

students. The last two sections are particularly useful for both ancient and medieval historians who look at barbarian settlement, and for those teaching courses on historiography.

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Sylvie Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the Letter of Aristeas*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003. xii + 210 pages. ISBN 0-415-28072-9.

The *Letter of Aristeas* is, as Sylvie Honigman reminds us at the beginning of her learned, dense and impressive work, neither a letter nor by Aristeas. Though it begins with an address to an addressee, and though its writer claims the name Aristeas, neither address nor name is genuine; each is part of a cover-up that has extended now for some 22 centuries. It is Honigman's task, with her predecessors since at least the seventeenth century, both to recognize that cover-up and, more innovatively and ambitiously, perhaps also to resolve the problems which it represents.

The *Letter* purports to offer an account of how the Pentateuch was translated into Greek in Alexandria by 72 elders of the Jews, trained and skilled in both Hebrew and Greek, who had been sent there from Jerusalem at the invitation of a Ptolemy, conventionally identified as Ptolemy II Philadelphus (regn. 285-247 BCE). That ruler, a lover of learning and founder of a great library, had been told by his librarian, Demetrius of Phalerum, that his collection lacked one important work, the law of the Jews. The invitation to the High Priest in Jerusalem was a logical consequence. The presence of Demetrius as Librarian for Ptolemy II has long been recognized as a difficulty in accepting the work as true and as transmitting an authentic historical record, and numerous other features of the text confirm Bentley's judgment of the work as 'a clumsy cheat'. But it took many centuries for this kind of view to emerge. Until the end of the Middle Ages, the text was accepted as genuine and true, and was seen as a very important witness for Christian claims.

The story of how the Greek text of the Pentateuch came into existence nearly three centuries before the birth of Jesus offered Christian apologists from an early date valuable evidence for what they claimed were references to him in the biblical text, references which had been removed, so they asserted, from the Hebrew original after the crucifixion. If those references were there so long before his birth, and fortuitously, even providentially, preserved in the Greek version, from a time when the Jews could not have known about him and hence removed them from the text, this constituted evidence in favour of the truth of his message and the claims made for him. Hence the importance and popularity of the *Letter*, which survived, principally because of this aspect of its contents, in the Christian tradition, the Jewish one having long lost any direct access to it or use for it. In recent centuries, however, authorship, genre, date, intended audience, purpose, and much in the contents have alike been the subject of much debate.

If it is impossible now to know who really wrote the text, which Honigman prefers to call the *Book of Aristeas*, it is not impossible to know something of the writer's aims in producing it. Past scholarship has seen in it a variety of literary types, using arguments of genre and content to characterize it as an apology for the Jews, support for Ptolemaic claims, propaganda for Judaism over against paganism, etc. In modern times, ever since Hody in the seventeenth century and others demolished its claims, few have accorded much credence either to the work's assertion of the king's involvement in the translation enterprise or to the link with the Library of Alexandria. Both are seen generally as elements in propaganda by the Jewish author designed to demonstrate the favour in which the Jews of Egypt were held by the ruler and to create the illusion of a special relationship between the Jews of Egypt and the Ptolemies. Anachronisms and awkwardnesses in the testimony proffered by the *Letter* led scholars to the conclusion that neither could be true.

In this book Honigman offers a new theory, which is both attractive and buttressed solidly by scholarship and intelligence. Her theory also represents an attempt to save the phenomena, for she argues strongly that we should understand the *Letter* in its correct literary and cultural contexts and not insist in a positivistic fashion too much on a simplistic necessity for truth as a criterion for the acceptance of what the *Letter* tells us. The contexts to which she refers are those of Greek life and culture in Hellenistic Egypt — she argues against the use of what she sees as an artificial and erroneous modern concept of Judaeo-Hellenistic literature, as though the Jews of Egypt were somehow ghettoized, separate, cut off from their Greek neighbours. And she insists that much in the *Letter* that past students of the text have rejected as so much invention can be interpreted in far more charitable ways as parts of what ancient historians and their readers would have regarded as true and correct representations of reality.

Honigman's argument is that the *Letter* is designed to provide a 'charter myth' for the Septuagint (or at least for the Septuagint version of the Pentateuch), aimed at giving it sacred status. Her argument for this is detailed and complex, and much in it carries conviction. She points out that correct identification of the literary genre to which the *Letter* belongs is essential to understanding the text and its purpose. As to this, she argues that the *Letter* has close links to Hellenistic historiography, though, more complexly, the 'form is Greek but the thematic material is Jewish'. In her view there are two inter-twined literary paradigms in the *Letter*: the first is Alexandrian, and is royal propaganda for the Library; the second is biblical, with the Exodus story providing the matrix. It is the combination of these two that gives the *Letter* its 'real meaning'. The translation and its high quality were key elements in the building of the 'charter myth', and the intended audience was Jewish, especially the Alexandrian Jewish elite.

