THE EVALUATION OF THE GREEK SCRIPTURE TRANSLATIONS IN RABBINIC SOURCES

The topic of this study is the evaluation of the Greek translations in early rabbinic sources. It is often claimed that the earliest Greek translation, that of the seventy-two elders, was strongly disliked by rabbinic Judaism and was eventually replaced in Jewish communities by newer translations such as those of *kaige*-Th(eodotion) and Aquila. To what extent the Septuagint translation was indeed liked or disliked still needs to be analyzed[1], but from the end of the first century CE onwards it clearly ceased to be influential in Judaism[2]. Before that time, the centrality of Greek Scripture within Christianity resulted from its importance within Judaism. However, in some books of the New Testament and in early Christian literature, Hebraizing revisions of the Old Greek often were quoted rather than the Old Greek version itself[3], reflecting the beginning of the decline of the LXX (the Old Greek) in Judaism. That decline continued with the growing centrality of the LXX in the new religion, Christianity, and it was that special status which created an atmosphere of distrust toward that translation in Jewish circles. But that distrust was first and foremost based on the growing recognition that the content of the LXX version differed from the Hebrew text that was in use in Palestine in the last centuries BCE and the first centuries CE[4].

1. For a summary of the opinions expressed on this issue, see G. VELTRI, *Eine Tora für den König Talmai – Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum, 41), Tübingen, Mohr (Siebeck), 1994, pp. 16-18.

2. At the literary level, one of the last signs of the influence of the LXX was its central position in the writings of Josephus at the end of the first century CE.

3. For the most recent study in this area, see M.J.J. MENKEN, *Matthew's Bible – The Old Testament Text of the Evangelist* (BETL, 173), Leuven, University Press – Peeters, 2004.

4. The centrality of the LXX continues today in religious communities, since that translation has an authoritative and sacred status in the Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches. Thus, paradoxically, the only Scriptural basis for the Jewish festival of Chanukkah is 1 Maccabees (chapters 4–5), which was not accepted by rabbinic Judaism, but is now sacred in the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches and has a special place in Catholicism. On a similar note, the Peshitta has a semi-authoritative status in the Syriac Orthodox Church (hence the modern translation of that version: G.M. LAMSA, *The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts Containing the Old and New Testaments, Translated from the Peshitta, the Authorized Bible of the Church of the East*, Philadelphia, PA, Holman, ^{9}1957.

Ironically, already in antiquity the use of the earliest and best-known Jewish translation was discontinued in its own environment. As the reason for the contempt, the post-Talmudic tractate *Soferim* states:

מעשה בחמשה זקנים שכתבו לתלמי המלך את התורה יוונית והיה אותו היום קשה לישראל כיום שנע בו העגל שלא הייתה התורה יכולה להתרגם כל צרכה

> It happened once that five elders wrote the Torah for King Ptolemy in Greek, and that day was as ominous for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made[5], since the Torah could not be accurately translated (*Sof.* 1.7)[6].

According to this tradition, the Torah, like the Koran, is untranslatable, and only the Hebrew source text should be considered binding. At the same time, this argument is not used for other biblical translations, viz., the Aramaic Targumim, as we shall see below. Jewish discontent with the LXX went as far as prompting the institution of a day of mourning for that translation commemorating an enterprise that was, at least according to tradition, initiated by the High Priest Eleazar himself. The instruction of the *Megillat Ta'anit Batra* to fast on the 8th of Tevet[7], that was canceled in the Middle Ages, reminded religious Jews of the distortions of Scripture by the ancient translators. Likewise, the seventy-two translators are described in rabbinic literature as misrepresenting the content of the Hebrew Torah in no less, but also no more, than 10–18 details (see below)[8].

5. The translation of the Torah "for King Ptolemy" is described as idolatry, probably because it was made for a heathen. Furthermore, the strong condemnation of the translation stands in great contrast to the annual festivities instituted for the same translation according to the Epistle of Aristeas §180.

6. The latter part of this statement in the post-Talmudic tractate removed two crucial words from the earlier dictum of *y. Meg.* 1:11 (71c) שאין התורה יכולה להתרגם כל צרכה אלא יוונית(the Torah could be accurately translated only in Greek).

7. The data are not found in the main sources of *Megillat Ta'anit*, but in a relatively late addition to that scroll, found in some manuscripts, namely *Megillat Ta'anit Batra*. See A. NEUBAUER, *Anecdota Oxoniensia, Chronicles and Chronological Notes Edited from Printed Books and Manuscripts*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1895, vol. 2, p. 24. For an analysis, see G. VELTRI, *Gegenwart der Tradition – Studien zur jüdischen Literatur und Kulturgeschichte* (Journal of Semitic Studies. Supplement Series, 69), Leiden–Boston–Cologne, Brill, 2002, pp. 144-150. According to M. Friedländer, quoted by Veltri, 146, the day of fasting was already instituted in Palestine in the first century CE, if not earlier. See M. FRIEDLÄNDER, *Geschichte der jüdischen Apologetik*, Zürich, 1903; repr. Amsterdam, Philo Press, 1973, p. 16 (however, Friedländer himself does not provide a date). On the other hand, S.Z. LEIMAN, *The Scroll of Fasts: The Ninth of Tebeth*, in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 74 (1983) 174-195 suggests that there is no evidence for the writing of *Megillat Ta'anit Batra* before the time of *Halakhot Gedolot* (8th-9th century) and therefore the institution of the fast cannot be dated before that period.

