

BILINGUAL JEWS AND THE GREEK BIBLE*

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i

Bilinguals have the potential of playing a unique role. Fluent in two languages, they can translate from one to the other. As languages encompass and express a whole cultural outlook, bilinguals may also be biculturals, and can thus serve as tradents from one cultural context to another, helping to lay the foundations for a fresh synthesis. Indeed, in historical experience, young bilinguals have often been in the first wave of cultural change, leading others in staking out the boundaries of a new identity.¹ This paper is intended to explore the

* An early version of this paper was presented at the Symposium on *Figures Bibliques: Herméneutique juive et chrétienne à l'époque hellénistique et romaine*, co-sponsored by the Hebrew University and by the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), held in Jerusalem, Israel, in April 1990. My thanks are due to Dr. G. Bohak of Tel Aviv University for a number of helpful suggestions in response to a much later version. Responsibility for the contents is, of course, mine.

¹ See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (2nd ed.; London/New York, 1991), 90–93 and 118–120. For a discussion of Moses that would fit well into Anderson's perspective—as the son of foreign slaves, raised as an adopted child in the imperial culture, and then leading his native people to freedom—see J. Méléze Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt* (Princeton, 1995), 14–16.

There is a substantial literature on bilingualism as a linguistic and social phenomenon in the modern world. See, for example, F. Grosjean, *Life with Two Languages* (Cambridge, MA, 1982); C. Hoffmann, *An Introduction to Bilingualism* (2nd ed. London/New York, 1991); S. Romaine, *Bilingualism* (Oxford, 1995). As these studies emphasize, bilinguals need not necessarily be bicultural. That potential is not always realized, but my principal concern in this paper is with examples (ancient and modern) in which that possibility is actual.

Among the first to apply the insights of modern study of bilingualism to the ancient Jewish evidence was M. Silva, "Bilingualism and the Character of Palestinian Greek," *Biblica* 61 (1980), 198–219. Silva's expertise was study of ancient languages. For a meeting of the perspectives written by a scholar whose training was in the study of the modern phenomenon see B. Spolsky, "Jewish Multilingualism in the First Century: An Essay in Historical Sociolinguistics," in J.A. Fishman, ed., *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages* (Leiden, 1985), 35–50. For a fascinating analysis of the issues, intended to undo some of the anachronisms introduced into the discussion by modern linguistic romanticism and nationalism, see S. Schwartz, "Language,

attitudes of ancient bilingual Jews towards the translation of the foundation document of Jewish experience and the ultimate source of authority—the Bible, and the Torah in particular—into Greek.²

My objective is not to take up the question of just who was bilingual, the extent of bilingualism in either direction, or its variety (which was the first language learned, and which the second) from one area to another (the Diaspora vs. Palestine, for example). That has been investigated by others, and the evidence for at least some Hebrew/Greek bilingualism seems incontrovertible.³ Rather, as out-

Power and Identity in Ancient Palestine," *Past and Present*, 148 (1995), 3–47. A major focus of Schwartz's study is the role of Aramaic, not prominent in my discussion below, which concentrates on the Greek Torah.

In antiquity, bilingualism was usually highly valued. Thus, according to Herodotus 2.154, Psammetichus took steps to have selected Egyptian children learn Greek, in order to create a class of interpreters. For Greek/Latin bilingualism see the synthesis in H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York, 1956), 342–357. To cite a few Jewish examples of the esteem usually accorded to bilingualism, speaking seventy languages was a supposed requirement for membership in the Sanhedrin, *b. Sanh.* 17a. Philo, *Conf.* 13 asserted that learning many languages made you popular with those who spoke these languages. Josephus, *AJ* 20.264, turned the convention on its head when he asserted that among Jews knowing many languages was not as highly valued as being an expert in the Torah, and explained that if knowing many languages were such a distinction how was it that many bilinguals were slaves.

Herodotus's account of the steps taken to produce interpreters should be compared with the rabbinic tradition about the permission granted the members of the Patriarchal house to study Greek, necessary in order to enable them to serve as representatives of the Jews to the Roman government, *t. Sot.* 15.8 (241–242, Lieberman) and *b.B.K.* 83a. For one possible example of the implementation of this policy see Libanius, *Epist.* 1078 and the discussion in M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism, Volume Two: From Tacitus to Simplicius* (Jerusalem, 1980), 582 and 596.

² As the argument below will indicate, these Jews could read and write in both languages. This is a very high standard of bilingualism even in modern terms (see e.g., Romaine, *Bilingualism*, 11–19), not to speak of the ancient world, in which literacy was far less extensive. On literacy in antiquity see further the revisionist conclusions of W.V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, 1989). It may therefore be no accident that while one important pool of ancient bilinguals were slaves, forced by their circumstances to master a second language (see Josephus, *AJ* 20.264), the few ancient Hebrew/Greek writing bilinguals who can be named were all of aristocratic or priestly origins. Josephus, to be discussed more fully below, may stand as a telling witness to the social circumstances which produced these relatively rare individuals. For an analysis of Josephus's educational development—stressing the gap between what he knew when writing *JW* and what he learned later, by the time he wrote *Ant.* and *Ag.Ap.*, and indicating the advances Josephus made in his knowledge during that period, both on the Jewish and Hellenic side—see S. Schwartz, *Josephus and Judaean Politics* (Leiden, 1990), 23–57.

