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978-1-108-00758-0 - An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek: With an
Appendix Containing the Letter of Aristeas

Henry Barclay Swete

Excerpt

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PART I.

*THE HISTORY OF THE GREEK OLD TESTAMENT
AND OF ITS TRANSMISSION.*

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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE ALEXANDRIAN GREEK VERSION.

I. A Greek version of any portion of the Old Testament presupposes intercourse between Israel and a Greek-speaking people. So long as the Hebrew race maintained its isolation, no occasion arose for the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into a foreign tongue. As far as regards the countries west of Palestine, this isolation continued until the age of Alexander¹; it is therefore improbable that any Greek version of the Scriptures existed there before that era. Among the Alexandrian Jews of the second century before Christ there was a vague belief that Plato and other Greek philosophical writers were indebted for some of their teaching to a source of this kind². Thus Aristobulus (*ap. Clem. Al. Strom.* i. 22; cf. *Eus. præp. ev.* xiii. 12) writes: *κατηκολούθηκε δὲ καὶ ὁ Πλάτων τῆ καθ'*

¹ Individual cases, such as that of the Jew mentioned by Clearchus (*ap. Jos. c. Ap.* i. 22), who was *Ἑλληνικὸς οὐ τῆ διαλέκτῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆ ψυχῆ*, are exceptions to a general rule. How numerous and prosperous were the Jewish colonies in Asia Minor at a later period appears from the Acts of the Apostles; see also Ramsay, *Phrygia* i. ii. p. 667 ff.

² This belief was inherited by the Christian school of Alexandria; see *Clem. Strom.* v. 29, *Orig. c. Cels.* iv. 39, vi. 19; and cf. *Lact. inst.* iv. 2.

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ἡμᾶς νομοθεσίᾳ, καὶ φανερός ἐστι περιεργασάμενος ἕκαστα τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ λεγομένων. διηρμήνευται δὲ πρὸ Δημητρίου ὑφ' ἐτέρου¹, πρὸ τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ Περσῶν επικρατήσεως, τὰ τε κατὰ τὴν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐξαγωγήν τῶν Ἑβραίων τῶν ἡμετέρων πολιτῶν καὶ ἡ τῶν γεγονότων ἀπάντων αὐτοῖς ἐπιφάνεια καὶ κράτησις τῆς χώρας καὶ τῆς ὅλης νομοθεσίας ἐπεξήγησις—words which seem to imply the existence before B.C. 400 of a translation which included at least the Books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. A similar claim has been found in the statement attributed by Pseudo-Aristeas to Demetrius of Phalerum: τοῦ νόμου τῶν Ἰουδαίων βιβλία... οὐχ ὡς ὑπάρχει σεσήμανται, καθὼς ὑπὸ τῶν εἰδόντων προσαναφέρεται². But no fragments of these early translations have been produced, and it is more than probable that the story arose out of a desire on the part of the Hellenistic Jews to find a Hebrew origin for the best products of Greek thought³.

2. The earliest and most important of the extant Greek versions of the Old Testament was an offspring of the 'Greek Dispersion' (ἡ διασπορὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων, Jo. vii. 35), which began with the conquests of Alexander the Great.

The Hebrew Prophets foresaw that it was the destiny of their race to be scattered over the face of the world (Deut. xxviii. 25, xxx. 4, Jer. xv. 4, xxxiv. 17). The word *διασπορά* (O.L. *dispersio*) employed by the Greek translators in these and similar passages (cf. 2 Esdr. xi. 9, Ps. cxxxviii. (cxxxix.) tit. (codd. A^a T), cxlvi. (cxlvii.) 2, Judith v. 19, Isa. xlix. 6, Jer. xiii. 14 (cod. N*), Dan. xii. 2 (LXX.), 2 Macc. i. 27) became the technical Greek term for Jewish communities in foreign lands, whether planted there by forcible deportation, or

¹ δι' ἐτέρων, Eus.

² See Tischendorf, *V. T. Gr.* (1879) *prolegg.* p. xiii. n.

³ Cf. Walton (ed. Wrangham), p. 18; Frankel, *Vorstudien*, p. 14 f.; Buhl, *Kanon u. Text*, p. 108 f.