8. This description is not shared by VELTRI, *Eine Tora* (n. 1). The main thesis of Veltri, described on pp. 107-112, relating to the lists of readings/changes in the LXX, is that these were originally independent readings that were sometimes combined into clus-

In the wake of these negative opinions of the LXX, we want to devote some attention to the history of the Jewish evaluation of *all* the Greek translations. It is probably appropriate to do so in Leiden[9], where the evaluation of the LXX underwent changes in the scholarly mind[10]. This discussion in seventeenth century Leiden pertained to very academic matters, which were also central to theological positions within the Church. Likewise, in antiquity the debate over the use of either the Old Greek translation or a newer Jewish version became a central issue in Palestine.

Our analysis will proceed step-by-step, dealing with the Jewish character of the LXX, its use in Jewish communities, the emergence and Jewish background of new Greek translations, and the approach of the rabbis towards the LXX and Aquila, with an appendix regarding the so-called changes by the Greek translators.

I. The LXX is a Jewish Translation

The Old Greek version of the Torah was a Jewish enterprise. It is probably necessary to stress this fact since several centuries later, the LXX was considered to be Christian literature. Prior to that, the vocabulary, wording, and content of the Old Greek version was central to the wording and formation of the New Testament and of the new religion. Subsequently, the Old Greek was considered to be the inspired translation of Hebrew Scripture, and as a result the two Greek Testaments were transmitted together in Christianity, often in large-scope manuscripts. Without Christianity, we would not have been blessed with so many good manuscripts of the Greek version of the Old Testament.

ters of two or three instances, and only later joined (by the *soferim*) to the lists that are now found in several places in the rabbinic literature. The background of these readings/changes is that they were actually written 'for King Ptolemy,' the one on whose behalf the exegetical changes were inserted in the translation. This is a very central point in the argumentation of Veltri, from which the book derives its name: *Eine Tora für den König Talmai* (n. 1). That is, the rabbis prepared a written midrash for King Ptolemy since he did not have the advantage of studying Torah with the rabbis (p. 108). For the rabbis, this written Torah was the LXX! That the LXX contained such an exegetical copy of the Torah can also be inferred from the use of the term דבר, introducing the individual readings/changes (זה אחד מן הדברים ששינו/שכתבו לתלמי המלך), parallel to the term דבר אחר introducing an alternative explanation in rabbinic literature. According to Veltri, the original tradition spoke about 'writing' to Ptolemy, secondarily altered to 'changing' (p. 108).

9. This paper was first read at the meeting of the IOSCS in Leiden, September 2004.

10. J.C.H. Lebram, *Ein Streit um die hebräische Bibel und die Septuaginta*, in Th.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer – G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes (eds.), *Leiden University in the Seventeenth Century*, Leiden, Brill, 1975, pp. 21-63.

The Jewish background and character of this translation lived strongly in early traditions; for example, an early source like the Epistle of Aristeas stressed the fact that the translation was guided by the High Priest, Eleazar, who sent scrolls from Jerusalem to be translated in Egypt[11]. Such was also the message of rabbinic literature, in which, however, the High Priest is not mentioned. See the story in *b. Meg.* 9a to be quoted below. Likewise, *Sof.* 1.7: "It happened once that five elders wrote the Torah for King Ptolemy in Greek" (the continuation of that sentence is mentioned above), and 1.8: "Another story about King Ptolemy…" (here follows the same story as in *b. Meg.* 9a).

Internal analysis confirms the Jewish character of this translation, which shows more links with rabbinic interpretations than the other Greek versions. Indeed, in the legal sections of the Torah, as well as elsewhere, the translation agrees occasionally with interpretations in rabbinic literature[12]. Furthermore, the vocabulary of that translation often reveals its Jewish background, evidenced by the use of Aramaic names for festivals (σάββατα, Πασχα) and for a Jewish concept (גר - γειώρας) as well as the distinction between the Jewish (ὁλοκαύτωμα) and pagan altars (βωμός). By the same token, several neologisms coined to express specifically biblical ideas, probably reflect their Jewish background (e.g., ἁγιαστήριον – מקדש, θυσιαστήριον – מזבח)[13].

11. §310–11. The various, mainly Christian, sources for this tradition have been collected by P. WENDLAND, *Aristeae ad Philocratem Epistula cum ceteris de origine versionis LXX interpretum testimoniis*, Lipsiae, Teubner, 1900; H.St.J. THACKERAY, *The Letter of Aristeas, Translated with an Appendix of Ancient Evidence on the Origin of the Septuagint*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1918.

