

Common Judaism

Explorations in
Second-Temple Judaism

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writers were the led rather than the leaders. But it is scarcely possible to assert this without falling into a circular argument about what is center and what is periphery. Rather, we can see Greek-speaking Jews as sharing honorably in “common Judaism” and as linked to those other Jewish worlds of Palestine and of the Diaspora through a common dedication to Scripture, albeit expressed in their own ways.

The constraints of living as a minority demand protection of traditions; self-imposed boundaries are sought and constantly redefined. Adherence to the Bible was a tool for this purpose for Greek-speaking Jews, from which other tools could be derived. Yet there is no reason to think that Diaspora Jews huddled around their Torah—or, rather, their *nomos*. Far from it. While the Greek Bible catered to the Jewish identity of “Hellenized” Jews, it also, and paradoxically, provided the intellectual route by which Mediterranean Jews became more “Hellenized,” because it ensured that the entirety of their lives, including their religious lives, could be lived in Greek. The Greek language gave access to the world. Greek-speaking Jews perhaps lived *with* Torah, rather than fully *by* or *through* Torah. Paradoxically again, it was the spread of the Jesus movement that opened new opportunities in the Diaspora for a more totalizing brand of text-centered existence; yet this came now with a radical redefinition of what such an existence entailed.

11. *Aristeas* or Haggadah: Talmudic Legend and the Greek Bible in Palestinian Judaism

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Scholars of rabbinic literature from the Talmudic or late classical era have greatly valued E. P. Sanders’s attempts to rescue rabbinic texts from abuse at the hands of theologians, New Testament scholars, and historians of Second Commonwealth politics and society. It is not simply a matter of calling attention to the negative presuppositions that are often attached to such terms as “Pharisees”¹ or “ritual.”² His contributions extend to a more substantial scholarly recognition that the extant compendia of rabbinic teachings, all of which postdate the second century C.E., were not treatises on theology or chronicles of their authors’ or protagonists’ times. For that reason, they provide little if any evidence for the doctrines of the early church or the life of the historical Jesus. It is unfortunate that Talmudic Judaism has not left us a Paul or an Augustine, a Josephus or a Eusebius. Attempts to reconstruct historical narratives out of specialized works devoted to the minutiae of legal debate or rhetorical preaching can be undertaken only with extreme caution.³

The Rabbinic Septuagint Legend

By way of illustration of these methodological perils, I turn to a familiar passage from rabbinic literature that claims to preserve historical information about an important milestone in the development of Judaism in the third century B.C.E. I will argue that the failure to take into account the distinctive purposes and literary character of rabbinic

traditions has led to fundamental errors in the historical conclusions that were drawn from this text.

The rabbinic text is a legend about the circumstances surrounding the translation of the Torah into Greek and the supposed emendations that were introduced into that document by the sages charged with that translation. The tradition is preserved in numerous versions, whether in the form of brief allusions or exhaustive lists of verses, in works emanating from the tannaitic, amoraic, and medieval eras.⁴

The tradition, in its various versions, was examined with characteristic thoroughness by Emanuel Tov in an article that appeared in 1984.⁵ Tov undertook a detailed comparison of the rabbinic traditions and the extant Greek versions of the LXX. He classified the variants into different types and proposed reconstructions of the Greek text that underlay the rabbinic Hebrew versions. After noting the many disagreements between the rabbinic versions and the standard LXX, he arrived at a far-reaching conclusion:

The surprising thing is that two-thirds of the biblical passages in the list were changed in the course of the textual tradition of the LXX, and if this is really so, then clearly the original text of the LXX completely differed from the translation known to us from the manuscripts.⁶

Tov's clear preference for the rabbinic tradition, which is contained in works redacted half a millennium or more after the composition of the LXX of the Pentateuch, over the manuscripts of LXX itself, was startling. The reasons for my surprise, and the objections I have to Tov's judgment on this matter, will form the basis for the present essay.

Let us begin with a presentation of the text under discussion, as it appears in *b. Megillah* 9a-b:

King Ptolemy assembled seventy-two elders, and placed them inside seventy-two rooms without disclosing to them the reason why he had assembled them. He approached each one individually and said to them: Write for me the Torah of your master Moses.

The Holy One instilled counsel into the hearts of each one, and they all arrived at a single consensus.

They wrote for him:

"God created in the beginning" (Genesis 1:1).

"Let me make man in the image, after the likeness" (Genesis 1:26).

"And on the sixth day God finished . . . and he rested on the seventh day" (Genesis 2:2).

"Male and female he created him/it"⁷ (Genesis 5:2).

"Come, let me go down, and there confuse their language" (Genesis 11:7).

"So Sarah laughed to her relations" (?; Genesis 18:12).⁸

"For in their anger they slayed men, and in their wantonness they hamstrung a stable" (Genesis 49:6).

"So Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a carrier of persons" (Exodus 4:20).

"The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt and in other lands was four hundred and thirty years" (Exodus 12:40).

"And he sent nobles [*za'atutei*] of the people of Israel" (Exodus 24:5).

"And against the nobles of the children of Israel he put not forth his hand" (Exodus 24:11).

"I have taken not one valuable [*hmad*] of theirs" (Numbers 16:15).

"Which the Lord thy God distributed to give light to all the peoples" (Deuteronomy 4:19).

"And he went and served other gods which I commanded should not be served" (Deuteronomy 17:3).

They also wrote for him "the beast with hairy legs" and they did not write "the hare" (Leviticus 11:6) because the name of Ptolemy's wife was "Hare"; lest he should say, The Jews have mocked me by putting the name of my wife in the Torah.

One important question raised by this list is whether it witnesses to the text of the LXX or the Hebrew on which it was based.

From the Parts to the Whole

It would seem that there is a strong propensity among scholars to attach greater credence to documents or editions that lie outside their strict domains of expertise. I personally used to envy the lot of scholars of the Qur'an, whose texts seemed to have been established much closer to the time of its revelation and hence were not subject to the complex issues of redaction and flexible transmission that plague the discipline of rabbinic philology. Such, at least, was my impression until I actually consulted with Qur'an experts and heard about the thorny challenges they face in trying to extrapolate the original text from the significant changes introduced during the era of the caliphs many generations after the time of Muhammad.⁹

The same problem applies to the present question. As Bible scholars examined the tradition about the seventy-two elders, their responses were marked by a credulous faith in traditions that professional rabbinites regarded with the utmost suspicion and skepticism.

The story of Ptolemy and the elders clearly and unequivocally belongs to the genre of rabbinic haggadah. In the discipline of Talmudic philology, there are established methodological approaches that guide our analyses of texts and traditions of the

haggadic genre and that determine the appropriate ways for basing historical conclusions on them.