³ See esp. the summary article of S. Lieberman, responding to critique of his earlier work by other scholars, S. Lieberman, "How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine," in A. Altman, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 123–141. From

lined above, I begin with a recognition of the special role bilinguals can play, and therefore ask about the attitudes of ancient Hebrew/Greek bilinguals towards the translation of the Bible and the Torah into Greek from that perspective. I presume that the attitude of these bilinguals towards the translation of the Torah should merit special attention, as it was a matter within their realm of special linguistic competence. Furthermore, as the translation of the Torah was an expression of an outlook on the relationship between the Jewish and Greek worlds, a relationship to which these bilinguals likely made a unique and leading contribution, their perspective on that endeavor is of particular interest.

ii

Accurate translation of the Torah into Greek is essential for anyone who wants to live based on it in a Greek speaking environment, in which access to the Hebrew original is not widely available. For that reason, it is no surprise to find the *Letter of Aristeas*—an account written to legitimate and praise the Septuagint by relating its history⁴ celebrating the exactness of the work done by the translators:

As the books were read, the priests stood up, with the elders among the translators and from the representatives of the "Community," and with the leaders of the people and said, "Since this version has been made rightly and reverently, and in every respect accurately, it is good that this should remain exactly so, and that there should be no revision."

another perspective see J.N. Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek?* (Leiden, 1968). The renewed investigation of Greek and Latin loan words in rabbinic texts, begun by D. Sperber, who published initial results in topical dictionaries such as *A Dictionary of Greek and Latin Legal Terms in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat Gan, 1984), promised detailed analyses on which firm conclusions could be drawn. On Sperber's results see R. Katzoff, Review of Sperber, *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 20 (1989), 195–206. For a recent summary of the state of the question see A. Wasserstein, "Non-Hellenized Jews in the Semi-Hellenized East," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 14 (1995), 111–137. Much like Schwartz, "Language, Power and Identity," 12–31, Wasserstein stresses the role of Aramaic, alongside Hebrew and Greek. For further bibliography on ancient bilingualism see also above, n. 1.

⁴ The reasons for the translation of the Torah into Greek—royal initiative or community need—have been much debated, but they are beyond the interests of this article. For a recent discussion of the matter, within the context provided by expanding knowledge of Persian and Ptolemaic imperial policy, see Méléze Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt*, 99–106.

There was general approval of what they said, and they commanded that a curse should be laid, as was their custom, on anyone who should alter the version by any addition or change to any part of the written text, or any deletion either. This was a good step taken, to ensure that the words were preserved completely and permanently in perpetuity. (*Aristeas* 310–311)

The reader of *Aristeas* is supposed to presume that the local priests, the representatives of the “Community,” as well as the leaders of the people included some bilinguals, whose testimony to the accuracy of the translation was thus meaningful. Philo of Alexandria described the work of the translators in a similar vein:

Sitting here in seclusion . . . they became as it were possessed, and under inspiration, wrote, not each several scribe something different, but the same word for word, as though dictated to each by an invisible prompter. Yet who does not know that every language, and Greek especially, abounds in terms, and that the same thought can be put in many shapes by changing single words and whole phrases and suiting the expression to the occasion? This was not the case, we are told, with this law of ours, but the Greek words used corresponded literally with the Chaldean, exactly suited to things they indicated . . . The clearest proof of this is that if Chaldeans have learned Greek, or Greeks Chaldean, and read both versions, the Chaldean and the translation, they regard them with awe and reverence as sisters, or rather one and the same, both in matter and in words, and speak of the authors not as translators but as prophets and priests of the mysteries, whose sincerity and singleness of thought has enabled them to go hand in hand with the purest of spirits, the spirit of Moses. (*Mos.* 2.37–40)

Philo’s own knowledge of Hebrew has been the subject of much scholarly debate, with some magnifying its extent and others minimizing it.⁵ Perhaps Philo thought of himself as one who mastered

⁵ See, for example, S. Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria—An Introduction* (New York, 1979), 131. The current consensus favors minimalizing Philo’s knowledge of Hebrew. See Schwartz, “Language, Power and Identity,” 38–39. Thus, Schwartz notes, Philo was not always careful to distinguish between Aramaic and Hebrew, both of which he often called “Chaldean.” At times, Josephus too did not differentiate between Hebrew and Aramaic, calling both “Hebrew.” *Aristeas* 11 warned against this confusion. Ancient evidence indicates that locals, learned in the finer distinctions between peoples and languages did not conflate Phoenician and Syrian into one, and insisted on their separate identity. See the discussion in A.I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary* (Leiden, 1981), 232–235. By these standards, *Aristeas*’s warning is thus one additional indication, if one were needed, that the “real” author of this pseudepigraph was Jewish, while Josephus was often thinking and writing in non-Jewish terms. Philo’s conflation shows just how far he was from intimate personal knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic.

both Chaldean and Greek, and could thus speak on the basis of his own knowledge, of the translators as prophets and priests of the mysteries, who produced a work in which the normal distinction between translation and original was irrelevant. In any case, whether Philo was speaking for himself or not, his praise of the Greek Torah knew no bounds. It was a miracle in every sense of the word, a result of direct divine revelation, performed by prophets, and celebrated by an annual festival at the site (*Mos.* 2.41–42). Ordinary (i.e. human) limitations thus did not apply to the Greek Bible, as bilinguals gladly attested.

iii

When one turns from authors the extent of whose bilingualism is open to some doubt, such as Philo, to those whose mastery of both languages was beyond question, the picture changes. Indeed, rather than ratifying the accuracy of the translation of the Torah, as one might expect based on the comments above, it was called into question. Ben Sira’s grandson, in the prologue to the translation of his grandfather’s work, is a convenient point of departure. Introducing his own translation, he apologized for its inadequacies, but explained that these faults were not his alone:

For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language. Not only this work, *but even the law itself*, the prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little as originally expressed.

