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The Letter of Aristeas and the Question of Septuagint Origins Redux[*]

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1. Introduction: The Real Problem with *Aristeas*

Whenever scholars approach the question of the origins of the Septuagint—and here I mean the Greek translation of the Pentateuch, usually thought to originate in Alexandria, Egypt in the early part of the third-century BCE—some discussion of the *Letter of Aristeas* follows close at hand. The reason is obvious: it is the earliest story/account that we have of how this translation was made and for what reason.[1] Unlike the Wisdom of Ben Sira, whose translator, the author's grandson, introduced his translation with some reflections about the nature of translating, the Septuagint translators left behind no such introduction to help us understand their efforts. So, we are left with and inevitably tend to fall back on *Aristeas*'s account to inform us about how the translation came about.

According to our text, the narrator is a Gentile courtier in the court of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, named Aristeas, who has been part of a deputation sent to the Jewish high priest, Eleazar, in Jerusalem to fetch Jewish translators to bring to Alexandria so that they might translate the Jewish law into Greek. The project originated as part of a larger enterprise, the acquisition of "all the books in the world" for Ptolemy's library, a project led by Demetrius of Phalerum, who is said to be the library's head. In a report to Ptolemy about his progress, Demetrius notes that the laws of the Jews had not yet been included, since they needed to be translated. Ptolemy authorizes the translation and sends for the translators. Between this authorization and the carrying out of the work, Aristeas explains how he engineered the release of Jewish slaves in the kingdom; he describes the gifts that Ptolemy sends for the Jewish temple;

[1] Of course, there is a mention in the Hellenistic-Jewish author Aristobulus of some similar data to Aristeas, but Aristobulus offers no real story of the translation's origins. For Aristobulus, see Carl Holladay, *Fragments of Hellenistic Jewish Authors: Volume 3, Aristobulus* (Atlanta: SBL, 2001) and Adela Yarbro Collins in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (James H. Charlesworth, ed.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985) 831–42. Of course, the tradition survives in later sources, most, if not all, ultimately depending on *Aristeas*. See Abraham Wasserstein and David J. Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint from Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

and he narrates a travelogue describing the Temple, Jerusalem, and its environs. When the translators arrive, Ptolemy fêtes them with a series of symposia at which they display their philosophical prowess. Afterwards, they are led out to a tranquil spot, where they translate and compare their results in order to arrive at a final product. After they are finished, the Jewish community gathers and gives its approbation. The king also is delighted by the result. The translators return to Jerusalem, and the work concludes with a short epilogue.

Since the eighteenth century, scholars have pointed out the numerous difficulties that attend *Aristeas*'s account, and for the most part all recognize the improbability of the story as it stands. In the first place, the author is not a gentile, but a Jew, and the work was not written during the reign of Ptolemy II, but much later, sometime in the mid-second century BCE.[2] Historical problems attend the narrative as well. The most conspicuous, as many have pointed out, is the extreme improbability (some would say impossibility) that Demetrius of Phalerum, who was an advisor to Ptolemy I, was the librarian under Ptolemy II.[3] Additionally, that Ptolemy would write to a Jewish high priest as if he were an equal is quite improbable. The number of one hundred thousand slaves freed is remarkable and equally as problematic. The descriptions of the Temple and of Jerusalem in the travelogue bear little resemblance to what we know of these locales from other sources. The author certainly was not the eyewitness that he claims to be.

Yet, Ps.-Aristeas, as I will refer to our Jewish author, writing over a hundred years after the purported events, does have some familiarity with Ptolemaic bureaucratic language and customs, albeit primarily from the second century BCE, which lends a veneer of veracity to the

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[2] Practically every modern scholar recognizes that the book was not written in the era of Ptolemy II. Exactly where in the second century BCE one should date the book is debated, however. Some would put it late in the second or even in the early first century BCE, so Elias Bickerman, "Zur Datierung des Pseudo-Aristeas," *ZNW* 29 (1930) 280–96. Henry Meecham (*The Letter of Aristeas: A Linguistic Study with Special Reference to the Greek Bible* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1935] 333), also using linguistic criteria, opts for "the late Ptolemaic period (say about 100 B.C.)." Others situate it more toward the middle of the century or even earlier. Moses Hadas (*Aristeas to Philocrates* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951] 54), following Bickerman's arguments, prefers a date "shortly after 132 BCE," although he accepts that it could be as early as 150 or so. Sylvie Honigman (*The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* [London: Routledge, 2003] 128–30) argues that the linguistic criteria offer the best clues to a date and that they fit "the mid- or late second century BCE." She refines that ballpark figure slightly—"a date shortly before 145 BCE should perhaps be preferred." Finally, R.J.H. Shutt would push *Aristeas* back to around 170 BCE ("Letter of Aristeas," in Charlesworth, *OTP*, 1.9). For my purposes, an exact second-century date for *Aristeas* is not necessary. The point is that its composition is not contemporary with the origins of the translation, which most scholars would place in the early part of the third-century BCE.

[3] Recently Nina Collins (*The Library in Alexandria and the Bible in Greek* [VTSup 82; Leiden: Brill, 2000]) has tried to revive the historicity of this claim, although her arguments are not convincing. She makes this argument in the larger context of attempting to rehabilitate the historical veracity of *Aristeas*'s account.

narrative.[4] He clearly has a decent Greek education, and he employs a variety of different genres and literary devices. This aura of authenticity has convinced some scholars that *Aristeas* preserves a historical core about the Septuagint's origins, even granting the historical difficulties that attend Ps.-Aristeas's story.

Looking at the history of scholarship on *Aristeas*, one finds that much discussion has focused on these kinds of data. Which bits reflect the actual circumstances of the Septuagint's beginnings and which can be set aside? What parts of *Aristeas* are historical, and which ones fiction? Moreover, the fact that *Aristeas* contains the earliest account of the Septuagint's beginnings often conveys to the narrative a kind of *de facto* credibility, and scholarly reconstructions often proceed on the assumption that *Aristeas* has something to tell us about how the Septuagint was produced. For example, Arie van der Kooij has remarked with respect to the Pentateuch,

> The presentation of the translators of the Law in *Epistle of Aristeas* is certainly an ideal one (the translators as best philosophers!), but it may be assumed that its basic pattern reflects (social) reality. It fits the culture of the time that translations of "ancestral books" were produced by respected persons, both in the sense of being of noble birth and of being learned, who were asked by leading authorities (such as the High Priest) to do so. The important thing is that only in this way could a translation (into Greek) of writing belonging to the literary heritage of a nation be accepted officially.[5]

One can see how *Aristeas*'s narrative undergirds van der Kooij's picture, and in fact, he assumes that what *Aristeas* says would reflect "reality." For instance, he simply accepts that some leading person, such as a high priest (à la *Aristeas*), would gather translators together and that such a translation would have an official function. But why assume that *Aristeas* in the mid-second century BCE should reflect anything that might have gone on over a century earlier?

In a different way, Holger Gzella gets taken in by *Aristeas*. In his book, *Lebenzeit und Ewigkeit*, he argues that the language used in *Aristeas* to indicate translation shows that the translators of the Septuagint intended to translate and interpret at the same time.[6] On the basis of

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[4] For an argument that *Aristeas* and other "historical fictions" deliberately create such a veneer as part of an attempt to fashion a "believable fiction," see Sara Raup Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity: Third Maccabees in Its Cultural Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[5] Arie van der Kooij, "Perspectives on the Study of the Septuagint: Who are the Translators?" in *Perspectives in the Study of the Old Testament and Judaism: A Symposium in Honour of Adam S. van der Woude on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (Florentino García Martínez and Ed Noort, eds.; VTSup 73; Leiden: Brill 1998) 214–29 (here 220).

