THE GREEK PENTATEUCH AND THE LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA

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The Bible has been present as an actor in all the great transformations of our Western civilisation. The most influential translation in Antiquity was that of the Greek Pentateuch. It was through this that the wisdom of Israel passed from the medium of a Semitic to an Indo-European language, the Greek, the universal language of the time. Thanks to its adoption as an official Bible by the new religion, Christianity, and thanks to the new translations from the Greek to the languages of the different nations within the Roman Empire, the Bible spread out to the Eastern and Western frontiers of the οἰκουμένη. This process, which was to have such important consequences, started in the first part of the 3rd century BCE in Ptolemaic Alexandria.¹

The use of the Bible was also a determining factor in the transition from scroll to codex. The use of the codex coincides with the formation of the Christian *corpus* of Scriptures.² The Latin Bible was the first book printed by Gutenberg (Mainz 1455), the forty-two lines Bible, and up to the end of the fifteenth century no less than 124 editions had been printed.³ The Biblical texts were at the centre of Humanistic and Renaissance discussion, and the print edition contributed enormously to the diffusion and expansion of the Reformation. Will the new electronic revolution on-line, supplant the traditional printed book? Will the Bible be present and active in this new transformation of the global village? The number of seminars or conferences on this subject is witness to the fact that the Bible is also at the forefront of this new transformation.

After the decay of the famous library the spirit of Alexandria continued alive in other centres of knowledge throughout history: Rome, Antioch, Edessa, Nisibis, Bagdad, Toledo, and El Escorial. Precisely the library of El Escorial cannot be understood without the personality and support of Philip II, a spiritual descendant, eighteen centuries later, of the

¹ See N. Fernández Marcos, "Las traducciones en la Antigüedad," *Sefarad* 67 (2007), 263-82.

² "The passage from roll to codex represents indeed the most dramatic transformation in the history of the book before Gutenberg", see Guy. G. Stroumsa, "The Scriptural Movement of Late Antiquity and Christian Monasticism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008), 61-77, 66.

³ See W. A. Copinger, *The Bible and Its Transmission*, London: Henry Sotheran & Co, 1897, 220, and C. de Hamel, *The Book. A History of the Bible*, London: Phaidon Press, 2001, 190ff.

Ptolemies, and the expertise of his librarian Benito Arias Montano, a humanist and orientalist skilled in ten languages.⁴

My aim in this paper is to emphasize the ancient dream of the Alexandrian Library as a universal temple of knowledge, which could embrace –by means of book editions and/or translations– all the scientific and literary achievements of Antiquity.⁵ In fact, it could be said, with some certainty, that, with the activities of the royal Museum, philology and text processing started in the West. It was there that the production of the first official editions of the classics and the scientific transmission of the ancient legacy were produced.

In addition, my paper has a second goal, that of relating the origins of the Septuagint to the project of the mythical Library, where Western academic life and scientific research started. I want to re-establish the connection between classical and biblical studies, that connection which existed at the beginning of historical criticism in the 18th century⁶. The German lyric and Jewish freethinker Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) pronounced what was, no doubt, a hyperbolic statement: "All men are either Hebrews ... or Hellenes."⁷ I would like to paraphrase his sentence, reducing it modestly to "all Europeans or people of the Western civilisation," since I think that the Bible and the Greco-Roman classics permeate the greater part of Western cultural expression.

1. *The Library of Alexandria*

Ptolemy I Lagos, one of Alexander's generals and one of his most faithful friends, founded the *Museum* on ca. 306 BCE, an institution of scientific and religious character. The director was a priest appointed by the king. Its members, devoted to the service of the Muses, were lodged in the royal palace, as Strabo tells us: "The Museum is also a part of the royal palaces; it has a public walk, an Exedra with seats, and a large house, in which is the common mess-hall of the man of learning (*filologwn a[ndrwn*) who share the

⁴ "Uno de los hitos [en la restitución del espíritu de Alejandría tras su ocaso] lo tenemos cerca, en la biblioteca de El Escorial, cuya existencia y contenido no se pueden comprender sin apelar a la educación, personalidad y pensamiento de Felipe II, un descendiente espiritual – dieciocho siglos después– de los Ptolomeos," see J. M. Sánchez Ron, "Todos hemos estado en Alejandría: centros de saber en la historia del conocimiento," en J. García Maza (ed.), *Siempre estuvimos en Alejandría*, Madrid/Valencia, 1997, 249-69, 258. "Notoria fue, en particular, la influencia del citado Arias Montano, el erudito bibliotecario, el Eratóstenes escurialense, que dominaba el hebreo, griego, latín, sirio, árabe, alemán, francés, flamenco, toscano, portugués, además de, por supuesto, castellano ...," *ibid.*, 260-61.