Translation is a difficult task, and not even the translation of the Law was immune from its imperfections.⁶

⁶ Note the statement attributed to R. Judah b. Ilai in *t. Meg.* 4:42 (364, Lieberman): “one who translates a verse literally is a liar, while one who adds is a blasphemer.” The difficulties of translation were a theme among intellectuals of oriental origin in the Graeco-Roman world. Compare Philo of Byblos, *F. Gr. H.* 790 F 2.10.8 on the ambiguities of the translation from Phoenician into Greek, as a result of which Greeks erred in their understanding of Phoenician history. For a similar comment in an Egyptian context see *Corpus Hermeticum* 16.1: “Hermes . . . said that to those who come upon my books their composition will seem absolutely straightforward and clear, although on the contrary, it is obscure and hides the sense of the words. It will be yet more obscure when the Greeks later get the idea of translating the books from our language into theirs. A complete distortion of the text and total obscurity will result.”

For these authors (unlike Ben Sira’s grandson, R. Judah b. Ilai or Josephus, to be discussed below), the difficulties of translation were invoked in the service of

On a practical level, the testimony of Josephus is of great import. In his version of the *Letter of Aristeas*, composed over two centuries after the translation of Ben Sira, Josephus introduced many changes.⁷ One of these concerns events when the translation was presented to the Jews of Alexandria, and should be compared carefully with the original cited above:⁸

and all of them, including the priest and the eldest of the translators and the chief officers of the community, requested that, since the translation had been so successfully completed, it should remain as it was and not be altered. Accordingly, when all had approved this idea, they ordered that if anyone saw any further addition made to the text of the Law or anything omitted from it, he should examine it and make it known and correct it; in this they acted wisely, that what had once been judged good might remain forever. (*Ag* 12.108–109)

At first sight, Josephus would seem to be rewriting *Aristeas* in his own words, but nevertheless not altering the effective meaning:⁹ all present agreed that no change should ever be made in the translation of the Torah. Josephus continues, however, that if anyone saw anything wrong with the text of the Greek Torah he was to correct it and restore the original. This advice is not wholly consistent with what was just stated: Josephus did not counsel the person who believed he had found an error to consult the authoritative copy of the translation supposedly deposited in Alexandria, and of which a copy was given to the Jewish leaders (*Aristeas* 309). The identification of the error and its correction were both done on private initiative. That is, Josephus is here continuing in the footsteps of Ben Sira's grandson in his perception of the difficulties of translation, informing us of the attitude and practice of a bilingual ancient Jew towards the Greek Torah. The difficulties of translation were such and so prevalent that, according to Josephus, when a *bilingual Jew believed* he had

more general anti-Greek sentiments. For a fuller discussion of this oriental anti-Greek reaction see my other article in this volume, "Were the Greeks Different?" above, 9.

⁷ S.J.D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome* (Leiden, 1979), 34–35.

⁸ See E.J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 106. The difference between Josephus and Aristeas, his source, was also noted by I. Gruenwald, "The Polemic Concerning the Translation of the Torah into Greek," *Teudah* 4 (5746), 70 [in Hebrew], but its significance was not realized. See also R. Marcus's comment in his translation of Josephus in the LCL series, VII, 55, n.d. Compare A. Pelletier, *Flavius Josephus, adaptateur de la Lettre d'Aristée* (Paris, 1962), 187–189.

⁹ See above, n. 7.

found a mistake in the Greek text, on the basis of *his knowledge* of the Hebrew original (whatever that Hebrew version might have been: the agreement of that Hebrew text with the Masoretic version cannot be taken for granted) *he emended* the Greek *on his own* to conform to his notion of the Hebrew.¹⁰

Evidence of another sort indicates that Josephus was not speaking for himself alone, but rather reflecting the practice of a wide circle of ancient bilingual Jews. "Private emendation," by readers who thought they knew the correct reading, was common in the transmission of Greek and Latin works. For the Greek Bible, its principal practitioners should have come from the ranks of Jewish bilinguals, who corrected the Greek to the best of their knowledge to correspond to their text tradition and understanding of the Hebrew. The impact of this "perversity of ancient revisers" on the Greek Bible can be traced in some detail.¹¹ It is explicitly attested to by

¹⁰ I should emphasize that Josephus did not display this attitude towards the Greek Pentateuch because he regarded it as illegitimate or inferior. While a number of the attitudes he displayed, in *Ag.Ap.* in particular, made him a full fledged participant in oriental anti-Greek sentiments (see above, n. 6), he regarded the Greek Bible as a worthy endeavor to communicate Jewish History to the Greeks, an effort which he saw the ancient translators as having accomplished only in part and which he intended to complete in his works. Josephus therefore considered the Greek Bible an important precedent for his own writings. See Josephus, *Ag* 1.9–12:

Besides these motives there were two further considerations to which I had given serious thought, namely whether our ancestors, on the one hand, were willing to communicate such information, and whether any of the Greeks, on the other, had been curious to learn our history.