12. For examples, see the scholarly literature on the Torah, Joshua, 1–2 Kings, Isaiah, Job, Proverbs, and Daniel: Z. FRANKEL, *Über den Einfluss der palästinischen Exegese auf die alexandrinische Hermeneutik*, Leipzig, J.A. Barth, 1851; J. FÜRST, *Spüren der palästinisch-jüdischen Schriftdeutung und Sagen in der Übersetzung der LXX*, in *Semitic Studies in Memory of Rev. Dr. A. Kohut*, Berlin, Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1897, pp. 152-166; L. GINZBERG, *Die Haggada bei den Kirchenvätern und in der apokryphischen Literatur*, in *MGWJ* 42 (1898) 537-550; 43 (1899) 17 ff.; V. APTOWITZER, *Rabbinische Parallelen und Aufschlüsse zu Septuaginta und Vulgata*, in *ZAW* 29 (1909) 241-252; L. PRIJS, *Jüdische Tradition in der Septuaginta*, Leiden, Brill, 1948; D.W. GOODING, *Problems of Text and Midrash in the Third Book of Reigns*, in *Textus* 7 (1969) 1-29; S. SAFRAI, *Halakha*, in S. SAFRAI (ed.), *The Literature of the Sages: Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, Section Two, 3, Assen–Maastricht, Van Gorcum; Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1987, pp. 137-139; see also the earlier studies by Gooding quoted there. Additional literature on rabbinic exegesis until 1948 is mentioned by PRIJS, *Tradition*, pp. XIII and 105. See further my study *Midrash-Type Exegesis in the LXX of Joshua*, in *RB* 85 (1978) 50-61; revised version: *The Greek and Hebrew Bible – Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (VTS, 72), Leiden–Boston–Cologne, Brill, 1999, pp. 153-163.

13. See my paper *Studies in the Vocabulary of the Septuagint: The Relation between Vocabulary and Translation Technique*, in *Tarbiz* 47 (1978) 120-138 (Heb. with Eng. summ.), especially p. 123.

II. Use of the LXX in Jewish Communities

There is ample literary evidence for the notion that the LXX was read in religious gatherings[14] of Greek-speaking communities from the first century BCE onwards[15]. Among other things, Philo refers to such a custom in Alexandria[16]. 4 Macc 18,10-18, possibly written in Egypt in the first century CE, expressly mentions the reading of the Law accompanied by reflections taken from the Prophets, Psalms, and Hagiographa. Probably the clearest reference to the use of Greek Scripture in Palestine is contained in the so-called Theodotos inscription from Jerusalem, usually ascribed to the first century CE[17]. The LXX was used by learned writers, such as Philo in Egypt in the middle of the first century BCE, Josephus in Rome at the end of the first century CE, as well as Pseudo-Ezekiel and other, less known, Jewish-Hellenistic authors[18].

III. Emergence of New Greek Translations

Although the Old Greek translation was used widely in Egypt and Palestine, less than a century after the *completion* of that version several new Jewish translations were authored, probably at first in Palestine. The emergence of these new versions should be seen as a reaction to new developments in the ever-changing textual reality of Palestine.

14. A prerequisite for the use of the LXX in Jewish communities would seem to have been that the translation be understood by the ancients. However, illogical as it may be, this is not a *conditio sine qua non* for Holy Scripture for which the public had and still has a great deal of tolerance. See C. Rabin, *The Translation Process and the Character of the LXX*, in *Textus* 6 (1968) 1-26.

15. Early papyri of the Pentateuch from Egypt (P.Ryl. Gk. 458 [first half of the second century BCE] and P.Fouad [first century BCE]) show that the Greek translation was known in various parts of the country though not necessarily used in religious gatherings.

16. Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*, 81-82: "They use these laws <those of the Torah> to learn from at all times, but especially each seventh day, since the seventh day is regarded as sacred. On that day they abstain from other work and betake themselves to the sacred places which are called synagogues… Then one of them takes the books and reads". See further Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:13; *Moses* 2:215. Greek Torah scrolls are also referred to in *m. Meg.* 1.8; 2.1 and *t. Meg.* 4.13. For an early analysis of this evidence, see Z. Frankel, *Vorstudien zu der Septuaginta*, Leipzig, Vogel, 1841, pp. 48-61.

17. See J.B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*, Città del Vaticano, Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1952, vol. 2, pp. 232f, No. 1404; B. Lifschitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs dans les synagogues juives* (Cahiers de la RB, 7), Paris, Gabalda, 1967, pp. 70-71.

18. The writings of these authors have been reviewed by P.W. van der Horst, *The Interpretation of the Bible by the Minor Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, in M.J. Mulder (ed.), *Mikra, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, Section Two, I, Assen–Maastricht, Van Gorcum; Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1988, pp. 519-546.

Thus, when the LXX was brought from Egypt to Palestine, it was soon recognized that the content of that translation differed considerably from the then current Palestinian Hebrew text.

As a consequence, in the strict religious climate of Palestine from the first century BCE onwards, it became important for religious leaders to discontinue the use of the Old Greek translation. The adherence to the then current Hebrew/Aramaic text involved the creation of new Greek versions reflecting that text. This factor was apparently more instrumental in the creation of the new Greek versions than others mentioned in the scholarly literature. At a later stage, the frequent use of the LXX by Christians did indeed cause Jews to dissociate themselves from that translation, but the Old Greek had already been revised before the birth of Christianity. By the same token, the assumption that a need was felt for new Jewish-Greek versions that would reflect Jewish exegesis better than the earlier ones is not borne out by the evidence[19].

