

REVIEWS • RESENSIES

Tessa Rajak, *Translation and Survival. The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi +380. \$140. ISBN 978-0-19-955867-4.

This monograph by Tessa Rajak has its origins in six Grinfield lectures (1995-96) on the Septuagint, which dealt with the original, Old Greek texts and their later reception, as well as *de novo* writings. The intention of these lectures was to relate two fields of research that have unfortunately remained largely separate in the past: the study of Hellenistic Judaism and the study of the Greek Bible. The book's conclusion was construed in the context of a funded research project entitled 'Greek Bible in the Greco-Roman world', a field to which Rajak has contributed in many publications (e.g. as editor of *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007).

As the title indicates, the central theme of the book is cultural adaptation in diasporic Jewry (p. vi). In essence, it is a literary and social study about translators and the reception of their texts. The theme is set out in nine chapters, beginning with the origins of the Septuagint (the book of Aristeas) and ending with the LXX between Jews and Christians.

As a specialist in Hellenism in the Greco-Roman world, the author has many innovative views to offer on the Greek Bible in the ancient Jewish diaspora. The first is terminological, namely that the term 'Septuagint' is an unsuitable one to describe the Jewish Bible in Greek. She is, of course, correct since this term originally referred only to the Pentateuch.

The second innovative perspective concerns the provenance of Septuagintal books. She is of the opinion that not all of those books outside of the Pentateuch were translated in Alexandria. She regards Syria or even one of the cities in Asia Minor as possible locations (p. 3). See also her view that some Septuagint versions could have originated in the Judaeian desert (p. 94). I agree that all of these books did not originate in Alexandria; I think the book of Proverbs was in fact translated in Jerusalem in the wake of the Antiochian revolution, *circa* 150 BCE. Other examples of a Palestinian provenance are the LXX of Esther, Ruth and Ecclesiastes. This naturally does not mean that she undervalues the impact of Alexandria on the Septuagint – a whole chapter 'Going Greek: Culture and Power in Ptolemaic Alexandria' is devoted to this topic.

Thirdly, concerning the book of Aristeas, she agrees to some extent with Silvie Honigman, who researched the book of Aristeas *an sich*, in accepting it as a ‘charter myth’, as historical myth. According to Rajak, ‘Echoes of history reverberate in the myth’ (p. 28) and it can therefore not simply be rejected as fiction. Her conclusion concerning Aristeas is: ‘We are dealing with a story which, while clearly oversimplified, is not impossible’ (p. 43). (See also the view by N.L. Collins, *The Library in Alexandria and the Bible in Greek*. VTS 72. Leiden, Boston & Köln: Brill 2000.) In the final analysis she concentrates not on finding facts, but on the meaning and function of the story.

A fourth important aspect of Rajak’s creative approach is that she correctly stresses the fact that the Jewish side of the equation in Septuagintal research has been neglected by scholars in the past (p. 8). Problems in this regard, according to her, are: a static understanding of Judaism; outdated ideas about sects of the time; the meaning of the ‘dispersion’; the ‘legalistic’ character of the Torah; the closure of the canon and the early fixity of the text, etc. (p. 8). She is correct in her estimation that our understanding of this period has been transformed and is constantly developing. One of the strong points of this monograph is her contribution towards our understanding of this transformed view of that time.

Finally, she is adamantly opposed to the supposition that the Greek scriptures were abandoned in Jewish circles in the light of the ‘take over’ by Christians. According to her, the ‘supersessionist’ claim that Christianity made the original Jewish parent obsolete is unacceptable (p. 282) and it took much longer for the LXX to lose its influence in Jewish circles. She is also critical of the reconstruction of the so-called ‘Synod of Jamnia’ (p. 289). One of the supposed decisions of this ‘Knesset Gedolah’ was ‘that Jews everywhere were now told to stop using the Old Greek’ (p. 289). Understandably, she is also not convinced by the view that Jews actually tampered with the extant texts (p. 295).

As the subtitle of the monograph implies, the focus is on the diaspora. She rightly regards translation as located between cultural worlds and correctly sees the Greek Bible as first and foremost a book for the diaspora (p. 92). She moreover adopts John Barclay’s definition of the term ‘diaspora’ (p. 93). In this diasporic environment language naturally plays an important role. Hence Rajak devotes a chapter to Language and Identity in the Greek Bible. Again she offers refreshingly innovative ideas. She is sceptical of endeavours to downplay the significance of knowledge of Hebrew in this time in Alexandria. Yet she is critical of the newly devised interlinear paradigm, originally formulated by Albert Pietersma, with its focus on the role of the source language, Hebrew. She does, nevertheless, accept the inherent

value of this innovative model: 'the interlinear theory retains considerable explanatory power and may survive with modification' (p. 145).

It is not possible to do justice to Rajak's monograph within the confined space of this review. From the above it should be evident that it has met a much needed *desideratum* in Hellenistic studies. She has been successful in helping to close the gap between the fields of Hellenistic Judaism on the one hand, and the Greek Bible on the other. This book should be read by all interested in Judaism in the broad sense of the word and in hermeneutical issues in general.

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