The most rudimentary literary analysis of this tradition will observe that it can be subdivided into two main parts:

1. A narrative framework that is similar in its main outline to the well-known story of the *Letter of Aristeas*¹⁰—or, to be precise, to the supplements provided by Philo (*Mos.* 2.25–44)¹¹ concerning the seventy-two elders who were assembled by the emperor Ptolemy, and who were given the supernatural inspiration that allowed them to produce identical Greek translations.¹²

2. Lists of biblical verses for which the translators' versions differed from the established Hebrew text.

The final product gives the impression that the two segments constitute a single unified entity, such that the miraculous status of the translation, as established by the narrative, is demonstrated by the existence of the variants. That is to say: if the translators had arrived at a unified translation only with respect to the verses that were translated literally from the Hebrew, then their achievement would not necessarily have been grasped as a supernatural one, since it might be argued that their agreement merely reflects their identical *Vorlage*. However, this cannot be argued about the cases when their translations constitute departures from the Hebrew original. For how would so many translators have arrived at the same translation if not through miraculous means? It therefore appears that the two components of the haggadah are interdependent and mutually complementary.¹³

The apparent integrity of the story, however, is called into question by the fact that the tradition about the miraculous concurrence of the seventy-two translators does not figure in any rabbinic tradition other than the Babylonian Talmud and works that derive from it. By contrast, lists of "things that our rabbis altered for King Ptolemy at the time that they wrote the Torah for him in Greek" (and similar formulations), or the identifications of particular verses that belong to those lists, are cited with some frequency in the literature, in such diverse collections as the *Mekhilta*,¹⁴ the Palestinian Talmud, classic Palestinian midrashic compendia, and the *Tanhumas*—without any allusion whatsoever to the tale of the agreement between the translators.¹⁵

It should be noted that not all scholars would concur with my claim that the full story is limited to the Babylonian Talmud. Historians and biblicists are quick to cite additional works from the rabbinic corpus that provide independent corroboration of the tradition. In this connection, they are likely to bring support from Tractate *Soferim*, included among the "Minor Tractates" of the Talmud; the *Midrash Haggadol*; or the *Yalqut Shim'oni*. These collections, however, are not primary documents of rabbinic literature, but rather medieval anthologies whose compilers were striving to collect diverse material from the classical Talmudic era. In particular, the provenance and purposes of *Soferim* have recently been the topic of intense scholarly controversy. There is a growing tendency to date the tractate, or at least sections of it, as late as the eleventh century,¹⁶ although the opening chapters, which include the tale of the seventy-two

elders, evidently belong to the earlier stratum, perhaps from around the seventh century. The *Midrash Haggadol* and the *Yalqut Shim'oni*, while useful as textual witnesses to the documents that are anthologized therein, are nothing more than late compilations in which passages from the Talmud and Midrash are organized according to the sequence of the Hebrew Bible. They cannot under any circumstance be counted as rabbinic works in their own right. Although these observations might strike some readers as obvious, they have proven to be stumbling blocks to some distinguished scholars.¹⁷

When a tradition appears in diverse forms in different rabbinic collections, the versions found in the Babylonian Talmud are unlikely to represent the original or even an early form of that tradition. Of the various rabbinic compendia, the Babylonian Talmud is the most removed from the main wellspring of haggadic traditions, the land of Israel. It was also the last of the classical rabbinic works to undergo its final redaction, perhaps not until close to the Islamic age.¹⁸ Despite the skepticism with which we customarily approach Babylonian haggadah, in the present specific instance there are good reasons not to dismiss its account of this story. First, it is introduced by the formula *tanya* ("it was taught"), thereby indicating its tannaitic provenance. Second, it is hard to find a reason to suspect that it was invented by the Talmud's redactors. Third, its agreement with the *Letter of Aristeas* and Philo further enhances the story's claims to authenticity.

Nevertheless, we would do well to reconsider the connection between the two parts of the Babylonian pericope, and to ask whether the two components are complementary, or even if they reflect a consistent approach. This question in and of itself will not necessarily spark a revolutionary change in the historiography of the Septuagint, or in the history of rabbinic thinking. Nonetheless, the separation of the text's two components has implications for several important issues.

One such topic concerns the rabbis' attitudes toward the Septuagint. Conventional wisdom in almost two centuries of historical writing would have it that the Jewish sages of the Talmudic era were moved by overt hostility to the Alexandrian Greek version of the Torah, whether because of its adoption by the Christian church or because it is not sufficiently faithful to the Hebrew syntax to allow for sophisticated midrashic interpretation.¹⁹ At first glance, our Talmudic passage, taken in its entirety, would not support such a point of view, since its main point is to show that the elders were imbued with the Holy Spirit when performing their task; the activity of the Holy Spirit is evident particularly in their departures from the Hebrew.²⁰ If, on the other hand, the list of narratives is not seen as connected originally to the narrative about the translators, the passage upholds the conventional understanding of the rabbis' stance toward the Septuagint.²¹ At the very least, the list of alterations can be described and characterized without imposing on it the assumptions of the preceding passage from the Babylonian Talmud.

A second issue concerns the homiletical point of the literary unit. Rabbinic haggadot are not usually known for their thematic complexity. Since they are frequently rooted in homilies that were delivered before synagogue congregations, they are likely

to focus on a single issue, which is capable of being grasped by the folk who assemble for such occasions. Indeed, the presence of more than one homiletical topic is often an indication of the composite nature of a given passage, whether compiled in antiquity or from the marginal additions by medieval scribes and glossators that were copied into the main body of the manuscript. As we shall argue later on, the identification of multiple messages in the passage can assist us in reconstructing the pathways of the development of the Babylonian tradition regarding the writing of the Septuagint.

The need to identify the homiletical point of a rabbinic discourse, as a step toward unwrapping its “historical kernel” from its ancillary elements, is borne out by the fact that none of the lists of alterations comes close to being complete. We know of numerous variations between the Greek and Masoretic texts that find no mention whatsoever in the Talmudic traditions.²²

It is undoubtedly difficult to use haggadic material for historical purposes, but it can be done. Though he was speaking about Palestinian Jewish history, the principle articulated by Saul Lieberman in his 1944 article “The Martyrs of Caesarea” holds for our material as well:

The simple rule should be followed that the Talmud may serve as a good historic document when it deals in contemporary matters within its own locality. The legendary portions of the Talmud can hardly be utilized for this purpose. The Palestinian Talmud (and some of the early Midrashim) whose material was produced in the third and fourth centuries contains valuable information regarding Palestine during that period. . . . The evidence is all the more trustworthy since the facts are often recorded incidentally and casually.²³

In other words, the historical credibility of rabbinic sources is in inverse proportion to their explicitly historical objectives.²⁴ Rabbinic sources are of greatest historical value when they are speaking unguardedly without consciously intending to provide historical information. This premise will serve us in good stead with respect to our tradition about the emendations introduced by the seventy-two Jewish elders: what they have to teach us relates more to the generations of the tannaitic and amoraic sages than to third-century B.C.E. Alexandria.

The Absence of Important Septuagint Variants

The historical nature of the list is further cast in doubt when we observe that the list of variants does not contain any halakhic passages and that the Jewish sages never cite the LXX variants in support of normative halakhic positions.²⁵ Indeed, there are at least two well-known examples of momentous translations that do *not* figure in the rabbinic list.