These new translations are usually described as revisions of the Old Greek version, since the new versions did not embody novel translation enterprises; rather, they revised in some way or other the Old Greek translation[20].

IV. Jewish Background of the New Greek Translations

In none of the biblical translations are the Jewish characteristics more clearly visible than in the Targumim. These Targumim agree so frequently with biblical exegesis embedded in rabbinic literature that they may be considered 'in-house productions' by the rabbis. In rabbinic literature, this exegesis is scattered in a vast literature, but in the Targumim it follows the sequence of the biblical text, so that it may be said that these Targumim served as official rabbinic companion volumes to Hebrew Scripture. Indeed, according to Tal[21], from the outset, the Targumim were intended to facilitate exegesis and modernization in translation, so that the Hebrew text itself could be left unaltered. The

19. In fact, the LXX reflects more exponents of Jewish exegesis than the newer versions (see below). As a result, my own formulations in *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2d rev. ed., Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press; Assen, Royal Van Gorcum, 2001, p. 143 should be revised.

20. In some cases, the revision reworked an earlier revision which itself was based on the Old Greek version. Thus Aquila and Symmachus revised the earlier *kaige*-Theodotion. See D. Barthélemy, *Les devanciers d'Aquila* (SupplVT, 10), Leiden, Brill, 1963, pp. 81-88, 246 ff.

21. A. Tal, *Is There a Raison d'Être for an Aramaic Targum in a Hebrew-Speaking Society?*, in *Revue des Études Juives* 160 (2001) 357-378.

presence of these companion volumes should be viewed against the background of the lack of rewritten rabbinic Bible compositions like e.g., Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Temple Scroll, *pesharim* and many Qumran commentaries on biblical books[22]. Therefore, the emergence of the Targumim in rabbinic sources runs parallel with the writing of parabiblical compositions in other circles.

If the degree of Jewishness of a translation can be measured at all, the Targumim are closest to rabbinic literature, followed at a great distance by the LXX and Peshitta of the Torah[23]. The LXX presented only a thin layer of Jewish exegesis, with the newer Greek versions showing even less.

These revisions of the Old Greek translation reflect an approach of exact representation of the source text, which follows the ideals of several rabbinical scholars, but explicit Jewish exegesis is hardly detectable in the new versions. In spite of the remark in the *Palestinian* Talmud that the Greek translator Aquila was a student of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua (*y. Meg.* 1:11 [71c])[24], there is little evidence for the assumption that Aquila reflects rabbinic exegesis[25]. By the same token, there is very little evidence in favor of the claim that the earlier *kaige*-Th revision made a special effort to reflect such exegesis, as claimed by Barthélemy

22. See S.L. BERRIN, *Pesharim*, in L.H. SCHIFFMAN – J.C. VANDERKAM (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, vol. 2, pp. 644-647; M.J. BERNSTEIN, *Interpretation of Scriptures*, in *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 376-383; ID., *Pentateuchal Interpretation*, in P.W. FLINT – J.C. VANDERKAM *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, vols. 1-2, Leiden–Boston–Cologne, Brill, 1998-1999, vol. 1, pp. 128-159.

23. See Y. MAORI, *The Peshitta Version of the Pentateuch and Early Jewish Exegesis* [Hebrew], Jerusalem, Magnes, 1995.

24. In *b. Meg.* 3a, on the other hand, the same remark refers to Onkelos, the translator of the *Aramaic* Targum: "The Targum of the Pentateuch was composed by Onkelos the proselyte under the guidance of R. Eleazar and R. Joshua".

25. Possibly the major argument adduced in favor of such an assumption is the assumed link between the translation of the *nota accusativi* את and the Greek σύν as in Gen 1:1 בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ – ἐν τῇ κεφαλαίῳ ἔκτισεν θεὸς σὺν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ σὺν τὴν γῆν. Usually it is claimed that this equivalent (σύν generally followed by the accusative) reflects the rabbinic rule of *ribbuy umi'ut* (inclusion and exclusion), one of the 32 hermeneutical rules (*middot*) of R. Eliezer ben Yose ha-Gelili. This rule covers certain Hebrew particles that are always presumed to include at least one element in addition to the word(s) mentioned after it. Thus, גם, "also", is usually translated in *kaige*-Theodotion with καίγε, "at least". However, this assumption does not appropriately explain the equivalence את – σύν, which should probably be explained as reflecting a stereotyped rendering of all occurrences of את not as the *nota accusativi*, but as את, "with". In other words, linguistic consistency for the two meanings of את rather than Jewish exegesis forms the background of this special rendering. The lack of Jewish exegesis in Aquila is also noticed by VELTRI, *Gegenwart der Tradition* (n. 7), p. 76. On the other hand, Aquila's namesake Onkelos, the author of the Aramaic translation, often reflects rabbinic exegesis.

in his *Devanciers d'Aquila*[26]. Already in 1972 the present author expressed his doubts regarding Barthélemy's theory[27], and in 1990 Greenspoon summarized the various criticisms voiced against it[28]. The main exponent of Jewish exegesis visible in the new Greek versions is probably the representation of the tetragrammaton with paleo-Hebrew characters in several manuscripts[29].