I found then that the second of the Ptolemies, that king who was so deeply interested in learning and such a collector of books, was particularly anxious to have our law and the political constitution based thereon translated into Greek; while, on the other side, Eleazar, who yielded in virtue to none of our high priests, did not scruple to grant the monarch the enjoyment of a benefit, which he would certainly have refused had it not been our traditional custom to make nothing of what is good into a secret. Accordingly, I thought that it became me also both to imitate the high priest's magnanimity and to assume that there are still today many lovers of learning like the king. For even he failed to obtain all our records: it was only the portion containing the Law which was delivered to him by those who were sent to Alexandria to interpret (translate) it.

¹¹ See E.J. Bickerman, "Some Notes on the Transmission of the Septuagint," *Studies in Jewish and Christian History, Part One* (Leiden, 1976), 150–157.

E. Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem, 1997), 11 describes four stages in the development of the text of the LXX. The second stage was characterized by: "a multitude of textual traditions resulting from the insertion of corrections (mainly towards the Hebrew) in all known scrolls in the pre-Christian period, and to a lesser extent in the first century C.E." Tov is describing the practice of private emendation, to which Bickerman referred, from a different

Origen, who complained bitterly that as a result of this process the tradition of proper names in the Torah and Prophets was often hopelessly deformed (*Commentary on John*, 6.41; *GCS* 10.150–151).¹² In sum, in his treatment of *Aristeas*, Josephus has taken an ancient text and reinterpreted it as meaning what he and his contemporaries have been doing, without acknowledging the gap between the original and that practice.¹³

iv

In the balance of this paper I would like to utilize knowledge of the attitude of bilingual Jews towards the Greek Torah, as expressed in their practice of private emendation, as the foundation on which to propose a new interpretation of a group of rabbinic passages which have been much discussed. The rabbinic traditions concerning the translation of the Torah into Greek, “when the Torah was translated for King Ptolemy,” have been the subject of scholarly attention since the beginning of the academic study of Judaism. They consist of various lists of passages in which the translators supposedly changed the Greek away from a literal rendering of the Hebrew. These lists are enigmatic and offer little explanation of their contents and overall purpose. One item, the modification of the translation of Lev 11:6 is explained as having a political objective, but the other items have none. Earliest scholarly efforts were devoted to determining the precise contents of these lists or list,¹⁴ while more recent efforts focus on the readings in the Greek Bible behind these passages,¹⁵ or on

perspective. Note that Tov’s second stage was coming to an end in the first century C.E., around the time Josephus was composing *Ant.*

¹² See further E. Tov, “The Rabbinic Traditions Concerning the ‘Alterations’ Inserted into the Greek Pentateuch and their Relation to the Original Text of the LXX,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 15 (1984), 75–76.

¹³ For another example of this practice by Josephus see my discussion of his interpretation of the obligation of parents to teach their children the Torah as a commandment to teach children to read, *Ag.Ap.* 2.204, in A.I. Baumgarten, “Literacy and the Polemics Surrounding Biblical Interpretation in the Second Temple Period,” in J. Kugel, ed., *Studies in Ancient Midrash* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 34–35.

¹⁴ See especially V. Aptowitz, “Die rabbinischen Berichte über die Entstehung der Septuaginta,” *Haqdam* 2 (1909), 11–27, 102–122; 3 (1910), 4–17.

¹⁵ Tov, “Alterations,” 66–69. As Tov is disinterested in determining the “original” list behind the different variations he simply conflates all these versions and

the reasons motivating each individual change.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, considering the inherent obscurity of the lists and their lack of any clues, I know of only two attempts, to be discussed more fully below, to consider the lists as a whole.

To understand these accounts, however, one must begin by recognizing that they come in two versions: one a simple list of places in which the translation was changed (hereafter, Version A),¹⁷ the second a miraculous description of the process of translation followed by the list of the changed translations (hereafter, Version B; Version B is thus a miracle story plus Version A),¹⁸ with the miracle story

deals with fifteen passages in all, which he believes represent the “central tradition” (*ibid.*, 66): Gen 1:1, 1:26, 2:2, 5:2, 11:7, 18:12, 49:6; Exod 4:20, 12:10, 24:5, 24:11; Num 16:15; Deut 4:19, 17:3, 14:7 = Lev 11:6.

¹⁶ The lists are usually treated as a grab-bag of verses, compiled from groups of verses, some groups originating in divergent manuscript readings or in an attempt to close gaps in the biblical text, others in theological considerations (particularly to dispel any hint that the Bible might support belief in more than one God), and yet others in political concerns of various sorts. The reasons proposed for the changes then vary from group to group. See, for example D. Barthelémy, “Eusèbe, la Septante et ‘les autres,’” *Études d’histoire du texte de l’ancien testament* (Göttingen, 1978), 187–193; G. Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmi* (Tübingen, 1994), esp. the summary, 107; A.D. Wasserstein, “On Donkeys, Wine and the Uses of Textual Criticism: Septuagintal Variants in Jewish Palestine,” in I. Gafni, A. Oppenheimer and D. Schwartz, eds., *The Jews in the Hellenistic-Roman World—Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern* (Jerusalem, 1996), 119*–142*; D. Wasserstein, “Ptolemy and the Hare: Dating an Old Story About the Translation of the Septuagint,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 17 (1998), 77–86, esp. 82, who characterizes the lists as a bringing together of a number of free-floating elements. Note, finally, that Tov concedes the varied background of the examples which comprise these lists in his comments, “Alterations,” 82–89.