The first is the nonliteral rendering of Lev 23:11 as *tē epaurion tēs prōtēs* (“the morrow of the first day”) rather than “the morrow of the Sabbath.” This reading is consistent with the Pharisaic and rabbinic methods for dating the Feast of Weeks, a topic of deep sectarian controversy during the Second Temple era. Second, the LXX rendered Exod 21:22-23, dealing with causing a miscarriage to a pregnant woman (ruling that the difference between a civil and a capital offense depends on the state of the fetus’s development): “If it be unformed, he shall be fined . . . but if it is formed, then thou shalt give life for life.” This is drastically different from the conventional Jewish reading, according to which the difference hinges on the fate of the mother’s life: “And if no harm follows [that is, to the woman], the one who hurt her shall be fined. . . . If any harm follows [to her], then you shall give life for life.” The LXX, evidently reflecting an Alexandrian Greek tradition, became the basis for the normative Christian position on abortion.²⁶ If the list in our passage were the result of a serious, and real, attempt to collect significant variations in the LXX translation, it could not possibly have overlooked cases like this, which were at the center of Jewish exegetical concern.

The Talmudic List as a Hybrid

These omissions from the list suggest that its rabbinic compilers were motivated not by historical or halakhic concerns but by homiletics. On the basis of his detailed examinations of the respective verses, Giuseppe Veltri concluded that most of the examples can be justified as attempts to resolve exegetical difficulties that elsewhere in rabbinic works were discussed without explicit connection to the Greek translation. Emanuel Tov found this conclusion utterly bizarre: “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.”²⁷ In the end, even Veltri does not call into question the basic historical reliability of the rabbinic tradition. All he proposes is that a distinction be made between the actual Greek translation and a separate interpretative midrash that the elders provided for Ptolemy. This conclusion seems arbitrary and motivated not so much by the evidence as by a prior commitment to the historicity of haggadic texts.

If one sets aside such prior commitments, a different picture emerges. A good starting point for an acceptable solution to our problem may be found in the approach adopted by Rashi to *b. Megillah*. Throughout his commentary on our story about the seventy-two elders, Rashi repeats the phrase “so that they should not say . . .” This formula is used to deflect a literal reading of the verse that would otherwise lead the naïve reader to conclusions that are unacceptable to Judaism.²⁸ In several instances, Rashi goes so far as to spell out the nature of the heresies that the elders were trying to avoid, principally, the belief that there are “Two Powers in Heaven,” and the possibility of finding scriptural support for polytheistic beliefs.

Rashi's claim that the text was intended to counter such heresies can be borne out by a close look at some of the translations found in the list:

1. Genesis 1:1: "God created in the beginning"—The intention is evidently to avoid a reading such as "The beginning [*bereshit*] created God," which would have implied that God was the creature of a prior being. Note that the ambiguity allowed by the Hebrew could not really be replicated in Greek, where case structure very clearly designates grammatical subjects and objects.
2. Genesis 1:26: "Let me make man in the image, after the likeness"—The use of the first-person plural form has been a long-standing source of embarrassment for Jewish monotheists confronting dualists, pagans, or trinitarians.
3. Genesis 2:2: "And on the sixth day God finished . . . and he rested on the seventh day"—This version, which does in fact agree with the received text of the LXX, was evidently responding to a perceived contradiction in the Masoretic version: either God was finishing the work on the seventh day, or he rested, but not both! The Greek version makes it clear that the creation was completed by the end of the sixth day.
4. Genesis 11:7: "Come, let me go down, and there confuse their language"—As in 1:26, the Hebrew suggests a plurality in the divine.
5. Exodus 12:40: "The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt and in other lands was four hundred and thirty years"—The Greek tradition removes a glaring incongruity between the claim of the verse and the chronology of events in Genesis and Exodus by allowing that the count does not refer strictly to the sojourn in Egypt but in fact begins during the patriarchal era.

This summary lends support to Veltri's thesis that what we have here is not an arbitrary collection of problematic verses but a selection of texts with common characteristics. Unfortunately, it is in the apologetic readings that we are least likely to find agreement with the Greek tradition of the LXX. The verses in which God is designated as a plural appear there unaltered. These discrepancies led Tov to question the authenticity of the manuscript tradition of the LXX.

A very different picture emerges if we treat the pericope as a standard haggadic passage rather than a historical record. There is considerable evidence in Talmudic and midrashic literature that the Jewish sages were sensitive to problematic biblical texts that could provide support for heretical or pagan positions. The rabbinic corpus contains several disputes between sages and sectarians or heretics, some of which revolve around similar lists of biblical texts that generated polemical arguments. Following are two examples:

1. *y. Berakhot* 9:1 (12d):²⁹

The heretics [*minim*] asked Rabbi Simlai: How many deities created the universe?

He said to them: You ask me? Go and ask Adam, since it says (Deuteronomy 4:32) "For ask now of the days that are past. . . ." "Since the day that the gods created man upon the earth" is not what is written, but rather ". . . since the day that God created man upon the earth."

They said to him: But is it not written "In the beginning created God [*Elohim*, a plural noun form]?"

He said to them: Does it say *bar'u* [the plural verb form]? What is written is *bara* [the singular form].

Said Rabbi Simlai: In all instances where the heretics blasphemed, their refutation can be found right nearby.

They continued to challenge him: What is this verse that is written (Genesis 1:26) "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"?

He answered them: It is not written here: "So the gods created man in their own image," but rather: "So God created man in his own image" (27).

His disciples said to him: These people you pushed aside with a reed. What will you reply to us?

He said to them: In the past, Adam was created out of dust and Eve was created out of Adam. From Adam onward, "in our image, after our likeness." Man cannot be without a woman and woman cannot be without a man, and the two of them cannot be without the divine presence.³⁰

They continued to ask him: What is this text that is written (Joshua 22:22) "The Mighty One, God, the Lord! The Mighty One, God, the Lord! He knows"?

He answered them: It is not written here "they know," but rather "he knows."

They said to him: Rabbi, you could push those people aside with a reed, but what shall you reply to us?

He said to them: The three names refer to the same one, just as a person might say "King Caesar Augustus."

They continued to ask him: What is this that is written (Psalms 50:2): "The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth"?

He said to them: Does it in fact say: "they spoke" or "and they summon." What is written is "speaks and summons the earth."

His disciples said to him: Rabbi, you could push those people aside with a reed, but what shall you reply to us?

He said to them: The three names refer to the same one, just as a person might say "a craftsman, builder, architect."

They continued to ask him: What is it that is written (Joshua 24:19) "for he is a holy God [*elohim qedoshim*]?"

He said to them: "They are holy gods" is not written, but rather "he is a jealous God."

His disciples said to him: Rabbi, you could push those people aside with a reed, but what shall you reply to us?

Rabbi Isaac said: Holy in all types of holiness. . . .

They continued to ask him: What is this that is written (Deuteronomy 4:7)

“What great nation is there that has a God so near [*elohim qerovim*] to it?”

He said to them: It is not written here “as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon them,” but rather “whenever we call upon him.”

His disciples said to him: Rabbi, you could push those people aside with a reed, but what shall you reply to us?

He said to them: Near in all manners of nearness. . . .

2. *b. Sanhedrin* 38b:³¹

Rabbi Johanan said: Wherever the heretics blasphemed, their refutation is right nearby:

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”—“So God created man in his own image.”

“Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language” (Genesis 11:7) —

“And the Lord came down [sing.] to see the city and the tower” (verse 5).

