *Sepher ha-Yashar* in its place. But we could just as easily see this as a story about the wickedness of the Jews. The structure of the story here seems almost to favour the latter reading.

The "oppressors" tell the king that the Jews have a wonderful book: "Our lord the king, why are you bothering with all this, send to Jerusalem to the Jews, and they will bring you the book of their Torah which was written for them by God by the hands of their prophets, and from it you will be able to gain wisdom and to judge from it every case and everything according to your will". The king is attracted by what they say, and sends for the book. But the Jews hide the genuine article, and send something else in its place. It looks good, the king likes it, and "blessed those who had advised him (about) this thing". But the truth filters out, and the "oppressors" appear once again, to reveal the truth about the rascally Jews: "Our lord the king, Israel has made fun of you . . . they have sent you another book . . . send to them (again) and they will send you the book of their Torah". No one makes fun of the king; his anger is duly aroused and he sends again for the Torah. This time the Jews supply it. But the king

is now on his guard; he suspects the possibility of trickery. So he makes them send seventy elders, separates them from each other and orders them to make him individual copies. No scribes are mentioned here; nor, for that matter, if we read this story carefully, does it say anything about translation. Neither the first book, *Sepher ha-Yashar*, nor the Torah is said anywhere here to have been translated for the king. What the elders provide for him is seventy copies of the Torah. Upon being checked, they turn out all to have the same text: "a single version without any addition and without any subtraction", thanks to the work of the holy spirit. Once again, there is nothing here about translation; and the standardised phrase about no addition and no subtraction is here used to denote not a perfect translation but a perfect copy. The original point about separating the translators was to ensure, thanks to the miracle, that there should be no variety in their versions, not to avoid addition or subtraction of material. That point has been lost or transmogrified along the way. The king is satisfied with the result. He is all the more satisfied with the content of the text (though it is worth noting that we are somehow given a lesser impression of the value of the Torah than of *Sepher ha-Yashar*). We lose sight of sixty-nine of these copies of the text immediately, as in most of the other versions of the story studied here, but one remains in the king's library, and after his death the Jews play a trick on his son and remove that, leaving him just with the *Sepher ha-Yashar*. We understand that *Sepher ha-Yashar*, not the Bible, is the subject of this story. And we also understand that *Sepher ha-Yashar* is a book of special rank and value.

Sepher ha-Yashar is a piece of medieval literature. Though written in the seventeenth century and a product of, and perhaps also for, the age of print, it belongs atmospherically to earlier generations. It preserves attitudes and understanding and learning which characterise earlier centuries. But if it did not pretend to have been written two thousand years ago, it would be a relic, almost a fossil. Long before this text was written, Jews had begun to be aware of new horizons, of other sources of information, of alternative ways of understanding the past and of different ways of using the sources that had survived from the past. We have seen the first glimmerings of this new understanding in different ways in Samuel Usque and in Gedalya ibn Yahya. They lived in the middle and the second half of the sixteenth century, a generation and more before the author of *Sepher ha-Yashar*. In Chapter 10 we shall look at the emergence of the Seventy onto the stage of modernity and at their almost immediate ejection from the records of history. The hero of that story, and the first to recommend their expulsion, was another Jew, a contemporary both of Usque and of Gedalya ibn Yahya, Azaria de' Rossi.

10

The Septuagint in the Renaissance and the Modern World

Gedalya ibn Yahya marks the end of the pre-modern history of our story. His contemporary and fellow Jew Azaria de' Rossi points forward to the modern era. The two had much in common, and it is no accident that both should have lived in Italy. This meant, among other things, that they were both able to enjoy fairly easy access to non-Jewish literature and society more broadly considered while not losing either their roots in Jewish culture or their Jewish identity. In the case of Gedalya, as we have seen, the new books which he read, like the *Letter*, simply helped to increase the database, so to say, for his historical writing and to expand the story that he had to tell. Azaria de' Rossi, by contrast, who would probably have been a remarkable person in any context, was able to benefit much more from the broadening of horizons which life in renaissance Italy meant for Jews.

Our concern in this final chapter will be not so much with the story and its literary peregrinations and transformations as with the beginnings of modern critical study of the story and its background. The renaissance and the age of print gave a new lease of life to the legend which the *Letter* told. Its subject matter made the *Letter* of interest to three distinct, if overlapping, groups. First, as a Greek text from antiquity it excited interest among scholars of the ancient world. It offered apparent documentation of an important historical event, as well as material of more general appeal about the world of hellenistic antiquity. A large number of translations were made at this time, into a variety of languages, testifying to the growth of widespread awareness of the book and keenness to know what it contained.

Secondly, as a textual witness to the origin of the authoritative, Greek version of (part of) Scripture, it was of paramount interest to those scholars who were beginning to take seriously the notion of applying to the Bible new approaches to the editing of ancient texts. The new critical methods worked for other texts, seen to stand in need of the application of such techniques. The idea that the

Bible might need and could benefit from them took longer to penetrate and longer still to become acceptable. The notion of the Bible as an inspired text seemed to mean that a *textus receptus*, wherever it was received from and whatever variety it seemed to encompass, was to be accepted as correct and as true. The Bible did not need editing, a notion that implied tampering with Holy Writ. Nonetheless, there was variety in its manuscript transmission, and that variety implied also problems. These facts it had in common with other texts. Slowly the idea of editing the biblical text came to seem less outrageous than it had done.

In the sixteenth century and after, many scholars of Greek also knew Hebrew and understood their work to include the three principal classical languages and the cultures associated with and expressed in them. In this the Renaissance differs greatly from the modern period. The other great translation enterprise, the creation of the Authorised Version of the Bible, in the early seventeenth century, depended critically on the existence in England of numerous scholars with such a combination of skills. The "companies of translators" who produced the final version numbered around fifty members.[1]

The third group here, the Jews, overlapped with the others for similar reasons. Here the figure of Azaria de' Rossi stands out as he, for the first time since Antiquity, brought the *Letter* back into the consciousness of a Jewish readership by translating it into Hebrew. Nonetheless, the *Letter* never attracted much Jewish interest until long after him, when Jews themselves became more integrated in the modern world of scholarship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It took until the middle of the twentieth century for other Hebrew versions to appear.[2]

For all three of these groups – classicists, students of the Bible, and Jews – in a large sense the central issue had not changed, and indeed would not change. That issue concerned the literal inerrancy of the biblical text. If the *Letter* and its later developments were correct and their story true, then they were testimony to the divine inspiration of the translators and, hence, to the truth of the Greek version of Scripture. This was of more than casual interest, especially in the Renaissance. At this time, Christian scholars took up once again a question that had exercised many before them, Christian and non-Christian. The age of the world was a real issue and engaged the attention of scholars with access to new methods for identifying and extracting what the texts held. We shall see that this question was of concern now to historians and not just to divines. In this we note an echo of the earlier situation in Islam. But the new age of criticism also held other possibilities, and new dangers.

[1] For details see McGrath 2001:178–82, and passim; and, for Hebrew study in Tudor England, Lloyd Jones 1983.

[2] Then, curiously, we have two: Kahana 1956; Hartom 1969.

Beginning as early as the start of the fifteenth century, we find a series of translations into a variety of western European languages. Latin and Italian head the list, but there are also versions in German and French and English, and even a couple in Hebrew. We shall consider one of these next. Translation is one of the changes in the fortunes of the *Letter*. The other major change lies in the character of what people do with it and write about it. Before the Renaissance, what we find are re-tellings, re-workings, different versions of the story of the Seventy. As we have seen, the story lends itself to all sorts of patchwork re-telling, in the service of many different religious and cultural aims. Now, with the Renaissance, the introduction of printing and the explosion in audiences for books, the growth of scholarly enquiry and the development of critical method, such literary and semi-literary repetition of the story of the LXX is suddenly and completely abandoned. In its place we find scholarly study of the text of the *Letter* and of the meaning of the story it contains.

Such academic study is characterized by the interest in truth that we associate with scholarly enquiry generally. But this does not mean that those engaged upon it do not have concerns beyond the purely scientific. The *Letter of Aristeas* continues in this period and for long after to represent something more than just another ancient text, another historical work from the past. Its connection with Scripture is what drives interest in the work and fuels debate about its authenticity and the truth of its contents. We see something of the strength of that in the titles which a number of writers, especially English ones, give to their works on the subject. Unlike the textual criticism of Homer or the wars described by Thucydides, for the authors of these works, the *Letter* and its story have significance going far beyond themselves. And for the same reason, the *Letter* also comes to have importance in the conflict between Roman Catholic and Protestant.

The introduction of printing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries meant the diffusion of knowledge far beyond the narrow confines of those few who could afford manuscripts. This went along with the search for ancient works that were little or not known. And the search for unknown ancient writings encouraged both the discovery of genuine texts from Antiquity and the invention of fake ones. Annius of Viterbo (Giovanni Nanni; 1432(?)–1502) built his career on these facts, on the willingness of people then, as always, to accept what they were offered on trust, and on the difficulty in those times of perceiving what was not genuine. And Lorenzo Valla, in Rome, and Richard Bentley, in Cambridge, among others, built their careers in part on their ability to sniff out the fake, to denounce the forgery.[3] They did so by the application of critical methods, themselves also in part the creation of printing. Through the innovation of the production of multiple identical copies of books, printing made

[3] See generally Grafton 1990.

possible, and also soon necessary, the adoption of new standards for the exactness and the accuracy of texts. The new critical methods detected the anachronism, exposed the impossible, and in so doing demonstrated the necessity for systematic construction of bodies of knowledge to which appeal could be made for confirmation or rejection of what was claimed. In the words of Valla, "An melior ullus auctor est quam ratio?", "Is there any author better than reason?"[4] *Mutatis mutandis*, their methods were not so very different from those employed today by those who perform tests of authenticity on allegedly ancient objects.

The first to impugn the authenticity of the story in the *Letter* was Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540), the son of a family of Marranos, Jews descended from forced converts to Christianity.[5] Both of his parents were condemned by the Inquisition for relapse into Judaism. His father was burnt at the stake in 1524; his mother died of the plague in 1508, but was subsequently condemned by the Holy Office for judaising. Her remains were disinterred and burned at the stake in 1530 and, most importantly from the point of view of her accusers, her property was confiscated. In their son, if only in a genetic sense, we see another example of the possibilities which the Renaissance brought into being, a wandering between worlds whose full import we are only now beginning to understand.[6]

Unlike Ibn Yahya and de' Rossi, who were able to remain Jews even as they drank from the fountains of the new learning, Vives and his family suffered from the fanaticism of a religious intolerance which, as Americo Castro famously remarked of the Golden Age in Spain, made learning a dangerous thing. Lack of culture, he points out, guaranteed that one was not of Jewish descent, hence the intensive cultivation of ignorance which we associate with the so-called Old Christians.[7]

A celebrated humanist, Vives wrote on philosophy, education (his *Exercitatio linguae latinae* was translated into English as late as 1908 under the title *Tudor School-boy Life*, by F. Watson; another translation of it is still in print), moral topics (a work *de officio mariti* was translated into English by T. Paynell as early as 1555, as *The Office and Duetie of an Husband*), theological and ascetic subjects, and also on juridical, political and economic issues of the day (a dialogue, for example on the dissensions in Europe and the war with Turkey, and a work on support for the poor which went into a number of editions in the author's lifetime). Though born in Valencia, he lived most of his life outside Spain, in

[4] Quoted in Pfeiffer 1976:41.

[5] On Vives see the long entry on him in the *Enciclopedia Espasa-Calpe*, vol. LXIX, 713–20 (to be used with care); for the publications of his works I have used the catalogue of the Bodleian. See also Fontán 1992. For the Jewish background García 1987; for the Inquisitorial process Pinta Llorente and Palacio 1964. For a fairly up-to-date bibliography see Noreña 1990.

[6] For an example see García Arenal and Wiegers 1999.

[7] See the discussion of this in Lopez Rueda 1973:438.

the Low Countries and in England, whither he went in search of economic security.[8] Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas More presented him to Henry VIII. Both the king and his wife were struck by him and offered him patronage, as well as the job of tutor to the princess Mary, later Queen "Bloody" Mary, while other friends managed to obtain a fellowship for him in Oxford. As a Spaniard, he tended to the Queen's side in Henry VIII's divorce but not very strongly, and as a result he lost the favour of both, having in the end to give up his fellowship at Oxford and return to the continent.

Vives was also a friend of Erasmus who, though greatly his senior, appreciated his exceptional qualities as a scholar and as a humanist and invited him to join him in an edition of the works of St Augustine. His work on this led him, in 1521, to undertake a commentary on the *City of God*, published in 1522, and it is in this work that we find him making a remark in passing about the authenticity of the *Letter* attributed to Aristeas. Augustine, as we saw earlier, had discussed the production of the Septuagint (in the *City of God* 18. 42). He had presented the story in such a way as to stress the dispensation of divine providence that had brought about the translation in order that the Scriptures might become known to the gentiles. In his comments on this passage, Vives refers to the correspondence between Ptolemy and the High Priest Eleazar recorded in the *Letter*, and says: "In book 12 of Josephus' *Antiquities* there are letters of Ptolemy to the priest Eleazar and of Eleazar to the king about this matter taken from Aristeas, not Aristeas of Proconnesus[9] but some follower of Ptolemy, who says that he was one of the ambassadors sent by Ptolemy to Egypt (sic, for Jerusalem). There exists a little book under his name about the LXX translators composed in my opinion by someone more recent".[10]

Vives is explicit. He thinks that the author of the *Letter* is not the person that the *Letter* asserts, a member of the embassy sent to Jerusalem, but someone else, who lived later. Unfortunately, he does not tell us why he thinks this. It would have been instructive to learn whether Vives' remark grew out of an awareness of some of the anachronisms and other problems which the text presents. As it is, we can do no more than assume that something like this lay behind Vives' hint here.

Vives had urged the need for a Council on Pope Hadrian VI to heal the schism which the quarrel with Luther had introduced, but he had died; although the project was revived several times under his successors, it took until 1542 for a Council to be summoned, and it finally met only in late 1545, in Trent. Far

[8] Perhaps not just economic, given the fate of his father, executed in Spain for allegedly judaizing.

[9] Aristeas of Proconnesus is a semi-legendary figure, servant of Apollo, author of a poem on the Arimaspeans, a legendary people of the far North. See Phillips 1955, Bolton 1962, *der Kleine Pauly*, I, col. 555 (by H. J. Mette).

[10] Vives on Augustine, *City of God*, Book 18, Chapter 42, in edition of 1522, Basel.

from being the large general Council that had been envisaged, the assembly consisted of fewer than forty members, of whom three were legates of the Holy See. In its fourth session, on 8 April 1546, the Council declared that God was the sole author of both the Old and the New Testaments, defined the contents of the two collections in order to remove all possible doubt about the canon of Scripture, and pronounced an anathema on anyone who knowingly used anything other than the "old vulgate Latin edition" of these texts.[11] It went on to pronounce about the correct edition and use that might be made of holy writ. Only "Holy Mother Church" had the right to interpret the contents of the scriptures, and those who challenged that right were to be punished; further, in recognition of the new technology, printers were warned not to print books on such subjects without the licence of the Church, or without indicating clearly who the authors were and who the printers were too. The Council aimed to identify those responsible for publications it did not like. "And anyone who possesses such works, or reads them, without the authors being identified, will be held to be the authors" – and punished as if they were.

