

## Introducing the Septuagint

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Until recently, anyone wishing to begin study of the Greek translation of the Bible, the Septuagint, had to resort to occasionally dated and often highly technical studies. Throughout most of the twentieth century the prime introduction remained that of Swete (1900), which has justly had an impact on the field, such that many subsequent introductions have seen themselves as a supplement to that work. That we are now witnessing an explosion in introductions and handbooks to the Septuagint reflects the progress in the subject, with an ever greater number of scholars working in the area. The interest of the non-specialist and student alike has also grown, reflected in the number of projects to translate the Septuagint into various European languages as well as into Japanese. Faced with such an increase in interest, and looking to address diverse audiences, scholars over the past twenty five years have sought to present the complex and wide-ranging issues encountered in the study of the Septuagint. Their efforts reflect the changing focuses of the subject and their target audiences.

From the outset, it is worth noting that recent publications have not made Swete's classic *Introduction* dispensable. Its lucidity, depth and range of subjects covered have ensured its lasting value. The topics discussed in the book both reflect the interest in the Septuagint at the time and continue to be central issues in the scholarship. The book begins with the history and

transmission of the text, starting from the legends of its translation and proceeding through the later versions, Origen's hexapla, the manuscripts and the modern printed versions. A second shorter section considers the language and its translation technique. The revised edition of 1914 was able to supplement this section on the language with references and evidence from the newly published *Grammar* of H. St John Thackeray (1909). Thackeray himself, by profession a civil servant and undoubtedly endowed with an industrious zeal and learning, provided in the revision of 1914 an introduction to and edition of the Greek text of the *Letter of Aristeas*. This drew attention to the importance of the legend of the origins of the translation contained in *Aristeas* (that the translation of the Torah was sanctioned by Ptolemy so that he could have all the literature of his subjects in the Alexandrian library). That it is a pseudonymous and legendary account was recognized by Swete, who nonetheless acknowledged the likelihood that the translation was made in Alexandria from Hebrew scrolls from Jerusalem and out of a local Jewish need but with royal sanction. The inclusion of *Aristeas* from now on became an understandable standard in introductions to the Septuagint. A third part of Swete's *Introduction* looked at the use of the Septuagint, from the "non-Christian Hellenists" (notably Philo and Josephus) to the New Testament writers and early Christian writers. This concluded with a discussion of the use of the Greek versions for biblical studies and the textual condition of the Septuagint, especially given its use in Christian writers. Such recognition of the importance of the reception of the text has continued to grow in recent years. Every section of Swete's work is supported by ample illustrations, such as the demonstration of Aquila's style through parallel columns of LXX and Aquila (pp. 35–38) or the listing of the distinct

lexical features found in certain apocryphal books (pp. 310–13), and this allows even the beginner to gain an appreciation of the issues involved.

Ease of access for the beginner is not an attribute one would readily apply to Jellicoe's companion volume to Swete. Jellicoe's stated aim (1968, vi) was very much to bring some of Swete's discussions up to date, and his focus is seen in his detailed discussion of recent scholarly theories. The book opens with a substantial discussion of the *Letter of Aristeas*, other ancient traditions about the origins of the Septuagint, and current theories on the origins. He then provides the most detailed discussion at that time of the later Greek versions, the so-called Jewish "revisions" or "recensions". Whilst this repeats much of what is to be found in Swete, as did the next section on manuscripts and other ancient versions, it is a much fuller discussion than his predecessor's. The language and character of the translation is treated last, and is somewhat brief. A bibliography, arranged by topic, listed literature published since 1900 (the date of the publication of the first edition of Swete), although this has now been superseded (Brock *et al.* 1977; Dogniez 1995). One of the values in Jellicoe's volume is its summary of the scholarship and extensive discussion of manuscripts and versions. The content and scope, however, remained little changed from Swete, and it reflected little advance on the subject.

Next in the line of succession came Fernández-Marcos's *Introducción* (1979). Fernández-Marcos recognized his debt to Swete and Jellicoe, and saw his work too as supplementary to its predecessors. An expanded second edition has been welcomed (1998), and its translation into English (2000) will undoubtedly ensure its appreciation by a wider audience. The use of the plural *las versiones griegas* in the title signals the new emphasis brought by Fernández-Marcos. It is a recognition that there are multiple translations of