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by their own free agency (Jo. vii. 35, Jas. i. 1, 1 Pet. i. 1)¹. Such settlements were at first compulsory, and limited to countries east of Palestine. Between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. the bulk of the population of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms was swept away by Assyrian and Babylonian conquerors (2 Kings xvii. 6, xxiv. 14 ff., xxv. 11 f., 21 f.). A part of the Babylonian captivity returned (Ezra i. ii.), but Babylonia and Mesopotamia continued to be the home of a large body of Jewish settlers (Tob. i. 14 ff., 4 Esdr. xiii. 39 ff., Philo *ad Cai.* 36, Acts ii. 9, Joseph. *Ant.* xi. 5. 2, xv. 3. 1, xviii. 9. 1 ff.). This 'Eastern' Dispersion need not detain us here. No Biblical version in the stricter sense² had its origin in Babylonia; there, as in Palestine, the services of the synagogue interpreter (מְתוּמָן) sufficed for the rendering of the lections into Aramaic, and no desire was manifested on the part of the Gentile population to make themselves acquainted with the Hebrew scriptures. It was among the Jews who were brought into relation with Hellenic culture that the necessity arose for a written translation of the books of the canon. Egypt was the earliest home of the Hellenistic Jew, and it was on Egyptian soil that the earliest Greek version of the Old Testament was begun.

3. Long before the time of Alexander Egypt possessed the nucleus of a Jewish colony. Shashanq, the Shishak of 1 K. xiv. 25 f., 2 Chr. xii. 2 f., who invaded Palestine³ in the tenth century B.C., may have carried into Egypt captives or hostages from the conquered cities whose names still appear upon the

¹ The later Hebrew term was גְּלוּת, 'exile'; see Dr Hort on 1 Pet. *l. c.*

² The 'Babylonian' Targum is of Palestinian origin (Buhl, p. 173). On early Aramaic translations arising out of the synagogue interpretations, see *ib.*, p. 168 f.; and for the traditional account of the origin of the Syriac O. T. see Nestle, *Urtext u. Übersetzungen der Bibel* (Leipzig, 1897), p. 229.

³ *Authority and Archaeology*, p. 87 f.

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walls of the temple at Karnak. Isaiah (xix. 19 f.) foresaw¹ that a time must come when the religious influence of Israel would make itself felt on the banks of the Nile, while he endeavoured to check the policy which led Judah to seek refuge from Assyrian aggression in an Egyptian alliance (xxx. 1 ff.). Jewish mercenaries are said to have fought in the expedition of Psammetichus I. against Ethiopia *c.* B.C. 650 (cf. Ps.-Arist.: *ἐτέρων ξυμμαχιῶν ἐξαπεσταλμένων πρὸς τὸν τῶν Αἰθιοπίων βασιλέα μάχεσθαι σὺν Ψαμμιτιχῷ*). The panic which followed the murder of Gedaliah drove a host of Jewish fugitives to Egypt, where they settled at Migdol (Μάγδωλος), Tahpanhes (Ταφνιάς = Δάφνη)², Noph (Memphis), and Pathros (Παθούρη)³, i.e. throughout the Delta, and even in Upper Egypt; and the descendants of those who survived were replenished, if we may believe Pseudo-Aristeas, by others who entered Egypt during the Persian period (*ἤδη μὲν καὶ πρότερον ἰκανῶν εἰσεληλυθότων σὺν τῷ Πέρσῃ*). These earlier settlers were probably among the first to benefit by Alexander's policy, and may have been partly hellenised before his birth.

4. Alexander's victory at Issos in B.C. 333 opened the gate of Syria to the conqueror. In the next year he received the submission of Tyre and Gaza and, according to Josephus, was on the point of marching upon Jerusalem when the statesmanship of the High Priest turned him from his purpose⁴. Whether the main features of this story be accepted or not, it is certain that the subsequent policy of Alexander was favourable to the Jews. His genius discovered in the Jewish

¹ The passage is thought by some scholars to belong to the Ptolemaean age; see Cheyne, *Intr. to Isaiah*, p. 105.

² Cf. *Authority and Archaeology*, p. 107.