¹⁷ The earliest sources for Version A are *Mek. Bo, Parasha* 14 (50–51, Horowitz-Rabin): ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו בארץ מצרים... וזה אחד מהדברים שכתבו להלמי המלך. כיוצא בו כתבו אליו אלהים ברא בראשית, אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמותו זכר ונקיבו בראם. ויכל ביום הששי וישבתו ביום השביעי, הבה ארדה ואבלה שם שפתם, והצחק שרה בקרובה לאמר, כי באפם הרנו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס, ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושא אדם, לא חמור אחד מדם נשאת, אשר חלק הי אלהים אותם להאיר לכל העמים. וכתבו לו אשו לא צויתי לאומות לעבדם. וכתבו לו ואת צעידת הרגלים ומושב בני ישראל שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה.

See also *y. Meg.* 1.11.71d

¹⁸ The earliest source containing Version B is *b. Meg.* 9a.

דהנני: מעשה בתלמי המלך שכנס שבעים ושנים זקנים, והכניסן בשבעים ושנים בתים, ולא נילה להם על מה כינסו, ונכנס אצל כל אחד ואחד ואחד להם: כתבו לי תורה משה רבכם. נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא בלב כל אחד ואחד עצה, והסכימו כולם לדעת אותה. וכתבו לו אלהים ברא בראשית, אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמותו, ויכל ביום הששי, וישבתו ביום השביעי, זכר ונקיבו בראם. ולא כתבו נושא הבה ארדה ואבלה שם שפתם, והצחק שרה בקרובה, כי באפם הרנו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס, ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נושא בני אדם, ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו בארץ מצרים ובשאר ארצות ארבע מאות שנה, וישלה את זאטוטי בני ישראל, ואל זאטוטי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו, לא חמור אחד מדם נשאת, אשר חלק הי אלהים אותם להאיר לכל העמים, ויך ועבדו אלהים אשר לא צויתי לעבדם. וכתבו לו

apparently serving as confirmation or sanction for the actions of the translators in changing those places, at the very least. That is, while the miracle story may have other functions (see further below), its minimal role in its context in Version B is to indicate divine approval for the changes made by the translators. As such, Version B is remarkable. It shares the theme of miraculous translation with stories told by Philo and numerous church fathers,¹⁹ but while these latter authors all *lived* by the translation into Greek and thus needed to assert its authority, the Rabbis who told Version B did not live by that text at all, but rather by the Hebrew original as they interpreted it.²⁰ Perhaps this consideration will explain the fact that while Version B shares the theme of a miracle story with Philo and ancient Christian authors, it does not employ it for the same purpose. As will be discussed more fully below, the miraculous happenings in Version B sanction the actions of the translators in changing specific passages rather than functioning as authorization for the translation as a whole. What then could have been the purpose of Version B?

The objectives of those who told Version A are no clearer. Why

ואת צעירת הרגלים, ולא כתבו לו ואח הארנבת, מפני שאשחו שלחמי ארנבת שמה, שלא יאמר: שחקו כי היהודים והשלו שם אשתי בתורה.

The only scholar I have seen who notes clearly the difference between Versions A and B, and is sensitive to its significance, is Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 19–20.

¹⁹ On these traditions see A. Pelletier, *Lettre d'Aristée à Philocrate* (Paris, 1962), 78–98.

²⁰ For that reason I find it hard to comprehend the view of those scholars, e.g. M. Hadas, *Aristeas to Philocrates* (New York, 1951), 83, who assert that the story of the separation of the scholars and the miraculous agreement of their translations began in the rabbinic world and spread from there to Christian authors. This explanation seems implausible: Philo, *Mos.* 2.37, cited above, already writes of the seclusion of the scholars, who then wrote the same text word for word, as though dictated to each by an invisible prompter. Admittedly, in this context Philo means the isolation of the translators from the pollution of everyday life and their communion with the elements, but his version could serve as a basis for someone to assert the separation of the translators from each other. Philo clearly antedates the Rabbinic Versions A and B. Philo also has a more obvious motive than rabbinic authorities for needing to validate the sanctity of the Greek translation. For these reasons I consider him (or some other Alexandrian Jew) a more likely source for the origin of the tradition of the isolation of the scholars, and its appearance in Version B to be derivative.

For a different and more convincing account of the spread of the miracle story, from Alexandrian Jews to Jewish Palestine see D. Barthélémy, "Pourquoi la Torah a-t-elle été traduite en Grec?" *Études*, 325. In *b. Meg.* 9a R. Judah b. Ilai (a *tanna*, who lived in the mid-second century C.E.) is the tradent of Version B. This same R. Judah visited Alexandria. Barthélémy suggests that perhaps R. Judah learned the tradition behind Version B while there.

should someone have compiled and preserved a simple list of relatively few passages where the Greek differs from the Hebrew, particularly in light of the numerous places where the two texts do not agree? What might be special about these places to merit such notice? This question is even more puzzling as in contrast to Version B no claim for divine sanction of any sort is being asserted.

One further consideration should guide the investigation: in spite of the natural tendency to focus on Version B as the more complete tradition,²¹ one must consider the possibility that Version A preceded Version B. That is, the miracle story may be a later addition to an already existing list, and the version with the miracle story is not necessarily the original. This possibility is, in fact, enhanced by other considerations. Version A is found in sources which belong to earlier strata of rabbinic literature (a Tannaitic source and the Palestinian Talmud), while Version B is first found as a *baraita* in the Babylonian Talmud and even later works.²² This consideration is, admittedly, far from decisive but it should serve as a reminder of the possibility that the fuller account in Version B may be a later elaboration of an existing tradition.

v

Numerous differences exist between the Masoretic text of the Pentateuch and the Septuagint translation. Why might those Rabbis who compiled Versions A and B have selected only a few of these differences for special attention? Is there one explanation which unites this apparent grab-bag of divergent verses together?²³ If one were to judge on the basis of Version B alone the answer might seem clear and straightforward, as proposed by I. Gruenwald:²⁴ those who told and preserved Version B intended to assert the legitimacy of the endeavor of translating the Torah into Greek. God Himself approved

²¹ See e.g. Gruenwald, "Polemic," 65–78. For a brief history of scholarship on the relationship of the two versions see Tov, "Alterations," 67. Version B also has the advantage of being found in the Babylonian Talmud, in *b. Meg.* 9a, and the Babylonian Talmud remains the rabbinic source most widely studied by traditional Jews.