the Bible into Greek, beginning from early antiquity up to the modern era. Unusually, the book begins with the position of biblical Greek within *koine*, highlighting the need for further research in this area, the possibility of dialects (or registers) within *koine*, and the origins of features known from modern Greek in *koine*. Fernández-Marcos proceeds to consider the translation technique, noting the unprecedented fact of producing a translation, and only then (in Part 2) turns to the question of origins according to the ancient legends and modern theories. The 'versions' are discussed in depth in two sections: one on the Septuagint in Jewish tradition and one in Christian tradition. These are the largest of the two sections of the book, and importantly highlight the continuance of the Greek versions, if not the Septuagint proper, within Judaism. In contrast to other introductions, Fernández-Marcos here discusses the Genizah Greek fragments, the thirteenth-century *Graecus Venetus* (also in Swete), and the Constantinople Pentateuch (1547), each continuing the translation tradition of Aquila from antiquity. He reflects on these survivals of the Hellenistic Jewish tradition so often ignored by studies on the Greek Bible. After discussing the tradition of the Greek Bible in Christianity, Fernández-Marcos concludes with the role of the Septuagint in Christian origins, not only, as his predecessors, looking at the Septuagint in the New Testament and its influence on the early Church Fathers, but also discussing "the religion of the Septuagint and Hellenism". The Septuagint is recognised as an important religious document of Hellenistic Judaism, and some descriptions by Graeco-Roman writers of Jews could be accounted for in the light of the Septuagint text. The latter half of the twentieth century saw greater emphasis being placed on the religious content of the Septuagint, and it is first reflected here in introductions, but continues to play a part in subsequent studies.

Some Introductions have naturally arisen as ancillae to larger projects. To accompany the series of translations and commentaries on the Septuagint in French, 'La Bible d'Alexandrie', a summary of scholarship was compiled by Dorival *et al.* (1988) that places special emphasis (as the commentaries) on the formative influence of the Greek text on the early church. *La Bible grecque des Septante* remains, nonetheless, the most useful reference work and introduction to the current state of the question on many issues, even if it is already some years old. Once more the book describes first the situation of Jews in Egypt and considers the various legends about the translation in the light of scholarly theories on its origins. They conclude that a multiple explanation of origins, namely an official enterprise that also arose from the needs of the Jewish community and a liturgical necessity, is not satisfactory. Instead, they prefer to see a royal initiative that only secondarily fulfilled the needs of the community. In this they are not far from Swete's conclusions, although making a clear distinction between the initiative and the need. An important new element introduced in this volume is a detailed discussion of the provenance and dates of each of the translated books. Whilst the authors' conclusions can only be provisional, they set out clearly the possible criteria for judging the setting of a translation and propose a chronology of the books. This represents an attempt to present the text within its historical setting as the prime document of the "judaïsme hellénistique" of their subtitle. The later 'recensions', the language (including the debate over a distinctive Jewish Greek) and the exegetical content all play a part in revealing the place of the text within ancient Judaism. But the story is taken further. The decline in the importance ascribed to the Septuagint proper amongst Jews in the second century CE is signalled by the debate in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, but the text continued in use amongst Christians. A third section of the

volume traces the influence of the Septuagint on Christian writers, and how the vocabulary and theological implications of passages are used by them. Many important details are covered in the book, all written with clarity and a balance of assessment, but probably its lasting value is the place it has given to the Septuagint as a document of Hellenistic Judaism and as the formative text of the early Church.

Siegert's *Einführung* (2001) is presented as a practical handbook for Septuagint study, and coincides with the production of a translation of and brief commentary on the Septuagint by a team of German scholars. Siegert naturally considers the origins, nature of the translation, textual traditions and the formation of the biblical canon. However, a large part of his book is devoted to the translation technique (including poetical and metrical features), the vocabulary and theology. In this he too presents the Septuagint much more as a witness to the ideas of Hellenistic Judaism and the formative vocabulary for Christianity.

Introductions are not to be restricted to complete books alone; chapters in volumes can serve the same purpose. Tov has contributed chapters to a number of handbooks and dictionaries, but his most substantial survey is that published in 1987. Whilst containing many of the traditional subjects (name, date, origin, later 'recensions', useful tools) he concentrates on the Septuagint as an important text witness. This is an understandable focus given Tov's work on the Qumran texts and his authoring *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint* (1997), and few could have written on this aspect better. Tov emphasises that the Septuagint is the most important complete source for the text of the Bible before the Masoretes, supplemented now by the discoveries from Qumran. In drawing attention to the value of the Septuagint for biblical studies it is naturally this textual aspect that comes out. The reader is

recommended Septuagint study as a means of evaluating the hypothetical Hebrew *Vorlage*, for literary critical analysis, and for investigating evidence of Hebrew phonology. Tov does, nonetheless, have a section on the exegetical character of the translation, noting such features as midrashic exegesis, theological interpretation, etymological renderings, actualizations and allusions to Greek mythology. The contribution of the Septuagint to Hellenistic Judaism is thereby acknowledged. An abbreviated and slightly modified version of Tov's survey was published in English in 1988. As the English version is a significantly shorter piece, some of the discussions appear slightly trivial and the difficulties of writing on a large subject in limited words are apparent. The importance of the Septuagint for scholarship, for example, is reduced to less than half a page, where for biblical studies its only significance is given to be its value as a source for the Hebrew *Vorlage*. Even so, in this English version there are some innovations from the German, and greater attention is given to translation technique and the language of the Septuagint (for a full study of translation technique, see Oloffson 1990).