Honigman sees the Pentateuch translation, in accordance with what the *Letter* tells us, as a product of the reign of Ptolemy II, with the *Letter* itself being written in the mid-to-late second century BCE. Whether these datings are correct or not, I am not persuaded that they are both necessary for her argument. The *Letter* must certainly post-date the Pentateuch version, so positing an early date for the *Letter* forces one to claim an earlier date still for the translation of the Pentateuch. But must the translation belong to the reign of Ptolemy II himself? What then of the anachronism — to put it no more strongly than that — of the employment of Demetrius as Librarian in the *Letter*? Surely any oral tradition, something on which Honigman places more reliance than many other scholars, would have avoided this.

Not all parts of Honigman's argument enjoy as much support as she might wish. For example, she suggests (16) that the work 'provides evidence for the existence of a Jewish literary tradition in Alexandria which was eager to blend Greek forms and Jewish topics and, thus, to demonstrate that Jewish culture was an integral part of Greek culture'. Many will agree with the claim here about Jewish cultural activity in Alexandria; however, her evidence for it is a section in the *Letter* which says merely that when visitors or delegations came to the Egyptian king, special arrangements were made to give them treatment in accordance with the usages and customs of their home city. Far from suggesting anything about Jewish involvement or assimilation in Egyptian Greek life, this merely points to a diplomatic practice normal in major powers. So, too, in this same context, we might wonder why she thinks that the intended audience for the *Letter* is the educated Jewish elite of Alexandria, if the Jews are so assimilated as she claims, and not a discrete part of the educated elite of Alexandria as a whole. She also suggests that we should see a parallel between the activity of the editors of the Homeric epics in Alexandria around 150 BCE and the *Letter*'s representation of the work of the translators in the third century BCE: there may be discussion of this, and there is certainly room for more than a single view on it. But there can scarcely be two views about her suggestion (119-20) that the work of those Homeric editors (in the mid-second century BCE) actually served as an influence on the work of the translators a century earlier — 'It is not impossible — in fact, it would be natural — that the conceptual approach and working methods that characterized the grammarians from the library who carried out the

edition of Homer influenced the way the Jews proceeded with the LXX *concretely*' (her emphasis). And it seems that it is the desire to argue for the parallel with the Homeric editors that pushes her to accept the particular dating that she adopts for the *Letter*. She is a little ready (129) to attribute otherwise unsourced information to a wholly unattested 'oral tradition' about the genesis of the LXX, when common sense suggests much more economically invention by the author of the *Letter*. She thinks (58, 73) that the original number of the translators, according to this alleged oral tradition, was 70, agreeing with the biblical number of those who went up Mount Sinai with Moses, and that it was raised to 72 in order to allow for agreement with the number of tribes (12x6) — but, despite claims to the contrary, we have no evidence whatever for the existence of any oral tradition (*contra* 82, 86, 90, 140, etc.) on the issue, and oral tradition about a genuine event of this sort, as distinct from some sort of folk tale, for which we also have no evidence, might just as easily have transmitted a genuine number.

These are for the most part points of detail and do not detract from the considerable achievement of the author in constructing her thesis here. Honigman offers us an exciting and seductive theory, exciting because it offers a much broader and comprehensive interpretation of the text than earlier ones, and seductive because in doing so it offers an altogether new way of visualizing not only the text itself but also its subject, the translation, and the Jewish community of Alexandria. Exciting and seductive, then, but persuasive and true? Honigman claims that the *Letter* was widely read in Antiquity, but this seems an exaggeration, and the use made of it by both Philo and Josephus seems to argue against her on this too. The complexity of the structure which she builds need not be an argument against it, especially for an age when complexity and artificiality characterized so much Greek writing. There is much in this to attract, not least the way in which it succeeds in taking in all aspects of the text and building a satisfying whole. Where it fails, if it does, is that in part, as the author herself admits, the argument is circular (136).