V. Approach towards the LXX in Rabbinic Literature

It has been claimed often, by the present author among others[30], that prior to or simultaneous with the creation of the new Jewish versions, the LXX was rejected by forerunners of rabbinic Judaism. On the other hand, Veltri[31] suggested that when the rabbinic traditions are properly analyzed, they do not provide evidence for such an approach. Basing our discussion on a source analysis of *b. Meg.* 9a, we will defend the view that both approaches are reflected in rabbinic literature.

In general, I wonder whether one may speak of the rejection of a text if it had not been accepted previously. We therefore need to examine whether the LXX was embraced at one point by the Palestinian authorities and, if so, when? For one thing, we should take care not to make anachronistic and geographic mistakes by comparing procedures taking place centuries apart.

26. Note the subtitle of Barthélemy, *Devanciers*: *Première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodécaprophéton, trouvés dans le désert de Juda, préc. d'une étude sur les traductions et recensions grecques de la Bible réalisées au premier siècle de notre ère sous l'influence du rabbinate palestinien.*

27. *The Methodology of Textual Criticism in Jewish Greek Scriptures, with Special Attention to the Problems in Samuel–Kings: The State of the Question: Problems and Proposed Solutions*, in R.A. Kraft (ed.), *Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, vol. 2, Missoula, MT, Scholars, 1972, pp. 3-15. Revised version: *The Greek and Hebrew Bible* (1999) 489-499. All characteristic renderings of *kaige*-Th were explained by Barthélemy in the light of occasional statements in rabbinic literature, mainly in the Mekhilta, e.g. the translation of שאי, 'everyone' with ἀνήρ, אנכי with ἐγώ εἰμι, and the etymological translation of the roots יצב/עצב. However, Barthélemy probably went too far in his desire to explain all renderings of *kaige*-Th in accordance with rabbinic exegesis. It is more likely that these equivalents – with the possible exception of גם – καίγε – simply represent a literal, root-linked translation technique in which each Hebrew root is represented by its fixed equivalent.

28. L.J. Greenspoon, *Recensions, Revision, Rabbinics: Dominique Barthélemy and Early Developments in the Greek Traditions*, in *Textus* 15 (1990) 153-163. See further L.L. Grabbe, *Aquila's Translation and Rabbinic Exegesis*, in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982) 527-536.

29. The evidence is presented in my book *Scribal Habits and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, 54), Leiden–Boston, Brill, 2004), p. 220.

30. *Textual Criticism*, p. 143.

31. Veltri, *Eine Tora* (n. 1), passim (see *Konklusion*, pp. 215-219).

Greek Bible scrolls are mentioned in the Talmud in a general way. The sacred status of such scrolls is defended in *b. Shabb.* 115a[32] and *Meg.* 9a regarding all Greek Scripture scrolls, and in *b. Meg.* 18a regarding the Esther scroll. However, these references have no implications for the rabbinic evaluation of the LXX.

There is no direct evidence showing that the Pharisees or later rabbis actively used the LXX or cherished that translation[33]. Neither, however, are the other versions quoted much; there are only a few references to Aquila and the Targumim.

However, while it is irrelevant to speak of the rejection of the LXX, it is true that that translation was *disregarded* in rabbinic literature. This fact is not surprising as the rabbis were involved in legal discussions as part of their search for the best way(s) to explain and implement the divine Torah in daily life. In these legal discussions, no external sources were quoted, neither Jewish nor pagan, neither contemporary Roman law books nor old Mesopotamian clay tablets; instead, they relied solely upon their own internal logic[34]. As a result, there was no occasion for consulting the Old Greek translation, even though according to tradition that translation was divinely inspired, and its exegesis could have been made the base for specific legal decisions. There was, however, occasion for such quotations in the vast midrashic literature, but there, too, the LXX was disregarded. The use of ancient Greek translations is limited to a handful of quotations from Aquila (not in the Bab. Talmud; see below), Onkelos and Jonathan in the later rabbinic literature[35] (not in the literature of the Tannaim). When they are quoted, these Aramaic translations are referred to as 'in-house products,' often phrased as מתרגמינן, "we translate"[36]. It is thus clear that the Targum is part of the world of the rabbis, while the LXX is not.

32. "If they are written in Egyptian, Median, עיברית, Aramaic, Elamitic, or Greek, though they may not be read, they may be saved from a fire".

33. Similarly VELTRI, *Eine Tora* (n. 1), p. 19 and passim.

34. Indeed, a modern discussion of the type of arguments used in the Talmudic discourse contains no reference to external sources used in the Talmud: L. MOSCOVITZ, *Talmudic Reasoning – From Casuistics to Conceptualization* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 89, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2002.

35. Some evidence has been collected by E.Z. MELAMED, *Bible Commentators* [Hebrew], Jerusalem, Magnes, 1975, vol. 1, pp. 141-143. Other evidence, less clearly visible because it is at variance with Targum Jonathan on the Prophets, has been collected by M.H. GOSHEN-GOTTSTEIN, *Fragments of Lost Targumim* [Hebrew], 2 vols., Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983, 1989. See also H. SYSLING, *Three Harsh Prophets – A Targumic* Tosefta *to* Parashat Korah, in *Aramaic Studies* (July/August 2004), especially n. 7, forthcoming. I owe these references to S. Kogut and H. Sysling.