²² See further Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 24.

²³ See above n. 16.

²⁴ Gruenwald, "Polemic," 65–78.

this project by granting it a miraculous seal of approval. When we remind ourselves, as Gruenwald demonstrates, that there were some who regarded the translation of Scripture into another language as a desecration of the sacred,²⁵ that provides us with a plausible context for the telling of a miracle story to assert the opposite conclusion. Nevertheless, Gruenwald's explanation ignores Version A and does not do full justice to the complexity of Version B. It omits any consideration of the list of places in which the Greek translation differed from the Hebrew, yet this issue is crucial to the miracle story in Version B. If the purpose of Version B was to extend divine approval to the translation, then why list the places in which the translators did not offer a literal rendering of the Hebrew? This would seem to interfere with the supposed objective of the story. One might therefore reformulate the understanding of the story (on Gruenwald's behalf) and conclude that the purpose of those who told Version B was to assert that *even though* the translators changed specific places they did so with divine approval, hence the entire project was legitimate. One might go further, perhaps (again on Gruenwald's behalf), and argue that the goal of the miracle story was to claim that only certain deviations between the Greek and the Hebrew had divine approval while all others did not, but both these conclusions, however, weaken the effect of the miracle story as a whole, if its real purpose was to maintain the legitimacy of translation of Scripture into Greek. It is worth remembering, as noted above, that Philo and Christian authors—*anxious*, each for their own reasons, to assert the authority of the translation into Greek—knew nothing of places where the translators did not offer a literal rendering.²⁶ In a similar vein, the *Letter of Aristeas* claimed that the translation was recognized by the Jews and their leaders as being perfect, in other words absolutely accurate, with no deviations from the original (*Aristeas*, 310). A comparison of Version B with accounts definitely written to assert the authority of the Greek translation shows the former's weakness as a story intended to accomplish that purpose,

²⁵ Gruenwald, "Polemic," 71–75. See also A. Wasserstein, "Septuagintal Variants," 121*–122*.

²⁶ Philo's praise of the accuracy of the translation, *Mos.* 2.40, quoted above, is worth recalling. A bilingual person, he asserts, would regard the original and the translation with awe and reverence as sisters or "rather one and the same both in matter and words."

and indicates that while Version B may have been told to legitimate the translation of the Torah into Greek that explanation does not account for all its aspects, and does not begin to explain Version A, which lacks the miracle story entirely.²⁷

Another attempt to explain the lists as a whole has been made by E. Tov.²⁸ According to Tov, the Rabbis were aware of the readings to be found in the "original" manuscript of the Septuagint. Most of these readings were corrected in the archetype of all manuscripts known to us in order to conform to the Masoretic text. The rabbinic lists, however, preserved a number of such "original" readings and offer us a witness to the Greek Torah as first prepared by the translators.²⁹ Tov's assertions seem rather far-fetched and more in the nature of unproven assumptions. There is no evidence that the Rabbis knew a set of "original" readings otherwise almost completely lost, and if such a list existed the Rabbis seem to be the least likely group to possess it. On the whole, the Rabbis seemed little interested in the Greek Bible.³⁰ Once it had passed into the hands of the Christians, the Greek Bible was a source of awkward embarrassment: each side in the Jewish-Christian discussion could now produce its own written evidence to support its claims.³¹ The knowledge of "original"

²⁷ Gruenwald, "Polemic," 76 states that he chose to focus on the account I have called Version B as a matter of convenience, simply because it is fuller. When he comes to treat what I call Version A he asserts that it agrees with the claims of Version B, "Polemic," 77. This, however, is less than fully candid. Version A agrees with B only when one has begun with B as the original, and not merely as a matter of convenience. Taken by itself Version A makes no claim whatsoever for the legitimacy of the translation of the Torah into Greek. It merely states that when the Torah was translated—whether that was a good or bad thing in the opinion of those who told Version A is unstated—the following changes were made by the translators.

For an interpretation of Version B according to which its objective was to argue for divine approval of the divergences in the specific cases noted, but make no claim whatsoever concerning the legitimacy of the translation as a whole, treating it rather as a necessary but unavoidable evil, see Aptowitz, "Berichte," *Hagadem* 3 (1910), 12–16.

²⁸ See above n. 12.

²⁹ See Tov, "Alterations," 76.

³⁰ See A. Wasserstein, "Septuagintal Variants," 123*–125*. Compare Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 109 who has a higher evaluation of the degree of interest of the Rabbis in the Greek Bible from its earliest phases, but nevertheless considers it impossible to demonstrate that Versions A or B go back to a different original text type in Greek, as argued by Tov.

³¹ For a discussion of the competition between Jews and Christians in which each side produced its written proof to its claims see A.I. Baumgarten, "Justinian and

readings in the LXX which Tov attributes to the Rabbis is thus entirely out of character. Furthermore, why would the Rabbis care about the authentic text of the Septuagint; of what interest was this matter to them; did they care enough about the Septuagint to cause them to preserve the lists found in our sources?