“Because there God had revealed himself [literally: themselves] to him” (Genesis 35:7)—“to the God who answered [sing.] me in the day of my distress” (verse 3).

“What great nation is there that has a God so near [*elohim qerovim*] to it?” (2 Samuel 7:23)—“What other nation on earth is like thy people Israel?”

In light of these and similar passages (which may reflect the kinds of disputations that rabbis were involved in with some frequency),³² it seems likely that at some stage in the evolution of the tradition about the alterations that were introduced before King Ptolemy, the narrators decided to graft the original list of variant readings in the Greek translation³³ onto a sequence of verses that were well-known subjects of religious debates. In the rabbis’ historical imaginations, these verses *should* have been emended in the translation in order to avoid misrepresentations by actual or potential heretics. This reconstruction of the tradition’s development follows a readily understandable ideological logic that is familiar to anyone with experience in tracing the development of haggadic traditions across the Talmudic era. Evidently, this grafting preceded all the extant versions in rabbinic literature.

Dwatted Wabbit

Of especial interest is the “hare” example, which is highlighted in the Babylonian Talmud by being moved to the end of the list, in contrast to the other examples, which are

listed in the order of their appearance in the Pentateuch. A brief comparison of how this particular element is included in the various midrashic and Talmudic collections provides us with a textbook case for the evolution of haggadic traditions. In the *Mekhilta*, the list of the variants introduced for King Ptolemy includes the hare or rabbit (Lev 11:6 or Deut 14:7). This reading, like all the others in the passage, is presented without any additional explanation, and there is no mention of Ptolemy’s wife and her problematic name.³⁴

A discourse in *Leviticus Rabbah* in which various rabbis propose prophetic readings of some unlikely biblical passages contains the following pesher-like interpretation of the dietary laws (13:5):³⁵

Moses our master saw the empires in their activities: “the camel, and the hare, and the coney . . .” (Deuteronomy 14:7).

“And the hare”—This is Greece. King Ptolemy’s mother was named “Hare.”

In this passage, the comment about Ptolemy’s “mother” creates a link between the hare and Greece. However, it is not linked to any textual variants in the Bible, and certainly not to the legend of the seventy-two translators.

The Palestinian Talmud tractate *Megillah* (1:9 [71d])³⁶ is evidently the earliest source to incorporate the information about Ptolemy’s mother as a gloss, in order to explain the significance of the variant in the Greek text. That it is a later gloss is indicated by the fact that it is cited partially in Aramaic, though the actual list of variants, presumably a *baraita*, is in Hebrew.³⁷ The Yerushalmi’s version, like the *Mekhilta*’s and unlike the Bavli’s, includes the verse in its proper sequential order; it is given no special prominence by being placed at the end of the list.³⁸

Although there is no indisputable proof that the tradition evolved in precisely the order *Mekhilta* → *Leviticus Rabbah* → Yerushalmi → Babylonian Talmud, the hypothesis is an eminently plausible one, and it correlates nicely with the chronological order of the respective compendia. As has been noted, neither of the Palestinian traditions connects the list of Greek variants with the legend about the miraculous agreement of the translators. That decisive step was likely an innovation by the Babylonian redactors.³⁹ The “hare” variant is (to all appearances) not of a theological character. This fact supports the hypothesis that the theologically problematic examples were grafted on at a later stage in the tradition’s evolution.

As many scholars have noted, the Talmud has got its history a bit garbled. Ptolemy II Philadelphus, in whose reign the Bible was translated into Greek, did not have a wife named “Hare,” “Bunny,” or anything of the sort. He did, however, have a grandfather who bore the epithet “Ptolemy *Lagos*,” meaning “rabbit.” The Talmudic story would have been just as effective if it had alluded to the correct historical information.⁴⁰ The fact that it did not do so is yet another indication of the unreliability of the historical traditions in the Babylonian Talmud. This unreliability applies also to the traditions that it claims to preserve of the textual variants in the old Greek Bible.

In fact, Talmudic and midrashic literature suggests that the Jewish sages of that era did not have firsthand familiarity with the Alexandrian Septuagint, which they knew merely as a legendary episode from the distant past. What is preserved in our list is a credible description of interreligious disputations that took place during the rabbis' own days. The tendency to conflate a list of textual variants with a list of apologetic interpretations was likely facilitated by the fact that there was an overlap between the two lists. Gen 2:2 and Exod 12:40 figure in both traditions.⁴¹

The methodologies that we adopted for this analysis dovetail neatly with the data presented by Tov, according to which it was precisely those verses that seemed to suggest duality or multiplicity in the godhead that remained unemended in the *textus receptus* of the Septuagint: that is, Gen 1:1, 26; 11:7; and Deut 4:19.

The LXX Translators Were Not Bothered about Theology

Furthermore, we have good reason to suspect that the LXX translators might have preferred *not* to draw too much attention to the Torah's severe condemnation of idolatry, at least insofar as it was extended to Gentiles. If the translators tended to avoid physical or anthropomorphic descriptions of God, they were not nearly as strict when it came to allusions to multiple deities.

This point is well illustrated by the LXX rendering of Exod 22:28 (LXX 22:27), "You shall not revile God," as *theous ou kakologēseis*. This reading provided Philo of Alexandria with a rationale for teaching (*Mos.* 2.205):

No, clearly by "god" he is not here alluding to the Primal God, the Begetter of the Universe, but to the gods of the different cities who are falsely so called, being fashioned by the skill of painters and sculptors. For the world as we know it is full of idols of wood and stone, and suchlike images. We must refrain from speaking insultingly of these.⁴²

In light of such an attitude, it is not surprising that the Alexandrian translators did not hasten to eliminate plural verbs such as "let us make man" or "let us go down."

Based on his survey of anthropomorphism-related passages in the Greek Bible, Charles T. Fritsch concluded that "for the most part, the LXX reveals no consistent method of avoiding the anthropomorphisms of the Hebrew."⁴³ Harry M. Orlinsky went even further. Based on his reexamination of the evidence, he declared that

what have been regarded by virtually everyone as instances of an anti-anthropomorphic attitude on the part of the Septuagint translators are the result of nothing more tendentious than mere stylism, with theology and philosophy playing no direct role whatever in the matter. . . . Thus Fritsch made

nothing of the fact that the LXX translated the "face" of God literally 18 (!) times in the Pentateuch, and proceeded to create an anti-anthropomorphic fiction out of one (!) instance of this phenomenon—and an alleged one at that. . . . What is involved is not theology, but stylism and intelligibility.⁴⁴

Although one can point to cases where the LXX translators probably did rephrase the Greek to avoid anthropomorphisms, the practice was not carried out with any consistency;⁴⁵ furthermore, such cases do not appear among the ones enumerated in the rabbinic traditions.