[6] Holger Gzella, *Lebenzeit und Ewigkeit: Studien zur Eschatologie und Anthropologie des Septuaginta-Psalters* (Berlin: Philo, 2002).

this interpretation, he argues for a similar exegetical approach on the part of the modern scholar to the Greek translation of Psalms. Of course, *Aristeas* concerns the Pentateuch alone, but Gzella assumes that what *Aristeas* says about the translation of the Pentateuch must have been the case in the process of translating those books and that the same *mutatis mutandis* also applies to the translation of Psalms.[7]

What I find most fascinating about these scholarly discussions of the Septuagint's origins is that the actual character of the translation plays only a minor role in the discussion, when, as I will argue, it should occupy center stage in our inquiries into how the Septuagint originated.[8] Additionally, these reconstructions fail to recognize a basic distinction between what the translators intended at the point of the translation's *production* and what later gets said and done with the Septuagint in its *reception*. Thus, what characterizes the Septuagint in its reception history is often retrojected back to the Septuagint's point of production.[9]

The distinction between production and reception is critical when considering the problem of Septuagint origins, especially with respect to one claim that *Aristeas* makes that, as I see it, has infiltrated most discussions of the issue—that the Septuagint was from its very inception intended to be an independent substitute for the Hebrew text it translated. This assumption underlies a significant portion of the scholarly discussion of the Septuagint, yet it is almost completely unexamined. In the remainder of this essay, I want to look at this claim as *Aristeas* presents it and to see whether it is warranted, especially in view of the actual character of the translation of the Pentateuchal books.

2. *Aristeas*'s Construction of Septuagint Origins.

Although no scholarly consensus exists about the precise purpose of *Aristeas*, the translation of

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[7] For a summary and critique of Gzella, see Albert Pietersma, "Messianism and the Greek Psalter: In Search of the Messiah," in *The Septuagint and Messianism* (Michael A. Knibb, ed.; BETL 195; Leuven: Peeters, 2005) 49–75, esp. 62 and my article "Transcribing, Translating, and Interpreting in the *Letter of Aristeas*: On the Nature of the Septuagint," in *Scripture in Transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo* (Anssi Voitila and Jutta Jokiranta, eds.; JSJSup 126; Leiden: Brill) 147–61, esp. 149–50.

[8] Although by contrast, see Sebatian P. Brock, "The Phenomenon of the Septuagint," *OTS* 17 (1972) 11–36.

[9] For detailed argumentation about this distinction, one can consult any number of publications connected with NETS project that resulted in the publication of *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title* (Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), but see especially, Albert Pietersma, "LXX and DTS: A New Archimedean Point for Septuagint Studies?" *BIOSCS* 39 (2006) 1–11 and "Beyond Literalism: Interlinearity Revisited," in *'Translation is Required': The Septuagint in Retrospect and Prospect* (Robert J. V. Hiebert, ed.; SBLSCS 30; Atlanta: SBL, 2010) 3–21.

the Septuagint is central to its story, even though it takes up a relatively small portion of the work's 322 paragraphs. At almost every turn, however, the narrative elements of the story contribute to the literary enterprise of creating a myth of origins for the Septuagint.[10] To state my position in a nutshell at the start, rather than a genuine memory of the Septuagint's origins, *Aristeas*'s contention that the Septuagint was a replacement for the Hebrew text belongs to the Septuagint's reception history; it offers us a justification for what the Septuagint had become by the middle of the second century BCE, not what it was when it was translated, and its narrative should be interpreted through that lens. *Aristeas*'s author wants to portray the Septuagint "as genealogically a translation, deriving prestige and authority from its source text. At the same time, however, the author constructs the LXX as genetically an independent entity, of great literary and philosophical quality, highly acceptable, occupying a prestigious slot in the target culture."[11] So, how does Ps.-Aristeas accomplish this goal?

(1) The claim of royal patronage establishes two major points for our author. If the Jewish Law is to find a place in the king's library, it must already be a prestigious work to merit such inclusion, even if it needs to be translated. Paragraph 31 is explicit about the major reason that Demetrius recommends the Jewish Law's inclusion in Ptolemy's library: it "is most philosophical (φιλοσοφωτέραν) and flawless (ἀκέραιον) inasmuch as it is divine (θείαν)." The Hebrew, then, already has the status of a prestigious literary text. The king's desire to have the translation made further reinforces the Hebrew text's high cultural status. This picture gets further support when the translators arrive in Alexandria bearing "the remarkable parchments on which the legislation had been written in golden writing in Jewish characters" (§176). When presented with these texts, the king bows before them "about seven times." This prestige and character will later be transferred to the translation via the men that Aristeas brings from Jerusalem to Alexandria.

Furthermore, as part of the Alexandrian library, the translation would reside alongside of other great works of Greek literature. It would take its place as an independent Greek text meant for readers of Greek who presumably have no knowledge, and probably no real interest in, the

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[10] I used the phrase "myth of origins" in "The *Letter of Aristeas* and the Reception History of the Septuagint," *BIOSCS* 39 (2006) 47–67 (reprinted in Benjamin G. Wright III, *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, The Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* [JSJSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2008] 275–95). I came to this conclusion independently of Honigman, who, in a similar way, has called *Aristeas* a "charter myth" in *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*, 38–41.

[11] Wright, "*Letter of Aristeas*," 53.

Hebrew text. In this way, Pseudo-Aristeas establishes from the very beginning of his tale that the Septuagint possessed all of the characteristics of its Hebrew parent. Thus, it could substitute for the Hebrew text and function in the same way as any text composed in Greek.[12]

(2) In order to accomplish the translation, Ptolemy sends a deputation that includes Aristeas to Jerusalem, to Eleazar, the Jewish high priest, to return with "elders who have lived exemplary lives and are expert in their own law and are able to translate" (§§32, 39). These elders carry with them the Hebrew "parchments," thus verifying the text's authenticity. Their translation efforts are cooperative, since after reading and explicating, they compare their work and agree on a final product, which is "accurate."

Several important claims made about the personal character of the translators contribute to the larger argument being made in *Aristeas*. Even before they arrive in Alexandria, Pseudo-Aristeas tells us in §121 that they "not only had acquired experience in the literature of the Jews, but not incidentally they had given heed to preparation in Greek literature." Thus, they are equally at home not only in both languages but also in both cultural worlds. When they get to the city, the king organizes seven symposia during which he questions each translator about how he should conduct himself as king. Every answer is greeted with approbation, and the translators show themselves to be learned/cultured (πεπαιδευμένοις, §321) and men of virtue (ἀρετή, §§200, 235). In addition, the king claims that these Jewish translators are more accomplished philosophers than his own (§235).[13] They clearly have the credentials to produce the kind of Greek text that would be required for the royal library.