³ Jer. li. = xliv. 1 ff. *ἅπασιν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν ἐν γῆ Αἰγύπτου κτλ.* Many of these refugees, however, were afterwards taken prisoners by Nebuchadnezzar and transported to Babylon (Joseph. *ant.* x. 9. 7).

⁴ *Ant.* xi. 8. 4 f. The story is rejected by Ewald and Grätz, and the details are doubtless unhistorical: cf. Droysen, *l'histoire de l'Hellenisme*, i. p. 300.

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people an instrument well fitted to assist him in carrying out his purpose of drawing East and West together. Jews served in his army (Hecataeus *ap.* Joseph. *c. Ap.* i. 22 ἔτι γε μὴν ὄτι καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τῷ βασιλεῖ συνεστρατεύσαντο καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα τοῖς διαδόχοις αὐτοῦ μεμαρτύρηκεν); and such was his sense of their loyalty and courage that when Alexandria was founded (B.C. 332), although the design of the conqueror was to erect a monument to himself which should be essentially Greek¹, he not only assigned a place in his new city to Jewish colonists, but admitted them to full citizenship.

Joseph. *ant.* xix. 5. 2 ἐπιγνοὺς ἀνέκαθεν τοὺς ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ Ἰουδαίους... ἰσῆς πολιτείας παρὰ τῶν βασιλέων τετευχότας: *c. Ap.* ii. 4 οὐ γὰρ ἀπορία γε τῶν οἰκησόντων τὴν μετὰ σπουδῆς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κτιζομένην Ἀλέξανδρος τῶν ἡμετέρων τινὰς ἐκεῖ συνήθροισεν, ἀλλὰ πάντας δοκιμάζων ἐπιμελῶς ἀρετῆς καὶ πίστεως τοῦτο τοῖς ἡμετέροις τὸ γέρας ἔδωκεν. *B. J.* ii. 18. 7 χρησάμενος προθυμοτάτοις κατὰ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων Ἰουδαίους Ἀλέξανδρος γέρας τῆς συμμαχίας ἔδωκεν τὸ μοτοικεῖν κατὰ τὴν πόλιν ἐξ ἴσου μοίρας πρὸς τοὺς Ἕλληνας.

Mommsen indeed (*Provinces*, E. T., p. 162 n.) expresses a doubt whether the grant of citizenship² was made before the time of Ptolemy I., but in the absence of any direct evidence to the contrary the repeated statement of Josephus justifies the belief that it originated with Alexander³.

5. The premature death of Alexander (B.C. 323) wrecked his larger scheme, but the Jewish colony at Alexandria continued to flourish under the Ptolemies, who succeeded to the government of Egypt.

It may be convenient to place here for reference the names and dates of the earlier Ptolemies. I. Lagi, or Soter (B.C. 322—285). II. Philadelphus (B.C. 285—247). III. Euergetes I. (B.C. 247—222). IV. Philopator I. (B.C. 222—205). V. Epiphanes

¹ Plutarch *Alex.* 26 ἐβούλετο πόλιν μεγάλην καὶ πολυάνθρωπον Ἑλληνίδα συνοικίας ἐπάνωμον ἑαυτοῦ καταλιπεῖν.

² See Mahaffy, *Empire of the Ptolemies*, p. 86.

³ On the relations in which the Jews stood to Alexander and his successors see Wellhausen, *Isr. u. jüd. Geschichte*, c. xvi.

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(B.C. 205—182). VI. Eupator (B.C. 182). VII. Philometor (B.C. 182—146). VIII. Philopator II. (B.C. 146). IX. Euergetes II., also known as Physkon (B.C. 146—117). Of the brief reigns of Eupator and the younger Philopator nothing is known.

The first Ptolemy added considerably to the Jewish population of Alexandria. His expeditions to Palestine and capture of Jerusalem placed in his hands a large number of Jewish and Samaritan captives, and these were conveyed to Alexandria, where many of them acquired civic rights. The report of the King's liberality towards his captives, and of their prosperity in Egypt, attracted other Palestinians to Alexandria, and many came thither as voluntary settlers.