⁵ A. Erskine, "Culture and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Museum and Library of Alexandria," *Greece & Rome* 42 (1995), 38-48, and C. Jacob, F. de Polignac, *Alexandrie IIIe siècle av. J.C. Tous les savoirs du monde ou le rêve de l'universalité des Ptolémées*, Paris, 1992.

⁶ See John Van Seters, *The Edited Bible*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Museum. This group of men not only hold property in common, but also have a priest in charge of the Museum, who formerly was appointed by the kings, but is now appointed by Caesar."⁸ Most of the residents were philologists, whose interest was the recovery and transmission of the classic legacy. They lived in privileged conditions, under royal patronage and supervision, and with a substantial level of financial support. But they did not escape the criticism and envy of their contemporary colleagues. They were the target of satirical poems (*sivlloi*, 'squint-eyed'), burlesque imitations of the Homeric hexameters, such as those by Timo of Phlius (320-230 BCE), a disciple of the sceptical philosopher Pirron of Elide, the sceptic: "There are many who just fill out the papyri, well fattened in populous Egypt, who constantly peck at each other in the birdcage of the Muses."

The disciples of Aristotle, more specifically the peripatetic Demetrius Phalereus, might well have been very active in the origins and organisation of this institution. This library together with the sister library of the Serapaeum, brought together the best of the ancient world at a very early stage: Greece, Rome, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Persia, following the cultural policy of the Ptolemies. It seems that already in the 3rd century BCE, with the help of successive librarians, all of them outstanding scholars, the library had brought together some hundred thousand papyri scrolls, maybe as many as five hundred thousand under Callimachus.

Throughout a period of a thousand years, up until the Arabic conquest of Alexandria in 640 CE, the library was the main vehicle of a living preservation and transmission of the intellectual legacy of the past. Among its librarians one comes across five of the most famous philologists of Antiquity: Zenodotus of Ephesus, Callimachus of Cyrene, Eratostenes of Cyrene, Aristophanes of Byzantium, and Aristarchus of Samotracia.⁹ As we shall see in the next section, this intellectual atmosphere corresponds perfectly to the description of the Ptolemaic court and the activities of the library supplied by the *Letter of Aristeas*. Zenodotus produced an edition of Homer comparing the copies which were circulating in the diverse cities, divided the poems into 24 books and used the letters of the alphabet to designate them.

⁷ See J. Jacobs, *Heine*, in I. Singer (ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, vol. 6, New York/London, 1916, 329-30.

⁸ Strabo is writing at the end of the 1st century BCE, see Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.8. Edition and Translation by Horace Leonard Jones. Loeb Classical Library, London/New York, 1932: *tw'n de; basileivwn mevro" ejsti; kai; to; Mousei'on, e[con perivpaton kai; ejxevdran kai; oi\kon mevgan, ejn w|/ to; sussivtion tw'n metecovntwn tou' Mouseivou filolovgwn a[ndrwn. e[sti de; th'/ sunovdw/ tauvth/ kai; crhvmata koina; kai; iJereu;" oJ ejpi; tw'/ Mouseivw/ tetagmevno" tovtē me;n uJpo; tw'n basilevwn, nu'n d j uJpo; Kaivsaro"*.

⁹ It is disputed whether Callimachus was librarian or not. For a possible list of librarians see *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 1241, in B. P. Grenfell & A. S. Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, London 1898-.

The poet Callimachus created a new model of cataloguing, his writing-tablets or *pinakes* in which he divided the Greek literature into literary genres or different issues, organizing the scrolls in alphabetic order. The list drawn up for each name or author was followed by some biographical data, the *incipits* of his works, and the number of lines of each work. No doubt, these are indicators of a scholarly milieu that created a climate fitting for the translation of the Greek Pentateuch, the best known collection of a foreign corpus, probably translated into Greek in close harmony with the project of the library.