(3) This portrait of the LXX translators works in tandem with the language of translation and interpretation in the book. The crucial lexical items, particularly ἑρμηνεύω, ἑρμηνεύς, ἑρμηνεία, διερμηνεύω and μεταγράφω, are used in *Aristeas* in what I contend is a deliberately fuzzy way in order to invoke both the idea of translation and of interpretation.[14] The most critical passage is §§301–310, which describes the translators' task. They are taken to the island of Pharos (although *Aristeas* does not name the island) to do the work of translation/interpretation (ἑρμηνείας) and the process that they employ is one of reading (ἀνάγνωσις) and explication

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[12] For more extended argumentation, see Wright, "*Letter of Aristeas*," 54.

[13] See, Wright, "*Letter of Aristeas*," 55–6 and "Transcribing, Translating, and Interpreting," 153–4.

[14] Gzella does describe this part of *Aristeas*'s picture correctly. He simply makes incorrect inferences from that description. For a more detailed discussion, see Wright, "Transcribing, Translating, and Interpreting."

(διασάφησις) before comparing their work (ἀντιβολή). The result is set down in writing. In §307, we are told that they finished the translation, here using μεταγραφή, in seventy-two days "as if this circumstance happened by some design." The entire picture of translators working from a verifiably authentic parent text and producing the best possible translation is solidified, as Sylvie Honigman argues, by the use of the language of Alexandrian Homeric scholarship.[15]

The payoff of Pseudo-Aristeas's efforts is clear. The translators are experts in both Hebrew and Greek literature. They *translate* and thus produce a *faithful representation* of their Hebrew parent text. It is "accurate" (ἀκριβές), a term that Demetrius uses for both the goal and result of the project, and in this way the Septuagint is tied genealogically to the Hebrew Law. Thus, the Septuagint derives from the Hebrew, but it also retains a link to it. At the same time, these men are pious and expert philosopher-scholars who are fully capable of understanding the *meaning* of the original and making certain that the translation conveys that meaning. Any Jew who desires to live according to the laws handed down by Moses "the lawgiver," as he is referred to throughout *Aristeas*, need only read the Septuagint to discover what he meant. As I have argued elsewhere, the vocabulary of translation combined with the portrait of the philosopher-scholar-translator allows "Ps.-Aristeas to have his ideological cake and eat it too. For our author, the LXX shares in the prestige and divine quality of the Hebrew text, because as a *translation* it has a genealogical relationship with it. Even more, however, the intention of God resides within it, since the translators, who understood and lived what the Hebrew meant, transferred that meaning to the translation. The product is in no way inferior to or dependent on the Hebrew original."[16]

(4) This assessment leads directly to my last point in this brief review of *Aristeas*'s construction of the Septuagint as an independent replacement for the Hebrew. After the translation is completed, it is read to the assembled Jewish community (§308), whose leaders declare that the translation "has been made well, piously and accurately (ἠκριβωμένως) in every respect" (§310). They then put a curse on anyone who might make any revision or change to it (§311). Harry Orlinsky has argued convincingly that this scene resembles biblical scenes, such as Exod 24.3–7, 2 Kings 22–23, Jer 36.1–10 and Neh 8.1–6, where a text is read aloud to the people, who

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[15] Honigman, *Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*, 42–9, here 48.

[16] Wright, "Transcribing, Translating, and Interpreting," 160.

accept it as binding. Moreover, the prohibition of making any changes to the text functions like Deut 4.1–2 where Moses forbids changes to the law that God had given him. Orlinsky concludes that reading a document aloud to the people followed by an expression of consent "describes the biblical procedure in designating a document as official and binding, in other words, as divinely inspired, as Sacred Scripture."[17] The subsequent notice in §§314–316 that Theopompus and Theodectes had earlier attempted to render some pieces of the Law into Greek but were prevented by illness from doing so Orlinsky explains as a claim "that the Septuagint was the first, and only, Greek translation…of His Holy Law that God had authorized. It was, simply put, no less divinely inspired than the Hebrew original of Moses."[18] Thus, the Septuagint, and only the Septuagint, can function as scripture for the Alexandrian Jewish community.

Honigman also thinks that Ps.-Aristeas equates the translation with scripture for Greek-speaking Jews. She identifies an "Exodus paradigm" at work in the book, which is comprised of three basic scenes that show one of Pseudo-Aristeas's goals to be the elevation of the Septuagint to the status of sacred scripture.[19] The first episode focuses on the freeing of the Jewish slaves (§§12–27). Here, however, Ptolemy acts as a "benevolent Pharaoh" and not a harsh, mercurial one. The second element of the paradigm is the selection of 72 translators, who recall the 70 elders whom Moses takes with him onto Mt. Sinai in Exodus 24 (§§46–50).[20] The final episode is the reading of the Law and its acceptance by the people in §§308–310, which constitutes, in effect, a second giving of the Law.[21] For Orlinsky and Honigman, then, Ps.-Aristeas explicitly constructs the Septuagint as sacred scripture, and as such it functions independently of the Hebrew as the repository of God's Law.

[17] Harry Orlinsky, "Septuagint as Holy Writ and the Philosophy of the Translators," *HUCA* 46 (1975) 89–114, here 94.

[18] Orlinsky, "Septuagint as Holy Writ," 97. The mysterious illnesses that affect the two Greeks hint at divine involvement in the translation, even if God's activity is not foregrounded in the work.

[19] Hongiman, *Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*, 53–63. Also arguing for the influence of Exodus in *Aristeas*, but more pervading than Honigman suggests, is Arkady Kovelman, *Between Alexandria and Jerusalem: The Dynamic of Jewish and Hellenistic Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), see chapter 3. I am more sympathetic to Honigman's arguments than to Kovelman's on this point.

[20] Honigman argues that the number 72, rather than 70, reflects a civic paradigm in which the tribes are seen as civic tribes of a Greek *polis*, and the translators are representatives of the people. They thus represent the entire Jewish people (*Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*, 57–8). Aristobulus (Fragment 1, preserved in the Pascal Canons of Anatolius as reported in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* 7.32.14–19) gives the number as 70 rather than 72 (Holladay, *Fragments*, 3.129)

[21] Honigman again argues for a two-fold reading of the section. Not only does the scene have biblical parallels, she notes that it also resembles "the process of the promulgation of official editions of texts of classical authors in Greek cities" (*Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*, 59).

3. Preeminent Theories of Septuagint Origins

Any survey of the literature will reveal the raft of theories about how and for what purpose the Septuagint was produced. Some are more suspicious of *Aristeas* than others; some try to retain as much as possible of the narrative as historical; and others seem only tangentially connected to *Aristeas*'s tale. As I noted above, I think that almost all of them founder on the assumption that the underlying contention of *Aristeas*—that the Greek Pentateuch was meant to be an independent replacement for the Hebrew—reflects what was actually the case. In this short space, I could not possibly examine every theory, and so I will take some representative examples. Fortunately, Gilles Dorival has provided a convenient summary of the major theories and their proponents in his article "De nouvelles donées sur l'origine de la Septante?"[22] Moreover, in examining some of these theories here, I will not review the major critiques of them that scholars have offered, since even those critiques, even implicitly, often assume the validity of *Aristeas*'s construction. If these theories depend on what *Aristeas* says about the Septuagint, then one key to their potential explanatory power is whether *Aristeas*'s picture actually provides an adequate accounting for what we find in the Septuagint itself. I will consider that issue below.