36. E.g. *b. Shabb.* 10b (Deut 7,9); 64a (Num 31,50); *Gittin* 68b (Lev 11,13). The full evidence is visible with the aid of the CD of the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project.

Individual readings of the LXX are quoted only once, not as part of the context, but within a *baraita* that accuses the translators of altering Hebrew Scripture.

Knowing that the LXX formed the basis for the formative and authoritative writings of Christianity, scholars looked for hints that the rabbis rejected the LXX in favor of the newer versions. However, it seems that there is no evidence for the assumption of an active rejection of the LXX. That translation was disregarded like all other external sources, with the exception of a few quotations from Aquila, and a number of quotations from Onkelos and Jonathan, but far fewer than expected.

VI. Approach towards Aquila in Rabbinic Literature

In contrast to the lack of quotations from the Old Greek translation in rabbinic literature, the version of Aquila (עקילס הגר, 'the proselyte Aquila') is quoted ten times in the Palestinian Talmud, Genesis Rabba, Leviticus Rabba, Shir Hashirim Rabba, Echa Rabba, Esther Rabba, and Qohelet Rabba, but not in the Babylonian Talmud[37]. Under normal circumstances, in this vast corpus of rabbinic literature, these ten quotations would be considered a negligible quantity, were it not that they are not matched by any quotations from the Old Greek or other Greek versions. The ten instances have been discussed in the literature[38], especially by Veltri[39].

In these quotations, Aquila's Greek rendering is usually provided in Hebrew transliteration, followed by its Hebrew translation. Thus on Ps 48:15 מות הוא ינהגנו על, *y. Meg.* 5.4 (73b) says תרגם עקילס אתנסיה עולם שאין בו מות[40]: Aquila thus read or understood the Hebrew as אל מות with an *'aleph*.

In another instance, in Gen 17:1 אני אל שדי, 'I am the God Shadday,' Aquila's reading is quoted in conjunction with the opinion that שדי should not be read as Shadday but as *she-day* (probably: 'he who is sufficient')[41].

37. These quotations are repeated in the late midrashic compilations such as the Yalqut Shimony, Midrash Tanhuma (located with the aid of the CD of the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project).

38. A.E. Silverstone, *Aquila and Onkelos*, Manchester, University Press, 1931; J. Reider, *Prolegomena to a Greek-Hebrew and Hebrew-Greek Index to Aquila*, in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 7 (1916-17) 287-361.

39. Veltri, *Gegenwart der Tradition* (n. 7), pp. 83-90.

40. Likewise *y. Moed Qatan* 3.7 (83b) אתנא סירא.

41. In the running text: "… It was said in the name of R. Yitzhaq: אני אל שדי, I am the one who said to the world, *dayyi*, it suffices…. It was said in the name of R. Eliezer

Aquila's version thus enjoyed a special position for certain rabbinic authorities, probably less as an ancient version, and more as a source for rabbinic philological interpretation. After all, he was described and "praised"[42] as a student of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua (*y. Meg.* 1:11 [71c])[43].

VII. Different Views of the LXX Reflected in Rabbinic Literature

With the exception of the list of alterations by the Greek translators, no readings or interpretations of the Old Greek have been quoted in rabbinic literature.

Rabbinic literature basically disregards the content of this translation, but in the sole mention of that version, it is described paradoxically as both an inspired text and a distorted translation of Hebrew Scripture, in that sequence. The two diametrically opposed opinions are mentioned in one breath in *b. Meg.* 9a:

> And it goes on to state, 'R. Judah said: When our teachers permitted Greek, they permitted it only for a scroll of the *Torah*'. This was on account of the story told in connection with King Ptolemy. It has been taught 'It is related of King Ptolemy that he brought together seventy-two elders and placed them in seventy-two rooms, and he went into each one individually and ordered them "write for me the Torah of your Teacher Moses". The Holy One, blessed be He, put wisdom in the heart of each one so that they agreed with one accord and wrote for him "God created in the beginning… <here follows the list of the 15 'changes' mentioned in the appendix below>".

The *baraita* contains the following elements as one consecutive story:

1. It is permissible to write (copy) the Torah into Greek, as opposed to the other Scripture books.

son of Jacob, the world and everything in it is not sufficient without my divinity. Aquila rendered אקסיוס ואיקנוס (Gen Rabba 46:1 [ed. Theodor-Albeck, 460-461])". The exact form of Aquila's rendering has been reconstructed in different ways on the basis of the Hebrew transcriptions in the various manuscripts, of which the best reconstruction is probably ἄξιος καὶ ἱκανός, a double rendering based on both *k^{e}-day* (worthy) and *day* ([self-]sufficient).

42. קילסו אותו.

43. According to Veltri, *Gegenwart der Tradition* (n. 7), pp. 93-101, Aquila's translation was considered by the rabbis to be an oral Targum for which the term *tirgem* ("translate") was used as opposed to *katab* ("wrote") describing the activity of the 72 translators. However, the argument provided by Veltri is debatable. Veltri notes that the same word ("to translate") is used for the Aramaic Targumim and Aquila's translation, the implication being that both were oral, while the activity of the first Greek translators is described as "writing". However, the two terms refer to different activities. The LXX translation is quoted only with reference to the *story* that the LXX translators *wrote* their translation for King Ptolemy. It is not used for the quotation of single words from a translation, as in the case of Aquila.