Eratosthenes was a philologist and poet, and at the same time a true scientist. He carried out research into the surface area of the earth as well as the past of humankind, and published the first complete catalogue of constellations or *katasterismois*, where mythical anecdotes and astronomical calculations are combined in order to explain the origins of the different groups of stars. Aristophanes of Byzantium is the heir to a century of philological tradition and improves the editorial techniques by means of a greater number of diacritical signs. He excels in lexicographical studies. His *Lexica* extend to all the fields of literature, prose and poetry. He was the first to publish selected lists of authors, number and names of the epic, lyric and tragic poets, a kind of classical canon before the canon. Finally Aristarchus is the perfect philologist. He is the person principally responsible for the correction (*diorthōsis*) and recension of texts. He manifests his opinion in the margin by means of diacritical signs. He maintains the spurious passages in the text preceded by an obelus as a sign of doubtful authenticity (*ajgevtesi*). He is the best editor and interpreter of Antiquity. As important as his editions, are his commentaries or *uJpomnhmata*, where he justifies and explains the editorial decisions and interprets the difficult passages. Aristarchus defends the position that each author is the best interpreter of himself. Although the quotation seems to come from Porphyry, it has also been attributed to Aristarchus and resumes his method of interpretation: *{Omhron ejx JOmhvrou safhnivzein*, "to explain Homer by Homer", an exegetical rule which will later be applied to the Scripture, especially by the school of Antioch. While the scroll was in use, text and commentary were written on separate scrolls. When the codex was introduced, the margins of the codices offered space for the notes and commentaries.¹⁰

¹⁰ See for this section R. Pfeiffer, *Historia de la Filología Clásica. I Desde los comienzos hasta el final de la época helenística*, Madrid: Gredos, 1981, 165-400 [English original, R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship. From the Beginnings to the end of the Hellenistic Age*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968]; and P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria I-III*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, I, 323-30. See also J. Harold Ellens, "The Ancient Library of Alexandria: The West's Most Important Repository of Learning," *Bible Review* 13 (1997), 19-29.

There is another feature that approaches the transmission of the Homeric texts to that of the biblical texts. The first Homeric papyri from the end of the 4th century BCE attest an absolute lack of uniformity, they are *poluvsticioi*, with many additions, and recall the stage of textual fluidity of the biblical texts attested by the Qumran documents. Homer was for the Greeks and Romans as authoritative as the Pentateuch was for the Jews. Although the Alexandrian editors had a great influence in determining who were the first class authors, worth imitating and commenting by grammarians, and worthy of being studied at the school, they did not establish a canonical list of those authors.¹¹ This Hellenistic process of 'canonisation' of the classics might illuminate the process of canonisation of Scripture, be it in Hebrew or in Greek. It is worth emphasizing that the Alexandrian editors did not delete nor insert anything into the text, they simply signalled it with the sign of inauthentic. One can find some similarity with the procedure of the Masoretes who respected the written text and indicated the *qere* and other Masoretic notes in the margin.

2. A return to the Letter of Aristeas

After almost five centuries of scepticism concerning the historical value of the Letter, finally in the middle of the 20th century and especially in the last decade, more attention has been paid to the general information transmitted by the *Letter of Aristeas* in relation to the origins of the Greek translation, the intellectual climate of the Alexandrian library, and the Ptolemaic court¹².

The *Letter of Aristeas* is a pseudoepigraphic writing, a literary fiction, of the last part of the 2nd century BCE. Among treatises such as the Symposium and many other expositions or *ejkfravsei* "—on Jerusalem and Palestine, the High Priest and the Temple, the presents of Ptolemy and Eleazar, the allegorical explanation of the Jewish dietary prescriptions by the High Priest, etc.—, the Letter describes the origin and circumstances of the first translation of the Torah into Greek. However, in spite of incorporating several legendary motifs, it reflects quite well the atmosphere of Alexandria in the first part of the 3rd century BCE, the promotion of culture by the first Ptolemies, and the intellectual milieu of the library. The author of the Letter displays throughout the writing diverse allusions to the ambitious project of Ptolemy II,

¹¹ A list of authors, not of writings. This might be one of the reasons why the Biblical writings, anonymous in general, were attributed to specific authors like Moses, David, Solomon, the different Prophets. See Van Seters, *The Edited Bible*, 40-41.

¹² See N. Fernández Marcos, "The Greek Pentateuch and the Scholarly Milieu of Alexandria," *Semitica et Classica* 2 (2009) [forthcoming] .

described in paragraphs 9-11: "the librarian Demetrius Phalereus received an enormous fund to gather, if possible, in the library, all the books of the earth."¹³ In paragraphs 29-30 the survey of the librarian is recorded: the books of the Jewish Law are lacking and with the king's agreement the decision is taken to write to the High Priest of Jerusalem, Eleazar, in order to get the best experts from Jerusalem for the translation, six for each of the tribes. These men shall examine the "agreement of the majority in order to obtain the exact interpretation."¹⁴ These phrases echo the philological activity which was prevalent in the library with the Homeric edition as applied here to the translation¹⁵. They wish to put the Jewish Law "in a distinguished place fitting to the royal projects and implementations" (*Letter of Aristeas* § 32). Although the library is not mentioned in this context, the implicit reader understands that this distinguished place of honour cannot be other than the library. Moreover, in the Letter of Ptolemy to Eleazar the destiny of the translation for the library is stated explicitly: "... we decided to translate your Law from what you call Hebrew language to the Greek language, thus that we may have it also near us in the library together with the rest of the royal books."¹⁶ Throughout the Symposium, which occupies the most important section of the Letter, the Jewish translators from Jerusalem, received with all kinds of honours by the king, are presented as cultivated philosophers who are able to respond wisely to any question related to life or the best way of government.