I will not treat in detail Paul Kahle's Targum theory, which ostensibly might be relevant. The *crux* of his interpretation depends on the meaning and referent of the word σεσήμανται in §30 and on the contention that it refers to Greek texts that had been carelessly translated.[23] Gunther Zuntz and D.W. Gooding have convincingly demonstrated, however, that the word cannot be rendered by "translate" but rather must be translated as "transcribe" or "commit to writing" and that the word relates to Hebrew texts, not Greek ones.[24] Kahle's major piece of evidence, then, does not prove what he claims it does, and scholars have generally rejected this theory.

(1) A Liturgical Origin. In his Schweich lectures of 1920, H. St. John Thackeray argued that the Septuagint did not come about in the way that *Aristeas* claims, even though he does recognize some elements of truth in the narrative. Rather than official Ptolemaic patronage, Thackeray

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[22] *Semitica et Classica* 2 (2009) 73–9, see especially 73–6.

[23] See his *Cairo Geniza* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1953) 212–13.

[24] G. Zuntz, "Aristeas Studies II: Aristeas on the Translation of the Torah," *JSS* 4 (1959) 109–26 and D.W. Gooding, "Aristeas and Septuagint Origins: A Review of Recent Studies," *VT* 13 (1963) 357–79.

maintains that the Septuagint was a kind of semi-official product of Alexandrian Jews translated because of the religious needs of a Jewish community that had lost its facility for Hebrew.[25] In his estimation, the Septuagint "doubtless owed its existence to the lectionary needs of a Greek-speaking community."[26] This statement is the heart of the theory of a liturgical origin. In making this explanation, Thackeray combines two elements that require the Septuagint to function as an independent replacement that supersedes the Hebrew: (a) the Hebrew scriptures were used as part of lectionary readings in Jewish synagogue worship and (b) Alexandrian Jews did not have sufficient facility with Hebrew to be able to understand the text in that language. Thus, the Septuagint would be intended to function for Greek-speaking Jews in the same way that the Hebrew would have functioned for Hebrew-speakers.[27]

(2) A Legal Origin. A number of scholars, most notably Joseph Mélèze Modrzejewski, Dominique Barthélemy, and Gilles Dorival, have proposed that the Septuagint was translated to fill the need for a civic law, a πολίτικος νόμος, for the Jews of Egypt.[28] The Jewish Torah would have been employed within a Jewish community that was organized as a semi-autonomous πολίτευμα and would have functioned as civic law within the hierarchy of laws employed in the Ptolemaic judicial system along with the royal regulations and ordinances.[29] The primary evidence for this theory comes from Egyptian papyri. So, for example, Mélèze Modrzejewski cites a divorce complaint from 218 BCE in which the phrase "[civic] law of the Jews" appears.[30] Dorival appeals to the recently published papyri from Herakleopolis that date from between 144/143 and 133/132 BCE. One papyrus (P. Polit. Iud. 8) from 133 BCE refers to a Jewish πολίτευμα. In another (P. Polit. Iud. 4), Dorival argues that the phrase κατὰ τὸν

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[25] *The Septuagint and Jewish Worship: A Study in Origins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921).

[26] *Septuagint and Jewish Worship*, 41.

[27] Recently Sigfried Kreuzer has suggested the plausibility of the Septuagint being intended for use in the synagogue, although he is ambivalent about whether it would have been for liturgical or study purposes. See "Enstehung und Publikation der Septuagint am Horizont frühptolemäischer Bildungs- und Kulturpolitik," in *Im Brennpunkt: Die Septuaginta: Studien zur Enstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bibel* (Sigfried Kreuzer and Jürgen Peter Leshe, eds.; Band 2; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2004) 61–75.

[28] Joseph Mélèze Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt from Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995 [translation of original French publication from 1992]); Dominique Barthélemy, "Pourquoi la Torah a-t-elle été traduite en grec?" in *On Language, Culture, and Religion: In Honor of Eugene A. Nida* (Paris: Mouton, 1974) 23–41; Dorival, "De nouvelles donees."

[29] Mélèze Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 107–8.

[30] Mélèze Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 111. Note that the word "civic" is reconstructed.

νόμον combined with a reference to τὸ τοῦ ἀποστασίου βιβλίον, a similar phrase to that in Deut 24.1, 3, shows that the Septuagint is actually functioning as civic law.[31]

The legal theory of origins also takes seriously *Aristeas*'s basic contention that there was royal involvement in the Septuagint's beginnings. Of course, that involvement bears no resemblance to how *Aristeas* constructs it. Whereas in *Aristeas* Ptolemy II's participation in the events leading to the translation has cultural origins—that is, the translation will be included in the Library—this theory makes royal involvement necessary for the practical reasons of administering a kingdom and its various ethnic groups.[32]

Even if we assume with Mélèze Modrzjeweski and Dorival that the phrases they cite refer to the Septuagint being employed as a civic law that governs a Jewish πολίτευμα—and this is a challengeable position—clearly these papyri post-date the period in which most scholars place the translation of the Pentateuch. In each case, then, these scholars assume that how they assess the Septuagint's function at a later time indicates how it was intended to function from the beginning. In this way, the legal theory of Septuagint origins requires a translation that was meant *ab initio* to replace its Hebrew progenitor and function in the same way that other Greek legal texts would have functioned.

(3) Ptolemaic Initiative in Connection with the Library. Throughout the history of scholarly study of the *Letter of Aristeas* there have been scholars who have given credence to the basic narrative line that royal patronage on the part of Ptolemy II to include the Septuagint in the Alexandrian Library lies at the core of the origins of the Septuagint. Acceptance or rejection of this claim has come in waves, and in recent years the idea has rebounded in a variety of different variations on the same theme. In general, *Aristeas*'s picture is seen as plausible for any number of reasons. So, for example, some royal involvement was necessary because the Jewish community in third century BCE Alexandria was not very populous and not wealthy. Thus, the Jews could not have managed such a monumental undertaking; that could only happen with royal patronage. Furthermore, translations in antiquity were linked to centers of power and were not privately initiated, and so, only royal patronage would provide the necessary link to elite power circles. In other cases, it is simply asserted that since the tradition of Ptolemaic backing for

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[31] Dorival, "De nouvelles donées," 78–9.

[32] This idea also parallels scholarly suggestions of Persian authorization as an explanation for the origins of the Hebrew Pentateuch.

inclusion in the Library is so early and widespread (i.e., in *Aristeas*, Philo, Josephus, and the rabbis), it cannot be neglected—that is, it must be granted historical credence. For the purposes of my argument, I want to look at the constructions of four scholars who have most recently appealed to Ptolemaic patronage and connection with the Alexandrian Library: Sylvie Honigman, Arie van der Kooij, Natalio Fernández Marcos and Tessa Rajak.[33]

(a) In her book, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria*, Sylvie Honigman makes an important contribution to scholarship on the *Letter of Aristeas*. She proposes that *Aristeas* was composed as a "charter myth" for the Septuagint that aimed to provide justification for regarding it as the sacred scripture for Alexandrian Jews. If *Aristeas*'s author perceived a need to promote the Septuagint as sacred scripture in the middle of the second century BCE, Honigman reasons, then it is likely that it was *not* considered scripture in the third century BCE when it was translated. She writes, "[I]t is doubtful whether anyone in Ptolemaic Egypt, or indeed the Greco-Roman world at large, would have ever considered a freshly made *translation* of any sacred text as sacred itself, let alone integrated it in a ritual or liturgical framework."[34]