The LXX Was Not Known in Palestine

Even if the variants mentioned in the Talmudic accounts originated in a Greek text that was known to the rabbis—unlikely but possible—we would not need to accept the premise that the text they were referring to was an early edition of the LXX. There were, as we now know well, numerous Greek translations of the Bible circulating in ancient Palestine. Based on the nine fragments of Greek Bible translations that were unearthed at Qumran Caves 4 and 7 and at Nahal Hever, the present scholarly consensus⁴⁶ holds that during the Second Commonwealth era there existed Palestinian versions of the LXX that were emended by Hebrew speakers who were accustomed to a Masoretic-like text.⁴⁷ This phenomenon is normally understood as an attempt to produce a more literal adherence to the Hebrew. The resulting texts were neither LXX nor rabbinic but, as far as we can tell, merely the attempts of individual users, scholars, or communities to come up with the most faithful rendering they could of the Hebrew original.⁴⁸ It is conceivable that scholars might have used their linguistic proficiency in order to produce a revision of the LXX that was distinguished by its theological integrity, of the sort described in our rabbinic tradition. However, such a revision would not have been a witness to the original Alexandrian version. On the contrary, such a Greek text would have been yet another adaptation, whose distinctive readings cannot be credited to the original seventy-two sages.⁴⁹

If the Septuagint text was not current in the Holy Land in their time, then we are forced to assume that the rabbis must have known of its use in Alexandria or some other Diaspora community. However, I am aware of no convincing evidence that the rabbis of the land of Israel during the tannaitic era possessed detailed knowledge about the Alexandrian synagogues or about Greek Bible versions in their times.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Our analysis has demonstrated that the Talmudic version of the Aristeas legend is a composite that was assembled over several generations from numerous discrete sources.

When studied according to the methods of literary and philological analysis that are routinely applied to Talmudic and midrashic texts, the passage cannot be viewed as a reliable record of events that occurred centuries earlier than the compendia in which it is found. On the contrary, the exegetical attitudes that it ascribes to the Greek translators are inconsistent with what we do know about their theological concerns (or lack thereof); and more glaring disagreements between the LXX and the Masoretic Text find no place in the Talmudic lists of variants. The assumption that second- or third-century Palestinian rabbis would have preserved authentic memories of the original text of the Alexandrian Torah is contradicted by the literary and archaeological evidence.⁵¹

In light of these conclusions, it is hard to understand how scholarship ever treated the story with such respect. It is here, I believe, that we should remind ourselves of the tenacity of the outdated historiographic attitudes that E. P. Sanders has been instrumental in discrediting.⁵²

It is not simply a matter of our having more information than previous generations of scholars, though one should not minimize the importance of the discoveries at Qumran and elsewhere in challenging conventional wisdoms about ancient Judaism. Rather, earlier generations often studied the lives, values, and literature of ancient Jews primarily from theological perspectives, which promoted the tendency to force the data—and the people—into rigid conceptual categories. After all, it is so much neater to divide the Jews of the late Second Commonwealth into Josephus's easily recognizable sects—Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes—and to accept the claim (which served the interests of both Jewish and Christian apologists) that a single, linear, and consistent tradition extended from the Pharisees through to the Babylonian Talmud as interpreted by its authoritative commentators. Only when speaking about rabbinic Jews as a theological category is it possible to imagine that they maintained a uniform Bible text, uniform observances, and uniform beliefs; and that they and their Pharisaic predecessors could impose them on all Jews. It is only by subscribing to those naïve beliefs that rabbinic literature can be used as the basis for reconstructions of Ptolemaic Alexandria or the age of Jesus. Compared to those neat classifications, the alternatives are just too . . . well, *messy*. Even if we could be persuaded that ancient Palestinian peasants were, for some reason, more consistent in their beliefs and practices than our own experience with human nature would suggest possible,⁵³ a faith in clearly defined sectarian divisions is much easier to deal with than the evidence of, say, an Essene-like community that honored the Zadokite priesthood, observed Sadducee halakhah, and yet maintained a belief in survival after death, perhaps even in bodily resurrection.⁵⁴ The tidy consistency of the older categories is unquestionably attractive, even if it is historically indefensible.

12. Whom Do You Follow? The Jewish *Politeia* and the Maccabean Background of Josephus's Sign Prophets

David M. Miller

Freedom, according to E. P. Sanders, was an ideal that was common to most Jews living in Roman Palestine despite considerable disagreement about what it entailed or how it should be realized.¹ Sanders envisions a spectrum of freedom seekers, with those who waited passively for divine intervention, willing to die rather than give up their own way of life, at one end, and those who promoted violent resistance to Roman rule at the other end. Both groups could appeal to role models from 1 Maccabees—the former to the pious individuals who refused to defend themselves on the Sabbath (1 Macc 2:29–38), the latter to Mattathias and his sons, who eventually secured both religious freedom and political independence. Even among those who opposed the later Hasmonean dynasty, Sanders suggests that memories of the successful Maccabean revolt encouraged a general desire for freedom.²

The popular prophets Josephus accused of inciting revolt against Rome are located toward the middle of the spectrum among freedom seekers who were “ready to fight, but hoping for miraculous intervention.”³ These “sign prophets”—so-called because of their association with miracles that were supposed to play a role in divine deliverance⁴—are often regarded as independent figures whose eschatological “signs of freedom” or “signs of salvation” distinguished them from their more politically minded contemporaries.⁵ Such prophets are generally thought to have framed their activities not in terms of the Maccabees but in terms of the exodus and conquest,⁶ if not also an expected prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15–18).⁷

Some of the sign prophets doubtless did evoke the distant biblical past, including the conquest of Canaan. According to Josephus's account in *Ant.* 20.169–72, an Egyptian

40. See, for example, the Habakkuk commentary, 1QpHab 7:4–5.
41. Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 40.
42. H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, rev. R. R. Otley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 391–92.
43. A. Wifstrand, “Luke and the Septuagint” (in Swedish), *STK* 6 (1940): 243–62; translated in A. Wifstrand, *Epochs and Style: Selected Writings on the New Testament, Greek Language and Greek Culture in the Post-Classical Era*, ed. L. Rydbeck and S. E. Porter, trans. D. Searby. WUNT 2.179 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). See also Loveday C. A. Alexander, “Septuaginta, Fachprosa, Imitatio: Albert Wifstrand and the Language of Luke-Acts,” in idem, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles*, Library of New Testament Studies 298 (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 231–52.
44. Swete, *Introduction*, 26.
45. E. E. Ellis, “Biblical Interpretation in the New Testament Church,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder and H. Sysling, CRINT, Section 2: Literature of the Jewish People in the Period of the Second Temple and the Talmud 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 692.
46. This was pointed out to me by Ed Sanders. Cf. J. R. Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul “in Concert” in the Letter to the Romans*, NovTSup 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 33–39, on the “hearer competence” of Paul’s Roman recipients.
47. George J. Brooke, “The Canon within the Canon at Qumran and in the New Testament,” in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, JSPSup 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 242–66.
48. Devorah Dimant, “The Problem of Non-translated Biblical Greek,” in *VI Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Jerusalem, 1986*, ed. C. E. Cox, SBLSCS 23 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 3–6.
49. Recently explored in a new and fruitful way by N. Hacham, “The Letter of Aristeas: A New Exodus Story?” *JSJ* 36 (2005): 1–20.
50. Fishbane, “Use, Authority and Interpretation,” 356.
51. A point effectively demonstrated throughout Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*.
52. Holladay, “Hellenism.”
53. Cf. the remarks of van der Horst (“Interpretation”) and Doran (“Jewish Hellenistic Historians”).
54. Chaim Rabin, “The Translation Process and the Character of the Septuagint,” *Textus* 6, (1968): 21.

