

*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

wrong in his assumption that the Aquila translation itself did not have an independent life outside of the writings in which it is mentioned. Thus, the Christian explanation of the need for a new Jewish translation into Greek, while placing Christianity at its center, presents a logical explanation for it, but if we adopt Veltri's view that this is mere apologetics, we are left with no corresponding Jewish story of why such a new translation became necessary. Veltri explains quite convincingly how it was decanonized (making the Aramaic Onkelos, to this day, a canonized text), but he never suggests why it needed to be decanonized.

In his last chapter, Veltri discusses the Book of Ben Sira. Today this book does not belong to the Hebrew Bible. Veltri maintains that the book made claims to divine authority, and was at the time viewed as such, but was decanonized by the Babylonian Talmud because the rabbis viewed it as presenting no innovation beyond what they themselves had said.

The strength of Veltri's book is in its breadth of knowledge and the easy transitions the author can make between Jewish rabbinic literature, Christian Patristic writings, medieval and pre-modern Jewish and Christian interpretation and modern scholarship. He is able to move between a bird's-eye view of the field and a close reading of a text, whether in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin or any modern European language, leaving the reader breathless. The book is a useful summation of the literature in the field, and it suggests a fresh theory with which to approach the issue of Bible translation and canonization in the ancient world, based on new insights into the philosophy of literature. However, it leaves the reader with several queries, concerning a systematic methodology that seems to be missing.

There is a common thread underlying the three texts that Veltri chose in order to demonstrate his theory of decanonization: all are original Hebrew texts translated into Greek, and all were eventually rejected as canonical by the Jewish establishment (namely, the academies where the Babylonian Talmud was redacted). Yet there are also differences among them. While the Septuagint and Aquila are translations of the same text (the Hebrew Bible), Ben Sira is different, and while the text that the Septuagint and Aquila translated remained canonical for the Jews, in the case of Ben Sira, both the translation and the original underwent decanonization. Also, while it is easy to prove a process of canonization for the Septuagint (and perhaps to argue similarly, though inconclusively, for one in the case of Ben Sira), Veltri could find no similar evidence for canonization of Aquila.

The decanonization process of the three compositions within rabbinic literature, as described by Veltri, employed different techniques. While the translation of the Septuagint was now considered a book written for one person, the Greek Aquila was transformed into the Aramaic Onkelos, and the authority of Ben Sira was explained away. One needs more than a description of these techniques in order to argue that they are actually doing the same thing to the text. Also, the systematic transformation of Aquila into Onkelos and a serious undermining of Ben Sira's authority are both the work of the Babylonian Talmud. One could argue, based on the fact that the Babylonian Talmud also views the Septuagint as a project directed for the person of the king, that decanonization was a concern of the Babylonian academies. But this last assertion, concerning the Septuagint, is already found in the earlier tannaitic midrash, *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*. So, are we justified in assuming that a similar theological-philosophical-ideological process affected the way all three compositions were treated? I am not convinced that the sources warrant such an assumption.

I also have a problem with Veltri's analysis of the individual traditions within rabbinic literature that quote the Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira. Although the text of the Septuagint and of Ben Sira (and of fragments of the Aquila translation) do exist outside of rabbinic literature, when discussing the rabbinic renditions of these verses, Veltri never refers to these texts as points of comparison, to see whether the issue that worries the rabbis is indeed an issue in the received texts themselves. Thus, he never favors the transmitted Septuagint or Ben Sira tradition over and against their quotation in the rabbinic text. This attitude robs the readers of a base of comparison

where they could judge for themselves whether Veltri's analysis is valid. Let me give one example, based on Ben Sira. On 217-8 Veltri discusses a quotation in rabbinic literature allegedly taken from Ben Sira ('Do not strip the skin of [a fish] from its ear, lest you spoil it, but roast it [all the fish with its skin] in the fire and eat it with two twisted loaves'), and proceeds to explain how the rabbis use this quotation in order to discredit Ben Sira as teaching anything original. However, this quotation is given in the Babylonian Talmud in Aramaic, and Ben Sira was certainly written in Hebrew. Verses that are found in the extant Ben Sira are given in the Babylonian Talmud quite plainly in Hebrew. Neither in Aramaic nor in Hebrew, nor in Greek or Syriac is this verse found in any of the extant versions of Ben Sira. Why the rabbis claim it comes from Ben Sira is of interest in and of itself, but using this verse as a 'good' example of how and why the rabbis decanonized Ben Sira leaves much to be desired.

Finally it is important to note that the English of the book leaves much to be desired. I refrain from giving explicit examples, but I think the book would have profited much from careful linguistic editing.

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Die nach 1950 in Palästina gefundenen Papyri und Pergamente haben schon kurz nach der Entdeckung allgemeines Aufsehen erregt. Das Interesse richtete sich freilich vor allem auf die nichtdokumentarischen Texte. Die Urkunden wurden bislang vor allem aufgrund der vorgezogenen Publikation einzelner Texte, insbesondere aus dem Babathaarchiv, in Teilbereichen diskutiert. Ich erinnere vor allem an die Arbeiten von E. Seidl (*Studi Grasso* II, 1968, 345ff.) und H.J. Wolff (*ANRW* II 13, 1980, 763ff.), sowie A. Biscardi (*Studi G. Scherillo* I, 1972, 111ff.). Seit 2002 liegen nun die vollständigen Editionen vor; für eine bequeme Übersicht über den Gesamtbestand ist immer noch die Abhandlung von Cotton (*JRS* 85, 1995, 214ff.) unverzichtbar.

Nach dem Abschluss der Editionen war eine interdisziplinäre Diskussion der dokumentarischen Texte ein besonderes Desiderat. Ein Workshop 1998 an der Bar-Ilan University führte Vertreter der antiken wie auch der jüdischen Geschichte und Rechtsgeschichte zusammen. Der Band enthält die bei dieser Gelegenheit gehaltenen Vorträge. Den Veranstaltern und Herausgebern gebührt besonderer Dank.

Im Folgenden sind die einzelnen Beiträge vorzustellen; im Vordergrund steht natürlich das Babathaarchiv. Auf Einzelheiten kann jedoch nicht eingegangen werden.

Nach einer Einleitung der Herausgeber (1-6) eröffnet J. Méléze Modrzejewski den Band mit einer Darstellung der Rechtsverhältnisse im ptolemäischen und römischen Ägypten: 'What is hellenistic law? The documents of the Judaeon Desert in the light of the papyri from Egypt' (7-21). Neben Hinweisen zur Einheit des griechischen Rechts — ein für Juristen weitgehend unstrittiges Thema, aber nicht für Nichtjuristen (s. hierzu nur Gagarin, *The unity of Greek law* [Cambridge companion to ancient Greek law], 2005, 1ff.) — wird das Verhältnis von griechischem und ägyptischem Recht herausgearbeitet: Zwei Rechte nebeneinander, ohne Vermischung und ohne nennenswerte gegenseitige Beeinflussung; M. geht auch auf die Bedeutung des jüdischen Rechts ein. Entsprechendes ist für das Seleukidenreich feststellbar. Damit sind die Stichworte für die folgenden Erörterungen gegeben: Welchen Vorstellungen entsprechen die Urkunden: Jüdischem, griechischem oder römischem Recht? Sind Vermischungen oder Beeinflussungen festzustellen und in welchem Umfang?

Allgemeine Fragen werden angesprochen von H. Cotton und W. Eck: 'Roman officials in Judaea and Arabia and civil jurisdiction' (23-44). Verf. geben zunächst einen Überblick welche