Based on this conclusion, Honigman asks whether the narrative in *Aristeas* should be seen as having any plausibility. In the end, she does take seriously Ptolemy's involvement, not as the initiator of the enterprise, but as one who patronized the project in response to being approached by the Jewish community. Honigman wavers somewhat on the exact reason or reasons that the Jews might have had for requesting patronage. She argues that there may have been more than one. She pays significant attention to the legal hypothesis, suggesting that the evidence from the Herakleopolis papyri should be taken seriously (although she recognizes that legal use of the translation might be derivative). Prestige might have played a part in the Jews' approach to Ptolemy.[35]

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[33] Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*; van de Kooij, "Perspectives on the Study of the Septuagint" and "The Septuagint of the Pentateuch and Ptolemaic Rule," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* (Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson, eds.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007) 289–300; Natalio Fernández Marcos, "The Greek Pentateuch and the Scholarly Milieu of Alexandria," *Semitica et Classica* 2 (2009) 81–9; Tessa Rajak, "Translating the Septuagint for Ptolemy's Library: Myth and History," in *Die Septuaginta–Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten: Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 20.-23. Juli 2006* (Wolfgang Kraus and Martin Karrer, eds.; WUNT 219; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 176–93 and *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible and the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[34] *Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*, 95.

[35] For the full argument, see *Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*, chap. 5.

She also wants to take seriously the involvement of the Library, but only at a later stage in the development of the Septuagint and as a function of its early history. Here she places weight on the language of Homeric scholarship found in *Aristeas*. Only rather than an aspect of the production of the translation, she hypothesizes that at some point an exemplar of the translation was deposited in the library and that one important purpose of *Aristeas* was to "support the political step in the proclamation of the copy held in the library as authoritative…or, more probably, to meet public curiosity aroused by this step."[36] In this way, she can preserve the historicity of *both* royal patronage and inclusion of the Septuagint in the Library.

Whether one agrees with Honigman's conclusions or not, she articulates one specific premise that suggests to me that she is working with a model that, whatever her conclusions about the original purpose of the translation—prestige or law code—posits the Septuagint as an independent replacement for the Hebrew text from the start. Explaining the premises that undergird her analysis, Honigman asserts, "[W]e should not restrict ourselves by seeking too close an association between the *technique* and the circumstances of the translation on the one hand, and the original purpose of the translation on the other."[37] That is, the way that the translators went about their work should not necessarily be thought to say too much about the translation's origins. As I will argue below, I think that when we look at the Septuagint itself, this is *precisely* what has to happen, that the technique of translation and its intended function are closely connected. Honigman seems to imply here that even though the Septuagint contains difficult and even ungrammatical Greek, that fact should not eliminate either prestige or legal use as explanations for the translation. These purposes, though, would seem to necessitate a product that would function as a Greek text that did not require recourse to the original parent text.

(b) In two articles, Arie van der Kooij has argued that scholarly scribal translators produced the translation. I noted above how *Aristeas*'s picture forms the basis for his view of how the Septuagint was produced. In his construction, van der Kooij is convinced by Wolfgang Orth that the tradition connecting Demetrius of Phalerum with the Septuagint should be taken seriously.[38] But really his conclusions, which largely follow *Aristeas*'s narrative, are an extension of his

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[36] *Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*," 135.

[37] *Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*," 96. Emphasis is in the original.

[38] "Ptolemaios II und die Septuaginta-Übersetzung," in *Im Brennpunkt: Die Septuaginta—Studien zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bibel* (Heinz-Josef Fabry and Ulrich Offerhuas, eds.; BWANT 153; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2001) 97–114.

assessments of who the translators are. In his view, the translators must have been men, as Ps.-Aristeas portrays them, who were skilled in both "reading" and "interpretation."[39] Such scholar-translators would not have been found in the Jewish community in Alexandria, which presumably was not very organized or autonomous and was made up largely of "soldiers, slaves (prisoners of war), mercenaries and peasants."[40] In short, van der Kooij's conclusion, based on this assessment, is that the only way the translation could have been accomplished was in the manner set out in *Aristeas*—Demetrius proposes the project in connection with the Library, which then receives royal approbation, which scholar-translators sent from Jerusalem carry out.[41]

Van der Kooij does not accept the part of *Aristeas* that portrays the Septuagint as the sacred scripture of Alexandrian Jews, however. Taking seriously the connection with the Library would appear to rule that out for him. He writes about the Septuagint's presence in the royal Library:

> Although it is unlikely that Demetrius was the "royal librarian," as the *Letter* claims, the proposal made by Demetrius makes perfect sense if indeed the Torah was translated for the purposes of reading and study. Together with the Museion, the library was founded to foster Alexandrian scholarship. It thus was only natural to make the Greek version of the Torah available in the library. All this means that the Greek version of the Pentateuch was produced on the initiative of the Ptolemaic court for reasons of scholarly interest in the laws and constitutions of various peoples.[42]

If van der Kooij's reconstruction were correct, and by extension, *Aristeas*'s narrative on which it is based, the Septuagint must have originally been intended as an independent substitute for the Hebrew parent text. If the purpose of the Septuagint was reading and study and these activities took place in the institutional environs of the Library, then, whether it would be Jewish or Gentile readers, this reconstruction assumes that Greek-speakers would use the translation in a monolingual context. Thus, the Greek would supersede the Hebrew.

(c) In his Jeremie lecture of 2008, Natalio Fernández Marcos argues for a return to the *Letter of Aristeas* in much the same way as van der Kooij. In fact, Fernández Marcos says explicitly that he wants to take the argument a step further than van der Kooij. In most respects, though,

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[39] This is one of the major points of his "Perspectives" article.

[40] "The Septuagint of the Pentateuch," 293.

[41] "The Septuagint of the Pentateuch," 298–9.

[42] "The Septuagint of the Pentateuch," 299.

Fernández Marcos's reconstruction relies on *Aristeas* at almost every turn. So, he thinks that the portrait of the translators as learned in Hebrew and Greek literature and as philosophers makes sense. He writes, "[I]t is difficult to accept that this tradition, already present in the *Letter of Aristeas*, a century after the time of the translation, in Aristobulus, in Philo, in Josephus, and in the Rabbis, had been invented without historical support."[43] In his estimation, the activity of translation was likely to have been carried out in connection with the Library. "All the indicators," Fernández Marcos contends, "point in the same direction: That the translators could only carry out their work in a scholarly milieu such as that created in the circles of the Library for the philological editions and transmission of the classics."[44]

Although he does admit that some aspects of *Aristeas*'s tale are idealized, Fernández Marcos accepts fully the implications of following *Aristeas* in these matters. In particular, he explicitly recognizes that this means seeing the Greek Pentateuch as superseding the Hebrew text at its very inception. So, for example, in his assessment of the "interlinear model" employed as part of the *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS) project, Fernández Marcos says outright, "The Greek Pentateuch took place over [sic] the Hebrew Torah from the very beginning."[45] Further on he compares the Greek of the Septuagint to a number of fourth–second century Greek writers: "To evaluate correctly the quality of the Greek one should be aware once again that we are dealing with translation Greek, a Greek that can be understood without recourse to the Hebrew, and which can be compared to the scientific prose of Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, Archimedes, and Euclides."[46] For Fernández Marcos, the Greek of the Septuagint is fully acceptable *koine* Greek that was completely capable of standing on its own for Greek readers.