The intention was to establish and maintain, in the face of the new humanism and the new technology, control of the biblical text and to retain it for the Church of Rome. That biblical text was held to be the Vulgate as formed by Jerome in the fourth and fifth centuries. Not all of Jerome's work had been fully accepted by Christian faithful, for example, one of his versions of the Psalter, but by and large the Vulgate represents the work of Jerome. The Hebrew original was not regarded as reliable, but the Vulgate, as representing an authoritative version of that Hebrew original, was regarded as God's own word and the Greek translation of the Septuagint was also thus deliberately excluded. Whatever the status of the Greek might once have been long ago and far away, now Latin was the language God had chosen as the vehicle by which to make His message known to mankind, and the Latin was that of Jerome, based on the *Hebraica veritas*, the "Hebrew truth", of the original scriptures. Only the Latin was to be seen as authentic and reliable, authorised and inspired. The Greek, contained in the Septuagint, was not a serious competitor. The Church laid down that it and it alone might define not only what the text meant but even what it said:

> wishing to repress that temerity by which things are changed into profanities, and words and phrases of Sacred Scripture are twisted into buffoonery, fables, falsity, fawning, slandering, impious superstitions, diabolical incantations, divinations,

[11] Christian definition of the contents of the biblical canon was no mean matter, and took a surprisingly long time. Hengel 2002:57 points out that "In the West, at the Synod of Carthage in 397, a relatively but by no means definitively closed Scripture collection was *gradually* nearing more definite delimitation, culminating in the final decision taken at the fourth session of the Council of Trent in 1546" (stress in the original). See his n. 1 for further references and for comparison between the definitions of Carthage and Trent.

taking of lots, even defamatory lampoons, [the Council] orders and lays down, in order to remove such irreverence and contempt, that no one should in any way dare to usurp the words of Holy Writ for these and such ends, and that all such profaners and violators of the word of God should suffer punishments under law and by the judgement of the Bishops.[12]

The Vulgate Bible had already been printed, as we have seen, in Rome itself, in 1471, and even earlier by Gutenberg, and had appeared in print many times thereafter. Erasmus and others had taken note of the problem presented by different manuscript readings and variant traditions and taken up the idea of a critical edition of the scriptures. Erasmus was a Catholic and might to some degree be controlled, though his edition of the New Testament (not in the event such a wonderful edition as might have been hoped for, mainly because he worked in haste and did not use a very wide or good selection of manuscripts[13]) appeared in 1516, but there were also Protestants, whom the decisions of Trent could not rein in. The authority of the Vulgate and alongside it that of the Septuagint was now at risk.

One solution to the problem lay in the provision of authoritative versions of the texts. We have such editions in the official Vulgate printed in 1590, by authority of Sixtus V and, with as many as 3,000 corrections, again in 1592, under his successor Clement VIII.[14] This edition remained the official text of the Roman Catholic Church until 1979.[15] In the preface to the 1592 edition we are told that "among the first of the great benefits that God brought us through the sacred Synod of His Church at Trent" is that, out of all the many existing Latin versions of Scripture, it declared the old vulgate text, which had been in use among Christians for so long, the only authentic version. This was a blessing, for "in our time there has virtually come to pass what St Jerome testified had happened in his time, namely that there are as many versions as there are codices".

Yet quite apart from the problem of deciding what should form part of the canon of scripture there was also the question which versions of each book were to be accepted as divinely inspired. "Those books which are contained in the canon", the Preface went on, "have been accepted in part from the translation or the correction of St Jerome, partly retained from some very ancient Latin

[12] Tridentinum 1758:5–7.

[13] For Erasmus' edition, with Latin translation, see Greenslade 1963: index.

[14] Sixtus issued a Bull authorizing the edition of 1590 and declaring that its text was unalterable, thus creating a problem for those who wished to correct the errors in that edition. The problem was resolved in 1592 by inscribing the later edition with the words "Biblia Sacra Vulgatae Editionis Sixti Quinti Pont. Max. jussu recognita atque edita". The 1592 edition itself was not free of errors and there were several later attempts to improve upon it too.

[15] Rossano 1990:195.

edition, which St Jerome called 'common' and 'vulgate', St Augustine (called) 'Itala', and St Gregory 'old' ". St Augustine had described Jerome as "most expert in the three tongues" (i.e., Hebrew, Greek and Latin), and "confirmed that his translation was true through the testimony of the Hebrews themselves". St Isidore, "outstanding doctor [of the Church] of our century" for the Eighth Council of Toledo in 653 and canonised in 1598, had frequently placed the version of Jerome above all others, and Sophronius, himself a great scholar, had admired Jerome's work so much that he had produced his own "elegant Greek version" of Jerome's translation of the Psalms (we are not told which) and of the prophets.

In addition, "that same very sacred Synod of Trent wisely added to its decrees one to the effect that that same ancient and vulgate edition, corrected so far as possible, should be printed, and that no one should be allowed to print it without permission and approval". But it was still not entirely clear what text was under consideration or what was the nature of the correction envisaged. The preface goes on to tell us that Pius IV (pope 1559–1565), "thanks to his incredible care for all parts of the Church, had chosen a number of cardinals and others who were very skilled both in sacred literature and in the various languages, and charged them with the task of making very careful corrections in the vulgate Latin version, making use of the oldest manuscript codices and consulting for the purpose also the Hebrew manuscripts, as well as the Greek sources of the Bible, and the commentaries of the Fathers".

The result was not what a modern textual scholar might expect. The preface is quite open about this. Some changes have indeed been made to the traditional text, but not all that the normal work of editing a text might be expected to introduce:

Although no little effort has been expended in this edition of the Bible, in comparing the manuscript codices, the Hebrew and Greek sources and the commentaries of the ancient Fathers themselves, nevertheless, while some things have after much thought been changed in this edition given to the world, others, which it seemed should be changed, have after much thought been left unchanged. The reasons for this are that St Jerome more than once warned that this should be done thus in order to avoid giving offence to people [i.e., people who were used to a particular version], and also because it could easily be believed that our ancestors, who made the Latin from the Hebrew and the Greek, had plenty of better and more accurate books than those people who lived later . . . and finally, because in fact it was not suggested to the sacred congregation of the largest possible number of cardinals and to the other learned men chosen by the Apostolic See for this task that they should print some new edition or correct and emend an ancient translation in any way, but rather that they should take that same old, vulgate Latin edition, purified of the blunders of ancient copyists as well as of the errors of distorting emendations, and restore it to its pristine integrity and purity, so far as that could be done; and once

that was done, to devote great effort to see that it should be printed as correctly as possible in accordance with the decree of the ecumenical Council.[16]

In other words, it was a fudge. On the one hand, critical method and critical standards, in accordance with the new approaches, in order to get back to the original purity of the text; on the other hand, change as little as possible, regardless of what the results of such critical work turned out to be, in order to avoid upsetting traditionalists.

Another way of dealing with such problems was to confront them less directly. The Polyglot Bibles which appeared from the early sixteenth century offered at least the materials for a more scholarly approach. The earliest of these, which enjoyed the patronage of the Spanish cardinal Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros, was begun in 1502 but printed only between 1514 and 1517 and authorised for publication only in about 1522. This edition has the Latin text in the middle between the Hebrew on the outer margin of the page and the Greek on the inner margin:

moreover in the middle we have placed the version of the blessed Jerome, between the Hebrew and the Greek as though between the Synagogue and the Oriental Church, like the two thieves placed one on this side one on that with in the middle Jesus, that is the Roman or Latin Church.[17]

It is clear that scholarship was one thing, but the authority of the text depended on what particular text was being promoted.

All of this had implications for the *Letter* and its story. If one insisted on the divine legitimation of the Greek text of the Septuagint, this implied acceptance of the truth of the story in the *Letter* (as also of the expansions of the story in the Fathers, for their truth was vouchsafed by the authority of the Church itself). But if one questioned the truth of the story in the *Letter* (and by extension of its expansions in the Fathers) this implied rejection of the divine authority of the Greek biblical text. The former position came to be associated to some degree with Church authority and hence more with Roman Catholic scholars, though this was in conflict with the declared Tridentine preference for the Latin. The latter came to be associated with those who believed that the text of the Bible needed to be edited because of the many differences between versions and variations among manuscript copies and that it was capable of undergoing the same sort of editorial processes and procedures as other texts from antiquity.

Yet whereas Reformers and Protestants might have been at one in rejecting the authority of Rome, this did not mean that they agreed on everything else,

[16] From the Preface to the 1592 edition of the Vulgate, reprinted in the 1929 edition.

[17] See Chapter 3, n. 33 on the extraordinary character of this phraseology. For a detailed description of the Complutensian Polyglot see Ginsburg 1897:906–25 and, for its publishing history, Greenslade 1963, index.

including the nature of authority itself. And Romans too, for their part, had no overriding need to rest their faith on the authenticity of a story contained in a text which might turn out to be a pseudepigraphon. In the end, as we shall see, the story did not need to offer more than extra, external support for faith.

Before we look at this, however, we return to a non-Christian, Azaria de' Rossi. De' Rossi was the first scholar to examine the *Letter* and the story of the LXX in a critical manner. Vives had done no more than bury a cryptic remark about the real date of composition of the *Letter* in a commentary on Augustine. De' Rossi devoted an entire large book to the subject, going into the whole subject of the genesis of the Septuagint translation, using a uniquely wide range of materials, Jewish as well as Christian, to identify and to analyse the problem.

That he was able to do so called for a number of special circumstances. As a Jew de' Rossi enjoyed access to both Jewish and Christian sources. Access to the former, for a learned Jew, was perhaps normal (though limited by the depradations and damage of the papal censors), but willingness to use the latter was unusual. Still more unusual, in a Jew, was the ability to read Latin.[18] That enabled him to take advantage of the translation culture of his time in order to become acquainted with a text like the *Letter*.

As with Gibbon later amidst the ruins of the Capitol, so for Azaria de' Rossi the seed of the writing of *Me'or Enayim* was planted in the ruins of Ferrara. On 18 November 1570 the first in a series of violent earthquakes shook the city, and de' Rossi and his family, like most of the city's inhabitants, escaped to areas outside the town. De' Rossi found shelter south of the river Po and there fell in with a neighbour, a Christian scholar, who "to pass the time and divert his mind from the distressing earthquake, was enjoying himself by reading the book which I had begun to discuss with him which relates the story of the translation of our Torah" – apparently the *Letter*.[19]

Me'or Enayim, the Hebrew book which Azaria produced, fills some seven hundred large pages in Weinberg's recent translation.[20] It is divided into three sections, of unequal lengths. The first, preceded by an introduction of six pages, is twenty-five pages long and is an account of the earthquake, entitled the "Voice of God", designed both to stress God's benevolent involvement in everything that happens and to explain de' Rossi's interest in the *Letter*, awakened by the conversation with his Christian neighbour. The second section is a translation of the *Letter*, called here "The Splendor of the Elders", and occupying a little more

[18] In fact, such ability in itself was not so unusual as all that: we can point to numerous Jews of many periods and different circumstances who knew and used Latin, for example in pre-1290 England. What is unusual in this case is Azaria's participation, via his knowledge of Latin, in the Latin Christian culture of his time.

[19] Rossi 2001:31.

[20] Rossi Rossi 2001. See also Weinberg 1985, 1992.

than forty pages. And the final section, entitled "Words of Understanding", fills the remaining six hundred pages. This final section, with many subdivisions, deals with an almost bewilderingly broad miscellany of topics.

At the start of this main section of *Me'or Enayim*, de' Rossi considers a series of subjects with clear links to the *Letter* and its problems. In the first part, he defends the need occasionally to have recourse to non-Jewish sources; he discusses Philo and his relevance to the problems of the *Letter*; he looks at variants in the story of the LXX as we have it. Here he was breaking new ground, at least for Christian scholars. He was making the Jewish material available for the first time to non-Jews. He also considers the status of the Jewish Sages of antiquity: how far must what they said be accepted without question? He points out here that the sages were men of learning like others and that science itself had moved on since their day. They had said things which could not always now be confirmed by the findings of modern science. Whether the earth was round or flat, for example, a topical subject in Italy of de' Rossi's day, was a subject on which the Sages could not be guaranteed to provide a definitive and correct answer. In arguing thus, de' Rossi drew support also from Maimonides, who had made a similar point in support of rational enquiry and against blind acceptance of teachings of the past several centuries earlier. De' Rossi also aroused much opposition among other Jewish rabbis for his assertion that not everything recorded in Jewish tradition must be taken literally.

From the point of view of the *Letter*, the most important topic studied by de' Rossi in *Me'or Enayim* is chronological. De' Rossi was well aware of the chronological difficulties thrown up by a comparison of the Hebrew and the Greek versions of the biblical text. Unlike most earlier scholars, de' Rossi also acquired an intimate understanding of the various eras that had been in use among Jews and others, from earliest times. And he was able to show that the era of Creation, the numbering of years using the date of Creation as a starting point, in use among Jews (still today) was a relatively late innovation. For many centuries, Jews had used other eras, borrowed from their non-Jewish neighbours, in particular the Seleucid Era, or Era of Documents, beginning in 312 B.C.E.[21] As with his rejection of the need to accept the literal truth of everything in tradition, so this view too aroused a great deal of opposition.

As can be seen, whereas de' Rossi's concerns here include the *Letter of Aristeas* and the history of the translation of the Bible into Greek, the authenticity of the *Letter* as such is not a central issue for him. He is far more concerned with broader questions of ancient chronology and the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish sources for the ancient world. His results, however, like his methods, were not in keeping with Jewish traditional attitudes and ideas, and even before publication opponents girded themselves for battle. De' Rossi

[21] See Bickerman 1968:71–2 for details on some variations in the starting point of this era.

had shown the manuscript of his work to several rabbinical colleagues: some offered severe criticisms on scientific grounds, several attempted to suppress it as heretical. Death alone prevented the most influential of these opponents, Joseph Caro, the author of the *Shulhan Arukh*, from signing a decree in Safed in 1575 that the book should be burnt. For the century following its publication the book remained a subject of great controversy among Jews, with the rabbis of Mantua forbidding anyone younger than twenty-five to read it.

This reaction to his work meant that *Me'or Enayim* had much less effect among Jews than might have been expected. Not only might the work have brought the *Letter of Aristeas* into the mainstream of developing Jewish awareness of works written in non-Jewish languages. Much more broadly than this, its author's intimate acquaintance with so much of Latin and Italian writing, both on religious and on other topics, and also with Greek materials in Latin translation, together with his critical attitude to his sources, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, might have made a decisive contribution to the development of critical study of ancient Jewish history among Jews. That it did not is due very largely to the negative reaction to the work.

This can be seen very easily from the publishing history of *Me'or Enayim*. First published in 1573–75, it had to wait for more than two centuries for a second printing. The editor of the second edition, in 1794 in Berlin, was Isaac Satanov, a major figure in the development of the early Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, in the time of Mendelssohn. There was another edition in Vienna in 1829–30, published by the Christian Anton von Schmid, who enjoyed a monopoly on Hebrew printing in Austria. Then, in 1863, the bibliographer Isaac Benjacob (1801–63, compiler of *Otsar ha-Sefarim*, "the greatest Jewish bibliographical work in the Hebrew language", published only in 1880, seventeen years after his death), produced the first volume of a new edition. This was effectively replaced almost immediately, when David Cassel published (1864–66) a three-volume edition of the work with elaborate notes and commentary. But these editions all belong to the modern era. For the two centuries after its initial appearance the work was largely unknown among Jews.

The work was not wholly unknown among non-Jews, however, for a number of chapters from the work were translated and printed in works by Christians in this time. Beginning with Bartolocci, the famous Christian Hebraist and bibliographer, who printed two chapters (including one on the problem of the differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew original) in his *Bibliotheca Magna Rabbinica* (1675–93), and including such scholars as Buxtorf and Van Dale, we find nearly a dozen Christian publications of parts of the work in the period between the book's original Hebrew publication and its second appearance in that tongue.

Apart from questions about the authority of the biblical text and the authenticity of the *Letter* itself, the *Letter* was of special significance for Christians in

another direction too. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the question of the age of the world again began to interest Christians, and we find such a scholar as Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609), "the most remarkable scholar" of the sixteenth century, devoting his very considerable energies to them.[22]

Famous son of a famous father, Scaliger was active in two principal areas: classical philology and historical chronology. He discussed the *Letter* and its relation to ancient chronology in his *De emendatione temporum*. This was an ambitious contribution to a vast debate in which Scaliger was able to make use of materials of Jewish and Christian background of wider range than almost any earlier scholar. In the two editions of this work he included information from an Italian merchant and an Ethiopian about the Ethiopian computus, and introduced into the debate information acquired through correspondence with Samaritans, as well as data from Islamic sources.