As a final indication in favor of the distance between the Rabbis and the Greek text one should note the argument advanced by D. Wasserstein concerning the modification of the name of the hare in Lev 11:6 and Deut 14:7, as noted above the only change in translation in the rabbinic lists for which they supplied an explanation.³² According to the Rabbis, this change was made to avoid offending the king, because Ptolemy's wife or mother was named rabbit (*lagōs*). This is incorrect. The possible offensive translation concerned the name of the father of the founder of the dynasty, Ptolemy I (*Lagos*). The rabbinic account is therefore out of touch with the reality of the Ptolemaic context, and an explanation which originated in that context has degenerated. If the Rabbis did not preserve correctly the circumstances behind the one change whose reason they supposedly remembered, the likelihood that they knew a group of original readings in the Greek Torah is small.

In sum, evaluating previous attempts to discover a single motive behind the formation of the lists, Veltri comes to the reluctant conclusion that no one reason can be discovered. The lists have their origin in the exegetical traditions of the Rabbis, and the lists have a distinctly "rabbinic" character. Appropriately, many items take up difficulties in scripture addressed elsewhere in rabbinic literature, and employ rabbinic exegetical terminology freely. Nevertheless, the items on the list are there for a series of different reasons.³³

vi

The discussion of private emendation elaborated above offers an alternate context for Versions A and B, preferable in my opinion to

the Jews," in L. Landman, ed., *Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein Memorial Volume* (New York, 1980), 37-44. These circumstances are the basis for the suggestion of Barthelémy, "Eusèbe, la Septante et 'les autres,'" 191, that one reason for the presence of certain items on the list of passages "altered for King Ptolemy" was to deflect Christian interpretations of these verses.

³² D. Wasserstein, "Ptolemy and the Hare," 77-85.

³³ Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 107-111.

other suggestions offered thus far. I propose that the Rabbis who told Versions A and B were addressing their natural constituency of Palestinian Jews (at least some of who were bilingual) concerning private emendation, a practice well attested among them (unlike the hypothetical "original" version posited by Tov as the context for the lists). The purpose of these lists, I submit, was to put some limits on the tendency of these bilingual Jews to improve the Greek Bible in accordance with their understanding of the Hebrew. Each item on the lists may be there for a different reason, but the lists as a whole were intended to teach this audience that there were certain discrepancies which were original (Version A) and/or even had divine sanction (Version B), hence should be untouched. Both Version A and Version B thus become fully meaningful (in contrast to Gruenwald's explanation).

Whether or not rabbinic notions of original readings were historically correct by our standards is irrelevant. For whatever reason(s) and by whatever process they arrived at that conclusion, my suggestion is that the Rabbis responsible for Versions A and B were convinced that they knew a group of readings in the LXX which ought to be preserved against private emendation, and they tried to achieve this goal through the lists of deviations which were in the Torah as translated for King Ptolemy.

One further point should be noted in support of this suggestion. Private emendation of the Greek Torah, according to Tov, flourished in the era prior to the destruction of the Temple, and came to a close at the end of the first century C.E.³⁴ Josephus, who wrote at the end of the first century C.E. and whose comments on private emendation were a point of departure above, thus fits well into the chronological context. In a similar vein, D. Wasserstein has suggested that the rabbinic accounts of the translation of the Torah for King Ptolemy were compiled between 70 and 132,³⁵ more or less at the same time. If D. Wasserstein's dating is correct, understanding the rabbinic traditions on the Greek Bible as a response to private emendation makes excellent chronological sense, as they were addressing an issue still current at that time, the same time at which Josephus wrote.

³⁴ See above, n. 11.

³⁵ D. Wasserstein, "Ptolemy and the Hare," 83.

One final question need be asked: on the interpretation proposed, did the rabbinic effort succeed? Did rabbinic intervention preserve the readings on this list from private emendation (or, in a kind of boomerang effect, did rabbinic endorsement of these readings cause them to be re-introduced into the manuscript tradition of the Greek Bible, after they had already been removed)? The evidence, as surveyed by Tov, suggests that if my suggestion of rabbinic motives is correct it was largely ineffective. Of the fifteen Biblical passages Tov considers as forming the central tradition of the rabbinic list only five or at most six are reflected in the manuscript tradition of the LXX, while the other nine are found in none of the extant MSS. of the LXX.³⁶ Accordingly, in discussing these examples, Tov attempts *reconstructions* of the Greek renderings which are reflected in the rabbinic account.³⁷

An attempt to discover the reasons for the apparent failure of the intention I have attributed to the rabbinic list would pile speculation on speculation, hence should be approached with extreme caution. I would suggest, however, that if the chronological scheme outlined above is correct, the Rabbis would have intervened fairly late in the process, well towards the end of the era of private emendation, after most of the "damage" had been done. Their efforts might have suited the old proverb of closing the barn door after the horse has been stolen.³⁸

vii

What prompted these ancient bilinguals to be so critical of the translation of the Torah, to the extent that I suggest that Rabbis believed that they needed to be curbed? One part of the answer may be the pride felt by elite bilinguals in mastering two languages.³⁹ Thus, such bilinguals are often fervent opponents of code switching (introducing

³⁶ Tov, "Alterations," 73-76.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 76-82.

³⁸ I prefer this suggestion to its converse, which strikes me as perverse: combining the chronological evidence for the end of the era of private emendation with the date of the rabbinic lists and then explaining the end of private emendation as a result of rabbinic intervention.