The paragraphs devoted to the phenomenon of the translation are very scant, but they reproduce the kind of work and terminology used in the library for the restoration of the text of the Greek authors. The method behind the translation was that of agreement between themselves by comparing results, *-ajntibolhv*, is a technical term used in Alexandria for the collation of the manuscripts¹⁷. With this specific language, the author of the Letter is claiming for the translators a similar role and level of accuracy as those of the editors of Homer. Once the translation has been legitimated and approved by all the Jews it was

¹³ *jEjcrhmativsqh polla; diavfora pro;* to; sunagagei'n, eij dunatovn, a{panta ta; kata; th;n oijkoumevnhn bibliva, *Letter of Aristeas* § 9. The Greek text of the Letter is taken from the edition of H. St. J. Thackeray, "The Letter of Aristeas", in H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, 2nd edition, Cambridge 1902, Appendix 499-574. See also N. Fernández Marcos, "Carta de Aristeas", en A. Díez Macho (ed.), *Apócrifos del Antiguo Testamento II*, Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad 1983, 11-63.

¹⁴ ... o{pw" to; suvmfwnon ejk tw'n pleiovwn ejxetavsante" kai; lavbonte" to; kata; th;n eJrmhneivan ajkribev" ... *Letter of Aristeas* § 32.

¹⁵ See S. Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria*, London/New York: Routledge 2003.

¹⁶ ... i{n j uJpavrch/ kai; tau'ta par j hJmi'n ejn biblioqhvkh/ su;n toi'" a[lloi" basilikoi" biblivoi", *Letter of Aristeas* § 38.

presented to the king. When the complete text of the translation was read to the king, particularly emphasis was placed on the wisdom of the lawmaker. Afterwards Ptolemy made a deep reverence and ordered that these books be treated with the highest care and that they be preserved scrupulously (אֲגִנְו' ", *Letter of Aristeas* § 317).¹⁸

3. Christian authors and Byzantine Chroniclers

The tradition reflected in the *Letter of Aristeas*, which links the origins of the Greek Pentateuch with the library of Alexandria and the cultural policy of Ptolemy II was already accepted in the Jewish community and consolidated only a century after the phenomenon of the translation. It is supported and transmitted by diverse sources such as Aristobulus in the 2nd century BCE, Philo and Josephus in the 1st century CE, and the Rabbis in the centuries which follow. It is difficult to accept that the tradition itself, although embellished in different ways, might have been totally invented and was not based on a recognized historical nucleus.¹⁹ Moreover, we have another view of this at our disposal, even in later authors who record features of the same tradition independent of the *Letter of Aristeas*.

A series of statements of Christian authors echoes the close relationship between the first translation of the Septuagint and the library of Alexandria. From the context of the Letter (§ 317) one can plausibly deduce that the text of the translation was on deposit in the library for consultation of the scholars, and that it might have been there over two hundred years, at least, until the time of Julius Caesar, when in 48 BCE some boxes with ancient volumes were accidentally burnt when they were being prepared to be moved to Rome. But it is quite possible that the copy of the Septuagint did not perish in this disaster.

The Greek Pentateuch was known and quoted by such Jewish-Hellenistic writers as Demetrius, Aristobulus, Eupolemus, Ezechiel Tragicus, Aristeas the historian, Philo and Josephus, the authors of the New Testament (see especially Acts 2:23-31 and 15:35-42).²⁰ To

¹⁷ οἱ δὲ ἐπετεῖλον ἐκαστὰ συμφωνῶν ποιῶντες" πρὸς" εὐαὐτοῦ;" ταῖ" ἀντιβόλαι", *Letter of Aristeas* § 302.

¹⁸ *proskunhvsā*" ejkevlēuse megavln ejpimevleian poiei'sqai tw'n bibliwn kai; sunthrei'n aḡnw' ". Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I, 330 states: "And certainly it is natural to suppose that translations of these books were deposited in the Library as they became available." Perhaps on deposit in the library were also translations of the Persian texts of Zoroaster, since it is said that Hermippus, a disciple of Callimachus, wrote a commentary on Zoroaster's writings, see Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, XXX.4.