Chapter 11: Aristeas or Haggadah: Talmudic Legend and the Greek Bible in Palestinian Judaism

1. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (1992; corrected ed., London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1994), 400.
2. *Ibid.*, 329–30.

3. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
4. An excellent analytical survey of the development of this legend may be found in Abraham Wasserstein and David Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
5. Emanuel Tov, “The Rabbinic Tradition Concerning the ‘Alterations’ Inserted into the Greek Pentateuch and Their Relation to the Original Text of the LXX,” *JSJ* 15 (1984): 65–89.
6. *Ibid.*, 76. This section underwent considerable revision in the reissue of the article in Emanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, VTSup 72 (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 1999), 10.
7. Some texts add the gloss: “And they did not write ‘created them.’”
8. An interesting attempt to interpret this variant in terms of an attested LXX reading may be found in Abraham Geiger, *Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel, in ihrer Abhängigkeit von der innern Entwicklung des Judentums*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Mada, 1928), 415–19 (Heb.: 267–68). According to Geiger’s conjecture, the original allusion was to the fact that the LXX altered *beloti* (“worn out”), which the translators regarded as too crude. Most recent scholarship ascribes the variation to a different Hebrew *Vorlage*. See Tov, “Alterations,” 78–79.
9. For example, John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, London Oriental Series 31 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
10. Moses Hadas, ed., *Aristeas to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas)*, Jewish Apocryphal Literature (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951).
11. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, eds., *Philo with an English Translation*, ed. T. E. Page, E. Capps, and W. H. D. Rouse, 10 vols., LCL (London: William Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), 6:460–70.
12. See Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *LXX Legend*, 51–54.
13. *Ibid.*, 59; see also 65: “The story . . . is clearly intended to commend the changes to the reader as being worthy of attention precisely because they are the direct outcome of a miraculous event.” Many scholars have unjustifiably twisted the meaning of the passage in order to support their presupposition that the rabbis were out to discredit the LXX by accusing it of tampering with the biblical text.
14. *Pisha* 14 (H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, eds., *Mekilta D’Rabbi Ismael*, 2nd ed. [Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1970], 50–51; Jacob Z. Lauterbach, ed., *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, 3 vols., Jewish Classics, paper ed. [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961], 111–12). The (lack of) distribution among the tannaitic midrashic collections deserves some mention. Given that the alterations cover all five books of the Pentateuch (if we count the “hare” example as referring to Lev 11:6, and not only Deut 14:7), we should have expected the respective midrashic works to mention them, if only cursorily, as they were encountered. This is not the case, and the single reference in *Mekhilta* remains the only attestation in the literature of tannaitic midrash. The general situation remains the same in tannaitic midrashim that were not known to earlier scholars. J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed (*Mekhilta d’Rabbi Sim’on b. Jochai* [Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1955]) do not mention Ptolemy or the alterations in the commentaries on Exod 12:40 (34), transcribed from ms. Firkovitch, or on 24:5 (220), based on *Midrash Haggadol*. The same

holds true for Menahem I. Kahana, *Sifre Zuta on Deuteronomy: Citations from a New Tannaic Midrash* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 2003), where the surviving quotations contain no such references.

15. A methodical comparison of the rabbinic versions was already conducted by Geiger (*Urschrift*, 439–47; Heb. 282–87). Geiger was substantially correct in noting that the earliest and most reliable traditions are those contained in the *Mekhilta*, where the miracle story is not mentioned. He also noted the composite nature of the Babylonian version, while dismissing the medieval *Masekhet Soferim* as irrelevant to the ancient reality. Cf. Tov, “Alterations,” 66–67, and Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *LXX Legend*, 60.

16. Ezra Fleischer, *Eretz-Israel Prayer and Prayer Rituals as Portrayed in the Geniza Documents*, Publications of the Perry Foundation (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 199–202; Debra Reed Blank, “It’s Time to Take Another Look at ‘Our Little Sister’ Soferim: A Bibliographical Essay,” *JQR* 90 (1999): 20–21.

17. A rare and notable exception to this pattern is Giuseppe Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmi: Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur*, TSAJ 41 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994). In his review of Veltri’s book, Tov was compelled to concede the point; see Emanuel Tov, “Review of G. Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmi*,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 14 (1995): 178–83.

18. Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Mishnah*, (Edinburgh: TBT Clark, 1996), 204–208; cf. Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *LXX Legend*, 54.

19. The conventional view is expressed in Tov’s chapter on the LXX in the collection *Mikra*: “This negative approach is visible also in the view of the Rabbis who explained the differences between the MT and LXX as alterations of the latter.” See Emanuel Tov, “The Septuagint,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder and H. Sysling, CRINT Section 2: Literature of the Jewish People in the Period of the Second Temple and the Talmud 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 162.

20. This simple understanding of the passage is found in Rashi’s standard commentary.

21. Nevertheless, I am convinced that they are fundamentally incorrect. See also Abraham Wasserstein, “On Donkeys, Wine and the Uses of Textual Criticism: Septuagintal Variants in Jewish Palestine,” in *The Jews in the Hellenistic-Roman World: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern*, ed. Isaiah Gafni, Aharon Oppenheimer, and Daniel Schwartz (Jerusalem, Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History and the Historical Society of Israel, 1996), 122–23.

22. This fact was noted by Tov, “Review of G. Veltri.”

23. Saul Lieberman, “The Martyrs of Caesarea,” *Annuaire de l’Institut de Philologie et d’Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 7 (1939–44): 395. See also idem, *Texts and Studies* (New York: KTAV, 1974), 182.

24. Lieberman’s caveats have been followed with judicious results by most scholars of Talmudic philology and literature, to the point where the historical value of texts is often treated as virtually irrelevant to their study. See Shamma Friedman, “La-Aggadah Ha-Historit Ba-Talmud Ha-Bavli,” in *Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume*, ed. Shamma Friedman (New York and Jerusalem: Jewish

Theological Seminary of America, 1993). Friedman warns that “in light of the Bavli’s propensity for embellishing and expanding the tales about sages with formulas and motifs borrowed from other contexts, it is crucial to identify the original literary kernel of the passage before we determine the historical kernel” (119).

25. See Zacharias Frankel, *Über den Einfluss der palästinischen Exegese auf die alexandrinische Hermeneutik* (Westmead: Gregg International Publishers, 1972); Hanoch Albeck, *Introduction to the Mishna* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik; Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1959), 10–14.

26. See Viktor Aptowitzer, “Observations on the Criminal Law of the Jews,” *JQR* 15 (1924–25): 55–118; David Michael Feldman, *Birth Control in Jewish Law: Marital Relations, Contraception, and Abortion as Set Forth in the Classic Texts of Jewish Law with Comparative Reference to the Christian Exegetical Tradition* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1980), 257–62.

27. Tov, “Review of G. Veltri,” 183.

28. Cf. Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *LXX Legend*, 59.

29. For additional texts and discussion of the theological issues, see Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, SJLA (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 121–22, 124–34.

30. See also *Gen. Rab.* 8:8–11 (J. Theodor and C. Albeck, *Bereschit Rabba: Mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar* [in Hebrew], 3 vols. [Berlin: H. Itzkowski, 1903–23], 64). On the passage, see Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 39–41, 106.

