

Giuseppe Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmi—Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur. Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 41*, herausgegeben von Martin Hengel und Peter Schäfer. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994, pp. xi + 289. ISSN 0179-7891.

This abbreviated version of Veltri's 1991 dissertation for the Freie Universität in Berlin, guided by P. Schäfer, deals with the evaluation of and references to biblical translations in rabbinic and Jewish-Hellenistic sources, especially the LXX. This is an extremely detailed book, providing not only the rabbinic and Jewish-Hellenistic sources themselves, but also extensive analyses of these sources and of the *Forschungsgeschichte* on them. The book is written in a very professional, thorough, and original way, and will undoubtedly become the standard work on this topic, which has wider implications than one would think at first thought. Although this is a very extensive book (289 pp.), it actually seeks to solve mainly one question which is posed on p. 18, and the answer to which is provided in the summary on pp. 215-19, although the author's views are also expressed throughout the book (e.g., pp. 107-12).

This question, as explained in the introduction (pp. 1-18), is to show that all scholars before Veltri have wrongly embraced the view that the Jews rejected the LXX, either because the Christians had adopted that version or because they were opposed to the hellenization of other cultures by King Ptolemy who had the Hebrew Bible translated into Greek for precisely this purpose. That V.'s presentation of the views of some of his predecessors is imprecise is shown below.

V.'s study attempts to disprove this view, which according to him has become the accepted view of the scholarly world. V. realizes (p. 19) that the rabbinic sources actually do not contain explicit information on the acceptance or rejection of the LXX, and that they only contain some traditions from which such information may be culled. V.'s main contention is that when these traditions are properly analyzed, they do not prove the rejection of the LXX by the rabbinic sources.

The sources which are analyzed at length are (1) a number of traditions about verses 'written' or 'altered' 'for king Ptolemy'; (2) a story about the creation of the Greek translation of the Pentateuch, in different versions, sometimes in connection with a dictum that the Torah cannot be translated at all, in any language (except for Greek). In some traditions elements (1) and (2) are juxtaposed. According to V. these traditions do not explicitly refer to the acceptance or rejection of the LXX by the rabbis, although they do provide background information on the rabbinic understanding of the translation procedure of the LXX.

The LXX was basically a Jewish translation produced by Palestinian Jews or Egyptian Jews with a strong Palestinian background. This issue may be irrelevant, since at a certain moment the background of this translation was apparently forgotten when the LXX came into disuse. But it should have been stressed by V. that the LXX was a product of Egypt, used by Alexandrian Jews, who were not fluent enough in Hebrew to use the Hebrew Bible. They had no alternative, so to speak, but to use a translation, while the Jews of Palestine and Babylon did have an alternative, and could allow themselves to disregard the Greek translation. V. does not discuss these matters, nor does he address any *internal* evidence regarding the use or lack of use of the LXX in Jewish writings of the Second Temple period, including the rabbinic writings, in

the latter case, the lack of use. V. merely studies the approach to the LXX from external evidence, viz., a small list of references to verses in the LXX and a story about the creation of the translation. This self-imposed limitation determines the nature of the conclusions reached which, albeit important, are limited to the issue of how the LXX (and the Targumim) are evaluated in the rabbinic writings. The conclusions are important for our understanding of rabbinic Judaism and for the way traditions are created and transmitted within the rabbinic literature. However, they do not necessarily apply to the Jews of Palestine or Babylonia as a whole. Thus the author does not discuss the discovery of early fragments of the LXX (and its early revisions) in Qumran.

But more is involved. The self-imposed limitations of V. lead him to turn to only one of the exponents of rabbinic Judaism, viz., rabbinic literature. The author rightly suggests that we should not be quick in assuming on the basis of that literature that the rabbis rejected the LXX. But there is another type of evidence which also pertains to rabbinic Judaism, and which leads us to believe that certain rabbinic circles did reject the LXX. This evidence is provided by an internal analysis of the early, pre-Christian revisions of the LXX. These revisions, revising the LXX in accordance with an ever-changing, proto-Masoretic (proto-rabbinic) text, reflected the need to use a Jewish-Greek text based on the content of the Hebrew Bible, often different from that of the Greek Bible. Several of these revisions antedated Christianity, so that Christian influence could not have been instrumental in their creation (*kaige*-Theodotion, [reflected among other things in the Minor Prophets scroll from Nahal Hever], 7QLXXExod, 4QLXXNum; Pap. Oxy. 1007, and Pap. Rylands Gk. 458). This revisional activity shows that certain Jewish circles moved away from the LXX in the pre-Christian era, as mentioned by the present reviewer in his *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis/Assen-Maastricht 1992) 143 (and not as quoted by Veltri, p. 18). Whether or not these circles were identical with the ones from which the rabbinic traditions derived is not known, but it is likely that they were closely related. Note, for example, that *kaige*-Theodotion's exegesis is described by Barthélemy in the subtitle of his *Les devanciers d'Aquila* as 'sous l'influence du rabbinat palestinien'. This type of evidence should have been discussed by V., who would probably have come to the conclusion that the issues are more complicated than presented by him. Thus, the (later) Jewish translation of Aquila (also a revision of the LXX) is often quoted in the Talmud (Veltri, pp. 186-90 and Reider, quoted on p. 186), while the individual renderings of the LXX are not. This evidence alone leads us to believe that the rabbis were not happy about the LXX, to say the least.