¹⁹ See S. Kreuzer, "Entstehung und Publikation der Septuaginta im Horizont frühptolemäischer Bildungs- und Kulturpolitik," in *Im Breenpunkt: Die Septuaginta. Studien zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bibel. Band 2*. BWANT 161. S. Kreuzer and J. P. Lesch (eds.). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004, 61-75, 68-70.

²⁰ Quotations according to the Septuagint where the Septuagint differs notably from the Masoretic Text, see N. Fernández Marcos, *Introducción a las versiones griegas de la Biblia*. Segunda edición revisada y aumentada,

all events, Tertullian, Justin, Epiphanius and Chrysostom state that the Septuagint could be seen and consulted in the Serapaeum, the filial library of the Museum. As Veltri states: "Christian sources call to mind the fact that everybody can verify the presence of the manuscript(s) of the (Greek) Torah in the library of Alexandria as a proof that the story is true".²¹ In the 2nd century, Justin in his first Apology (I.31.5) directed to Antoninus Pius, states that after the translation the books were to be found among the Egyptians until his time, and were to be found everywhere among all the Jews.²² Tertullian (2nd/3rd century) in his *Apologeticum* 18.8-9 states: "Today these documents, translated into Greek, are exhibited with the same Hebrew texts in Ptolemy's library, in the Serapaeum. But the Jews also read them in public."²³ And John Chrysostom²⁴ affirms: "that you may learn that books do not make a place holy and that the disposition of those who gather there defiles it, let me tell you a story from ancient history. When Ptolemy Philadelphus, who was collecting books from all over the world, learned that among the Jews there were books which philosophised about God and the best way of life, he sent for men from Judaea and commissioned them to translate these books. Ptolemy placed the books in the temple of Serapis. He was a Greek and this translation of the prophets is in use to this very day. Now then, are we to consider the temple

Madrid: CSIC, 1998, 261-69, and H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, Cambridge: University Press, 1902, 369-72.

²¹ See G. Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and "Canonic" Texts: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*. JSJS 109. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006, 29. See also M. Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: its Prehistory and the Problem of its Canon*, Edinburgh/New York: T&T Clark, 2002, 224: "The translation stored in the famous library of Alexandria, is like the publication of a political constitution and/or of a cultural perception."

²² Kai; tou'to genomevnou [that is, the translation] e[meinai aiJ bivbloi kai; par j Aijguptivoi] mevcric tou' deu'ro, kai; pantacou' para; pa'sivn eijsin jIoudaivoi" ... In the 4th century Epiphanius (*De mensuris et ponderibus*, 11, PG 43, 255) says that the finished translation was placed 'in the first Library,' which was located in the Broucheion, see Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I, 323.

²³ *Ita in Graecum stilum exaperta monumenta hodie apud Serapeum Ptolemaei bibliothecae cum ipsis Hebraicis exhibentur. Sed et Judaei palam lectitant. Apologeticum, cura et studio E. Dekkers, in Tertuliani Opera. Pars I, Turnholt: Brepols, 1954.*

²⁴ In his *Adversus Judaeos Orationes Octo* (PG 48, 843-942), 851: Kai; i{na mavqhte, o{ti oujc aJgiavzei to;n tovpon ta; bibliva, ajlla; bvevbhlon poiei' tw'n suniovtwn hJ proaivresi", iJstorivan uJmi'n dihghvsomai palaiavn. Ptolemai'o" oJ Filavdelfo" ta;" pantacovqen bivblou" sunagagwvn, kai; maqw;n o{ti kai; para; jIoudaivoi" eijsi; grafai; peri; Qeou' filosofou'sai, kai; politeiva" ajrivsth", metapemyavmeno" a[ndra" ejk th'" jIoudaiva", hJrmhvneusen aujta;" di j ejkeivnwn kai; ajpevqeto eiJ" to; tou' Seravpido" iJerovn: kai; ga;r h{n {Ellhn oJ ajnhvr: kai; mevcric nu'n ejkei' tw'n profhtw'n aiJ eJrmhneuqeisai bivbloi mevnousi. Tiv ou\n, a{gio" e[stai tou' Seravpido" oJ nao;" dia; ta; bibliva; Mh; gevnoito. In fact the homilies were pronounced against Jews and Judaizers of the Christian community. There is no modern edition of these homilies. Only homily 1 and 8 have been translated into English by Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch, in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, Missoula, MO: Scholars Press, 1978, 83-126. The following translation is taken from this last work, 96-97.

of Serapis holy because of these books? Of course not!" The Serapaeum was destroyed together with other Egyptian temples in 389 following an order from emperor Theodosius. However, Chrysostom pronounced his homily against the Jews some years before, in 386. It depends on the credit that one concedes to the ancient sources, but it seems that various witnesses coincide in attesting the presence of the translation in the library, although no one is definite.