For Scaliger the story of the seventy-two was a fable. The Jews had been forced to translate the Bible into Greek at Ptolemy's command.[23] But Scaliger's view on this underwent some change. In an undated letter to the scholar Gilbert Seguin and in marginalia he wrote that despite the authority of the sources who recounted the story, it was not true; the divine inspiration of the translators was disproved by the poor quality of their version, and the Jews of that time had made use of more than a single translation. They had done so because they had forgotten Hebrew under Ptolemaic pressure to speak and write Greek.[24] Either way, the story in the *Letter* was false. Not only was the story in the *Letter* false the *Letter* itself was false too: "Aristeas is a forged book from the time of Augustus".[25]

Scaliger offered good historiographical considerations for rejecting the *Letter*; there were not twelve tribes at the time of Ptolemy because only two and a half remained; Demetrius had been on bad terms with Ptolemy II Philadelphus and could not have been behind the project to obtain a translation of the Torah; the three letters quoted in the text of the *Letter* were clearly all by a single author. All three arguments reflected the new approaches to scholarship characteristic of the age. None of these tools could have been wielded before the Renaissance. We shall see that these have remained the principal grounds on which most other scholars condemn the work. And he adds, "Everyone knows the inventions of the Jews".[26]

[22] The judgement is Grafton's (1983–93:I, 1). For what follows I rely on Grafton 1983–93, who describes (II, 648) the massive calendrical tables of Scaliger's *Isagogici canones* as "for the most part a magnificent failure".

[23] Grafton 1983–93:II, 414–15.

[24] Grafton 1983–93:II, 417.

[25] Grafton says (II, 706) that Scaliger "dated the text [of the *Letter*] precisely", but the date given here, "the time of Augustus", does not seem to square with what is said two lines later, "The author lived and the book was written 100 or 150 years before Philo".

[26] Grafton 1983–93:II, 706–07, with n. 92, "Qui nescit Iudaeorum commenta?"

Scaliger was almost an exact contemporary of David Ganz (1541–1613) of Prague. With Ganz we have our last Jewish witness (apart from the *Sepher ha-Yashar*) to the tale of the Seventy. He is, like de' Rossi, a product of a new trend in Jewish life. Long before the Jewish Enlightenment there were Jews who had been exposed to non-Jewish learning and to newer sciences. Ganz had studied, with Jewish teachers, philosophy, mathematics and astronomy. He was well acquainted with Euclid (it would be interesting to know in what language) and had been in contact with Kepler, with Regiomontanus (translator of Ptolemy – the astronomer, not the king) and with Tycho Brahe (who asked him to make a German translation from the Hebrew of the Alfonsine Tables). He wrote a number of works on mathematics and astronomy, with a historical section in one of them on the development of the study of astronomy. He was widely read in contemporary historical and geographical literature and no stranger to the broader culture of his time.[27] Ganz was also well acquainted with a good deal of Jewish literature. Like most educated and well-read Jews, he knew of Yosippon, but he also knew the work of de' Rossi; he refers to both of these, as well as the *Sepher Yuhasin* of Zacut, in connection with the story of the Seventy. His historical work *Zemah David*, "The offspring of David" (an allusion to the Messiah, taken from the liturgy), is cast in the form of a universal history in two sections: one on the Jews and another on non-Jewish history. It appeared first in 1592. In annalistic form, it refers to the translation a couple of times, both in the Jewish part and again in the general part.

In both sections Ganz quotes from earlier writers. Quoting from printed books, he does what any modern scholar does and quotes passages giving exact references to the pages from which he is quoting. His sources are two: Yosippon and Zacut. In respect of Yosippon, he quotes passages from texts with which we are already acquainted. In the case of Zacut, he uses the edition of Cracow of 1580, published, posthumously, with notes by his own teacher, Moshe Isserles (c. 1520–72). It was Isserles who had encouraged him to compose his *Zemah David*. The edition of *Sepher Yuhasin* available today is that edited by Filipowski in 1857, and that has a far shorter account of the Seventy than the edition that Ganz used. As we saw earlier, however, Filipowski's edition uses an autograph manuscript by the author, in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, whereas that of Isserles represents a less reliable witness to the author's original work.

Ganz's material on the Seventy thus amounts to a few extracts from these two works, Yosippon and *Sepher Yuhasin*, in their printed forms. Despite the new critical approach of de' Rossi and the vast range and quantity of material which that scholar had brought together in *Me'or Enayim*, Ganz did no more with his sources than quote from them as his predecessors had done with their sources, without weighing the material up and judging it and considering its worth for

[27] For Ganz's sources see the list at Ganz 1983:23–6, with discussion.

historical understanding. In a sense this is not to be wondered at, for, with all his access to new material and all his understanding of modern scientific method, in the writing of Jewish history Ganz still represents a continuation of old ways and approaches. Little would change in this area until the early nineteenth century. Prague in Ganz's day was an important centre of scientific enquiry and Ganz himself was a man of advanced abilities and singular qualities, as some of his other work demonstrates. But *Zemah David* belongs squarely in a historiographical tradition that was bound to the compilatory and the consolatory. Its author had certainly never read, possibly not even heard of, Scaliger, and even if he had read him he would probably not have been persuaded by what he had to say on such a subject as the Greek version of the Bible.

In any case, for Ganz that version represented now neither an event of positive importance for the Jews, as it had for the author of the *Letter* and others for several generations, nor a disaster of cosmic proportions, as it had for later generations in the Jewish tradition, nor yet apparently a matter of real significance for Jewish history. For the annalist in Ganz it had significance, but that significance was essentially that of the atomized fact, the detail, one among many, with its place in the entry for one year among many. Ganz does not, perhaps cannot, distinguish the important from the unimportant, sift the wheat from the chaff. He reads it in his sources, and he records it all. He has no idea why it matters. As with other annalists, for him too history is one thing after another. But Ganz is the only one among the writers at whom we look in this chapter for whom this is a historical event, the only one who does not look at the story of the LXX from a critical point of view, studying the story for its information about events in the past, not for its authenticity as a text and its possible contribution to other questions than that of the events of the third century B.C.E.[28]

Among Christians, however, critical notions were becoming much more acceptable. Richard Simon (1638–1712) was among those who delivered the strongest blows against received ideas about the Bible in the seventeenth century. He was interested in the text of the Bible and in its history, and this naturally led him also to an interest in the *Letter* and in the story of the Seventy. He discussed the question in his *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*. This was first printed in 1678, in Paris, but by chance word of its contents reached the ears of Bossuet, the great preacher, bishop of Meaux, and writer of, among numerous other works, the *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle* (1681), in which he sought to demonstrate the Christian idea of God's dominance of human history. Bossuet

[28] It is worth noting here that one of the Christian translations of part (Chapters 23, 25, 33 and 35) of *Me'or Enayim* of de' Rossi appeared in Voorst's Latin translation of the *Zemah David* (Leiden 1644).

was a Catholic and a determined defender of Catholicism against Protestantism: he had successfully persuaded the Protestant Maréchal Turenne to come over to Catholicism in 1668, and he also approved enthusiastically of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which ended toleration of Protestantism in France. Bossuet at once sensed dangers in the work of Simon. Simon's book was a manifesto, among other things, for a new edition and translation of the Bible, and, despite Simon's loyalty to the Church, he believed the biblical text, like any other text, needed editing.

Bossuet immediately had the entire edition of 1,300 copies seized, and with only a handful of exceptions they were destroyed shortly after.[29] Simon was expelled from his order, the Oratoire, without a hearing, and he was even accused of being in league with Jesuits. In 1680 a hasty reprint appeared in Amsterdam, but it was not until 1685 that a new and more careful edition appeared, in Rotterdam. The choice of place was significant, for Simon seems to have been convinced that he could not publish such a work in France.

For all the importance of Simon's work in relation to the text of the Bible, his remarks about the *Letter* seem fairly tame. Nonetheless, this impression derives in part from the very success of his work in a larger sphere. This was not only because Simon chose to write his book in French, rather than in Latin, and in a friendly and easy style which made the book far more attractive than many another work on the market at the time. Simon was a major proponent of the idea of criticism and the refusal simply to accept the word of authority because it was authority. In his remarks about the *Letter* itself he makes this point: "When it is a matter purely of criticism, we may never make do with simple authorities, if they are not at the same time in conformity with the truth".[30] However, in what he has to say about the *Letter*, Simon does little more than refer to and sum up the work of predecessors, and in particular of Scaliger. He adopts a Ciceronian manner, saying, "I shall not pause here to consider the reasons why Scaliger and some other critics have claimed that the Book of Aristeas is an invented work ['un ouvrage supposé'], because its chronology, they think, is false, and the tribes of the Jews are mentioned there as though they still existed at that time".[31] He does not, it is true, give the reasons, but he uses this style of assumed reticence to refer to many of his sources about the *Letter* and the problems which it presents. He suggests that it is more "appropriate ['à-propos'] to examine the truth of that History in itself than to haggle ['chicaner'] over

[29] Le Brun 1996:1357 draws attention to the work of Auvray (on whom see later) in showing the significance of Bossuet's share in what happened. We are reminded of the fate of the first edition of de' Rossi's work.

[30] Simon 1685:186.

[31] Simon 1685:187.

facts which are at the most only plausible". For him it is clear that the book is a Jewish pseudepigraphon, written to glorify the Jews.[32] Simon is very well read in Jewish and in non-Jewish materials, referring to the Talmud, to the Targum Jonathan, to many of the rabbinic texts which we have examined in earlier chapters of this work, as well as to numerous Church Fathers and mentioning the discrepancies among these works on the details of the translation. He goes further than de' Rossi in rejecting the authority of the Talmud as a source, for "it was written by ignorant Doctors, especially the part called Gemara, where there is almost nothing but stories made to amuse and ridiculous disputations". He notes that Philo speaks of the translators as "prophets", because they had "understood the sense of Moses with great penetration of spirit", but he pours cold water on Philo's judgement in the matter: Philo "was more interested in the study of eloquence than of criticism, and did not know the Hebrew language, so he could not judge a matter of which he had no understanding". And as to the name 'Septuagint', Simon offers his own explanation: "because it was approved by the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, which authorised it so that the hellenised Jews ('Juifs Hellenistes'; Scaliger had used the same expression[33]) could read it in their synagogues, or at least in their schools, in place of the Hebrew text".

The *Letter*'s reputation was finally destroyed, thoroughly and effectively, by Humphrey Hody. Hody was a very young man when he became interested in the *Letter*. Born in 1659, he went up to Wadham College, Oxford, in 1675, when he was not yet seventeen. He earned his B.A. in 1679 and within five years of that published the first edition of his attack on the *Letter*. It appeared in a second edition the following year.

If de' Rossi had prepared the way and had collected at least some of the materials with which that destruction could be effected, it was Hody who actually performed the task. As we have seen, de' Rossi, for all his learning, had not had a very clear idea what he was about in assembling so much material and writing such a large book on the *Letter*. Both the structure and the arrangement of his work show that. Hody, by contrast, is clear from the title page onwards: the very first word of his title is "Contra", and the title goes on to say "in which it is demonstrated that [the *Letter*] was forged by some Jew in order to give authority to the Greek version", and also, very much in the style of the

[32] If Scaliger had spoken of the Jews' "inventions" (*commenta*), Simon was scarcely politer: "The miracles which are reported there [in the *Letter*] and even the manner in which the whole book is written represent perfectly the spirit of the Jews, who have always taken pleasure, and especially at that time, in inventing books which contain almost nothing but extraordinary matters. It even seems that the author of this book wanted to anticipate the objection which might be made on this subject, saying that those who read it will scarcely believe it" (Simon 1685: 187).

[33] Grafton 1983–93:II, 414, with further discussion, 415–6.

day, "the arguments of the most distinguished and learned Dr Isaac Vossius and others in its defence are subjected to examination".[34]

The structure and contents of Hody's book differ radically from that of de' Rossi. Whereas de' Rossi had wanted to make the book available to a Jewish audience and to that end had translated it into Hebrew, Hody's aim was to demonstrate the work's falsity. He did not translate it, nor did he, at this stage, offer an edition of the Greek text. Where de' Rossi had offered a long series of dissertations and discussions of different aspects of the work and of topics connected with it, Hody consciously arranged the contents of his book as an orderly demonstration that the *Letter* is a forgery. Thus he begins with a short summary of the contents of the *Letter*, as part of his explanation of why he thinks it worth writing about at all, and then goes to tell us:[35]

And as I understood that the authority of the Greek version [scil. of the Bible] depended almost entirely on this book of Aristeas, it seemed to me worth while to undertake a study of the value of this book, and to ask whether there was anything in it from which it could be concluded that it was a fiction.

Hody argues that we have to use the critical method in "distinguishing the gold of true and genuine books from the cheaper metal of spurious ones", and explains that "I have drawn my arguments from anachronisms, errors in history, from ineptnesses, from style, and other things which show the writer to have been not a gentile as he claims to be but a Jew".

Hody divided his book into twenty-one chapters. The last has the air of an extra, tacked on to address a different kind of audience from the preceding chapters. It points to a passage in the *Letter* which, it seems, could have been written only by a Christian, thus long after the alleged time of Aristeas. The passage, in §227, is the king's question to the twenty-fifth Jewish elder: "To whom should we show generosity?", to which the answer is given, "All men think that we should be liberal to those who are well-disposed towards us, but I think that we should show a generous liberality towards those who differ from us, so as to bring them by this means to their obligations, in our own interest".[36] This has a certain Christian flavour, but not everything that concurs with Christian ideas is therefore Christian in origin.

The other twenty chapters deal with questions much more easily settled. Here Hody adopted a dual approach. On one hand, he sought out problems in the *Letter* itself, historical and textual difficulties which could be resolved very

[34] The full title of the first edition is: *Contra historiam Aristeae de LXX interpretibus dissertatio: in quâ probatur illam à Judaeo aliquo confictam fuisse ad conciliandam authoritatem versione Graecae: et claris. doctissimique viri D. Isaaci Vossii, aliorúmque, defensiones ejusdem, examini subjiciuntur.*

[35] Hody 1685: unnumbered pages "Lectori".

[36] Thackeray 1917:68 changes the text slightly for his translation, but it does not seem necessary.

simply one way or the other. On the other, he attacked earlier scholars, such as John Gregory and Vossius (father and son alike), who had accepted the *Letter* or different aspects of the legend too uncritically. At the most fundamental level, Hody conceded that the manuscripts of the work were "true (if not perfect)", but he pointed out that this meant only that the manuscripts might be faithful copies of their originals, not that their contents were not "fictions and inventions".[37]

Hody also brings to bear the skills of a scholar who knew Greek well and who was able, two hundred years and more into the age of print, on the basis of wide and deep reading in such texts, to assert that the alleged diplomatic letters included in the *Letter* were all composed by the same hand. There were no differences of style in the Greek of these documents, such as we should expect in letters written by three different people; that attributed to Demetrius was certainly not worthy of so celebrated a Greek stylist as that writer. These facts did not just cast doubt on the genuineness of the documents themselves; they also impugned the authenticity of the text in which they are included.

Some of Hody's arguments here are simply commonsensical points. He expresses incredulity at the claim, made by Aristeas, that there were no copies of the Law in Egypt at the alleged time of the translation. And Epiphanius, who had introduced the lodging of the translators in cells by pairs, was dismissed as an unreliable witness; there was nothing in the *Letter* about this, whether in the manuscripts of the *Letter* itself or in ancient quotations from it. There was no reason to accept what Epiphanius said on the subject.

Similarly, the relation of Demetrius to the translation, as described in the *Letter*, was beset with difficulties, both chronological and connected with his relations with Ptolemy II. Hody subjected the status of Hermippus as a witness to examination and showed against Vossius and Ussher that what he says can be relied upon. Hody went through the material in the *Letter* and showed that there were other chronological improbabilities and even impossibilities. Aristobulus too, already at this early stage of the study of the *Letter*, aroused Hody's suspicions, and he argued that the works alleged to have been written by him were supposititious.