Joseph. *ant.* xii. 1. Ἴ ὁ δὲ Πτολεμαῖος πολλοὺς αἰχμαλώτους λαβὼν ἀπὸ τε τῆς ὀρεινῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ τῶν περὶ Ἱεροσόλυμα τόπων καὶ τῆς Σαμαρείτιδος καὶ τῶν ἐν Γαριζείν, κατέφισειν ἅπαντας εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἀγαγών· ἐπεγνωκὼς δὲ τοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων περὶ τὴν τῶν ὄρκων φυλακὴν καὶ τὰς πίστεις βεβαιοτάτους ὑπάρχοντας . . πολλοὺς αὐτῶν τοῖς Μακεδόσιν ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ποιήσας ἰσοπολίτας· οὐκ ὀλίγοι δὲ οὐδὲ τῶν ἄλλων Ἰουδαίων εἰς τὴν Αἴγυπτον παρεγίνοντο, τῆς τε ἀρετῆς τῶν τόπων αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς τοῦ Πτολεμαίου φιλοτιμίας προκαλουμένης.

A separate quarter of the city was assigned to the colony (Strabo *ap.* Joseph. *ant.* xiv. 7. 2 τῆς Ἀλεξανδρείας πόλεως ἀφώρισται μέγα μέρος τῷ ἔθνει τούτῳ¹); it lay in the north-east of Alexandria, along the shore, near the royal palace². Here the Jews lived under their own ethnarch³, who exercised judicial authority in all cases between Jew and Jew. They were permitted to follow their own religion and observe their national customs without molestation. Synagogues sprang up not only in the Jewish quarter, but at a later time in every part of the city

¹ In Philo's time the Jews occupied two districts out of five (*in Flacc.* 8).

² Droysen, iii. p. 59.

³ Strabo, *ap.* Jos. *ant.* xiv. 7. 2; cf. Schürer *Gesch. d. jüd. Volkes*³, iii. 40; Lumbroso, *Recherches*, p. 218; Droysen, iii. p. 40 n. On the ἀλαβάρχη (ἀραβάρχη) who is sometimes identified with the ethnarch see Schürer iii. 88.

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(Philo *ad Cai.* 20, in *Flacc.* 6¹). In the time of Philometor the Jews stood so high in the royal favour that they were suffered to convert a disused Egyptian temple at Leontopolis into a *replica* of the Temple at Jerusalem, and the Jewish rite was celebrated there until after the fall of the Holy City, when the Romans put a stop to it (Joseph. *ant.* xii. 9. 7, xiii. 3. 1, *B. J.* vii. 10. 4)². Under these circumstances it is not surprising that shortly after the Christian era the Jewish colony in Egypt exceeded a million, constituting an eighth part of the population (Philo in *Flacc.* 6, Joseph. *c. Ap.* ii. 4). In the Fayûm villages were founded by Jews, and they lived on equal terms with the Greeks³. Nor were the Jewish settlers on the African coast limited to the Delta or to Egypt. A daughter colony was planted in Cyrenaica by the first Ptolemy, and at Cyrene as at Alexandria the Jews formed an important section of the community. The Jew of Cyrene meets us already in the days of the Maccabees (1 Macc. xv. 23, 2 Macc. ii. 23), and he was a familiar figure at Jerusalem in the Apostolic age (Mt. xxvii. 32, Acts ii. 10, vi. 9⁴, xi. 20, xiii. 1; cf. Strabo *ap.* Joseph. *ant.* xiv. 7. 2).

6. The Jews of the Dispersion everywhere retained their religion and their loyalty to national institutions. In each of these settlements among Gentile peoples the Holy City possessed a daughter, whose attachment to her was not less strong than that of her children at home. "Jerusalem," in the words of Agrippa⁵, "was the mother city, not of a single country, but of most of the countries of the world, through the

¹ On the magnificence of the principal synagogue see Edersheim, *History of the Jewish Nation* (ed. White), p. 67.

² A temporary check seems to have been sustained by the Alexandrian Jews under Philopator; see 3 Macc. ii. 31, and cf. Mahaffy, p. 270.

³ See Mahaffy, *Empire, &c.*, p. 86 n.; cf. Philo *de sept.* 6.

⁴ Where Blass (*Philology of the Gospels*, p. 69 f.) proposes to read *Λιβυστινῶν* for *Λιβηρτινῶν*.

⁵ Philo *ad Cai.* 36.