(4) Of the four scholars that I am reviewing here, Tessa Rajak, in her book *Translation & Survival*, spends the most time discussing the nature of the Greek of the Septuagint, and she reaches a very different conclusion from that of Fernández Marcos. But she as well wants to preserve Ptolemaic involvement in the origins of the Septuagint. Like each of these other scholars, she admits that *Aristeas* is idealized, apologetic, and even at times fanciful, but she also

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[43] "The Greek Pentateuch," 86.

[44] "The Greek Pentateuch," 89.

[45] "The Greek Pentateuch," 84.

[46] "The Greek Pentateuch," 88.

argues, "All in all, the substantial assertions made in the *Letter of Aristeas* are quite consonant with what we know of the early Ptolemaic environment there—the cultural activities of its kings, the breadth of interest of its Greek thinkers, and the position of its Jews on their mental map."[47] For her the Septuagint was translated for reasons of prestige, both on the part of Jews who wanted to "go Greek" and on the side of the king who "gained prestige from his control of a foreign law code."[48]

Much of the argumentation that she offers for this position takes up ideas and evidence that have been used by others to support the veracity of at least parts of *Aristeas*. What sets Rajak's analysis apart, however, is her candid evaluation of the nature of the Greek one finds in the Septuagint. Two points are most relevant here. In terms of the nature of the Greek, she notes, "No one would suggest that we are here dealing with ordinary Greek *in any of its registers* [emphasis mine]. Septuagint Greek is unique and altogether more peculiar."[49] When discussing the interlinear paradigm employed in the NETS project, she comments about the relationship between the Hebrew and Greek, "Septuagint Greek manifestly 'sits on top of' the Hebrew in a way that would seem to presuppose respect for, and some degree of acquaintance with, the source language as a literary vehicle, at least within its circle of primary users."[50]

This evaluation of Septuagintal Greek runs directly counter to what Ps.-Aristeas says about the nature of the translation, however. To account for this difference, Rajak takes two different tacks. As she assesses the situation, the motivation for the translation was prestige, which, at least on the part of the Jews, indicated a desire to be part of the cultural world of Hellenistic Alexandria, and yet, the character of the Greek is intentional, representing a kind of anti-colonial resistance to that same cultural world. It is a "foreignizing" of the translation that recognizes the "ultimately unbridgeable distance between two cultures."[51] The translation, then, serves as "an assertion of communal independence which made it possible for the translation to serve as a vehicle for quiet cultural resistance."[52] Thus, more explicitly than in most theories, Rajak attempts to make sense of the conundrum of *Aristeas*'s construction of the translation's

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[47] *Translation and Survival*, 66.

[48] *Translation and Survival*, 86, 88.

[49] *Translation and Survival*, 133–4.

[50] *Translation and Survival*, 145.

[51] *Translation and Survival*, 153.

[52] *Translation and Survival*, 156.

independence, which I think still lurks in the background of her analysis, when seen against the obvious difficulties that the character of the Greek present to that picture. I think, however, that a better explanation lies down a different path.

4. The Evidence of the Septuagint

Rajak's analysis notwithstanding, the many theories about the origins of the Septuagint only infrequently offer substantive discussion of the character of the Septuagint's Greek. Often one encounters claims that the Greek Pentateuch is characteristic of the popular *koine* of the third century BCE, which is seen in the papyri of the period, although the comparison usually is restricted to vocabulary or specific syntactical constructions. Fernández Marcos, as we saw, thinks that Septuagintal Greek compares favorably with Greek authors roughly contemporary with the translation. The Septuagint differs from all of these sources in one major way, however—it is a translation *into* Greek and not an original composition *in* Greek—and this fundamental distinction ought to play a leading role in any analysis of the text. As Cameron Boyd-Taylor has put it,
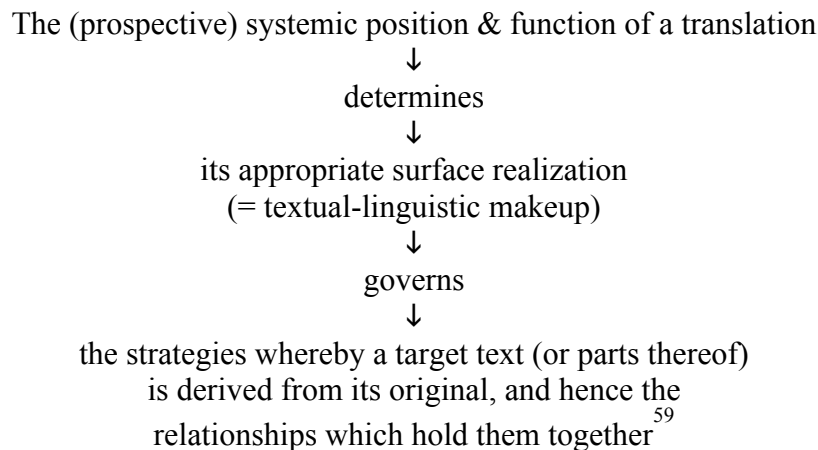
> Quite simply, a translated text never represents a straightforward instance of performance in the target language. Translations deviate from the conventions governing well-formed texts and this fact has both linguistic and socio-cultural implications. The practices of reading brought to bear on a translation, the expectations of its readership, the uses to which it is put, will vary systematically from those proper to non-translational texts.[53]

In recent years scholars who study the Septuagint have become more aware of the productive ways that the insights of Translation Studies can illuminate aspects of the translation. The publications of scholars such as Albert Pietersma, Cameron Boyd-Taylor, Theo van der Louw, and Naomi Seidman, as well as, I hope, some of my own, have moved theoretical questions about the study of the Septuagint to center stage.[54]

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[53] "In a Mirror, Dimly: Reading the Septuagint as a Document of its Times," in *The Septuagint: Issues and Challenges in the Study and Translation of the Greek Bible* (Glenn Wooden and Wolfgang Kraus, eds. Atlanta: SBL, 2006) 16–17.

[54] Albert Pietersma, "Beyond Literalism" and "A New Paradigm for Addressing Old Questions: The Relevance of the Interlinear Model for the Study of the Septuagint," *Bible and Computer: The Stellenbosch AIBI Conference. Proceedings of the Association Internationale Bible et Informatique "From Alpha to Byte" University of Stellenbosch 17–21 July, 2000* (ed. Johann Cook; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 337–64; Cameron Boyd-Taylor (most recently and in the most detail) *Reading Between the Lines: The Interlinear Paradigm for Septuagint Studies* (Biblical Tools and Studies 8; Leuven: Peeters, 2010). [A revision of his 2005 University of Toronto Ph.D. dissertation. I have not yet seen the book, and thus I will cite the dissertation in the notes below.]; Theo Van der Louw, *Transformations in the Septuagint: Towards an Interaction of Septuagint Studies and Translation Studies* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology 47; Leuven: Peeters, 2007); Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings:*

One particularly helpful analytical approach, which formed the basis for the work of NETS, comes from the Israeli translation theorist Gideon Toury, who has argued that a translation's function (position), its textual-linguistic makeup (product), and the strategies employed by the translator(s) (process) are all intimately connected.[55] For Toury, all translations are "facts of their target cultures."[56] That is, all translations originate in a specific cultural environment where they "are designed to meet certain needs of, and/or occupy certain 'slots' in it."[57] The socio-cultural niches or slots in the target culture that a translation is intended to occupy Toury calls its function or position.[58] This prospective position will subsequently determine what surface realization or textual linguistic makeup the translation will have. Finally, the intended textual-linguistic makeup of the text governs the particular strategies that a translator will employ in the execution of the product. The diagram below illustrates these relationships.