³⁹ Note, for example, Josephus's evident pride in his accomplishments in Greek, *AJ* 20.262-263. See also above, n. 2.

words or terms from one language into phrases in the other),⁴⁰ even though their own practice may not always live up to those standards. Perhaps this judgmental bent of very high level bilinguals has its origins in a crucial stage of acquiring another language: the realization that the new language is an independent and separate system, with its own lexicon and syntax, and usually employed in a specific context. This stage is critical both for those who learn a second language later in life, and those who grow up speaking two or more languages, as proven by the word games bilingual children play, in which they merge words, constructions, or grammatical forms from two languages for humorous or mischievous effect. The wit in these games is based on the recognition that items from two systems which should be kept separate are being joined. A bilingual of that degree of accomplishment, who has labored to overcome that hurdle and successfully internalized that recognition, may be especially critical of those less effective at the endeavor.⁴¹

Accordingly, it is not surprising to learn that ancient bilingual Jews disappointed the author of *Aristeas* or Philo of Alexandria⁴² in their attitude towards the Greek Torah. Rather than confirming its accuracy, they insisted on the difficulties of translation and gave practical expression to this outlook by constant attempts to improve the translation by private emendation. While full-fledged proof remains elusive in the absence of new evidence, I propose that the rabbinic accounts of the changes in the Torah as translated for King Ptolemy are best understood in this context and against this backdrop, as addressed to this audience of bilinguals and as an attempt to regulate their disposition to correct the Greek Torah. If my suggestion is accepted, the extent to which bilinguals contradicted the conclusions attributed to them by *Aristeas* and *Philo* is even greater.

⁴⁰ For an ancient example of opposition to code switching see Neh 13:24, as explained by Spolsky, "Jewish Multilingualism," 36.

⁴¹ On this aspect of bilingualism see Grosjean, *Life with Two Languages*, 186, 206-207 and Hoffmann, *Introduction*, 79-88.

In an informal survey, not meant to be more than anecdotal, I inquired of fellow English speakers who live in Israel how many of them read the subtitles in Hebrew in American movies, thus checking up on the work of the translators and noting their frequent howling errors. Virtually all conceded that this was their practice.

⁴² The gap between *Philo's* claims and the attitudes of high level bilinguals such as *Josephus* may serve as yet one further indication that *Philo's* knowledge of Hebrew was not extensive. Compare above, n. 5.

From another point of view, to return to the perspective with which this article began, the judgmental attitude of bilinguals towards the translation of the Torah may be a reflection not only of the effort required to speak and write both languages,⁴³ but also of the permanent dissonance felt by bilinguals between the two languages they know and the two cultures these languages represent. Under those circumstances, one, who has labored to overcome that hurdle and successfully internalized that recognition, may be especially critical of those less effective at the endeavor, truly at home in neither linguistic nor cultural context.⁴⁴ In this sense, the attitude of bilinguals towards the Greek version of the Torah may be one indication (among others)⁴⁵ of the awkwardness they felt in sitting at the meeting point of cultures.

⁴³ See Josephus's comments on his labors to learn Greek, marred at least in part when speaking Greek by his inability to overcome the accent associated with the language of his youth, *AJ* 20.263.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 92-93, quotes Bipin Chandra Pal describing the pain of a native Indian educated in English in India and England, who was "as much a stranger in his own native land as the European residents." On the *anomie* experienced by bilinguals, their sense of not really belonging to one world or the other, see also Hoffmann, *Introduction*, 146-148.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Josephus's awkward silence concerning Jewish hopes of national redemption as expressed in the book of Daniel, *AJ* 10.210. Compare, also, the delicate balance of polemic and apologetic in Josephus's treatment of the failure of Greek historians to mention the Jews, a major theme of *Ag.Ap.*

CONTEXT AND CONNOTATION: GREEK WORDS FOR JEWISH CONCEPTS IN PHILO

NAOMI G. COHEN

We are gathered today to discuss aspects of the phenomenon of the straddling of Jewish and Greek cultures in Hellenistic Jewish literature. I intend to deal with a very small aspect of this — with some Greek words; and more specifically, first, *how* certain words acquired idiosyncratic connotations in Hellenistic Jewish literature, and second, *what* the details of their metamorphosis indicate respecting *ideational and cultural developments* in Hellenistic Judaism. I know that this is a tall order, but all I wish to do today is to present a methodology replete with the appropriate examples, for the proof is in the details.

It is almost redundant to state that Philo was a religious thinker. Whatever else he may have been, he in any event was eminently that. But what is rarely considered is the no less obvious fact that when he discoursed about matters of religion it was not "religion in general" that he was thinking about, but more particularly, religion as he conceived it to be, in terms of his own, the Jewish tradition; and the most basic stage in which this is reflected is vocabulary.

While the writings of any great thinker take on a life of their own which often goes beyond the concerns and the conscious intention of their author, and in the final analysis the lasting significance of their work lies in this latter message, at the same time an important dimension of their writings is missed unless their words are also read in the same semantic field in which they were written; and respecting Philo, I am convinced that this is the indispensable master key to understanding his writings as his contemporaries read them.

When reading his work, it is important to bear in mind that a significant number of words whose connotation, when they were used by Jews in Jewish contexts took on a specifically Jewish meaning, which though related to their general connotation, is not the same.

I hope to show that Philo found much of what I shall henceforth term the "Judeo-Greek" vocabulary ready to hand, and that in the