31. Mentioned by Tov, “Rabbinic Tradition,” 85; Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 38–39, 106; Segal, *Two Powers*, 122–24.

32. Segal, *Two Powers*, 128: “Thus, we can derive a list of scriptural passages which were viewed as dangerous in the third century, contemporary with R. Simlai or R. Yohanan.”

33. See Wasserstein, “Donkeys,” 126–36 (dealing with Exod 4:20 and Num 16:15); Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *LXX Legend*, 64; and Tov, “Alterations.”

34. Cf. Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 222.

35. Mordecai Margulies, ed., *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 4 vols. (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1972), 290 (see his notes to line 7). Cf. Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 226, 232–33.

36. Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 233.

37. The sentence is, in fact, formulated in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic. Given the poor state of the Yerushalmi text, we should probably not attach too much importance to these nuances, which can easily get obscured by copyists. At any rate, it should be made clear that the Aramaisms in the Yerushalmi version cannot be explained on the same literary grounds as in the Babylonian version (as speech by a “foreigner”; see below). The fact that allusions to Ptolemy’s mother/wife are entirely absent from the *Mekhilta* version should remove any reasonable doubt about its being an explanatory gloss introduced during the amoraic era. The fact that this last sentence is worded in Aramaic, in contrast to the rest of the source, which is in Hebrew, as expected from a tannaic text (*baraita*), should not of itself be regarded as evidence that the story (or that part of it) is not original to the *baraita* in the Babylonian Talmud. In its current setting, it appears as if Aramaic is being used here as a literary device to suggest the foreignness of the speaker. This would be consistent with the use of the term “Jews” in the quotation, rather than

“Israel,” which is the normal manner for Jews to refer to themselves in rabbinic usage. “Jews,” on the other hand, usually appears in speech that is being ascribed to foreign speakers. In the Talmud, the use of the form *Yehudai* (Jews) rather than “Israel” is almost exclusively confined to speech by or to Gentiles. This pattern holds true generally, though not as consistently, in the Yerushalmi and Palestinian midrashim as well.

38. This is true, as well, of the *Mekhilta*. The unit would be out of sequence even if it were based on Deut 14:7, since it should be followed by Deut 17:3.

39. See Friedman (“La-Aggadah,” 162), who argues for the primacy of Palestinian over Babylonian versions of historical *haggadot*. The question of whether the Yerushalmi made use of *Leviticus Rabbah* or vice versa is a long-standing controversy in Talmudic scholarship. Albeck (“*Midrash Vayikra Rabba*,” in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Saul Lieberman et al. [New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945], 30–31) insisted that *Leviticus Rabbah* utilized the Yerushalmi. Margulies (*Midrash Vayikra Rabba*, Introduction XVII–XXII) refuted Albeck’s arguments, suggesting that similarities between the two collections could more profitably be ascribed to their both drawing from common sources. See also Leib Moskovitz, “The Relationship between the Yerushalmi and *Leviticus Rabbah*: A Re-examination,” in *Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, ed. World Union of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1993), 31–38. None of these studies cites our example in connection with the debates over the direction of borrowing between *Leviticus Rabbah* and the Palestinian Talmud.

40. Wasserstein, “Donkeys,” 139–41; cf. Tov, “Alterations,” 73–74, 89.

41. A useful summary of the relevant facts and scholarly discussions may be found in Segal, *Two Powers*, 129–30 n. 13.

42. Similarly, in *Leg.* 153, Philo states that the law of Moses prohibits unrestrained affronts to pagan deities because their worshippers do not know any better. See also Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.237, who justifies this prohibition by the Hebrew legislator out of reverence for the very word “god.” See Robert Goldenberg, “The Septuagint Ban on Cursing the Gods,” *JSJ* 28 (1997): 381–89.

43. Charles T. Fritsch, *Anti-Anthropomorphisms of the Greek Pentateuch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943).

44. Harry Meyer Orlinsky, “The Hebrew Vorlage of the Septuagint of the Book of Joshua,” in *Congress Volume: Rome 1968*, ed. G. W. Anderson et al., VTSup 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 187–95; idem, “The Septuagint as Holy Writ and the Philosophy of the Translators,” *HUCA* 46 (1975): 89–114; Emanuel Tov, “Theologically Motivated Exegesis Embedded in the Septuagint,” in *Translation of Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference at the Annenberg Research Institute, May 15–16, 1989*, ed. Annenberg Research Institute, JQR Supplements (Philadelphia: Annenberg Institute, 1989), 215–33.

45. See also Tov (“Theologically Motivated Exegesis”), who mentions Num 12:8; Exod 4:24; 24:10.

46. As formulated by Leonard J. Greenspoon, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Greek Bible,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 101–27.

47. There remains much that is unclear about the target audience of the Palestinian Greek Bible texts. See Greenspoon, “Dead Sea Scrolls,” 101; Wasserstein, “Donkeys,” 121–25.

48. The Greek Minor Prophets scroll from Nahal Hever provides an object lesson in the pitfalls facing those who would try to pigeonhole the data into a theory of authoritarian centralization. Recognizing that the scroll fits the paradigm of “*kaige*” translations, on account of its propensity to translate all the occurrences of the Hebrew particle *gam* (sometimes termed “proto-Theodotion” because they anticipate the literal approaches that would later typify the translations of Achilles and Theodotion), the first editor, Dominique Barthélemy, was compelled to date the scroll to the mid-first century, on the assumption that translations of this sort were “rabbinic” in character, reflecting the hermeneutical methods of Rabbi Akiva and his school, which attached midrashic importance to such minutiae (Barthélemy, “Redécouverte d’un chaînon manquant de l’histoire de la LXX,” *RB* 60 [1953]: 18–29). The link between Aquila’s translation and Rabbi Akiva’s hermeneutics is itself problematic, since rabbinic sources connect Aquila primarily to Rabbis Joshua and Eliezer, who belonged to an earlier generation and were not associated with Rabbi Akiva’s methods. This assumption underlies the conventional wisdom that “the rabbis” rejected the Septuagint because of its inadequacies for their new exegetical methods and sponsored Aquila’s new version to replace it. Unfortunately, the paleographical analysis of Barthélemy’s scroll produced a date in the first century B.C.E. or earlier, long before the alleged emergence of those rabbinic hermeneutical methods—and, for that matter, before the actual existence of “rabbis” as such. See Emanuel Tov, Robert A. Kraft, and P. J. Parsons, eds., *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Nahal Hever (8HevXIIgr): The Seiyal Collection I*, DJD 8 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

49. Another important testimony to the use of the Septuagint in first-century Palestine comes from Josephus. H. St. J. Thackeray observed that Josephus generally cited the Pentateuch from a Semitic original, whereas his quotations for the historical books derive from the Greek (*Josephus: The Man and the Historian*, The Hilda Stich Strook Lectures [New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1929], 81–89; Eugene Ulrich, *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus*, HSM 19 [Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978], 223–59). Josephus’s reliance on the Septuagint is evident not only in the biblical text that he brings but in his citations of apocryphal texts such as the *Letter of Aristeas* or the Additions to Esther. Most significant is the fact that Josephus’s Greek Bible has been identified as consistently “proto-Lucianic” in its textual tradition, reflecting a revision of the LXX and not a pure version of the Alexandrian text. Ulrich concluded that Josephus “used a text intimately related to 4QSam^a. His text was a biblical text in a tradition not aberrant but apparently more widely influential in the Second Temple period than that of the MT.”