Hody also carried the battle forward into enemy lines. If the author was not Aristeas – whoever that might have been – Hody also showed that there was much in the *Letter* pointing to a Jewish author, quite unlike what the author pretended. And he showed that there was good reason why a Jew might have chosen to write such a work under a name like Aristeas. Many things in the *Letter* pointed to a Jewish writer, among these the selection of seventy-two elders from the various tribes (who but a Jew would have known of the twelve tribes, especially so long after the disappearance of ten of them?); the way in

[37] Hody 1685:2 "vera . . . (etsi non immaculata) . . . fictitia & supposititia".

which comments are made on passages in Scripture; the excessive Greek respect for the Torah described in the *Letter*.

The cumulative effect of Hody's arguments was to cast so much doubt everywhere that little in the *Letter* was left untainted. Hody saw this himself, and ended his book with a fine literary flourish, an adaptation of a couple of lines from Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, IX, 607–08): *Singula si duram / Flectere non poterunt, poterunt tamen omnia mentem*, "if individual arguments can not sway a hard heart, nonetheless all of them together will do it".[38]

As this survey demonstrates, Hody was not working in a vacuum, nor did his *Dissertatio* emerge by some sort of scholarly parthenogenesis all out of his own head. It was a typical academic work, depending upon the work of earlier scholars, taking issue with some and benefiting by the work of all who had gone before. The indices to the book reveal his indebtedness to his predecessors. The first lists his sources, which are many and varied, although we note the relative absence here of Jewish sources. The second lists the modern authorities he had used and, often, disagreed with. These not only show command of an already large scholarly literature but also demonstrate how international scholarship in such subjects was even in the seventeenth century.

For all the breadth of his scholarship, Hody does not seem to know de' Rossi, although he had read David Ganz, whom he cites (for other Hebrew material he seems to be dependent on other scholars). This is not altogether difficult to understand. Even if we leave aside the difficulty that Hody might have had in reading de' Rossi's Hebrew, the preoccupations of a Hody were not those of a de' Rossi. De' Rossi had, it is true, been concerned with problems in the *Letter*, but these were of interest essentially to a Jewish audience. Problems of a different order aroused Hody's attention. Was the *Letter* genuine? Could we rely on it for authentic information about events in Egypt in the third century B.C.E.? What was its relation to the history of the translation of the Bible into Greek? And so on. De' Rossi had been more concerned with questions like the differences between the Greek and the Hebrew accounts of the translation. His material might have supplemented that used by Hody, but it was not essential to his argument or to his position.

Hody's work, expanded and included in his later, four-volume work on the original texts of the Bible, more or less doomed the *Letter*. Making use of virtually everything that was currently available on the subject, Hody summed up the state of scholarship on the *Letter of Aristeas* very efficiently and found that work wanting. Although not all were convinced, most of those who remained unpersuaded were committed in one way or another to a position defined for

[38] Hody 1685:312. The original says *si singula duram / flectere non poterant, potuissent omnia, mentem*. The change of tense and mood is needed by Hody, but the change in the order of the first two words (to conform to a pentameter form) is just a little odd.

them not by scholarship but by faith. The work was still not completed, for as van Dale remarked in the respectful preface to his own work of 1705,

That I should have decided to write something about the alleged 72 Translators after the most learned Humfrey Hody (to say nothing of Ussher, or of Isaac Vossius, or of other men of learning) will perhaps seem strange to many. . . . But those who read through both his *Dissertation* and mine and compare his with mine, will see that that material has not been completely exhausted by him. . . . He produced many wonderful things; but it is to be regretted that he was prevented by death from carrying further those things which he had begun to do on Aristeas.[39]

Nonetheless, Hody's solid scholarship and the contemptuous remark of another celebrated contemporary hunter of forgeries, Richard Bentley – "a clumsie cheat", he called it – had their effect.[40] The onus was now on the doubters to demonstrate that the *Letter* was entitled to credence, not the other way about. Serious concern with the *Letter* flagged and did not revive for almost two centuries. There were, nevertheless, some diehard loyalists of the old position.

Among these was Isaac Vossius, whom Hody had criticized. Vossius was no lightweight. One of the most distinguished classical scholars in Europe, a friend of Queen Christina, he was more than forty years older than Hody and, like many a man in his position, did not like to be criticised by one so junior to himself. He produced a response to Hody's work in 1686, in the form of an epistle added to a short work entitled "Appendix of observations on Pomponius Mela" (a first century Latin geographer). Committed as he was to the authenticity of the *Letter of Aristeas*, and at the end of a long life, he treated Hody with all the disdain that age and distinction allowed. Hody's name does not appear once in the pages of this epistle, which are scattered with expressions like "this young man from Oxford". Vossius pours scorn on Hody's youth and inexperience:

By many examples and arguments he tries to persuade (us) that librarianship was not more of an honour among the ancients than it is in our days. . . . But this young Oxonian who has never left his college and knows nothing of what goes on outside, thinks that all librarians are like those who work in those libraries that he visits – but if he were to cross over to France, he would find the archbishop of Rheims, Primate of all Gaul, who is (also) Royal Librarian.

Vossius responds to one charge with an impossible rhetorical question: "But let him say, if that translation was not made under Eleazar, about whom everyone

[39] Van Dale 1705:unnumbered pages, "Praefatio". The reference to Hody's death is odd, for he did not die until 1707.

[40] In Bentley's own best-known exposé of a forgery, the *Disssertation on the Epistles of Phalaris,* 2nd ed., 1699:83, quoted in Jellicoe 1968:47.

agrees, then under which high priest was it done?" Vossius died not long after, and Hody did not bother to respond to his attacks until 1705, shortly before his own death.

Another scholar who believed in the truth of the *Letter* was a younger contemporary of Bentley. Charles Hayes (1678–1760) was a mathematician who wrote on conic sections, and published, in 1704, the first work in English explaining Newton's method of infinitesimals. He also tried his hand at solving a problem of importance at the time, publishing in 1710 a "New and Easy Method to find out the Longitude". It seems to have been the influence of his mathematical studies which drove Hayes to learn Hebrew in order to investigate ancient chronology. Following Muslim scholars who, as we have seen, sought to lay down sound chronologies of the very ancient world, Hayes realized that for this it was necessary to establish relationships and links between lists of rulers in different parts of the world. He published one work in 1747 entitled "Series of Kings of Argos and of Emperors of China from Fohi to Jesus Christ", trying to show that their dates and the order of their succession agreed with the data in the Septuagint, and four years later another in which he attempted something similar for the chronology and history of the ancient Egyptians and "Chaldeans". He devoted the last eight years of his life to a far larger project, a "Chronography" of Asia and Egypt which he did not finish. In this work he argued that Josephus and the Seventy had had access to texts left out of the Old Testament canon but available to them in the Temple. On the basis of this it was possible to give credence to the testimony of the *Letter*, and hence also to what was contained in the Septuagint.

Not all those interested in the Septuagint and the *Letter* of Aristeas were English. Constantine Oikonomos (1780–1857) was a keen Greek patriot, at a time when this almost inevitably meant involvement in political activity too. But in later life he produced an elaborate four-volume study of the Seventy.[41] In this work he made a detailed study of the evidence for the Seventy, comparing for example the story as given by Aristeas with the version contained in Epiphanius, which, it will be remembered, had popularised the element of the separation of the translators in different cells by pairs. His work was filled with the most abstruse learning, and he showed himself well acquainted with all previous work on the subject, including even the posthumously published work of John Gregory. The work is not without its useful contributions to knowledge, not least in its sheer assembly of material, but the basic presupposition upon which it rests was the idea that the Septuagint text was inspired and thus to be preferred to the Hebrew original. In the nineteenth century, outside certain Roman Catholic circles, this could no longer be accepted as a serious argument in scholarly work; it would be uncharitable to suggest that there may have been

[41] Oikonomos 1844–49.

some link between Oikonomos' attachment to this idea and the fact that he was himself a native user of the language of the Septuagint. It may be added that the fact that he also wrote in Greek – partly because he was hostile to the intrusion of Western influence in Greek religious life – did not help to win him readers.

The last of those who took up the challenge of the *Letter* in this period was Edward William Grinfield (1785–1864). Like others whom we have encountered, Grinfield was a clergyman of extreme orthodoxy, one who enjoyed making his views known. He wrote on many topics: "Reflections on the Influence of Infidelity and Profaneness on Public Liberty, with a Plan for National Circulating Libraries" in 1817; and in 1830, "A Scriptural Inquiry into the Nature and Import of the Image and Likeness of God in Man". More to our point here, Grinfield established a lecturership at Oxford on the Septuagint, which still exists; he also wrote on the subject a number of times.[42] His principal work in this area was "An Apology for the Septuagint" (1850), although he also published, in the same year, "An Expostulatory Letter to the Right Rev. Bishop Wiseman on the Interpolated Curse in the Vatican Septuagint".[43] Grinfield's work was characterized, however, more by enthusiasm for a lost cause, that of the historicity of the *Letter*, than by new evidence.

The evidence itself, the text of the *Letter*, had been edited as early as 1561 by Schard but on a small manuscript basis, and other editions in the succeeding three centuries had expanded that basis but little. A new era began in the second half of the nineteenth century with work on the preparation of a new edition, taking account of all the manuscript evidence. This was begun by Ludwig Mendelssohn, but he died before he could complete the task, and the edition was completed by Wendland, who published it in 1900. His edition contains not only the text of the *Letter* itself (the now normal division into paragraphs is due to him) but also a wide-ranging collection of passages from patristic Greek and Latin writers in which our story appears. Thackeray, in England, also published an edition at the same time, but it is Wendland's that has become the standard. In 1917, however, Thackeray published a new English translation of the *Letter*, accompanied by English versions not only of the principal patristic sources but also of the main rabbinic ones. These works served to re-awaken modern interest in the work, and there has been a steady stream of studies of the *Letter* and its contents ever since.

For the most part, these studies have been scholarly, concerned with the issues that are thrown up by the text of any ancient work. But the *Letter* is not just any

[42] His works are listed in the entry on him in the *DNB*. See especially those numbered 19–22.

[43] Cardinal Wiseman (1802–65), first archbishop of Westminster after the restoration of a Roman Catholic hierarchy in England in 1850; until given a cardinal's hat in this year he was technically a bishop, of Melipotamus (an aptly named diocese for a man with his literary gifts) *in partibus infidelium*.

ancient work; its contents present problems which tie it in with the Bible, and because of this it is of interest not just to classical scholars but also to students of the biblical text. Its links to the patristic texts that we have looked at here made it a source of importance in the discussion of the inspiration of the biblical text in its various versions, and, as we have seen, that discussion continued for centuries. The publication of Hody's great work did not put a complete end to such thinking, but now it was perforce much more limited both in scope and in the range of those who engaged in it. Negative official Roman Catholic reaction to critical scholarly approaches to the Bible and to other texts connected with the Bible, like the *Letter*, continued to affect both scholarly interest in the work and, perhaps more importantly, consideration of the question of the authority of the Septuagint.[44] But since Hody, the inspiration of the translators was seen to derive from a legend that came into being centuries after the document which purported, falsely, to be a contemporary account of the translation. What kind of authority did the Septuagint then have? A lesser problem, perhaps, but also one of some moment, concerned how the *Letter* could be trusted as a historical source despite the attacks of Hody and others: must it be thrown out completely as a source for Septuagint origins? or did one risk losing the baby along with the water? Other problems came to the fore too. Were the older views simply wrong? Had Christians in the past been wrong to believe that the Septuagint was inspired? This belief was not simply an outgrowth of a reading of the *Letter*. It was guaranteed by the authority of the Fathers. If they had not been wrong then, then how could Christians be wrong now to retain the same belief? What did modern scientific scholarship mean for the very notion of inspiration of this foundational text of ancient Christianity?

That these issues still matter and that the story of the *Letter of Aristeas*, with the expansions introduced into it by Jews and Christians in Antiquity, continues to matter both for scholarship and for faith can be seen even in the present. Few

[44] The founder in 1890 of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, the French Dominican Marie-Joseph (born Albert) Lagrange (1855–1938), was a strong supporter of the efforts of Pope Leo XIII to encourage the critical study of the Bible in the Roman Catholic church. In 1902 Leo made him a member of the Biblical Commission, established "to further Biblical studies in conformity with the requirements of modern scholarship and to safeguard the authority of Scripture against the attacks of exaggerated criticism". But even Lagrange encountered strong opposition from official circles in the church, which affected his ability to publish. See the entry on him in *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française*, fasc. CX, 1997, cols. 282–84 (by B. Montagnes); the art. "Biblical Commission" in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*; also Lagrange 1966, and with it the introduction to that work by Roland de Vaux, like Lagrange a Dominican. But attitudes change, in the Roman Catholic church as elsewhere: in 1992 there appeared a hagiographical life of Lagrange (Guitton 1992), with the subtitle, perhaps not completely accurate, of "Celui qui a reconcilié la science et la foi". Written by Jean Guitton, "of the Académie Française" (and himself a friend of Lagrange), it was commissioned by the pope, as part of the preparations for the intended canonization of Lagrange. See also Theobald 1992.

now doubt that the *Letter* is anything but a fiction, that "Aristeas" was not the real name of the author, that the story of the Seventy-Two elders is not to be taken literally. The work of Wendland, with its collection of ancient testimonia in Greek and Latin, and that of Thackeray, with its translations of a number of additional Jewish texts, have clarified at least enough parts of the history of the legend to enable us to demonstrate how they stood in relation to each other. But the tradition of a millennium and a half is not easily cast off, and belief in the divine inspiration of the translators of Alexandria as related by the Fathers of the Church is deeply rooted. Several times in the last few decades there have been attempts to reconcile traditional doctrine with modern scholarship.

Two of these demand attention here. The first of these is an article by a Dominican scholar in Jerusalem, Pierre Benoit, entitled "La Septante est-elle inspirée?"[45] In this piece, Benoit points out that both before and after Jerome, most of the Fathers believed in the inspiration of the LXX. Nowadays, he says, it may appear ridiculous even to suggest the idea. He recognises that the source and the foundation of the original belief was a legend whose apocryphal character is now beyond doubt. He offers a newer way to take up the old belief, basing himself on newer ways, "suppler and more humane", of understanding inspiration.

One feature which encouraged the Fathers in this direction, he says, was the frequent citation of Scripture in the New Testament, not on the basis of the Hebrew original but on that of the LXX. As he points out, when the texts of the LXX and the Hebrew agree, this tells us nothing – but when they differ, he says, "the inspired author of the New Testament approves and canonises the new thought which it (scil. the Greek) contains".

Benoit suggests that "there are cases where the New Testament authors actually do claim to base an essential doctrine of the new faith on a text of the LXX which they consider Scriptural and whose sense nonetheless differs substantially from that of the Hebrew". He builds his case on three examples.

The first example is a text in Acts 2:25–31 and another in Acts 13:35–37, where Peter and Paul respectively use Psalms 15 (16): 8–11 to prove the resurrection of Jesus. The idea of a "happy immortality" is not found in ancient Israel before the second century, and we should require strong reasons to see it in this passage; in fact, Benoit tells us, we should never have thought to seek the idea of resurrection in these verses (in the Hebrew) were it not for the use made of them by Peter and Paul in the passages in Acts. Benoit's second example is drawn from the famous verse in Isaiah 7:14, about a virgin conceiving, quoted in Matthew 1:23,[46] and the third example is drawn from passages in Acts and

[45] Benoit 1951. Benoit became famous for his work on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

[46] This same example is used by Shahdost, the Syriac writer of the eighth century whom we met in Chapter 7.

Galatians where Genesis 12:3 and 22:18 are cited to prove that all the nations of the earth will share in the blessing received by Abraham.

In all three examples, Benoit draws a distinction between the content and purport of the Hebrew texts (and their authors) and the content and meaning of the Greek. This is in fact the point of his argument: when there is a difference between the two texts, the original Hebrew and the LXX Greek, and when he can see in the difference a meaning of significance for the doctrines of the younger communion, as in the case of Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23, then "we have a translation that adds something to the original".

The ancient Jewish translators, Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion, did not make a mistake in their versions from a strictly philological point of view; their error was, from the point of view of the Christian faith, to think they were returning to its original and unformed state ("a son stade primitif et encore vague") a revelation that the Alexandrian translators had carried forward by making it more precise.