In another chapter in a larger work, textual issues are also at the forefront (Botte & Bogaert 1993). The traditional ground is first covered, looking at origins, content, textual history, language and the later recensions and Christian editors. But the second half of the entry, authored by Bogaert alone, a survey by biblical book is given of the textual history and manuscripts, updating the information provided in the older critical editions. New papyrological discoveries of the Septuagint are listed at the end, providing a resource of information not easily accessible elsewhere.

All the works discussed so far (with the possible exception of Tov 1988) can be considered scholarly introductions, summarising the *status quaestionis* of issues for those already with a fair knowledge of the subject. They do not

address the needs of the beginning student, for whom the complexities of the textual history and the uncertainty over many questions will be daunting. Accordingly, in recent years we have begun to see the publication of books aimed at the beginner, who might only be in the early stages of biblical study or of learning Greek. Cimosà's *Guida* (1995) contains a very brief survey (13 pages) of the prime issues in Septuagint study, including origins, legends, 'recensions', theology and its role in the New Testament. This is then followed by a helpful summary by biblical book of the key features and text editions of many of the books. The larger second part is devoted to a summary of key linguistic and lexical features of the Greek, which is helpfully supported by short reading passages, a service rendered too by Conybeare & Stock (1905) with the added advantage here of translations and brief commentary to each text. The aim of this *Guida* is clearly to assist the student in beginning to read the Septuagint text in Greek. The introduction by Jobes & Silva (2000) aims, on the other hand, to provide a summary and clear explanation for students of the whole range of issues involved in Septuagint studies. For those without prior knowledge, this is an excellent place to begin, and complex issues such as the recensional versions and the manuscript traditions are clarified through the use of charts and of photographs of the manuscripts themselves. Although aimed at students, current debates and issues are not neglected. An important chapter on the "theological development in the Hellenistic age" continues the current interest in the text as a witness to Jewish Greek thought. It is primarily a survey of some recent work, with an indication of some of the difficulties involved in identifying the views of the translators, but it is an important introduction for students to the issues. The weakness in the study is its tendency to present the Septuagint as a Christian document from the first

century onwards (see Aitken 2002) and that it does not take into account the work of Fernández-Marcos, amongst others.

The most recent student introduction is that of Dines (2004). This also includes a helpful, although necessarily very brief, summary of the nature of the translations of each book. The topic of Septuagint origins is as usual discussed, but with the evidence of Aristeas and Aristoboulos being judged equally and compared. Dines appears to favour somewhat Aristoboulos's interest in the law as an impetus for the translation. Issues of texts, 'recensions' manuscripts and language are also included, and the reception of the Septuagint in Christianity is taken up to the fifth century. On the Jewish side, the evidence the Septuagint attests to of early biblical interpretation and its influence on the Hellenistic Jewish authors are noted. In its brevity, the introduction is able to cover many of the main issues, and its discussion of origins and its presentation of the features of each book are particularly useful.

It can be seen from this survey that issues of the text of the Septuagint and its relation to the supposed Hebrew *Vorlage* are important themes in the scholarship (e.g. Tov 1987; Botte & Bogaert 1993). But increasingly important have become the topics of the Septuagint as a Hellenistic Jewish document (e.g. Fernández-Marcos 1979/1998; Dorival *et al.* 1988) and as a source of Jewish thought (e.g. Jobes & Silva 2000; Siegert 2001). Reception history has also become a central issue (e.g. Fernández-Marcos 1979/1998; Dines 2004), although it could already be found in Swete. Within Christian tradition the reception has recently been explored by Hengel & Schwemer (1994), and in the book compiled by Mondésert (1984). In the latter we find topics that still require further attention, notably in the reprint of M. Simon's essay 'The Bible in the earliest controversies between Jews and Christians' and in D. Feissel's

'The Bible in Greek inscriptions'. As reception history has become more popular, the evidence still remains to be fully investigated, and, as already noted, the use of the Septuagint and other Greek versions in Judaism (on which see especially Fernández-Marcos 1979/1998) is often overlooked. The interest in the Septuagint within the New Testament has also been addressed in McLay's introduction (2003) that responds to the lack of reference to the Septuagint in New Testaments introductions and handbooks. In many ways McLay provides an introduction to analysing translation technique and the possible textual forms attested in the New Testament. It demonstrates the specialized focus that an introduction might take.

In the works discussed it has been noted how some present a survey of characteristics of each biblical book separately, either with focus on the textual evidence (Bogaert 1993) or in a brief summary of features (Cimosa 1995; Dines 2004). A larger-scale handbook that allows easy access to the lines of scholarship on each book is a desideratum. Further consideration of internal issues in the translations might also contribute to the debate on the origins and original purpose of the Septuagint, without having to rely on the ancient legends. The need for establishing a correct text of the Septuagint has been proposed as one explanation for a legend on the translation in Alexandria (Honigman 2003), but this needs to be seen in the light of what the text can tell us about itself. Certainly, one can predict that as the field expands and more people are introduced to it through these works we will learn more about the individual characteristics of the translations. Attention to external features of manuscripts, text-types and origins will be increasingly supplemented by discussions of the content and thought in the translations and their contribution to Jewish Greek studies.

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