The (prospective) systemic position & function of a translation
↓
determines
↓
its appropriate surface realization
(= textual-linguistic makeup)
↓
governs
↓
the strategies whereby a target text (or parts thereof)
is derived from its original, and hence the
relationships which hold them together[59]

Since these relationships are inextricably connected in an activity that is inherently teleological, according to Toury, what we know about one or two should be able to give some insight into one that might not be known. Of course, this is exactly the problem scholars face with the Septuagint.

Before proceeding further, however, it is important to recognize that by function or position, Toury is not talking about *Sitz im Leben*, which is what most of us in Septuagint Studies would love to know about the origins of the Septuagint. Since we do not have access to the translators' minds or anything that they might have said about their work, we do not know what they intended to do with it once it was finished. By position or function, Toury is referring to the slots within the target culture that have to do with the *systemic value* of the text within that culture, values that can perhaps best be articulated by oppositions such as literary/non-literary, central/peripheral, prestigious/non-prestigious, monolingual/bilingual.[60] The *Sitz im Leben* of a translation would presumably be a place within the culture where a translation made according to these systemic values would best fit, and, of course, if we do not know the specific *Sitz im Leben*, analysis of the kind that Toury advocates might point to more than one possible social or cultural location.

Moreover, translators are engaged in norm-governed activity where they are faced with some basic choices. So, for example, which linguistic norms should be followed, those of the target language or those of the source language? Toury speaks of "adequacy," adherence to source language norms, and "acceptability," adherence to target language norms. A convenient way to think about this distinction is to consider the extent to which a translation accedes to or deviates from the norms of the target language.[61] One paramount aspect of a translation's acceptability is the extent to which it displays positive or negative interference—positive interference being defined as the use of features of the target language that are at odds with the normal distribution of those features in that language and negative interference occurring when the translator allows source-language features to determine the use of target-language features that results in an ill-formed text as judged by the standards of the target language.[62] *All*

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[60] Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies*, 12. For this discussion and related bibliography, see Wright, "*Letter of Aristeas*," 50 and "Moving beyond Translating a Translation: Reflections on *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS)," in Hiebert, *Translation is Required*, 23–39.

[61] See Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies*, 56–7 and Boyd-Taylor, "Reading Between the Lines," 67.

[62] On interference, see Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies*, 274–9 and Boyd-Taylor, "Reading Between the Lines," 55–6.

translations exhibit interference, since no translation is a purely straightforward performance in the target language, and the degree to which translations display interference is an important indication of their target culture acceptability.[63]

One of the important benefits of Toury's theoretical work is that it shines a spotlight on the fundamentally socio-cultural and historical nature of translation. The relationships among position-product-process point to the fact that "the linguistic performances that constitute the activity of translation are inextricably rooted in the sociocultural realities and historical circumstance of the translators. The historical and linguistic are knotted together in an uncuttable Gordian knot."[64] As a consequence, since we do not know the exact position that the Septuagint translators intended for their work, analysis of the textual-linguistic makeup and the strategies they employed can be taken as evidence of that unknown intended position. That position, which can be described using the kinds of systemic descriptors I outlined above, will then be consistent or inconsistent with specific (and hypothetical) uses that the translation might have had. Moreover, that function might or might not fit well within the frameworks of the various theories of origins that scholars have proposed for the Septuagint.

Consequently, in the absence of any clear intended function for the Greek Pentateuch, we must begin with its textual-linguistic makeup. Whereas virtually all scholars who have studied the Septuagint have commented on its generally "translationese" quality, Albert Pietersma has offered the metaphor of interlinearity, which framed the approach of the NETS project, as a way of describing the *linguistic* relationship of the Greek target text to its Hebrew parent text, a relationship that he characterized as "dependent" and "subservient."[65] As Pietersma and I wrote in the introduction to *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, "NETS is presupposing a Greek translation which aimed at bringing the Greek reader to the Hebrew original rather than bringing the Hebrew original to the Greek reader. Consequently, the Greek's subservience to the Hebrew may be seen as indicative of its aim."[66] The use of interlinearity as a metaphor is intended to encapsulate the overall *linguistic* relationship between the source and parent texts,

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[63] On this point see Wright, "Moving beyond Translating," 29–30.

[64] Wright, "Moving beyond Translating," 25.

[65] See "A New Paradigm" and "Beyond Literalism." On the interlinear model, see also Boyd-Taylor, "In a Mirror Dimly" and *Reading Between the Lines*.

[66] Pietersma and Wright, *A New English Translation*, xiv. This notion was formulated by Brock, "Phenomenon of the Septuagint," 17 and "Translation in Antiquity," *Alta* (II) 8 (1969) 96–102 (here 99).

both to explain the unintelligibility *and* the intelligibility of the Greek translation. Whatever else the translators of the Pentateuch were doing, they generally operated using an isomorphic approach—that is, they translated at the word or small phrase level rather than at the clause, sentence or discourse level. This procedure sometimes results in complete nonsense in Greek, such as the rendering ἄνθρωπος ἄνθρωπος for the Hebrew distributive אִישׁ אִישׁ (Lev 18.6).[67] In other instances, however, the translators treat their source texts sensitively, but that sensitivity normally gets expressed at the level of words and short phrases.

Even if we were to set aside the numerous instances of infelicitous translations, transliterations, or unidiomatic uses of structure words, such as prepositions and the like, we are still faced in the Septuagint with an overwhelming abundance of interference, both positive and negative. One clear example of positive interference is the ubiquitous preference of καί over δέ or some other conjunction to represent Hebrew *waw,* no matter what syntactical function the Hebrew conjunction might have. Leviticus 13.3 presents a paradigmatic example of negative interference. The Hebrew עמק מעור expresses a comparative with the normal construction adjective plus מן plus noun. In this verse, the translator maps the Greek directly onto the Hebrew, producing a phrase that bears little resemblance to sensible Greek, ταπεινὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ δέρματος. In other instances, however, the translator renders the same Hebrew into idiomatic Greek, even though he still works at the short phrase level. So, for example, just a few verses later in verses 30 and 31, the translator encounters two more instances of the Hebrew phrase. Here, though, he resorts to the usual Greek manner of expressing comparison, employing a comparative adjective with the genitive case, thereby producing a perfectly understandable Greek phrase, ἐγκοιλοτέρα τοῦ δέρματος.

What we encounter, then, in the textual-makeup of the Septuagint, is a *text* that, even though one can find felicitous translations and sensitivity to the source text, is doubtlessly ill-formed by the standards of literary Greek. The creation of a literary text would require the suppression of features of the source text in favor of those of the target text, an approach not generally characteristic of the Septuagint. In other words, when confronted with Toury's initial norm, the choice of pursuing adequacy or acceptability, the Septuagint translators chose

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[67] For specific discussion and the translation profile of each Pentateuchal book, see the individual introductions in NETS. I have taken my examples from these introductions.

adequacy; they more frequently privileged source features over target ones.[68]

Returning to intended function, then, the evidence of the textual-linguistic makeup of the Septuagint would lead to the conclusion that it was not intended to be a literary translation able to stand on its own as an independent Greek text. Indeed, in numerous instances it manifestly cannot do so. Of course, simply describing a translation as non-literary does not mean necessarily that it cannot stand on its own. Yet the Septuagint's overall ill-formedness, the frequency of both positive and negative interference, the Hebraistic use of structure words, the numerous transliterations, to name only a few translation phenomena, all suggest that it was not intended to be the things that it is in *Aristeas*—independent, literary, prestigious, or scriptural. As I see things, the Septuagint was in all likelihood not intended to function as a literary and prestigious sacred scripture *at its point of production*. The *Hebrew* text would have remained the point of interest, attention, and emphasis, with the Septuagint pointing to and providing access to it.