We, who perceive more clearly the progress made from the Hebrew text to the Greek, and who see the latter make explicit an important truth which is consecrated later by the revelation of the New Testament, can legitimately wonder whether such a step forward in dogma could have been made without a special intervention by the Holy Spirit, and whether this text of the LXX to which Matthew has recourse is not itself inspired.[47]

Benoit concludes by suggesting that there may have been

something fitting in the idea that the Spirit of God should have continued to take care of His Scriptures in this vital stage of their history, the transmission to the Greek world and to the Church via the Alexandrian translation – not only by means of some negative, external assistance which preserved them from serious corruptions in matters of faith and morals ("moeurs"), but by a positive influence which introduced into the divine gift additions or changes full of meaning, often important, occasionally substantial, and thus prepared the final state of the old Revelation which was to receive and prolong the new Revelation.

Benoit is very careful. He does not deny the inspiration of the Hebrew text of the Bible, nor does he need either to assert or to deny the inspiration of the

[47] Benoit here points out that he is not isolated on this point. He cites two works by other Roman Catholics. E. J. Kissane, in a study called *The Book of Isaiah* (Dublin 1941) wrote (I, 89): "The prophet chose a word which is so elastic in meaning that it can refer to a virgin and yet not exclude the notion of child-bearing . . . the prophet was probably not aware of the full import of the revelation of which he was the medium . . . further revelation was needed to unfold its full meaning. The use of the word *parthenos* in the Septuagint probably indicates that the further revelation had come before that version was formed". And the Jesuit C. Lattey, writing in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, IX, 1947, 152: "Without believing the Septuagint to be inspired, we may still hold it to be a special effect of Divine Providence that the word [scil. parthenos] indicated more precisely the final term of the compenetration".

Greek of the LXX. In respect of both, all he needs to do is to recognize that they were, or may have been, suitable and relevant for their own times. This seems to apply also to such passages from the LXX as are quoted without any alteration in the New Testament. But those passages which occur in different form in the New Testament acquire for him thereby the status of inspired texts.

This line of argument is strikingly similar to that informing the original miracle element introduced into the translation story by the Jewish rabbis nineteen centuries ago. Identity of the two texts, Hebrew and Greek, is good, but it is indicative merely of fine translation work. Change, however, inconsistency, is evidence for divine intervention. Benoit is not as radical as they, for he does not take up the theme of multiple identical changes, made by separate translators acting independently; he cannot do so, for he is dealing in each case not with many translators but a single author. However, his general argument here is for all that very close to it, and we should wonder whether it simply grows out of his subject or whether he had studied the problem from this angle in greater depth than he permits us to know. There is nevertheless something of the circular about his argument too: it can only be regarded as correct, or true, if the message which the passages he cites aim to confirm is accepted as true as well. Benoit is preaching here only to the converted.

Paul Auvray, a priest of the Oratoire in Paris (like Richard Simon before him in the seventeenth century)[48] and author of the major study of Simon, responded to Benoit a year later, in the *Revue Biblique*, a journal published by the Jerusalem Ecole Biblique, to which Benoit himself was attached at the time.[49] Auvray's article bore the title "Comment se pose le problème de l'inspiration des Septante". In contrast to Benoit, Auvray added no question mark after his title. Pointing out that Benoit's argument would "apparently take us back three centuries", he proposed examining the position of the Fathers, to understand better the fluctuations of theological thought in the past.

After recognizing that faith in the inspiration of the LXX was widespread in the ancient church, Auvray points to three distinct concepts which have been distilled by centuries of reflection among theologians: revelation, inspiration and the help of the Holy Spirit, which preserves a canonical text from error. The Fathers introduced remarkable nuances in their application of these concepts. He concludes, "Inspiration, charisma, economy, providence, all these terms cover in the Fathers of the Church the same affirmation: that the version of the Seventy, in its totality, is indeed the word of God. Modern theologians say nothing different".

Auvray then points out that the Greek version of the Seventy was the canonical text of the Church for centuries – Hebrew was a dead language, he claims,

[48] On the Oratoire, see *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1002.
[49] Auvray 1952.

and no one, Jew or Christian, really knew that language anyway. Thus was the situation until the split with the Greek East. Then he points to a "curious coincidence": the centuries in which the Greek text was regarded with such reverence were precisely those when the truth of the *Letter* was asserted. But, he adds, "it is not the case that the *Letter of Aristeas* is the cause or the origin of the theological belief. We must say the contrary: faith, here, precedes the story which claims to justify it". And he goes on, "It is because the Jews already possessed and venerated the Alexandrian version [of the Bible] that they wrote and spread the Letter of Aristeas and its successive amplifications". There seems to be nothing on which this last sentence could be based. That a Jew composed the *Letter* is certain, but that "the Jews" did so is no more correct than the suggestion that "the English" wrote *Paradise Lost*; that the Jews "spread" the *Letter* is in flat contradiction to everything that we know of the history of that text and its contents.

Auvray then goes on to the heart of the matter, the differences between the Hebrew original and the Greek version of the Bible. He says that it is universally admitted that overall "the translators treated the texts which they had before them with real liberty. Philological incompetence, doctrinal prejudices or simple fantasy, the motive is of little significance here. The important point is that they put much of themselves into their translation". Turning to Benoit's argument and the three cases which that scholar had cited, he suggests that "it is difficult to reject [the exegesis of] Father Benoit" in those cases and that this leaves only two possibilities: either the text of the Seventy represents the original better than the masoretic text itself, something which he regards as quite improbable, or the text in question is inspired in the same degree as the original, and in that case there is reason to think that it was so at the level of the Greek translator.

One could apply this line of argument, Auvray continues, to other such passages, quotations from the Old Testament in the New, and affirm the inspiration of such passages especially when they differ from the original in the Old Testament. But this would lead to a strange situation: "sometimes the translators were inspired and sometimes they were not". "That is why some were tempted to conclude, by an audacious generalisation, [that there was] inspiration of the translation as a whole".

Auvray then makes a comparison with a scribe or copyist of a sacred book. Generally, there is no intellectual activity involved, far less inspiration. At the very most one could speak of help which "prevents him from introducing doctrinal error into his text. Nothing more. But when by chance he adds a development of his own devising, which is then incorporated into the text and received by the community, it seems then that he is working under the inspiration of the Spirit. The scribe becomes an inspired author." The case of the translator is very similar. Generally he just translates what is there. His version, if he is competent and conscientious, will be correct and thus inspired

partially or in the same degree as the original. "But if, here and there, he performs some personal work, interpreting or developing a point of doctrine, adding something substantial to the sacred text, then he becomes an author. And in this sense he shares in the charisma of inspiration." This should guarantee the inspiration of the Seventy. "Whether by conformity with the original text or by immediate inspiration, it is truly the Word of God". This is what the entire tradition affirms.

Auvray recognises that there are problems with this position. Translation in those days, he thinks, was a matter of word for word conversion of a text, not of true transmission of ideas, contents. The assimilation of a translator to the concept of a scribe is also inadmissible for him. The translator in Antiquity is so far beyond the level of a mere copyist that we cannot justly make that comparison.

To translate is to choose, judge, interpret; it is of necessity to bring all the intellectual faculties into play. . . . This is why, far from being an argument against its inspiration, the presence of divergences in the Seventy [by comparison with the original] rather invites us to recognise that its authors were inspired. Inspiration does not guarantee the fidelity of a version, it expresses the divine origin of a text, an attestation all the more necessary as there are more differences between the translation and the supposed original.

Auvray thus arrives at an extraordinary conclusion: the more numerous the differences between translation and original, the greater the proof this is of inspiration in the work of the translators. He sums up his survey thus: "an attentive examination of some witnesses to the ancient tradition, as well as reflections on the theology of inspiration, lead us to consider with favour the idea of inspiration of the Seventy as a whole". And finally, the Alexandrian version "would be no longer a simple instrument of textual criticism, a means to reach the original text of the Bible, but . . . an object of study in itself, as Word of God and source of revelation, in the same sense [au même titre] as the Hebrew text".

As this summary shows, Auvray goes much farther than Benoit but like him argues for inspiration of the Seventy. According to him, the whole of the Septuagint is to be seen as inspired. Although he draws careful distinctions between revelation, inspiration and the aid of the Holy Spirit at the start of his paper, by the end he is using the term inspiration in effect in all three senses indifferently.

In a sense, both of these writers are trying to save the phenomena. Acceptance of the differences between the Hebrew original and the Greek translation as due to the inadequacies of the translators, rather than as the product of divine inspiration, would deprive the Septuagint of its authority. This would not only mean that the Fathers of the Church had been wrong in attributing so much

authority to the Septuagint; it would also remove the prefigurations of the Messiah which the Church had seen in the differences between the two texts. Their significance for Christians lay in the fact that they had been made three centuries before Jesus, by people who could not have known what the changes they were making meant. If these were to be seen merely as translational variations, shorn of any divine source, this would affect the authority of the Christian message. For both writers, that authority could not be challenged, and their defence of the divine inspiration of the Septuagint starts from that point.

Both of these priest–scholars wrote half a century ago. But the spirit lives on. Our own generation offers a good example of the dependence of the Church itself on the argument for the inspiration of the LXX. It also illustrates the difficulties which the Church faces: on one hand it inherits from the past a commitment to the authority of the Latin and a tradition about the inspiration of the Septuagint, on the other hand it has a different kind of commitment to recognition of the advances in knowledge and understanding brought by modern scholarship, to say nothing of the traditional beliefs and dogma of Christianity itself. In 1979 the Roman church published a new version of the Vulgate.[50] This had a long gestation. The process began with Pope Pius XII, who issued an encyclical in 1943 confirming the declaration of the Council of Trent about the authenticity and freedom from error of the Vulgate "in rebus fidei et morum", although saying that it was to be understood in juridical rather than critical terms. The small step away from too complete an acceptance of the text as text is noticeable. A preliminary, but perhaps too hasty, revision of the Psalms appeared in March 1945 and met with many protests, from latinists and others, which continued up to the Second Vatican Council, in the 1960s.

At that Council Pope Paul VI tried to push forward the idea of a "most careful edition" of the Vulgate, such as the Council of Trent had proposed four centuries earlier. The commission appointed for this task in 1965 was to produce

> an edition which reflects the progress made in biblical studies and the need to provide the Church and the world at large with a new and authoritative text of Holy Scripture. This text will respect Jerome's Vulgate translation in those cases where it faithfully corresponds to the original, as given in the scholarly editions; in those cases where it diverges from the original or does not interpret it correctly, it will be prudently revised, bearing in mind the criterion of Christian biblical *latinitas*, so that we may at the same time respect the ancient tradition of the Church and the healthy critical requirements of modern science.[51]

[50] For what follows see Rossano 1990.

[51] This quotation comes, via Rossano 1990, from the address delivered by Paul VI on 23 December 1965 to the cardinals and the Roman Curia. We are reminded of the problems faced by Jerome

These two conditions do not always enjoy perfect harmony. Rossano tells us, "Special attention was given to the translation of messianic sections by bringing them back into conformity with the original text", and he gives some examples. In Isaiah 45:8 "*germinet salvatorem* was corrected to *germinet salvationem*"; and in Daniel, 9:26, "the Hebrew original has been translated literally: *occidetur christus* (no capital C) *et nihil erit ei*". We are told here that the "Hebrew original" of this specific text has been "translated literally". But, although in Lamentations 4:20 the old Vulgate's *Christus Dominus* (deliberately ignoring the grammar) has been replaced with *unctus Domini* ("in order to avoid any messianic misunderstanding", and by the way in conformity with the grammar), in Isaiah 7:14, by contrast, the New Vulgate has retained, like the old, "*Ecce virgo concipiet*, on the basis of the word παρθένος in the Septuagint, later quoted in Matthew 1:23, seeing that there is no cogent reason for excluding the meaning 'virgin' from the Hebrew". It is a curious logic, for of course "the meaning 'virgin'" is far from the only meaning contained in the Hebrew; there can be no good logical (or philological) reason for narrowing down the semantic range of the word in this single case; and the difference between this artificially narrow definition and the full meaning of the word has been the central issue in the argument between Christians and others over the meaning and translation of this word in this passage for very many centuries.

What stands out in the present context is not so much the insistence of the institution, the Roman Catholic Church, on a dogma which it sees as central to its identity, but far rather the means by which it seeks to argue for it.[52] That consists in the reliance on the core meaning of the Greek word in the Septuagint, deliberately ignoring the clear meaning of the word in the Hebrew original from which the Septuagint is translated. This represents merely a return from the authority of the Latin to that of the Greek. But this is more than a preference for one text or one version over another. It represents a return not only to the older ideas of inspiration, ridiculed politely but definitely by Benoit in 1951, but also to older, by now one might have thought discredited, methods of polemic, as if this sort of inverted logic could, by involving the notion of exclusive and uncheckable inspiration, somehow prove the truth of a fundamental dogma of a religious faith, as if, indeed, proof were what it was all about. We are reminded of the arguments of Benoit and Auvray half a century ago, to say nothing of Shahdost in the eighth century and countless others

in his translation work and of the preface to the 1592 Clementine edition of the Vulgate (see Chapter 6).

[52] It is worth noting here that Bishop Pietro Rossano (1923–91; served 1978–83 as Secretary of the Vatican's Secretariat concerned with non-Christian religions), on whose article of 1990 I rely here, served as Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for the revision of the Vulgate set up in 1965; and from 1968, following the death of Cardinal Bea, until 1971, he headed the commission.

over the last two millennia. The only possible basis for this reliance, beyond the dogma itself, is the view that the text of the Greek Bible translated by the Seventy-Two in Alexandria twenty-three centuries ago, as the story related in the *Letter of Aristeas* and expanded by the rabbis and the Fathers of the Church tells us, indeed enjoyed divine inspiration.

Conclusion

For ancient (and some modern) Christians, the authority of the LXX surpassed that of the masoretic Hebrew text. This authority is guaranteed by the miracle story. That story in all its manifold variety sits at the heart of the chapters that lie behind us. But it is, after all, just a story. The *Letter* has no value as testimony to genuine historical events. The intimacy of its detail, if nothing else, must tend to reduce whatever limited suspension of disbelief our desire for reliable sources might induce. For all that the story has fired the imagination and aroused curiosity among Jews and Christians, Muslims and even pagans. We find it in the Iberian Peninsula and in Caucasian Iberia, on the shores of the Atlantic and in the wastes of Central Asia; we have seen it not just in its original Greek but also in Latin and in Persian, in Armenian and in Ethiopic, in Hebrew and Arabic, and in Georgian, to say nothing of English and Portuguese and other languages of modern western Europe. It fuelled religious controversy and fed religious faith from the second century B.C.E. until the Renaissance and after, and even now its last echoes have not died away.

Taken together, the stories studied here add up to more than the sum of their parts. They testify to the vitality and acceptability of the story and its individual bits in many different contexts. Some of those contexts are merely linguistic or geographical: within the Greek world of the Hellenistic and early Christian Mediterranean, the story crops up wherever Greek is known. Others are cultural and bear witness to the richness and depth of the links between and among all the cultures and societies and languages that have succeeded to ancient Greece and ancient Judaism. And others again show that motifs can also split off and be taken up for purposes vastly different from those for which they were first created.[1]

[1] As a curiosity, we may note here the story told by Jacob Perez de Valencia in the fifteenth century that "After the conversion of Constantine the Great, the Rabbins . . . assembled in great multitudes at the Babylon of Egypt, which is called Cairo, where they, with as much secrecy as possible, falsified and corrupted the Scriptures, and concocted about five or seven points

Above all they point to an overarching unity among all of these cultures in the world surrounding the Mediterranean.