To this evidence, should be added the information transmitted by some Byzantine Chroniclers: Johannes Tzetzes, the monk Syncellus and Georgius Cedrenus. All three inform of the intense translation activity in the court of Ptolemy II. In spite of being later authors, they carefully collect ancient traditions. The Ptolemaic dynasty was open to other cultures. Coming from Macedon its policy was based on the integration of the different ethnic peoples of Alexandria. The 12th century scholar Tzetzes transmits the story of the translation differently. He uses different terminology and notes that more than one library –in fact two – existed in Alexandria. And he continues: "Once all the books of the Greeks, those of every one of the nations, along with the books of the Hebrews had been collected together (sunhqroismevnwn), that unsparing king ... translated to the Greek script and language the foreign books by means of wise men who shared their language ..."

The differences (sunavgein in Aristeas, sunaqroivzein in Tzetzes) suggest that Tzetzes was not dependent on Aristeas or Josephus, but drew his information from another source.²⁵ G. Cedrenus also links Demetrius to the translation: "And he [Ptolemy Philadelphos] translated to the Greek language through the seventy most wise Hebrew men the divine Scriptures and the rest of the Greek, Chaldaic, Egyptian and Roman books, ten thousand all together, since all were in another language. He placed these translations in his libraries of Alexandria ... And the king struck by the beauty of the divine Scriptures asked in presence of all the court, the philosopher Menedemus and Demetrius Phalereus, how being the divine Scriptures of such value ... no one of the historians or poets mentioned them."²⁶

²⁵ See Nina L. Collins, *The Library in Alexandria & the Bible in Greek*, Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2000, 91-92, and W. Orth, "Ptolemaios II und die Septuaginta-Übersetzung," in *Im Brennpunkt: Die Septuaginta. Studien zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bibel. Band I*. BWANT 153. H.-J. Fabry and U. Offerhaus (eds.). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001, 97-114, 106-108.

²⁶ PG 121,325AB: ο} [Ptolemy Philadelphos] kai; th;n metabolh;n tw'n qeivwn Grafw'n kai; loipw'n jEllhnikw'n, Caldaikw'n, Aijguptivwn kai; JRwmaikw'n eij" devka muriavda" ajriqmoumevnwn bibliwn, pasw'n te ajlloglwvsswn oujsw'n, eij" th;n jEllavda glw'ssan metepoiwhse dia; tw'n o j softavtwn jEbraivwn: a}" kai; ejn tai'" kata; th;n jAlexavndreian biblioghvkai" aujtou' ejnapevqeto ... jEpi; tw'/ kavllei toivnun tw'n qeivwn Grafw'n ejkplagevnto" tou' basilevw" kai; pavntwn tw'n ejn tevlei, parovnto" kai; Menedhvmou filosofvou kai; Dhmhtrivou Falhrevw" hjrwvta oJ basileuv" o}ti

In view of the evidence transmitted by such different sources, one may conclude that the framework of the story of the translation as narrated by the *Letter of Aristeas* is quite plausible.

One might object that, if the translation was deposited in the library it should be mentioned or quoted by pagan authors. This objection, according to Aristeas, was already put in the mouth of the king who asked Demetrius (*Letter of Aristeas* § 312): "How is it possible that such an important work is not mentioned by the historians or the poets?"²⁷ The author of the Letter recurs in his answer to the legend of the sacred book that cannot be touched by pagan hands without being punished by the divinity (*Letter of Aristeas* §§ 313-316). Be that as it may, in this case the argument *ex silentio* is very dangerous, taking into account the oblivion into which the ancient works and especially of the Jewish-Hellenistic production had fallen. These works were preserved by Christians and only in the measure that they served Christian interests.

Similar books such as those of Manetho, Berossus and even Josephus are not even quoted by pagan authors until the 3rd century CE, by the neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry.²⁸ The evidence may simply have been lost for a number of reasons. As Cook asserts: "Hecataeus, Ocellus Lucanus, Alexander Polyhistor, Diodorus Siculus, Nicolaus of Damascus and Ps.-Longinus are pagan authors who are aware of the LXX (or the Jews books of Laws) although extant quotations are sparse."²⁹

4. The Jewish-Hellenistic Writers and the Library

These Jewish authors, known only thanks to the quotations of the Christian authors Clemens of Alexandria (*Stromata*) and Eusebius of Caesarea (*Praeparatio Evangelica*), write in the manner of the Greeks. They use practically all the literary genres cultivated by the Greeks: the tragedy with biblical theme, and perhaps the theatre (Ezekiel Tragicus), the epic (Philo the Ancient on Jerusalem), the philosophy (Philo of Alexandria), the short novel (Joseph and Asenet), the short story (Judit), the historiography (Artapanus, Demetrius,

pw'' toiouvtwn o[ntwn ... oujdei;" iJstorikw'n h] poihtw'n ejmnhvsqh aujtw'n.