50. References to Alexandria in the Talmud and Midrash tend either to imbue it with the legendary aura of bygone Jewish magnificence (as in the descriptions of the great Alexandrian synagogue, in *y. Sukkah* 5:1 (55a–b); *b. Sukkah* 51b) or to portray it as a stereotypical metropolis in which were blended worldly sophistication and moral corruption. See, for example, *Esth. Rab.* 1:17. The rabbinic sources do not indicate much firsthand familiarity with the city; see *b. Sanh.* 67b.

51. See Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *LXX Legend*, 64–65.

52. E. P. Sanders, “Jesus and the Kingdom: The Restoration of Israel and the New People of God,” in *Jesus, the Gospels and the Church: Essays in Honor of William R. Farmer*, ed. E. P. Sanders

(Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987), 225–39; idem, “Defending the Indefensible,” *JBL* 111 (1991): 463–77.

53. And, for that matter, more consistent than those fickle mobs that are so easily swayed back and forth in Josephus’s accounts of the Jewish wars.

54. For a summary of these issues, see James C. VanderKam, “Identity and History of the Community,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years*, ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 1999), 487–533; Émile Puech, “Immortality and Life after Death,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years after Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society in cooperation with The Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum, 2000), 512–20.

Chapter 12: Whom Do You Follow? The Jewish *Politeia* and the Maccabean Background of Josephus’s Sign Prophets

1. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (1992; corrected ed., London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1994), 279.

2. Ibid., 41, 493. Cf. William Reuben Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus: An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1956), 203; S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967), 63; Morton Smith, “Zealots and Sicarii, Their Origins and Relation,” *HTR* 64 (1971): 2; David M. Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution, 6–74 CE: A Political History Based on the Writings of Josephus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 22–23.

3. Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 288.

4. The term was coined by P. W. Barnett, “The Jewish Sign Prophets—AD 40–70—Their Intentions and Origin,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 679, and includes Theudas (*Ant.* 20.97–99), an unnamed Egyptian (*Ant.* 20.169–72; *J.W.* 2.261–63), other anonymous prophets (*Ant.* 20.167–68, 188; *J.W.* 2.258–60; 6.285–86), and possibly Jonathan the Weaver, active in Cyrene after the Jewish revolt (*J.W.* 7.438; cf. 437–50; *Life* 424–25). Although these individuals are introduced in various ways—the promised actions of Theudas and the Egyptian are not called “signs”; the impostors who pledged “wonders and signs” are usually not labeled “prophets”—*J.W.* 2.258–63 indicates that Josephus viewed them together. Cf. Rebecca Gray, *Prophetic Figures in Late Second Temple Jewish Palestine: The Evidence from Josephus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 198–99 n. 2.

5. *J.W.* 2.259; 6.285; cf. *Ant.* 20.188. On the sign prophets as independent figures, see Smith, “Zealots,” 14; Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution*, 163–64; Richard A. Horsley, “Like One of the Prophets of Old’: Two Types of Popular Prophets at the Time of Jesus,” *CBQ* 47 (1985): 460. On the sign prophets as eschatological figures, see E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 171; Gray, *Prophetic Figures*, 137, 141; Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution*, 83; Horsley, “Two Types,” 454.

6. Cf. Barnett, “Jewish Sign Prophets,” 685; Horsley, “Two Types,” 454.

7. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, “*Mōūsēs*,” *TDNT* 4:863; Howard M. Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1957), 65, 109; Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles*

of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity (London: Lutterworth, 1969), 358–59, 364–65; Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 AD*, trans. David Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 230; Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 83.

8. The Jordan River location most naturally recalls Joshua. The strongest reason for connecting Theudas to the exodus from Egypt is the description of his followers taking their possessions with them into the desert (*Ant.* 20.97; cf. *Exod.* 12:31–39; cf. Hengel, *Zealots*, 229–30).

9. Gray, *Prophetic Figures*, 125–33. In contrast to Josephus, the phrase “signs and wonders” is used frequently in the Septuagint for God’s mighty acts of deliverance at the exodus from Egypt. The three authenticating “signs” given to Moses at the burning bush, Josephus observes, were intended to confirm Moses as Israel’s deliverer (*Ant.* 2.272–84); the ten plagues, on the other hand, are attributed solely to God.

10. Cf. *Ant.* 6.110; 18.211; 19.9, 94; *J.W.* 3.404; 4.623; and esp. *J.W.* 1.377. For other prophetic *sēmeia* in Josephus, see *Ant.* 6.54, 57, 91; 8.232, 236, 347; 10.28–29.

11. *J.W.* 2.259 and *Ant.* 20.167 (the Egyptian); *Ant.* 20.188 (a certain impostor); cf. Theudas, who persuaded the people to follow him to the Jordan (*Ant.* 20.97), as well as Jonathan the Weaver (*J.W.* 7.438).

12. Gray, *Prophetic Figures*, 137: “As a religious motif, the wilderness had wider associations than the exodus and conquest events alone.” Cf. Daniel R. Schwartz, “Temple and Desert: On Religion and State in Second Temple Period Judaea,” in idem, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity*, WUNT 60 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 34–38, for examples.

13. The most likely reason why the rebels asked permission “to retire to the desert” (*J.W.* 6.351) was because the desert surrounding Jerusalem afforded a natural escape route, not because they believed God would there provide salvation (contra Gerhard Kittel, “*erēmos*,” *TDNT* 2:659; Farmer, *Maccabees*, 116; Hengel, *Zealots*, 255).

14. Cf. Gray, *Prophetic Figures*, 117; Klaus-Stefan Krieger, “Die Zeichenpropheten: eine Hilfe zum Verständnis des Wirkens Jesu?” in *Von Jesus zum Christus: christologische Studien: Festgabe für Paul Hoffmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Rudolf Hoppe and Ulrich Busse (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 186.

15. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Josephus are taken from H. St. J. Thackeray, Ralph Marcus, Allen Wikgren, and L. H. Feldman, *Josephus*, 10 vols., LCL (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926–65), except quotations of *Antiquities* books 1–4, which are taken from Louis H. Feldman, *Judean Antiquities 1–4*, vol. 3 of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

16. Cf. Krieger, “Zeichenpropheten,” 184; *J.W.* 6.286. Hengel (*Zealots*, 114–15) and Barnett (“Sign Prophets,” 688; cf. 682–83) suggest that “signs of freedom” (*sēmeia eleutherias*) (*J.W.* 2.259) recalls a related expression (*tōn . . . pros tēn eleutherian autois sēmeiōn gegonotōn*) applied to Moses in *Ant.* 2.327. This suggestion overlooks the fact that the word “sign” is combined with “freedom” most frequently in a context that anticipates the Jewish revolt, but has no relation to the exodus at all. In Josephus’s lengthy account concerning the assassination of the emperor Gaius, a password of freedom (*sēmeion eleutherias*) ironically portends Gaius’s murder (*Ant.* 19.54, 186, 188).