There remain many unanswered questions, paths not followed here. As has been seen, the Seventy (or the Seventy-Two) became a wandering motif. Detached from their original background, they nonetheless continued to serve in others, not always very different in literary structural terms. Thus the story from Zosimus in the Appendix to this volume. Rather better known than that is another example of the wandering motif, in connection with Peisistratus and the claim that he was responsible for a sixth century "edition" of the Homeric poems.[2] Another set of unanswered questions concerns the Georgian Epiphanius and its relation to the Greek and Syriac texts of that author. And another concerns the Copto-Arabic and Ethiopian Synaxaria and their ties to Jewish sources. Both of these contain documents and information and present problems of real direct relevance here. The resolution of the difficulties which these present will enable us to make headway, in the case of the Georgian Epiphanius, with problems in the history of our text of Epiphanius, going beyond our present story, and with the history of intra-church polemic in the second-fourth centuries, and in the case of the Synaxaria, with the nature of the intellectual links between Jews and Christians in the Islamic world around the year 1000 C.E. And we are left wondering, probably without much prospect of an answer, about why the story should apparently have so little appeal to the Coptic milieu.

The legend and the *Letter* are two separate things. And they stand at least a couple of levels of sophistication and complexity higher than individual motifs like that of the Seventy-Two. As our examination has shown, each – legend and *Letter* – could exist without the other. Both retail the inauthentic as true. Each has been condemned on that account. But the success of each outweighs any failures. The fate of the *Letter* was different from other pseudepigrapha. The others – the forged Berosus of Annius of Viterbo, the Donation of Constantine,

to serve as vowels, these points having been invented by Ravina and Ravashe, two of their doctors. The same Rabbins also concocted the Talmud" (cited in Ginsburg 1968:47). Perez de Valencia (1420–91 or 1408–90), known as bishop of Christopolitanus, was an Augustinian, learned in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic and "algarabia", who wrote a great deal, "confuted the Jews, discussed with the Moors, and taught all". His *Tractatus contra Judaeos*, together with a commentary on the Song of Songs, published in Valencia in 1486, went through eighteen editions by 1749. He was the first inquisitor of Valencia appointed by the Catholic Monarchs. When Philip II passed through Valencia in 1586, he is said to have said to the Augustinians there, "Fathers, an unknown saint lies here". As a result they made enquiries with a view to his beatification. He is credited by the Spanish *Espasa-Calpe* encyclopaedia (vol. 43, 711) with identifying the circulation of the blood long before Servetus, but the textual support offered there for the claim is weak.

[2] I am preparing a separate study of this.

the *Letters* of Phalaris – once exposed were immediately cast out of respectable company, expelled from the bookshelf of scholars and forgotten. Who now reads the *Letters* of Phalaris? Where can we find a new edition of Annius' Berosus? All have disappeared. It is true that the *Letter of Aristeas* is not a forgery in quite the same way as those Renaissance creations of Annius, but it is no less a pseudonymon than the supposed *Letters* of Phalaris, and it is of similar age. They have faded, despite the undoubted interest, value and importance which they have for the cultural and intellectual history of the period when they were written. The *Letter of Aristeas* has survived, and the legend it retails along with it. If it is no longer universally accepted as authentic and true, it is a tribute to something in it that dispute about aspects of it still continues. Even as these lines are written, at the start of the third Christian millennium, a book has appeared in which the *Letter*'s contents are accepted as fundamentally true and as offering a reliable account of events in Alexandria in 281 B.C.E.[3] Another, less credulous but still accepting of the main lines of the legend, has just appeared.[4] If nothing else, this is a tribute, not just to the skills of the original writer (who was, after all, exposed, like the others, as soon as critical eyes were turned on his work) but also to the meaning for his bimillennial audience of the message that his work contains.

That message was born with modest aims. It began its life as a frame-story in a work of Jewish propaganda written in Greek, offering nothing more than the justification for that work. It was the story of the translation that engaged the attention and stimulated the imagination of Jews and Christians in later generations. Hence the additions to the story that were invented both by the Rabbis and by the Fathers of the Church. In this activity the Rabbis had their own purposes similar to but not identical with those of the Christian writers. The Fathers of the Church pursued the obviously propagandistic aim of bestowing legitimation on the Greek version of the Bible and indeed more than mere legitimation; there is patent evidence of the desire to ascribe divine inspiration to the text of the Greek version of the Jewish scriptures.

The introduction of the miracle gave the legend new meaning. Before, it had related no more than an impressive event. Now it told of divine intervention. As we have seen, the miracle could have been introduced among Jews only in the narrow space of time around the end of the first century and the start of the second century C.E. The desire among Jews to give increased authority and prestige to the Greek version of the Bible soon passed, but we never find any expression of doubt among Jews about the miracle which had been invented for that purpose. This was true even in medieval times, when the story of the translation and the detail of the agreement of the translators in the changes

[3] Collins 2000; see my review in *Scripta Classica Israelica*, XXII, 2003, 318–20.

[4] Honigman 2003.

did not testify to Jewish admiration for the Greek version but, if anything, confirmed hostility to it.

Christians soon took up the theme of the miracle and used it to build new versions of the legend, which testified to pre-Christian Jewish anticipations of Jesus. Although their versions generally abandoned the story of the changes, this is echoed occasionally in accusations of Jewish tampering with the biblical text, with the aim of hiding prophecies of the arrival of the messiah.

In the orient, though Greek was no longer a biblical language of significance, the legend continued to thrive. Eastern Christians remembered the story of the agreement of the translators even as they forgot the language of the translation, and they embroidered further the accusations of tampering with the text. They also added the picturesque detail of the survival for three hundred years of one of the translators, identified as Shim'on ha-Tsaddiq, so that he could see the messiah whose coming he had doubted when he found it referred to in the biblical text that he was translating. Among Muslims the story of the miraculous agreement of the translators survived but shorn now of significance for the truth of the text. The Muslim view that Jews and Christians had altered the holy texts meant that no version of the Bible was of great interest to them, but narrative elements like the Library of Alexandria and the supposed date of the translation could still be of use to Muslim historians and to chronographers.

Down to the twentieth century, the legend of the inspiration of the translators, confirmed by the miraculous agreement of their versions, continued to give authority to Christian translations of the Bible. The work of Hody and others established definitively, centuries ago, that the *Letter* contained a fiction and that there was no basis in our sources for the notion of divine inspiration of the Septuagint translation. Nevertheless, that version has continued to find defenders in our own time who have sought support for their beliefs in what are at base variations of the legend of the changes, founded originally on the story in the *Letter*. As we have seen, it is a legend of Jewish origin, created by the Rabbis for homiletical purposes in order to commend to their fellow Jews a Jewish translation of the scriptures, which was taken over and re-fashioned by the Fathers of the Church and has, in Christian dress, for two millennia given the authority of inspiration to that translation.

APPENDIX

In Partibus Infidelium: Zosimus of Panopolis

Zosimus of Panopolis does not fit neatly into the schema which we have used to categorise the contents of this book. That schema divided our sources essentially according to religious context: Jewish, Christian and Muslim. Zosimus does not fit tidily into any of these categories. The Appendix is his natural home. Though Greek, apparently he is not Christian. Although he comes from and works in the East, in Egypt, he is too early to be placed in the broader category of the orient as I have used that term in this book. He is a pagan, of sorts, in a world which, if not yet fully, even dominantly, so, is by this time essentially Christian;[1] he is Greek-writing – it would appear – but deep in Upper Egypt (Panopolis is situated far to the south of Asyut on the right bank of the Nile and, though it came to be a Christian centre of some cultural significance, that happened only a century or so after the most commonly assumed time of Zosimus[2]). Though a Greek, finally, his use of the story appears to have egyptianising aims.

For a pagan and a polytheist, the story of the translation by the Seventy is likely to have had little real attraction, as it has most genuine significance in the exclusivist atmosphere of a monotheistic faith that regarded the Jewish scriptures as sacred. That explains why the story can be put to such effective polemical use in Christianity and, later, Islam. But here we find the story, even if only this once, in a syncretistic semi-pagan context of hermeticism and gnosticism. If nothing else, this demonstrates that the story has potential beyond such barriers too. It is particularly interesting that we should find it in this context in Egypt, home of the Ptolemy of our original story and home, too, of the biblical translation itself. It is the character of hermetic materials and ideas in Egypt, borrowing

[1] For a subtle analysis of aspects of the christianization of his home city, see Frankfurter 2000. Whereas his emphasis on the possibility of inter-generational tensions as a factor in the christianization is less than persuasive, the overall picture drawn here is rich and helpful to understanding of Zosimus' background. See in particular nn. 13, 15–16, 19 with further references.

[2] See Egberts, Muhs and van der Vliet 2002. The poet Nonnus, who was probably active in the fifth century, is the city's most famous son.

from everywhere and mixing everything together in a shapeless jumble, that explains these two features of its context here.

The real problem is that we cannot know Zosimus very well. We do not know when he lived nor can we be sure that the material going under his name really comes from him. Unlike most of our other sources, the hermetic tradition to which he belongs, and especially the alchemical sub-branch of that, abounds in pseudepigraphic material, pseudonymous texts, texts attributed both to real authors and to imaginary ones by writers whose identities can now never be known. Our texts constantly quote from each other and cite authors in ways which make it very difficult, even impossible, for us to work out relative chronologies.[3] Zosimus the man may have lived around 300 C.E. Such a date is relevant for our present purpose, as it would place him and hence his version of our story at a time when we find the story in Jewish and Christian hands as well, and it would be at least noteworthy that the story was circulating more widely than just among followers of these two faiths at that time. But we cannot be sure; the date of Zosimus himself is much less certain than most of those who write about him suggest, and the attribution of our story to the man Zosimus must also be uncertain.

Zosimus is neither a common nor yet a very rare name. Our man is not, it seems, to be confused with either of two sophists of the same name, one from Gaza and one from Askalon, nor with the well-known pagan historian of the fifth-sixth centuries.[4] Apart from the question of date, however, it is not entirely obvious that an identification at least with the historian should be impossible. The historian had connections (he plagiarised from him) with Olympiodorus of Thebes, who also figures here. As to the date of Zosimus, Martin Plessner[5] noted that the alchemist Synesius apparently mentions him.[6] This Synesius is apparently not to be confused with his contemporary and namesake, a pupil of the pagan philosopher Hypatia, originally a pagan, who was a bishop of Ptolemais at the start of the fifth century, despite being married and having doubts about some parts of the Christian faith.[7] Again, there

[3] On the Byzantine alchemical tradition generally see art. "Alchemy" in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 54–56 (by David Pingree and Anthony Cutler). For a salutary warning about the difficulties involved in the dating of such material, see Fowden 1986:11, n. 53.

[4] Barry Baldwin, art. "Zosimus" in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 2231. See also *der Kleine Pauly*, *s.nomine* Zosimus, nos. 2–3, cols. 1562–64 (by Hans Gärtner).

[5] Martin Plessner, art. "Zosimus of Panopolis", *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, XIV, 1976, 631–32.

[6] See the entries on him in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1993 (by Barry Baldwin), *der Kleine Pauly*, 5, 454 (by Bernd Reiner Voss), and the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., 1332.

[7] Fowden 1986:178, n. 108, refers to Lacombrade for the view that there are two men called Synesius, whereas he himself seems to be arguing for one called Synesius and another, of unknown name, who forged the epistle referred to next.

seems little reason to be so confident about rejecting such an identification. Synesius, whoever he was, seems to have sent an epistle or a book to a certain Dioscorus who was High Priest of the Serapeum in Alexandria.[8] As this was destroyed in around 390, Plessner suggested that "Zosimus is presumed to have lived around A.D. 300".[9] The gap between 390 and 300 is a little large for a *terminus ante quem*, but it seems to be accepted by Fowden.[10] Berthelot raised the possibility of a doublet here: he points out that the name Dioscorus occurs also in the authentic letters of Synesius, as the name of a bishop. He suggested that although, perhaps, we might have here a homonym, another possibility was that of a priest of Serapis, a pagan, who later, like Synesius, became a convert to Christianity.[11] Howard Jackson explored the matter more fully. He noted the reference to Zosimus (although it does not actually name him) by

[8] Lacombrade 1951:70–71 argues against the identification of our Synesius with Synesius of Cyrene, the famous one, because at the date of the destruction of the Serapeum, around 390, he would have been too young to have written to Dioscorus. As against this we should consider, first, that we have in fact no idea when such an epistle would have been written. Dioscorus was not necessarily the High Priest at the time of the destruction, and of course the text could have been written and dedicated to him at any date before the destruction. This would tend to strengthen Lacombrade's argument. That argument is, however, based on a birth date for Synesius of ca. 370. But that date, like those which push his birth back as far as 365 and those which push it forward, is simply a guess, based on the supposed dates of his life and writings themselves. This is circular. And it should also be urged, secondly, that the entire argument based on the supposed date of an alleged despatch or dedication of an epistle to Dioscorus becomes a little less than persuasive in this context when we read in Lacombrade himself (69) that the epistle is actually not a letter but a dialogue. Lacombrade remarks (in a parenthesis) "car, par une gaucherie de composition tout à fait insolite chez un artiste délicat, cette épître se change soudain en dialogue". This does not refute any of the argument as to dates, but it does seem to make it all irrelevant.

[9] We hear of another text related to the destruction of the Serapeum. The reference is in Jerome, *de Viris Illustribus*, 134, dealing with someone called Sophronius who, according to Jerome, "composed a remarkable work on 'the destruction [*subversio*] of [the temple of] Serapis". The same Sophronius also wrote other works and translated a number of Jerome's works from Latin into Greek "elegantissime", including one of Jerome's versions of Psalms and that of the Prophets. This Sophronius is not (naturally, in our present context) to be identified with others of the same name, notably the famous seventh century patriarch of Jerusalem who surrendered the holy city to the Muslims. He seems to be identical with the Sophronius who translated Jerome's *de Viris Illustribus* (including the entry on himself) into Greek. But this is not certain (cf. Wentzel, 1895; Puech 1928–30:III, 549; J. Geiger 1996:48, with nn. 61–62, with further references; Kokkinos, 2003; Chuvin, 1990:70–74, with further references; Eunapius 472, also refers to the story of the Serapeum and hints at a possible reference to it in his lost *Katholike Historia*). It is a nice irony that this curious detail, at the tail end of the classical tradition of the Seventy, should involve the destruction of the Serapeum: the cult of Serapis is said (v. *OCD*, s.n.) to have been introduced to Alexandria with the assistance of Demetrius of Phalerum, who is said by Ps.-Aristeas to have played a part in the creation of the Septuagint.

[10] Fowden 1986:90–91, 120.

[11] Berthelot 1938:191.

Synesius, and accepted that, because of the destruction of the Serapeum around 390, "Zosimus must therefore well antedate A.D. 389".[12] Why "well antedate", with Plessner, rather than simply antedating, is not made clear. He notes further in the fragments attributed to Zosimus a citation from Porphyry, who died around 305, and a quotation from a Gnostic source which must itself date from around 290, as well as a hint in the same part of his text to the effect that three generations may have passed since the advent of Mani (ca. 242). All of this, together with what he calls the "disastrous" economic and political conditions of the late third century, encourages him in a dating for Zosimus of around 300 C.E.

The latest editor of the texts attributed to Zosimus is Michèle Mertens.[13] Mertens devotes considerable space to discussion of the date of Zosimus;[14] in the end, she does not disagree with the general consensus, although the emphases of the argument presented in its favour differ slightly. She dismisses the reference to Porphyry, as a *terminus post quem* for Zosimus, on the ground that the quotation from this writer is not actually to be found in the writings correctly to be attributed to Zosimus; the attribution is an error. She dismisses the Synesius quotation, on similar grounds, although her argument for doing so is a little opaque, at least to me. In particular, she uses the reference to the Serapeum as a point d'appui in favour of a *terminus ante quem* of 391. The implication, here as elsewhere in the literature, is that a reference to the Serapeum, without a reference to its destruction, justifies the supposition that the Serapeum was still in existence at the time of writing. However, even if Zosimus is Egyptian and writing in Egypt, a reference in his text to something that allegedly happened some hundreds of years earlier, the "deposit in each of [their] sanctuaries, especially the Serapeum", does not, it seems to me, need to mean that the Serapeum was still in existence at the time of writing and therefore that Zosimus antedated its destruction in 391. (He may have done so, but this cannot be part of the argument that he did so.) There seems no good argument, however, on this basis, not to see Zosimus as active at any date up to the time of Synesius himself, at the end of the fourth century, and possibly beyond that.