²⁷ pw'' thlikouvtwn suntetelesmevnwn oujdei;" ejpebavleto tw'n iJstorikw'n h] poihtikw'n ejpimnhsqh'nai;

²⁸ In *De abstinentia* 4.11-14.

²⁹ See J. G. Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Graeco-Roman Paganism*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 52. And in page 2 he insists: "Most of the (pagan) Greek literature concerning the Jews written between IV B.C.E. to II C. E. has been lost, as a glance at F. Jacoby's FGrH will show."

Eupolemus, and Flavius Josephus). They make use of most of the Greek literary genres and imitate the Greek and Roman authors. They use the Hellenistic *topoi* and rhetorical devices in order to construct the Jewish identity. They have discovered the power of story and narrative rhetoric over historical facts.³⁰ For example, the epic poet Theodotus writes on Jacob and Sechem in a Homeric framework and reinterprets the biblical version of Genesis 34, the rape of Dinah. The poem reflects slight echoes of the Septuagint, while most of its expressions and structure are Homeric.

Other authors also appropriate the Hellenistic *topoi* of the *πρωτό σοφόν* (first sage) and *πρωτό εὐρετήν* (first inventor) and the myths of foundation to demonstrate the cultural priority and, consequently, superiority of the Jews over Babylonians and Egyptians. Rewriting the past of Israel to serve the needs of the moment is one of the characteristic devices used by these authors. History becomes, in a certain way, rhetorical propaganda. Pseudo-Eupolemus, in the middle of the 2nd century BCE presents Abraham as the inventor of astrology and its teacher to the other peoples. Astrology was also taught by Abraham to the Egyptians, according to Artapanus. Eupolemus presents Moses with the literary *topos* of the cultural benefactor, the founder of civilisation, the first wise man and lawgiver. It was from him that the Phoenicians and the Greeks received the alphabet. Artapanus is even more clever in combining pagan mythology with biblical traditions in an euhemeristic fashion. Taking advantage of the homophony, Artapanus identifies Moses with Mousaios, a mythical Greek poet and teacher of Orpheus. Artapanus transmits the only realistic portrait of Moses in the Hellenistic fashion: "he was tall, ruddy complexioned, with long flowing grey hair, and dignified."³¹ Even the *Letter of Aristeas* not only quotes Hecataeus, Menedemus, Demetrius Phalereus, Theopompus and Teodectes, but Jerusalem's description (*Letter of Aristeas* §§ 83-106) seems to be inspired by the description of the ideal city of Aristotle in his *Politics* VII, 11.3-4.³² The author of the Letter follows Aristotle's advice concerning the needs of the *πολις*, especially in the water's installations (*Letter of Aristeas* §§ 88-91).

³⁰ See E. S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism. The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press 1998.

³¹ See N. Fernández Marcos, "Interpretaciones helenísticas del pasado de Israel," *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica* 8 (1975), 157-186, ----, "Rhetorical expansions of biblical traditions in the Hellenistic Period," *Old Testament Essays* 15 (2002), 766-79, 771-76, and C. R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Vol I, Historians*, Chico, CA: Scholars Press 1983; *Vol II, Poets*, Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1989; *Vol III, Aristobulus*, Chico, CA: University of California Press 1995.

³² Especially the praise of Jerusalem water supplies (*Letter of Aristeas* §§ 88-91), see Honigman, *Homeric Scholarship*, 23-25, 23: "For example, the detailed description of the combined sources supplying water to the

When one compares the Jewish literary legacy in Greek language, the literary genres and compositions which arose and grew up in the shadow of the Greek Bible, with the legacy of Qumran, one is struck by the deep differences. The Jewish-Hellenistic writers had access to the most important writings of Greek Antiquity. In other words, they had access to the great library of Alexandria. It is quite possible that Theodotus, Aristobulus (who knows the Greek Bible and uses the allegorical interpretation of Scripture before Aristeas), Ezechiel Tragicus, and other Jewish-Hellenistic authors were in contact with the library. It is possible that some distinguished members of the Alexandrian *polivteuma* were engaged in the cultural activities of the library, just as other Hellenistic Jews, whose names and qualities are well known, made their own *cursus honorum* in business and politics.³³ It is true, no individual Jews, scribes or intellectuals, are known in the early 3rd century BCE, but we should bear in mind that in Antiquity writers or authors were dependent on patrons and institutions, that is, on the centres of power concentrated mainly in the royal palaces and the temples. Therefore they functioned as the spokesmen for the perspectives of these institutions, not for their own's, and they disappeared from the scene as individual actors.