5. The Septuagint, *Aristeas* and the Question of Origins

We can now return to the *Letter of Aristeas* and its construction of Septuagint origins. If we compare what *Aristeas* says about the Septuagint with what we find in the Septuagint itself, we find *Aristeas* contradicted at almost every turn. For the author of *Aristeas*, the Septuagint was based on a Hebrew source text that was "philosophical," "flawless," and "divine" (§31). The translators who were brought to Alexandria from Jerusalem excelled in their own lives and in the knowledge of Hebrew and Greek literature. They were perfectly suited to convey the characteristics of the Hebrew text to the Greek, which would serve to replace the Hebrew as a new giving of the law in Greek, and thus, the island of Pharos becomes a kind of second Sinai. After its completion, the translation is read to the Jewish community, which accepts it as binding, as sacred scripture. The king himself is amazed when he hears the translation read. In §317, he even bows when he hears Demetrius's report about the translation, mirroring his earlier reaction to the arrival of the Hebrew manuscripts, and he orders that "they be preserved reverently."

How do we explain the contrast between *Aristeas*'s construction and the textual-linguistic character of the Septuagint itself? Hongiman attempted to head off this problem by claiming that

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[68] On the idea of translational norms and translation as a norm-governed activity, see Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies*, chap. 2. On literary translation, see 170–1. See also, Boyd-Taylor, "Reading Between the Lines," 59–65.

the technique of the translation should not be connected to its purpose, but as Toury has shown, this is quite impossible. These two things are intimately related. Rajak resorts to a two-pronged explanation—royal initiative combined with anti-colonial resistance—but, even though she recognizes the connection between the Septuagint and its Hebrew source, her explanation still does not span the "unbridgeable distance" that separates *Aristeas*'s picture and the character of Septuagintal Greek.

I have argued in other venues that if we take seriously the distinction between the translation at its point of production and its later reception history, then we can make sense of this distance.[69] The textual-linguistic character of the Septuagint provides evidence of the translation at its point of inception; the *Letter of Aristeas* witnesses to the Septuagint at a moment in its reception history. In brief, by the second century BCE, the Septuagint *had become* an independent replacement for the Hebrew text, and it *had achieved* the status of scripture. Thus, *Aristeas* proffers a myth of origins for the position or function of the Septuagint in the second century.[70] As Toury notes, translations can change their functions over time, and that is precisely, I think, what happened with the Septuagint.[71] *Aristeas* offers a justification for that change, namely, that the Septuagint had the status of a literary translation that was accepted as scripture from the very beginning. All of the different elements of *Aristeas*'s narrative, then, contribute to this myth of origins, and they cannot be mined for data about how the Septuagint originated. Together they comprise a sophisticated literary argument for how *Aristeas* understood the Septuagint in the mid-second century BCE.

If we look back at the theories of origins I surveyed above, we find that all of them, whether explicitly or implicitly, accept and rely on *Aristeas*'s claim that the Greek Pentateuch was intended to be an independent replacement for the Hebrew text from the very beginning, a

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[69] See, "*Letter of Aristeas*," "Moving beyond Translating" and "Translation as Scripture: The Septuagint in *Aristeas* and Philo," in Kraus and Wooden, *The Septuagint*, 47–61.

[70] Here I am in full agreement with Honigman in *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*. It is intriguing that the Herakleopolis papyri date from approximately the time when *Aristeas* is written. The Septuagint certainly functions in these papyri independently of its source text, if indeed they do demonstrate the Septuagint's use as a law code for the Jewish community. Such possible deployment as a law code, however, needs to be kept a separate issue (at least initially) from the evidence supplied in *Aristeas*, since our text tries to establish the Septuagint as sacred scripture, which seems to be a different matter from whether it was employed to govern the Jewish community. The Septuagint, of course, ultimately did come to function independently of its source text. The evidence from *Aristeas* and the Herakleopolis papyri might point to a time slightly before this period as the period when that change begins to take place. Once it achieved an independent status, the translation could well have served more than one function within the Jewish community.

[71] Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies*, 30.

claim that is belied by the observable textual-linguistic makeup of the translations themselves. Since *Aristeas* does not provide evidence for the Septuagint at its point of production, any theory of Septuagint origins that relies on Ps.-Aristeas's narrative, which testifies to Septuagint's reception history and not its historical origins, is deficient at precisely that point.

In most cases, I would now proceed to offer my own construction of the Septuagint's origins. Unfortunately, I will probably disappoint on this expectation, since using Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies approach, even though it embeds translation in particular social and historical circumstances, and applying the metaphor of interlinearity do not produce a theory of origins. Toury's concept of "function" or "position" does not equal *Sitz im Leben*, nor does interlinearity, as a metaphor for understanding the textual-linguistic makeup of the Septuagint, constitute a theory of origins. Both are ways of describing what we find when we examine the Septuagint's textual-linguistic makeup and translation strategies. These descriptive models *can* provide a means for assessing the story in *Aristeas*, though, and it allows us *some* way forward toward drawing a few conclusions, however meager they might be, about the Septuagint's beginnings.[72]

If we can arrive at a detailed description of the textual-linguistic makeup of any book in the Septuagint and catalogue the translation strategies that were employed in the translation, then we should be able to arrive at a reasonable assessment of the intended function of the translation. In other words, the Septuagint's intended function, as it is derived from the textual-linguistic makeup of the translation, will have a connection with or point to the socio-cultural and historical contexts for which that intended function makes sense. Based on such information, we would then be obliged to argue on behalf of whichever of the possible historical or socio-cultural contexts in the social and cultural landscape best accounts for what we have learned. On the other hand, historical and socio-cultural contexts in which the intended position does not make sense would not constitute reasonable candidates for seeking the origins of the Septuagint. The *Letter of Aristeas*, which forges close associations among royal patronage, independent scriptural status, and a product of literary and philosophical character, does not offer a picture consistent with what we can observe in the Septuagint itself, and thus we cannot rely on it for information about the translation's original historical and socio-cultural contexts.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and historical scholarship abhors a lack of explanation. The

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[72] For more detailed argumentation, see Wright, "Moving beyond Translating," 36.

narrative in *Aristeas* is attractive in part because it is the only story of the Septuagint's origins that we possess from anywhere near in time to the translation's production. The fact that this is a Jewish writer from Alexandria, the home of the Septuagint, makes the story even more seductive. In the end, however, the *Letter of Aristeas* tells us about the Septuagint in *Aristeas*'s own time, not at the time of its origin. To take *Aristeas*, which witnesses to the reception history of the Septuagint, as legitimate testimony to the translation's historical origins or point of production, is to confuse matters that ought to be distinguished as much as possible. If we want to know about the origins of the Septuagint, then *Aristeas* is not our best bet. We should look where we find our best evidence of the Septuagint's intended function, the textual-linguistic character of the translation itself.