2. The Greek Torah is singled out for positive treatment because of the story told about the miraculous and divinely inspired translation enterprise[44].

3. The miraculous translation included 15 details that were "written for King Ptolemy". All these details in the Old Greek differ from MT and, in two instances, the text before the alteration by the translators is explicitly mentioned[45]. Therefore, although this *baraita* and the parallel in *Mek*. speak of 'writing,' other texts speak of an 'alteration,' which is clearly the implication of the list in *b*. *Meg*. as well[46].

Turning now to a source analysis of the story in *b*. *Meg*. 9a[47], I suggest that the sequence of the elements narrated is unnatural because of the juxtaposition of admiration for an inspired translation and an account of the alterations inserted by the translators which implies major criticism of these translators who "dared" to change Holy Scripture. This unnatural combination suggests that at an earlier stage the two elements were unconnected. After all, following the description of the miraculous event, when examples are given showing the method of translation, one would expect many types of renderings, but not those actually given in *b*. *Meg*. In the present context, the only examples provided for the content of the miraculous translation enterprise are these distorted renderings.

This unnatural sequence of the elements in *b*. *Meg*. reflects, in a nutshell, the complexity of the evaluation of the Greek translation in rabbinic sources which is sometimes positive, but mostly negative. To the originally positive story regarding the translation, the list of criticisms may have been added at a later stage when admiration for the translation was replaced by criticism of its content as described above.

The fact that these two evaluations have been juxtaposed in the *baraita* in tractate *Megillah* and elsewhere should cause no surprise, since in rabbinic literature many diverse elements have been juxtaposed.

44. Different versions of the same story are found in the Epistle of Aristeas; Philo, *Vita Mos*. 2.12-52; Josephus, *Antiq*. XII 1-118; as well as later sources. According to I. Gruenwald, these accounts were meant to repel certain challenges voiced against the translation: "Polemical Attitudes toward the Septuagint", *Teudah* 2 (1986) 65-78 (Heb. with Eng. summ.).

45. (4) 'Male and female he created him' and they did not write 'he created them' (Gen 5,2; the final three words are lacking in several parallel sources); (15) and they wrote for him צעירת רגלים and they did not write ארנבת (Lev 11,6 [5], Deut 14,7). The numbers in parenthesis refer to the list in *b*. *Meg*. 9a.

46. *Y*. *Meg*.: "thirteen details were changed by the sages for King Ptolemy; they wrote for him…"; *Midr*. *Hagadol* Exod 4,20: "this is one of the eighteen details which our Rabbis changed in the Torah in Greek". Likewise, *Sof*. 1.7.

47. The analysis also pertains to the parallels in *Yal*. *Shim*. Gen 3 and *Sof*. 1.7.

Such juxtaposed layers involve the associative combination of elements that are not always relevant to the context, and sometimes even contradictory to it. In modern terminology, added elements are often in the nature of a footnote. In this case, the combination of the diverse elements is instructive since it shows two levels of evaluation of the LXX, positive and negative, in this sequence. These two approaches cannot be dated absolutely, but the positive evaluation must reflect the original approach towards the Old Greek, while criticism of that version would have arisen whenever the differences between the Palestinian Hebrew text and the LXX were recognized, probably from the first century BCE onwards.

The complexity of the evidence explains why it has been difficult to decide whether or not the LXX was rejected by the rabbis. It seems that both approaches are reflected in rabbinic literature, for which the *baraita* in *b. Meg.* 9a provides the main evidence.

VIII. SUMMARY

The Old Greek is an Egyptian Jewish translation whose use was discontinued by the Jews of Palestine when its discrepancies from the text current in Palestine were recognized. At that point, newer Jewish versions, not necessarily reflecting more Jewish exegesis than the Old Greek, were created. Are these historical developments reflected in rabbinic literature?

1. The content of the LXX is disregarded in rabbinic literature, probably because that corpus does not quote from external sources, with the exception of a handful of quotations from Aquila and a greater number of quotations from the Targumim.

2. Some scholars claim that rabbinic literature attests to the rejection of the LXX by Palestinian Judaism. We suggested that both positive and negative approaches towards the LXX are evidenced. This is visible in the juxtaposition in *b. Meg.* 9a of a tradition reflecting admiration for an inspired translation and alterations inserted during the course of the translation enterprise.

3. The translation of Aquila, quoted ten times in rabbinic literature, must have enjoyed a special position for certain rabbinic authorities, probably less as an ancient version, and more as a source for rabbinic philological exegesis.

4. The *list* presents a separate document enumerating not only real differences between Hebrew and Greek Scripture, but also inner-Hebrew exegetical readings that probably had nothing to do with the LXX (see the Appendix).

APPENDIX: TENDENCIES IN THE LIST OF THE SO-CALLED CHANGES

Various passages within rabbinic literature cite a series of 10–18 alterations by the Greek translators of the Torah[48]. Five, and only five, of the passages are identical to the LXX (3, 8, 10, 11, 15), with another one (9) being close to it. The assumption that the Hebrew list goes back to Greek words translated into Hebrew is well substantiated by passage 15.