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colonies which she sent forth at various times.' No colony was more dutiful than the Alexandrian. The possession of a local sanctuary at Leontopolis did not weaken its devotion to the temple at Jerusalem¹; pilgrimages were still made to Jerusalem at the great festivals (Philo *ap.* Eus. *praep.* *ev.* viii. 14. 64; cf. Acts ii. 10); the Temple tribute was collected in Egypt with no less punctuality than in Palestine (Philo *de monarch.* ii. 3). But it was impossible for Jews who for generations spent their lives and carried on their business in Greek towns to retain their Semitic speech. In Palestine after the Return, Aramaic gradually took the place of Hebrew in ordinary intercourse, and after the time of Alexander Greek became to some extent a rival of Aramaic. In Alexandria a knowledge of Greek was not a mere luxury but a necessity of common life². If it was not required by the State as a condition of citizenship³, yet self-interest compelled the inhabitants of a Greek capital to acquire the language of the markets and the Court. A generation or two may have sufficed to accustom the Alexandrian Jews to the use of the Greek tongue. The Jewish settlers in Lower Egypt who were there at the coming of Alexander had probably gained some knowledge of Greek before the founding of his new city⁴; and the children of Alexander's mercenaries, as well as many of the immigrants from Palestine in the days of Soter, may well have been practically bilingual. Every year of residence in Alexandria would increase their familiarity with Greek and weaken their hold upon the sacred tongue⁵. Any prejudice

¹ See Schürer³, iii. 97 ff.

² Droysen, iii. p. 35.

³ Mommsen, *Provinces*, ii. p. 163 f. On the whole question see Hody, *de Bibl. textibus*, p. 224 f.; Caspari, *Quellen zur Gesch. d. Taufsymbols*, iii. p. 268 ff.; Deissmann, *Bibelstudien*, p. 61 ff.; Kennedy, *Sources of N. T. Gk.*, p. 21 ff.

⁴ There was a large Greek settlement on the Pelusiac arm of the Nile at an early period; see Herod. ii. 163.

⁵ Cf. Streane, *Double Text of Jeremiah*, p. 11 f.

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which might have existed against the use of a foreign language would speedily disappear under a rule which secured full liberty in worship and faith. The adoption of the Greek tongue was a tribute gladly paid by the Alexandrian Jews to the great Gentile community which sheltered and cherished them.

But the Greek which the Jews of Alexandria learnt to speak was neither the literary language employed by the scholars of the Museum, nor the artificial imitation of it affected by Hellenistic writers of the second and first centuries B.C.¹ It was based on the *patois* of the Alexandrian streets and markets—a mixture, as we may suppose, of the ancient spoken tongue of Hellas with elements gathered from Macedonia, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Libya. Into this hybrid speech the Jewish colony would infuse, when it became their usual organ of communication, a strong colouring of Semitic thought, and not a few reminiscences of Hebrew or Aramaic lexicography and grammar. Such at any rate is the monument of Jewish-Egyptian Greek which survives in the earlier books of the so-called Septuagint.

7. The ‘Septuagint²’ or the Greek version of the Old Testament which was on the whole the work of Alexandrian Jews, is, written in full, the *Interpretatio septuaginta virorum* or *seniorum*, i.e. the translation of which the first instalment was attributed by Alexandrian tradition to seventy or seventy-two Jewish elders. In the most ancient Greek MSS. of the Old

¹ Cf. Thiersch *de Pent. vers. Alex.*, p. 65 ff.; Mahaffy, *Greek life and thought*, p. 196 f.; Kennedy, *Sources of N. T. Greek*, p. 18 ff. The remarks of Hatch (*Essays*, p. 10 ff.) are less satisfactory.

² Irenaeus (iii. 21. 3) speaks of the *seniorum interpretatio*; Tertullian (*Apol.* 18) of the *septuaginta et duo interpretes*; Jerome, of the *LXX. interpretes*, or *translatores* (*praef. in Esdr.*, *Isai.*), *LXX. editio* (*praef. in Job*, *ep. ad Pammach.*), *editio LXX.* (*praef. in Paralipp.*). Augustine (cited by Nestle, *Urtext*, p. 62) remarks: “interpretatio ista ut *Septuaginta* vocetur iam obtinuit consuetudo.”