5. Conclusions

For the first translation of the Torah into Greek, exceptional circumstances had to concur in order to make it possible: the cultural climate of Alexandria and the competition between the different peoples to achieve a place of prestige against the dominant Greek culture. It is impossible to think of such a complex undertaking without the institutional support of the Ptolemaic monarchy and the infrastructure of the Museum itself. The team of translators were bilingual Jews, cultivated scribes both in Hebrew and Greek languages and literatures. The scholarly milieu created around the famous Library is the most fitting *Sitz im Leben* for the origin of the Greek Pentateuch. The *Letter of Aristeas* does not affirm explicitly that a copy of the translation was deposited in the Museum or Serapaeum.³⁴ But it is sufficiently suggested when the king manifests his interest in preserving it scrupulously (*Letter of Aristeas* § 317). The Greek Pentateuch was known and consulted by the Jewish-Hellenistic authors, by Philo, Josephus, and the authors of the New Testament. It had to be in

Temple (chs 88-91) finds its *raison d'être* in Aristotle's insistence on the need for the *polis* to enjoy a good water supply, both in quality and quantity (*Politics*, 7.11.3-4)."

³³ See A. Paul, *La Biblia y Occidente. De la Biblioteca de Alejandría a la cultura europea*, Estella (Navarra): Verbo Divino 2008, pp. 98-106 [French original, A. Paul, *La Bible et l'Occident. De la bibliothèque d'Alexandrie à la culture européenne*, Paris: Bayard 2007].

open access, and the best place to provide such an access was the library. Christian authors claim that people could consult the translation in "the first Library" or in the Serapaeum,³⁵ and the Byzantine Chroniclers inform, apparently with independence of the Letter's tradition, on the translation activity in the court of the Ptolemies and precisely on the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in this context. If not demonstrated, the links of the translation of the Greek Pentateuch with the ambitious Ptolemaic cultural project and the intellectual climate of the Library, as narrated in the *Letter of Aristeas*, are more than plausible.

Concerning the relationship of my paper with the main topic of the Conference, Bible & Computers, I would like to finish with a wise and cautious reflection of Prof. Robert Barnes, a Senior Lecturer in Classics at the Australian National University:

"In the late twentieth century, the problems of large libraries have by no means been resolved. There has been much premature speculation that digital recording of texts will overcome all difficulties of collecting and storing them, and will make them available immediately to anyone, anywhere in the world. In fact the digitising of library holdings of printed texts has scarcely begun, and its costs, with present technology, would seem to limit it to a comparatively small selection of commonly used texts. Although most new books nowadays must be recorded somewhere in digital form, the economics of publishing discourage wide access to the books in that form. Above all, we simply do not know whether present technology will preserve texts even as efficiently as libraries of manuscript and printed books have done. The Alexandrian library may have preserved its books, without substantial loss, for up to 600 years.³⁶ We should not be confident that we will preserve our own literature for anything like as long."³⁷

³⁴ The library created later by Ptolemy III Euergetes.

³⁵ See Epiphanius of Salamine (PG 43, 255-56): Kai; ou}tw" aiJ bivblioi eij" Jellhni vda ejktegei'sai ajpetevqhsan ejn th'/ prwvth/ biblioqhvk/ th'/ ejn th'/ Brouciw/ oijkodomhgeivsh/. [Eti de; u{steron kai; eJte vra ejgevneto biblioqhvk ejn tw'/ Serapivw/ mikrotevra th'" prwvth", h{ti" kai; qugavthr wjnomavsqh aujth'": ejn h|/ ajpetevqhsan aiJ tou' jAkuvla, kai; Summavcou, kai; Qeodotivwno", kai; tw'n loipw'n eJrmhnei'ai, meta; diakosio sto;n kai; penth kosto;n e[to". The first library is the Museum, close to the royal palace, in the Brucheion Greek quarter of Alexandria. The Serapaeum was located at Rhakotis in the southwestern part of the city, see R. Barnes, "Cloistered Bookworms in the Chicken-Coop of the Muses: The Ancient Library of Alexandria," in R. MacLeod (ed.), *The Library of Alexandria. Centre of Learning in the Ancient World*, London/New York: I. B. Tauris 2005, 61-77, 62-63.

³⁶ Probably for up to a millennium until the Arabic conquest, I would say.

³⁷ See Barnes, "Cloistered Bookworms," 75.