In the introductory pages, V. points out the difficulties inherent in the *Epistle of Aristeeas* and in the stories in the rabbinic literature. According to both sources, the LXX was made on behalf of the Ptolemies—indeed the story that an earlier *λαγώς* in the LXX was changed in Lev 11:6(5) to *δασύπους* is understandable only when that change was made within the framework of a translation for the Ptolemies, who the translators allegedly did not want to insult by including *λαγώς* among the unclean animals. Thus, while rabbinic traditions recognized the Ptolemaic origin of the translation, at some stage that translation was rejected. But V.'s new insights lead us to believe that this rejection took place only at a late stage in the rabbinic tradition and that at first the LXX was embraced by the rabbis as a legitimate source. V. shows that the often-quoted dictum comparing the creation of the LXX with the making of the golden calf appeared in the late tractate *Sopherim* (1.7) and not in earlier sources.

Likewise, the day of fast in memory of the preparation of the LXX translation is not mentioned before the late *Massekhet Ta'anit*.

V. attempts to correct the imprecisions in the recording of the rabbinic evaluation of the LXX and it seems to us that V. has succeeded in doing so through his analysis of the stories about the creation of the LXX in the rabbinic literature. There is indeed no explicit reference in the early rabbinic literature to the rejection of the LXX. But the evidence remains open to different interpretations, as we shall see below.

V. sets out to prove his thesis by two main arguments.

1. One of the arguments which has been used in the past for proving that the rabbis rejected the LXX derives from an interpretation of lists of details in which the rabbinic text of the Bible (the so-called proto-Masoretic or proto-rabbinic text) differs from the LXX. These lists have always been viewed as lists of alterations (note that *שינויים* and *שינוי* are used in some rabbinic passages, as opposed to *דברים* and *כהבו* in others). Since the story of the creation of the LXX is mentioned in *b. Meg.* 9a in conjunction with the list of these passages (*וכתבו לו*), it had been suggested before V. that the rabbis resented these differences and that they considered them 'alterations' by the Greek translators, and that they therefore rejected the LXX. However, they were not 'alterations' (*שינויים*), argues V., but merely passages (*דברים*), and only they were considered alterations in the later tradition. Since these readings were originally not alterations, according to V. they could not be taken as an argument in favor of the view that rabbinic Judaism at an early stage rejected the LXX.

The passages in the early and late rabbinic literature are presented with all the manuscript variations on pp. 220-47 and they are analyzed in detail on pp. 22-109. A great part of the book is thus devoted to a detailed analysis of these passages. The passages have been transmitted either separately or in lists containing between ten and eighteen such items. Major problems regarding the nature of these passages (their number, original language, agreement with the LXX) had been discussed by scholars preceding V. One major obstacle for a coherent analysis of these items is that most of the supposed readings of the LXX are not known from any of the manuscripts of that translation even though according to the rabbinic sources they were included in the LXX. This reviewer has therefore suggested that the original Greek readings have been lost, and that they existed once in an earlier (original?) version of the LXX (*JSJ* 15 [1984] 65-89). V. himself returned to a view which had been suggested previously in various forms (Frankel, Friedmann, Aptowitz, Talmon) that the changes actually do not refer to differences between Hebrew and Greek texts, but that they pertain to inner-Hebrew variations. More specifically, according to V. most of the 'readings' which according to rabbinic tradition were written on behalf of King Ptolemy actually reflected rabbinic exegesis of some kind. In a lengthy discussion (pp. 22-109), V. points to such exegesis in rabbinic sources, not necessarily identical with the list of readings/alterations, but at least referring to the same biblical verses. At the same time, V. realizes that four instances which have been transmitted in 'some manuscripts of some rabbinic tractates' (p. 98) must be regarded as translations from Greek into Hebrew (Gen 2:2; Exod 12:40; Lev 11:6; Num 16:15). The other ones reflect 'merely text-critical and exegetical difficulties in an already fixed Hebrew text' (p. 98). To some of these difficulties V. finds references in different rabbinic sources, explicit or implicit, while for other ones he does not find such references. For example, the different sequence of the text written 'for King Ptolemy' in Gen 1:1