Beyond this, however, Plessner also points to another set of awkward facts:

The grouping of texts in Berthelot's *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs* does not give a clear idea of which texts were really written by Zosimus. Among those under the name "Zosimus," several contain only citations from Zosimus; and for others

[12] Jackson 1978:4–5.
[13] Mertens 1995.
[14] Mertens 1995:xvi, 5, 89 n.54.

not even this much is true. On the other hand, many of the texts attributed to Zosimus include citations from later authors. Further, Berthelot did not collect the citations from Zosimus that appeared in other books not published under his name, nor did he carry out a systematic comparison of the Syriac and Greek texts. Finally, the Syriac texts are given only in a French abridgement, not in the original.[15]

Some of the disorder referred to here by Berthelot has been sorted out in the new edition of Mertens, who devotes many pages to discussion of the texts, of their manuscripts, and of their internal relations with each other and their external relations with other texts, as well as to the Syriac and Arabic versions of some of them.[16]

The awkward inter-relationships of authors, of texts, of relative and absolute datings, of attributions true and false, mistaken and correct, do not end here. A historian Zosimus borrowed, copied, plagiarised from the historian Olympiodorus. An alchemical writer Olympiodorus is also one of our principal sources for the alchemical writer Zosimus. According to Berthelot, Olympiodorus wrote, *inter alia*, "The Alexandrian Philosopher Olympiodorus on the Book of Deeds by Zosimus and on the Sayings of Hermes and the Philosophers".[17] Which Olympiodorus is this? We know of at least two. One, Olympiodorus of Alexandria (we note the place-name, shared here with the title attributed to the work just mentioned), was a neoplatonist who lived during the first half of the sixth century. He is "thought to be the author of the commentaries on the astrological work of Paul of Alexandria ascribed to a certain Heliodorus"; but it "is less likely that he wrote an extant treatise on an alchemical text of Zosimos". He was a pagan, although he was later mistakenly thought to be a Christian.[18] "Less likely", perhaps, but he might well fit. The other Olympiodorus was born, in Thebes (of Egypt), before 380 and died after 425. He is a far more colourful character altogether. A militant pagan, for more than 20 years he "travelled adventurously around the world with a parrot that could dance, sing, and speak his name". Given the shape and length of his name, this is impressive.

[15] Plessner, in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, XIV, 1976, col. 632. Mertens 2002:166, lays out the contours of the problem very well: "the chronology of those writings is extremely difficult to establish, for one can do no better than try and disentangle crossed quotations within the Corpus". This is, of course, in normal cases, the norm. But in alchemical texts it does not work. See also Letrouit 1995.

[16] Mertens 1995:xix–lv, especially Conclusions, ci–cv. The last sentence of this exhaustive study is: 'Comme tant d'autres auteurs de la fin de l'antiquité, Zosime est assurément un bel exemple de naufrage littéraire'. The image is fine (so fine, indeed, that she repeats it, at Mertens 2002:167), and the sentiment is true, but it tends to play down the special character of his writings as belonging to the alchemical tradition, referred to earlier.

[17] Karl H. Dannenfeldt, art. "Olympiodorus", *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, X, 208.

[18] Barry Baldwin, art. "Olympiodorus of Alexandria", *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1524.

In 412 he was an ambassador to a Hunnish king, whose death soon after aroused suspicions that our Olympiodorus may have been involved in arranging it. He wrote a historical work which was a source for the Arian historian Philostorgios, for the ecclesiastical historian Sozomen, and also, as we have seen, for Zosimus the historian. Momigliano suggests that he probably shared the superstitious beliefs which he describes in his work.[19] It could be this one too. If we are tempted by the apparent correlation of dates (to say nothing of the parrot) to plump for this candidate, we should remember that in alchemical and magical texts, in hermetic literature of all types, the normal rules of editorial and generally scholarly argument based on citations from known writers whose known dates can supply us with some fixed points round which to construct a sound chronology simply do not apply. And there is the problem of the place-name: Alexandria is not Thebes. If, however, we plump for the other Olympiodorus – he did after all have a documented interest in alchemical matters too – then, quite apart from anything else, this might seem to place everything a couple of centuries later.

We have two possible people called Synesius, two possible candidates for the relevant name Olympiodorus here, and two possible identities for the name Zosimus in relation to our story.[20] Between them they offer us a date range from around 300 or so (though, as we have seen, there is actually no good argument for placing Zosimus more than a decade or so earlier than 390) to somewhere in the middle to second half of the sixth century. It is a long period, and it is frustrating to possess what looks like so much material with multiple interconnections and yet to be unable to sort it out in a plausible way. Plessner's view, that Zosimus "appears to be the earliest genuine historical figure mentioned as an author in the Greek alchemical texts", may well be correct, but who he was, when he lived, and what his connection may be with any of the texts attached to his name are all questions to which we still do not have adequate answers.

It is time, whatever we make of the identity of Zosimus, to turn to the version of the story itself attributed to him. I take the text from Mertens, the latest editor. The principal other editions available are that of Berthelot and

[19] Arnaldo Momigliano, art. "Olympiodorus (3)", in *OCD*, 751.

[20] This does not exhaust the relevant and interesting people called Zosimus. We have an inscription from the highlands of Phrygia in Asia Minor, in which we learn of a diviner called Zosimus, who used "inspired Scriptures and Homeric verses" as a means to discovering answers to questions about the future posed to him by local people. Robin Lane Fox suggests that this Zosimus was not a pagan and that he was possibly a follower of the sect of the Most High god, known in the area, and more probably a Christian, "using Homer and the Bible to answer questions by random selection or lot". In view of what we shall see about our Zosimus, either possibility seems acceptable. We do not seem to have a date for this Zosimus. Lane Fox 1988:404, with 746 n. 2, referring to C. H. E. Haspels, *Highlands of Phrygia*, I, 1971, no. 40, p. 313; "she offers no commentary".

Ruelle, that of Scott, and that of Jackson.[21] My translation differs slightly from those of Jackson and Mertens.[22]

Furthermore, look at the tablet[23] that Bitos wrote, and Plato the thrice-great and Hermes the infinitely-great, (saying) that Thoth means in the original hieratic language the first man, the interpreter of all that exists and the giver of names to all corporeal beings. The Chaldeans, the Parthians, the Medes and the Hebrews call him Adam, which means "virgin earth," and "blood-red earth," and "fiery-red earth," and "fleshly earth." These things are to be found in the libraries of the Ptolemies; they laid it[24] away in each sanctuary, above all in the Sarapeion, at the time when he[25] invited Asenas[26] the high priest of Jerusalem[27] to send translators,[28] who translated the whole of the Hebrew into Greek and Egyptian.[29]

We see at once the parallels to the original story, though we note as quickly the differences from it. It is obvious that this is not a textual borrowing, but rather a reminiscence.[30]

[21] Berthelot and Ruelle 1888:II, 230; III, 223 (II is a *livraison* containing the Greek texts; III a *livraison* containing French translations; these are not always bound as separate volumes; occasionally we find the Greek and the French sections which are related to each other bound together. But the paginations are separate); Reitzenstein 1904:104; Scott 1936:106. On Scott's work see Copenhaver 1992:liii. As he remarks, "some of his textual insights were brilliantly right, others brilliantly wrong". Jackson 1978:14, n. 30 expresses himself more directly: "Scott's butchery of the text is a travesty of textual criticism".

[22] Mertens 1995:4–5 (also Jackson 1978:26): καὶ βλέψαι τὸν πίνακα ἅν καὶ Βίτος γράψας, καί ὁ τρίσμεγας Πλάτων καί ὁ μυριόμεγας Ἑρμῆς, ὅτι Θώυθος ἑρμηνεύεται τῇ ἱερατικῇ πρώτῃ φωνῇ ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος, ἑρμηνεύς πάντων τῶν ὄντων καὶ ὀνοματοποιὸς πάντων τῶν σωματικῶν. οἱ δὲ Χαλδαῖοι καὶ Πάρθοι καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ Ἑβραῖοι καλοῦσιν αὐτὸν Ἀδάμ, ᾧ ἐστὶν ἑρμηνεία γῆ παρθένος καὶ γῆ αἱματώδης καὶ γῆ πυρρά καὶ γῆ σαρκίνη. ταῦτα δὲ ἐν ταῖς βιβλιοθήκαις τῶν Πτολεμαίων ηὕρηνται: ὅν ἀπέθεντο εἴς ἕκαστον ἱερὸν, μάλιστα τῷ Σαραπείῳ, ὅτε παρεκάλεσεν Ἀσεναν τὸν ἀρχ<ιερέα> Ἱεροσολύμων πέμψαντα Ἑρμῆν ὅς ἡρμήνευσε πᾶσαν τὴν Ἑβραίδα Ἑλληνιστὶ καὶ Αἰγυπτιστὶ.

[23] Gk. πίνακα.

[24] The Greek has here a singular, despite the preceding plural.

[25] Sic; unidentified.

[26] Gk. Ἀσεναν.

[27] Following the elegant restoration of Reitzenstein. Codd. τῶν ἀρχιεροσολύμων.

[28] Although I do not reject out of hand the notion of a play on words involving the name of Hermes and the Greek for translators in a previous sentence (see Fowden, in following note here), I cannot see how such a pun would work here. It seems clear to me that we must understand an original text that said something like "translators", and not Hermes. See the apparatus of Jackson and Mertens, ad loc.

[29] The Greek is awkward and the text is corrupt at the most important section, the very end, of this passage. The meaning seems fairly clear, given our knowledge of the context. Jackson gives the currently known varieties in his apparatus (26). Fowden 31 n. 108, referring to an emendation of Scott here, mixes up the text and the emendation chiasmically (unless he is actually by mistake referring to the reading proposed by Festugière). He refers also to the pun involving the name of Hermes and the Greek for translating. See also Mertens, ad loc.

[30] See also the quotation, or near-quotation, from this in Olympiodorus (the alchemical writer), in Berthelot and Ruelle 1888:II, 88–89; III, 95 (and in Mertens 1995:88, n. 52): Καὶ ὅρα ὅτι

There are similarities to, or, rather, echoes of the Septuagint story which we know from Aristeas and the tradition depending more or less directly on him: the references to the Ptolemies, their libraries, the Serapeum, the high priest in Jerusalem, the translators (if this is a correct understanding of the text), the "whole of the Hebrew" being translated into Greek, even the absence of a miracle. At the same time, there are differences. It is not just that material from that tradition is missing here and that this story represents a greatly abbreviated version of the original but also that this version offers details that clash with what we know from our other versions. Here we have a reference to the Ptolemies, in the plural; instead of seventy translators, we have here either Hermes, one single translator, or an unspecific plural, "translators"; the name of the Jerusalem High Priest, which we know in the form Eleazar, is here given as Asenas; the target language of the translation activity is now not only Greek but also Egyptian. Most interestingly, we have new material, though its relationship to the translation story is puzzling.

What is new here is the explanation of the meaning of the name of Adam.[31] In this context, it illustrates, as it also drives home for us, the character of the text before us as part of a literature which was a complex mixture of materials drawn from a wide variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The structure of the paragraph before us is not a little obscure; it begins by drawing attention to a text written by Bitos. Unfortunately, though it purports to cite from this text, it does not indicate where the citation ends. Given the non-Jewish character of the material about Thoth and the Jewish character of what follows, it might be reasonable to suppose that we should see the end of the material drawn from this source after the word Thoth (in the translation earlier, after the words *corporeal beings*). But we are not in regular textual territory here, and we cannot know where we should see such a conclusion to a quotation. If we look back from the sentence saying, "These things are to be found in the libraries of the Ptolemies", we might just as easily suppose the entire paragraph to come from a single source. Thoth, it is true, would strike a strange note in a genuine text of Jewish background, because we rarely find information about alien gods in such texts; here, however, we are dealing, at best, with an alleged quotation from such a text. But genuine or not, there is another puzzle with the material allegedly of Jewish background here. On one hand, at least some parts of it seem to come genuinely from a Jewish source. On the

ὁ σκοπὸς οὗτος ὁ τῶν ψάμμων ἀλληγορία ἐστὶν, οὐχὶ τὴν ψάμμον αἰνίττονται, ἀλλὰ τὰς οὐσίας. Πόθεν δὲ στηριζόμεθα ὅτι ἡ ἀνατολὴ τῷ ἄρρενι ἀπενεμήθη, ἡ δὲ δύσις τῇ θηλείᾳ; καὶ ἐκ τοῦ Ἀδάμ. οὗτος γὰρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων πρῶτος ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων στοιχείων. Καλεῖται δὲ καὶ παρθένος γῆ, καὶ πυρὰ γῆ, καὶ σαρκίνη γῆ, καὶ γῆ αἱματώδης. Ταῦτα δὲ εὑρήσεις ἐν ταῖς Πτολεμαίου βιβλιοθήκαις. "Zosimus" cannot have borrowed from this.

[31] On the Adam literature in general see Stone 1992, McNamara 1975, D. Wasserstein 1988.

other hand, none of it can have been in the biblical text which we are told was translated for the Ptolemy. It does not form part of any biblical text at all; in addition, it seems to have come into existence rather later than the time of the translation.

The Hebrews, we are told here, "call him Adam, which means 'virgin earth', and 'blood-red earth', and 'fiery-red earth', and 'fleshly earth'". (The reference to the Chaldeans, the Parthians and the Medes can safely be dismissed as sheer invention, intended to increase the air of the exotic. These peoples did not know Adam as the first man and could not have done so other than via the Jewish tradition. The presence of the Medes in the list demonstrates its invented character; they had not existed as a distinct group, linguistically or otherwise, for many centuries by the time of Zosimus, whenever he lived. And beyond this, all the explanations that follow depend on knowledge of the Hebrew underlying the name.[32]) 'Adam' does not, of course, mean these things at all, but there is a rich ancient tradition which sought to explain Adam's name in terms of Hebrew cognates and in other ways. Among these, as is noted by Mertens, Zosimus shows himself acquainted, in later passages, with the (linguistically Greek) tradition that explains the name Adam as derived from the initial letters of the Greek words ἀνατολή (east, where the sun rises), δύσις (west, where the suns sets), ἄρκτος (north, not present in Zosimus' text), and μεσημβρία (south, thus completing the four cardinal points, and forming the name of the first man, as microcosm). This goes back to the first book of the Sybilline Oracles (III, 24–26) and beyond that to II Enoch 30. 13.[33] But this is a single, discrete explanation for the whole name. What we have here, rather, is a number of interpretations, which do not together form a complete whole; each is more or less, although not wholly, independent of the rest. The first, "virgin earth", seems to go back to Josephus.[34] "Blood-red" and "fiery-red" both reflect the traditional link, found in many sources, between the name 'Adam', the word *adama* ("earth" in Hebrew) and *adom* ("red" in Hebrew). "Fleshly earth" is less easily explained; it seems likely that it reflects another ancient tradition, but it is not clear what.[35] II Enoch 30. 8 relates different physical parts of Adam's body (flesh, blood, eyes, bones) and various of his attributes (intelligence, soul) to a wide variety of sources, including the dew, the sun, cloud, "my breath", and so on. Among these, we find also that his flesh was made "from the earth". Given the link with II Enoch that we have just seen and the absence of other

[32] Mertens 1995:87–88, n. 52 discusses this but treats the names of these nations more seriously than they seem to deserve.

[33] Ginzberg 1909:V, 72–73, n. 15.

[34] Josephus, *A.J.*, I, 34; see also Ginzberg 1909:V, 72–73, n. 15, with further references, including Löw, in *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, XI, 167.

[35] Mertens 1995:93, n 60, seems to miss the point here.

explanations for this detail, it may not be far-fetched to see a link with II Enoch here. But we cannot be sure of this.

The dates of these Jewish interpretations of the meaning of Adam's name vary a good deal. However, their overall character, close or identical to that of midrash, points to a relatively late date for most of them. Midrash may well have existed before the Common Era, in one form or another, but it certainly did not exist in any well-developed form as early as the time of the Ptolemies and the translation of the Septuagint. No such interpretation of the name of Adam can have been among the biblical texts allegedly translated for the Library of the Ptolemy.