Honigman's case is essentially that the *Letter* is patterned on the Exodus story. She argues energetically for this position, and her argument is attractive, but one is left wondering not so much whether the parallels, in the Bible and in surviving Greek literature, which she identifies are real as why it is that it has taken some 22 centuries for anyone to notice them. If they were intended to be there, then surely an ancient reader was expected to recognize them. Secondly, the patterning which Honigman identifies depends crucially on multiple allusions to other Greek, especially Hellenistic, works. Again, these may all be in her text — and what reader of Hellenistic works would be surprised to find such references? But here too a modern reader is worried: Nigel Wilson suggested years ago that we have perhaps one percent of ancient Greek literature. If anything, that is surely an over-estimate. If we had twice as much in our hands today, or if we had say ten percent or twenty percent of ancient Greek literature, it seems reasonable to suppose, given the largely random nature of our losses, that Honigman would be able to identify for us a vastly greater range of literary allusion and cross-reference. But there is ultimately something depressing, even disturbing, in the thought of thus cross-referencing virtually everything in Hellenistic literature. Not only is there more to literary creativity, even in a literature so full of allusion and self-reference as Hellenistic. It is also that, with so little of that literature surviving, Honigman has been able to identify so much — if we had a great deal more, how dense would the thicket of literary allusion be, how much more visible (and hence also plausible), the argument that she builds here. And yet, it has taken 22 centuries for this to be discerned.

None of this is to dismiss Honigman's argument. Rather, it is to suggest something of the riches of this challenging and thought-provoking work. The *Letter of Aristeas* has never been an easy work to understand. From its creation until the seventeenth century what it reported was accepted too easily as unvarnished truth about the most important text in Judaism and Christendom; thereafter Hody and Bentley consigned it to scholarly near-oblivion. Honigman has the great merit of forcing us to look at the work anew, of re-focusing our attention and of placing the *Letter of*

*Aristeas* solidly in its twin contexts, Jewish and Greek, at a time of the greatest inter-penetration in their history before the rise of Christianity.

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Giuseppe Veltri, *Libraries, Translations and 'Canonic' Texts: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish Christian Tradition*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006. 278 pages. ISBN 9-004-14993-7.

In this book Giuseppe Veltri continues his ongoing probe into the meaning of the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. In his previous book on the topic, *Eine Tora für den König Talmai* (Tübingen, 1994), by his own admission (ix-x), Veltri had claimed that the rabbis had never rejected the Septuagint as the Torah, in face of its canonization by Christians. In this book, however, instead of supporting his previous assertion, and rather than viewing 'rejection' as the proper term with which to describe what the rabbis did to the Septuagint, he now claims that they 'decanonized' it. Decanonization is a concept developed by Veltri in this book, which asserts that, under changing historical conditions, texts that had once held a certain canonic status within a religious society lose that status, without actually being rejected as heretical. In order to define the term better and to explain the phenomenon, Veltri uses three examples: the Septuagint, i.e. the earliest translation of the Bible into Greek, Aquila's second translation of the Bible into Greek, and Ben Sira, a book that was probably first considered canonical by the Jews, and is in fact part of the Septuagint, but which was then gradually decanonized by the rabbis.

The first two chapters of the book are devoted to the Septuagint. In the first, Veltri discusses the function of what he calls 'the legend of the Septuagint' (31-2), and claims that its aim was to legitimize the divine origin of the composition for Hellenistic Jewry, endowing it with a status equal to the Hebrew Torah. He compares this legend to a similar legend, developed in Greek and Hellenistic circles, about the canonization of the Homeric corpus. The comparison is most compelling. Next, Veltri shows how this legend was first adopted by the Christians, in order to legitimize their use of the Septuagint as a proof-text for the veracity of the New Testament. He then traces the slow loss of canonical status, a development, assigned particularly to St. Jerome, who in the fifth century translated the Bible into Latin directly from the Hebrew, thus sidestepping, and in effect decanonizing the Septuagint for the Christians.

In his second chapter, devoted to the Septuagint, Veltri sets out to explain the rabbinic attitude to this composition. He maintains that the Septuagint was decanonized (but not de-emphasized) by the rabbis, by making it a composition created for the benefit of one person, King Ptolemy, but not for the public. Since he is convinced that this was not done because of the adoption and canonization of the Septuagint by the Christians, it is not clear why he thinks this move was necessary for the rabbis, although he does stress that historically, once the Greek-speaking Jewish community of Alexandria was eliminated in 117 CE, the Septuagint was no longer of practical value for Jews.

Veltri devotes the next chapter to the Aquila translation of the Bible into Greek. According to Veltri, this translation is reported in two opposing literatures — the Christian and the rabbinic. According to the Christian interpretation, this text was produced by the Jews in order to undermine the veracity of Septuagint, which had received canonical status in the eyes of the Christians. The Jewish story, however, is, in Veltri's view, one of decanonization. In the Babylonian tradition, Aquila becomes not the person who rendered the Torah in perfect Greek, but rather the person responsible for the canonized Aramaic Targum, Onkelos. This process, prominent in the Babylonian Talmud is, in his opinion, the decanonization of the Greek text of Aquila. The main problem with this argument is not what it says, but what it leaves out. It assumes that our understanding of the Aquila translation is bound up with the evidence for it in the literature. But he is