(‘God created in the beginning’) reflects problems raised by and solutions given in various rabbinic commentaries (*Gen. Rab.* 1:14; *Tanḥuma Buber Bereshit* 4)—see pp. 25-31. The addition in Deut 17:3 ‘for King Ptolemy’, לַעֲבֹדָם, is paralleled by an identical addition in *Siphre Deut.* 148 (see pp. 92-7). Likewise the addition of לַהַאִיר in Deut 4:19 ‘for King Ptolemy’, is paralleled by an identical addition in the late midrashic collection *Wa’etḥanan* ad loc. (pp. 92-7). The change ‘for King Ptolemy’ of אֲבוֹס to שׁוֹר in Gen 49:6 reflects an inner-Hebrew development, identifying שׁוֹר as שׁוֹר (not שׁוֹר) and applying it to Joseph; possibly אֲבוֹס is an orthographical variation of אֲפִיס (Apis) or סַר אֲפִיס (Serapis), identified with Joseph (*b. ‘Abod. Zar.* 43a). See pp. 63-9.

But the principle, rather than the details, are important in this analysis. It remains difficult, and actually unexplained, how and why difficulties in a biblical verse which one or more rabbis present according to some source should be ascribed to the translational activity of the seventy translators.

More importantly, whether or not the very difficult problem of the original language of the changes ‘for King Ptolemy’ can be solved may not be relevant for the main thesis of this book, namely V.’s view that the rabbis did not reject the LXX. Even if the changes/readings ‘for King Ptolemy’ had originally been phrased in Greek, V. could probably, on the basis of the arguments mentioned below, still maintain his main thesis that the LXX was not rejected. The argument would be stronger if the changes/readings ‘for King Ptolemy’ were not based on Greek readings, as V. suggests, but it makes no major difference. The suggestion that the readings/changes are inner-Hebrew did not convince the reviewer, in spite of the parallel with the development of the lists of *Tiqqunê Sopherim* also containing inner-Hebrew changes, mentioned on p. 105, n. 326, but not further developed (and in spite of the parallel of the *Qerê* notations in the Masorah, not mentioned by V.). In both of these cases, lists of phenomena of a different origin were combined under one heading. Thus only some of the *tiqqunê sopherim* listed in the rabbinic literature are corrections of the *sopherim*, while others are mere exegetical euphemisms. Likewise only some of the *Qerê* notations originally had an authoritative status as corrections, while others originally were probably mere *variae lectiones* subsequently upgraded to the status of a *Qerê*. By the same reasoning one could argue that only some of the changes ‘for King Ptolemy’ were real Greek renderings, while the other ones, actually cases of inner-Hebrew exegetical changes, had nothing to do with the LXX. This is a possibility, which seems to me remote, but as stated, the option of this or that explanation does not affect the main thesis of V. with regard to the rejection of the LXX.

The main thesis of V., described on pp. 107-12, relating to the lists of readings/changes of the LXX, is that these were originally independent readings, sometimes combined into clusters of two, three instances, and only later joined (by the *sopherim*) to the lists which are now found in several places in the rabbinic literature. The background of these readings/changes is that they were actually written ‘for King Ptolemy’, the one on whose behalf the exegetical changes were inserted in the translation. This is a very central point in the argumentation of V., from which the book derives its name: *Eine Tora für den König Talmi*. That is, the rabbis prepared a written midrash for King Ptolemy since he did not have the advantage of studying Torah with the rabbis (p. 108). For the rabbis this written Torah was the LXX! That the LXX contained such an exegetical copy of the Torah can also be

learned from the use of the term **דבר**, introducing the individual readings/changes (**זה אחד מן הדברים לתלמי המלך ששינו/שכתבו**), parallel to the term **דבר אחר** introducing an alternative explanation in rabbinic literature. According to V., the original tradition spoke about 'writing' to Ptolemy, secondarily altered to 'changing' (p. 108).

Although according to V., some of the rabbis knew Greek, and some of the readings/changes derived directly from the LXX, the rabbis conceived of them as reflecting a different form of exegesis, so that the possibility of a different Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX never entered their minds. V. does not explain how the readings/changes, which originated in the exegetical tradition of midrashic possibilities in conjunction with the Hebrew Bible, came to be ascribed to the Greek translation.

2. On the basis of the lists and stories about the creation of the LXX, chapter 2 established that the changes/readings reflect midrashic possibilities and that the LXX is a translation made for King Ptolemy personally. The next chapter (3) goes one step further and investigates the approach of the rabbis towards translating and exegeting in general, also beyond the Greek language. For scholarship this is a novel discussion in which V. makes some very important observations and distinctions not recognized previously, using only external, and not internal, evidence, as in chapter 2.