Garth Fowden argues for the possibility of some Jewish influences on Zosimus, basing his views in part on arguments about other apparent evidence of Jewish influence in hermetic materials from Egypt and in part on arguments about the numbers of Jews there. As to the latter, at the time in question, apparently around 300 C.E., but possibly a century or more later, we cannot be sure at all that there were very many Jews there. The estimates to which Fowden refers, and which he is understandably and correctly cautious about, refer in any case to a much earlier period, before the rise of Christianity and before the impact of other factors, especially the failure of the revolt of 115–117 C.E., on the decline of Judaism in the Roman empire.[36] The wide distribution, which might well to some degree have compensated for relatively small and declining numbers, is also, at least as documented, rather a feature of earlier periods. And the actual evidence which he cites of such influences themselves seems to add up not to the heady mixture that some of Fowden's modern authorities wish to see but rather to the usual mish-mash of bits of half-knowledge cheek by jowl with half-understood echoes of notions and ideas from a wide variety of sources, the sort of omnium gatherum that we expect to find among gnostics and hermeticists at this or indeed any time.[37] Hermeticism and gnosticism, like the paganism out of which they grew and unlike the monotheistic faiths from which they also borrowed much, are hospitable to difference, welcome variety, careless of detail, indifferent to consistency. Zosimus, insofar as we can know him, fits well into his context.

Our little text itself, in combination with everything that has been said earlier about its backgrounds, accentuates the oddity of the presence of this translation motif of apparently Jewish origin in this writer. Should it then really be seen as such? or should we prefer to see it as in some way a distant relative of a Greek text, written in Greek Egypt and with some definite Graeco-Egyptian concerns, including promotion of a particular image of the ruler (we might

[36] Fowden 1986: 11, n. 53; 36, nn. 136, 138–39.

[37] Part II of Dodd 1935 is devoted entirely to the topic of Hellenistic Judaism and the Hermetica. See also Fowden 1986:72.

recall here that image to whose development the alleged letter of Manetho to Ptolemy II Philadelphus was also a contributor[38])? That Greek text is the *Letter of Aristeas*. We can too easily, while looking, rightly, at that work's internal Jewish background, Jewish authorship, Jewish content, Jewish concerns, forget that it was written in Greek. It could easily, one way and another, in later circles such as those in which hermetic ideas were popular, have been viewed as part of the wider, non-Jewish (or not specifically Jewish) Greek-using culture of late and post-Hellenistic Egypt, even as late as the third and fourth centuries of the Common Era.

I have suggested, in a note to the translation just given, that the use of the name 'Hermes' at the end of our text is an invention of the editors; it is not a pun (Hermes: *hermeneuein*), although it is easy to imagine that it might, via a process involving both haplography and misreading of the *beta* of *hebdomekonta* as a *rho*, in *hermeneis/hermeneutas*, represent a corruption-contraction of *hebdomekonta hermeneis/hermeneutas*.[39] We should nonetheless also take note of the possibility that there is some sort of pun intended here too. If there is, this might indicate a desire to domesticate this story in a (Greek) pagan or syncretistic context. Such a desire might suit the broader context, but it would do so rather awkwardly.

It is awkward because, regardless of the possible syncretism, other features of this version of the story indicate a desire to domesticate it in a more purely local Egyptian context.[40] The first of these is the name 'Asenas'. The original story had the name 'Eleazar'. Asenas is obviously not a corruption of the Hebrew name. Nor is it a Greek name. If we are to find a parallel to it, that can, probably, be only in the name of Aseneth, the daughter of Potiphar whom Joseph married. This is an Egyptian name.[41] It is not irrelevant here to note that Aseneth also gave her name to the apocryphal work relating her conversion to Judaism, the *Prayer*, or the *Life*, *of Aseneth*.[42] The name did not, however, it seems, enter the Jewish tradition at this time.[43] The *Prayer of Aseneth* is a Greek text, like

[38] Adler 1989:63–64, and see index as well. As Adler's work demonstrates, this whole question is highly complex, and needs further investigation. In particular, the share of Ps.-Manetho in such an enterprise may be a product of much later Alexandrian editorial intervention.

[39] For a very similar example see later.

[40] For a different interpretation, see Mertens 1995:90, n. 57, where she suggests that this reworking of the legend, which she attributes to Zosimus himself, is intended to increase the glory of Hermes (her additional remark, in the same sentence, to the effect that in the time of Zosimus the Bible had been translated into Coptic, seems less than relevant and, depending on the date of Zosimus, possibly also incorrect).

[41] It is strange, however, that the Egyptian woman's name Aseneth should be used here, in the form Asenas, as the name for a (presumably) male priest.

[42] Also known as *Joseph and Aseneth*; for the title see Burchard 1983–85:II, 181.

[43] Ilan 2002, lists the name among "Other (mostly Semitic) Names in the Greek Alphabet – Male", and records only this single occurrence of it (she lists none under "Female" either). Burchard 1983–85:II, 199 (with references), points out that Aseneth was never popular as a Christian

the *Letter of Aristeas*, though probably somewhat later in date than the *Letter*; like the *Letter* it is a product of Hellenistic Judaism, and it shares with the *Letter* the broad aim of propagandizing for Judaism in the Hellenistic world.[44] If we are to see anything at all in the use of this name here, then that must be an attempt to egyptianize the story, by egyptianising the characters in it. It is doubly awkward that we should find an ethnically and linguistically Egyptian name given to a non-Egyptian, Jewish High Priest.

The second major feature of this sort that we find is the claim that 'the whole of the Hebrew' was translated, not into Greek, but 'into Greek and Egyptian'. Quite apart from its lack of any historicity, this is a remarkable and awkward claim. The claim in our text in Zosimus, whoever he was, whenever he lived, whatever he wrote, that 'the whole of the Hebrew' was translated into 'both Greek and Egyptian' belongs to a particular cultural context.[45] As we have seen, that context is the antique hermetic tradition. That is why we learn here only of 'the whole of the Hebrew', without any explicit description of what 'the Hebrew' refers to, namely specific, specified, existing texts in Hebrew, like the Bible or the Pentateuch. The normal reader of the time would have understood that what is intended here is a general reference to some sacred writings of the Hebrews, but nothing specific is set out and probably nothing specific was intended or for that matter understood.

The passage just translated refers also to 'the original hieratic language', and to such authors as Hermes Trismegistus (actually "the infinitely great"; our author makes Plato thrice-great, so he has to make Hermes ten thousand times great, *muriomegas*[46]) and Bitos (or Bitys). The yoking of Plato with Hermes Trismegistus tells us at once what sort of atmosphere is being evoked here. And the introduction of Bitos strengthens this impression further. The latter figure, Bitos, is a most obscure figure who is referred to otherwise only by

name, occurring four times in a Greek tax list from after 716 C.E. (and nowhere else?), among Armenians from the fifteenth century onward, and a few times in English in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The name survives to this day, of course, in the modern Hebrew name Osnat.

44 The work enjoyed some considerable popularity: it survives in Greek in a large number of manuscripts, as well as in Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Slavonic and Ethiopic (for the manuscripts and the text, see the survey by Burchard 1983–85:II, 178–81). For the date cf. Burchard 1983–85:II, 187–88 (he suggests a date between 100 B.C.E. and the first third of the second century C.E.). Kraemer 1998:239 suggests a date between the late third and the late fourth century C.E., but this appears excessively late. Burchard (195) argues against a missionizing aim and prefers to see the work as aimed rather at literate, but not highly educated, Hellenistic Jews. The text is unknown in the rabbinic tradition and similarly in the patristic one.

45 Mertens 2002:171, n 37 seems to miss the point here, doubly: she thinks that only some, not all the holy, texts written in Hebrew were translated, and she suggests that they were translated into Greek or into Egyptian, not into both languages.

46 Is this adjective otherwise attested?

Iamblichus, a neoplatonic philosopher of the third and fourth centuries C.E. and by Michael Psellus, an eleventh-century Byzantine intellectual or someone close to him.[47] Bitos may or may not have existed; it seems less than likely that he did.[48] But he is important for writings which were attributed to him, in particular translations into Greek of texts written in ancient Egyptian, texts which formed part of the underpinning of ancient hermetism.[49] Iamblichus refers to the book which "the *prophetes* Bitys translated ... to King Ammon, finding it inscribed in hieroglyphic characters in a sanctuary at Sais in Egypt".[50] The alleged expounding of hermetic inscriptions for an Egyptian king of long ago had its parallels in later times, closer to the period of Zosimus himself. Not infrequently, we hear of hieroglyphic inscriptions on stelae, which had survived immensely long periods of time and natural disasters like the great Flood. George Syncellus, for example, reports something extremely similar to this aspect of what we have seen in Zosimus, and it has similarities also with the passage from Iamblichus:[51]

It remains now to give a few extracts concerning the dynasties of Egypt from the works of Manetho of Sebennytus. In the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus, he was styled high-priest of the pagan temples of Egypt, and wrote from stelae in the Seriadic land, stelae inscribed, he says, in a priestly language[52] and hieroglyphic characters by Thoth the first Hermes and translated after the flood from the priestly tongue into the Greek language in hieroglyphic characters.[53] When the work had

[47] For the Psellus reference see Whittaker 1979:60–62 (cited by Fowden 1986:152, n. 40, who quotes some of the Greek but not that most relevant for our present purpose).

[48] It is striking, not to say suspicious, that our only two ancient sources for Bitos, Iamblichus and Zosimus should, at least if we accept the consensual dating for Zosimus and if we accept the identity of Bitos and Bitys, have been almost exact contemporaries, though they seem to have spent their lives in different places: Iamblichus in Syria and Zosimus in Egypt. (Fowden 1986:120, n. 15, points out that the record of an apparent trip by Zosimus to Rome, with an itinerary including Syria, referred to by Jackson 1978:4, is actually a translation from Galen. See also Mertens 1995:lxxvi–lxxvii.)

[49] Iamblichus (*de Myst.* 10.7, quoted at Whittaker 1979:60, n. 15) also refers to Bitos as translating (? interpreting; Gk. μεθηρμήνευσεν) "from (the) Hebrew books" (ἐκ τῶν ἑβραικῶν βίβλων). At the very least, it would be an unusual combination of skills. In Scott 1936, IV, 39, however, we find the reading Ἑρμαικῶν. Iamblichus 1966:214 agrees with Scott; he gives no variant readings here. Although in an ordinary text this latter would obviously be the preferable reading, in such a text as this can we be sure? The easy confusion of *beta*, *rho* and *mu* here recalls that suggested earlier for *hebdomekonta hermeneis*. It would be interesting to know where Whittaker's reading originated.

[50] Iamblichus, *de Myst.*, VIII.5.267–8, quoted by Fowden 1986:140.

[51] Syncellus 1984, paras. 72–73, pp. 40–41; translated in Adler 1989:57.

[52] I translate here "language", not "dialect", against Adler. The difference is not great, but it seems to me that "language" suits the context better.

[53] A moment's thought shows that there is a problem here. In the *Letter of Aristeas* itself we may perhaps find the notion of writing one language in the script of another, but would ancients in general have understood any better than most moderns such an idea? Further, could Greek

been arranged in books by Agathodaimon, son of the second Hermes, and father of Tat, in the *adyta* of the temples of Egypt, Manetho dedicated it to this same king Ptolemy II Philadelphus. . . .

We note the mysterious "Seriadic land", the unknown language and the illegible characters, the formality of the deposit in the *adyta*, the innermost sanctuary, the parts that may not be trodden, of the temples of Egypt, all designed to build up a particular atmosphere, to give a kind of imprimatur to what turns out to be untrustworthy historical information about the ancient ruling dynasties of Egypt.[54] The idea involved was not genuine ancient texts as such – for there were no such materials, or at least there were no such materials available to scholars before the nineteenth century – but the authority to be ascribed to esoteric texts of hermetic content. Fowden's study of the hermetic tradition in Egypt devotes some dozens of pages to the notion of translation in this tradition.[55] It is noteworthy – but hardly surprising – that throughout his discussion we find reference only to translation from Egyptian (in whatever form) into Greek and not a single reference to translation from Greek into Egyptian.[56] Part of the explanation for this is clear: all our evidence comes from the mixed tradition of ancient Egyptian hermetism which expressed itself mainly in Greek and for a Greek-using audience. But not all of it is actually in Greek; some is written in Egyptian. And it is also true that we know virtually nothing at all of translation from any language into ancient Egyptian.[57] Ancient Egyptian, once the Greeks came to Egypt, lost much status and a good deal of its role. It did not lose all of it, as the survival of hieroglyphic writing until well into the Common Era attests. And the survival of Egyptian for many centuries in the forms of demotic Egyptian and of Coptic demonstrates this even more. But as a major local vehicle of literary expression, Egyptian withdrew ever more from the public stage and acquired a new, and murkier, role, one which it has retained in one way and another to this very day. That role is as the home, and the alleged source, of esoteric lore. A language which cannot be read by anyone is obviously a language which has much to conceal. And what is worth concealing is both secret and, hence, worth knowing.

easily, or at all, have been written in hieroglyphic (non-phonetic) characters? Fowden seeks, with Scott, to omit the words "in hieroglyphic characters", as a "doublet" from earlier in the sentence, even though the earlier occurrence is phrased differently. Cf. S. Naeh and J. Price, "Transliteration as a cultural phenomenon in the Roman Near East", to appear in the volume emanating from the conference, "Epigraphy and Beyond: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Near East from Hellenism to Islam", Institute for Advanced Studies, Jerusalem, 2003.

[54] Cf. Fowden 1986:140–15, for a similar idea.

[55] Fowden 1986:45–74.

[56] There is what looks like a single exception to this, at 66, n. 85, but Fowden argues persuasively that it is in fact not a case of real translation from Greek into Egyptian.

[57] See previous note.

Here we learn, however, of translation of all the sacred lore of the Jews from Hebrew into Greek. That is not surprising, because we already know of it, and we know it in some sense to be true. And, as part of the same story, we hear also of such translation of this same material into Egyptian. That is far more puzzling. It is also awkward because a story needs some narrative logic. Here we have a story of translation. Logic, narrative and other, tells us that translation, while it may be made from more than a single language, is generally made into one language, not into two. At the very least, this story has been handled maladroitly. It is also awkward for the reason just mentioned: the status of Egyptian as a language of translation. This story takes its place as one among many fictions relating the translation of wondrous texts of various sorts, hermetic texts in particular, from outlandish, exotic, unknown, foreign or dead languages into a language which was none of these things, neither outlandish nor exotic, not unknown, neither foreign nor dead. But our story stands out in this company precisely because in such stories Egyptian never appears as a target language of translation. These alleged translations are never made from other languages into Egyptian. Egyptian appears regularly, even exclusively, as the unknown, exotic, obscure language from which texts are brought out into the openness of a known language like Greek. This fact underlines the obviously fictional character of this adaptation of the original story of the Seventy. It also serves to highlight the structure and the fictional nature of at least the great bulk of these alleged translations.

Translation here is a formulaic trait. Like Hermes himself, the source of the *Hermetica*, and like Asenas, the Egyptian replacement for the name of Eleazar, the Egyptian target language of the version spoken of here serves to underline the exotic character of the world into which the story has been transposed. All of this comes together in this attempt to make the story locally Egyptian, in a way that it was not when it was tied, by the tradition of the *Letter*, to Greek language, Greek culture, a Greek Library and a Greek ruler and dynasty in a Greek city in that land. In what Fowden, in a slightly different context, describes as "a rather desperate exhibition of syncretism", the story of the Seventy has been grafted onto a native stock, contributing thus to the mixture of secondhand materials and ideas which was the religious marketplace of late antique Egypt.[58]

[58] Fowden 1986:151.

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The Arabic definite article (al-) has been disregarded for purposes of alphabetisation.

In the case of publications in Arabic, it is common to find that dates are given according to both the *hijri*, Muslim pattern, and the Common Era. Thus a book whose date of publication is given as 1398/1970 appeared in 1398 of the Muslim era, and 1970 of the Common Era.

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N.B. The Hebrew article *ha-* and the Arabic article *al-* have been disregarded in the alphabetization.

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