The *list* presents a separate document enumerating not only real differences between Hebrew and Greek Scripture, but also inner-Hebrew exegetical readings that had nothing to do with the LXX. This was shown in detail by Veltri[49] in a book-sized discussion devoted to the *baraita* in Tractate *Megillah*. In my earlier study, I presented a different opinion when reconstructing the Greek readings behind the details in the list, but I now realize that several of these readings should not be retroverted into Greek[50], and, in fact, not all the details in the list should be taken at face value[51]. The unreliability of many details in the list is paralleled by similar lists of textual data in which not every detail should be taken seriously: not all the "emendations of the scribes"[52] reflect real corrections[53], *'al tiqrê* readings ("do not read X, but Y") do not reflect

48. The principal sources for the rabbinic tradition are: *b. Meg.* 9a; *y. Meg.* 1, 1, 4, p. 72a; *Mek.* Exod 12,40; *Midr. Hagadol* Exod 4,20; *Abot de-R. Nat.* version B, chapter 37; *Soph.* 1. 7; *Yal. Shim.* Gen 3; *Midr. Tan.* Exod para 22. Additional sources are listed in M. HIGGER, מסכת סופרים, New York, Debe-Rabbanan, 1937; repr. Jerusalem, Makor, 1970, p. 101. It is impossible to determine with certainty which among these lists mentioned is the original or the nearest to it. The lists in *b. Meg.*, *y. Meg.* and *Mek.* are the most ancient among the sources, but we lack proven criteria in order to evaluate the differences between these sources themselves. For a detailed analysis, see my study *The Rabbinic Tradition Concerning the 'Alterations' Inserted into the Greek Pentateuch and Their Relation to the Original Text of the LXX*, in *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 15 (1984) 65-89. Revised version: *Greek and Hebrew Bible* (1999) 1-18.

49. VELTRI, *Eine Tora* (n. 1). Some of the readings quoted as "changes" are mentioned in various rabbinic sources as *Hebrew* variants unconnected to the LXX. For example, the unusual sequence of the text written 'for King Ptolemy' in Gen 1,1 ('God created in the beginning') reflects problems raised by and solutions given in Gen. Rab. 1,14 and *Tanḥ. Buber Bereshit* 4 – see pp. 25-31. The addition in Deut 17,3 'for King Ptolemy', לעבדם, is paralleled by an identical addition in *Siphre Deut.* 148 (pp. 92-97).

50. TOV, *The Rabbinic Tradition*, and *Greek and Hebrew Bible*, 75-82.

51. In the words of VELTRI, *Eine Tora* (n. 1), p. 112: "Die *Devarim* sind keine textkritische Liste. Vielmehr stellen sie eine "fiktive Überlieferung" dar, mit deren Hilfe die Rabbinen/Redaktoren Schwierigkeiten der Bibelexegese auszuräumen versuchten".

52. See *Sifre* 84 to Num 10,35 (8 instances), *Mek. Shirata* 6 to Exod 15,71:Exod 15:7 (11 or 9 instances), *Mekhilta*1:*Mekhilta* to Exod 15,71:Exod 15:7 (11 instances).

53. Several (all?) instances described as "corrections" are merely exegetical euphemisms. See W.E. BARNES, *Ancient Corrections in the Text of the Old Testament (Tiḳḳun Sopherim)*, in *JTS* 1 (1899-1900) 387-414; C. MCCARTHY2:C. McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (OBO, 36), Freiburg–Göttingen, 1981; M.A. ZIPOR, *Some Notes on the Origin of the Tra-*

different readings but serve as an exegetical play with letters, and the enigmatic *baraita* about the three copies of the Torah found in the temple court cannot be taken at face value[54].

The original list of "changes" of the LXX translators was very brief, and it may have been expanded in order to enhance criticism of the LXX. The details in the present form of the list are not at all typical of the textual and exegetical differences between the Old Greek and the Hebrew text, and it is unclear whether the present or original list has a focus at all.

That the Greek translators were accused of altering the message of the original is understandable in the cultural climate of Palestine. Such a claim is natural in the relations between religious groups. A similar claim was made by the Jews against the Samaritans as related in the Talmud (זייפתם תורתכם, 'You have falsified your Torah')[55], and by Justin Martyr (defending the LXX against the Hebrew text of his time) against the Jews[56].

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dition of the Eighteen Tiqqûnê Sôp^{e}*rîm*, in *VT* 44 (1994) 77-102; S. SCHORCH, *Euphemismen in der Hebräischen Bibel* (Orientalia biblica et christiana, 12), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2000.

54. See my analysis in *The Text of the Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek Bible Used in the Ancient Synagogues*, in B. OLSSON – M. ZETTERHOLM (eds.), *The Ancient Synagogue: From Its Origins until 200 C.E. – Papers Presented at an International Conference at Lund University October 14–17, 2001* (Coniectanea biblica. NT, 39), Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003, pp. 237-259.

55. *B. Sotah* 33b; *b. Sanh.* 90b.

56. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, *passim*, especially paragraphs 71-73.