Thus V. noticed that the verb used for the activity of the LXX translators is **כתב** as opposed to that used for the Aramaic translations, viz., **תרגם**. The use of this verb **כתב**, to write, implies that for the rabbis the LXX did not constitute a regular translation from the source language to the target language, but the writing in a Greek shape of the content of the Hebrew Bible. The Greek and Hebrew versions were considered to be of equal value—just like the understanding of the LXX in several Jewish-Hellenistic sources. The fact that the LXX was made for King Ptolemy, and not for the liturgical needs of the Jewish community, is stressed time and again in the rabbinic sources, implying that the exegetical changes were meant to make the king's reading easier. This aspect of the rabbinic tradition, which hitherto was taken *cum grano salis*, is taken seriously by V. who provided the background to these statements.

In this regard V. recognizes a major distinction between the rabbinic approach to the LXX and to the Aramaic Targumim. In the rabbinic sources the former translation was meant for external use, for the King, while the Targumim represent an internal product of Judaism, produced and controlled by the rabbis. For the latter, the verb **תרגם** is used, not only with regard to the Targumim (see p. 181), but also with regard to other types of translations. Although we know the Targum to be a special type of translation, for the rabbis the verb **תרגם** referred to the act of translating in general, while **כתב** (with reference to the LXX) was used for the writing of the Bible in Greek. In accordance with this usage, the seventy translators are *not* named translators in rabbinic sources (rather 'old men', 'wise men'), and only in the later Christian tradition were they called 'translators' (p. 193). On the other hand, the *meturgeman* was a translator, or actually a mediator between the official exegetes of the Bible (the wise men or the rabbis) and the community.

Interestingly enough, the only other translation for which the verb **תרגם** is used in rabbinic sources is Aquila. V. ascribes this situation to the fact that Aquila, like the Targumim, reflects rabbinic exegesis (p. 212). This conclusion, however, may be hasty, since the mentioning of Aquila cannot be contrasted with other translations since they are not mentioned in the rabbinic literature. Furthermore, the case of

Aquila is unique because of the confusion between עקילס and אונקלוס in rabbinic literature. For the latter the formula הירגם אונקלוס or הירגם אקילס was in order.

Another difficulty with V.'s stringent distinction between כתב (for the LXX) and תרגום (for the Aramaic Targumim and Aquila) is that in the later tradition the distinction became blurred when תרגום came to be used also for the LXX (*Sopherim* 1.7 and *Sepher Torah* 1.6).

Conclusion. The author's *Rückblick* (pp. 213-14) and conclusion (215-19) stress that his main aim was to disprove the idea of the rabbinic rejection of the LXX. However, the material analyzed in this book pertains to many more issues than just the question of whether or not the rabbis rejected the LXX. If V. had wanted to address only this question which he considers the main focus of this book, he should have written a more limited monograph, or possibly an article. But V. considers his task to be much more comprehensive, so that in fact he helps us to understand many more issues. At the same time, the structure of the book would have been improved if V. had posed his questions differently. For even if one disagrees fully or partially with V.'s main thesis, one could still benefit much from other aspects of this very valuable book.

V. demonstrated convincingly that in the early rabbinic sources the LXX is presented differently from what has been thought hitherto. In these sources the LXX is indeed presented as 'eine Tora für den König Talmai' (thus V.; or rather 'die Tora?'). However, it is not clear to what extent the information contained in the list of readings/changes can be used to describe the nature of that Torah as a personal exegetical copy intended to help Ptolemy in understanding the Torah since he was deprived of rabbinic exegesis. The early rabbinic tradition as embedded in rabbinic sources probably did not reject the LXX. This has been established by V., but at the same time there is also other evidence (relating to pre-Christian revisions) showing that certain rabbinic circles discontinued the use of the LXX (see above). The picture is thus more complicated than suggested by V. That later rabbinic sources (*Sopherim*, *Sepher Torah*, *Massekhet Ta'anit*) present a negative evaluation of the LXX is known to V. and on the last page of the book before the conclusion (p. 214) he states that he does not know how these sources reached such a negative view. It seems to me that the earlier traditions about readings/changes for King Ptolemy contained that criticism in a seminal way, which could have influenced the later tradition. Furthermore the embracing of the LXX by Christianity (*pace* V., p. 215) and the replacement of the LXX by Jewish revisions in Jewish circles (BCE and CE) provided all the elements for such a negative view.

This is a very stimulating book, well-written and clearly argued. It also is an eye-opener on many issues. Our own disagreements are more in the nature of scholarly disagreements than criticisms. The reading of this book is highly recommended.

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