

Tessa Rajak. *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible and the Ancient Jewish Diaspora.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. xvi + 380 pp. \$140.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-955867-4.



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Generalists and specialists alike interested in the history of Greco-Roman Judaism and Septuagintal studies will benefit immensely from Tessa Rajak's most recent contribution to these fields. Despite the technical nature of the subject, the chapters are quite readable, perhaps because the book originated as the Oxford University Grinfield Lectures on "The Septuagint as a Social and Cultural Artifact" (1995-96). As she notes in her preface, lecturing about the Greek Bible can be a daunting task. Even the great classical historian Arnaldo Momigliano pondered "in what sense a lecturer on the Septuagint might lecture without talking about it" (p. v). Rajak, however, does talk about the Greek Bible, combining recent research on the subject with the perennial quest to define "the nature and limits of Jewish Hellenism or Hellenistic Judaism" (p. v). Rajak's core contributions to this issue revolve around the claim that the Greek Bible represents a middle position between assimilation and rejection of Greek culture. The linguistic features of the Greek Bible simultaneously Hellenize Judaism and Judaize Hellenism. A

book review cannot possibly do justice to the numerous insights of this detailed and richly argued work. A brief summary of selected aspects will have to suffice.

Postponing the fullest development of her central thesis to later chapters, Rajak devotes the initial part of her work to providing preliminary background on major issues in Septuagintal studies and Hellenistic Judaism. In the introduction, Rajak situates the Septuagint within both the diverse notions of Jewishness in recent scholarship and the complex history of its textual transmission. This involves complicating an apparently simple claim that the Septuagint renders the Hebrew "torah" as "nomos" (law/custom). For Rajak, the Greek Bible can also be conceived as rendering "nomos" as Torah (The Law).[1] Rajak lays the foundation for an essentially linguistically based argument. She convincingly demonstrates that the *nomos/torah* rendering simultaneously Hellenizes an essentially Jewish institution, while Judaizing a common Greek word by altering its semantic valence. Continuing to provide background, Rajak

tackles the notorious crux of the Greek Bible's origins in chapter 1, "The *Letter of Aristeas* between History and Myth." For Rajak, defending or attacking the *Letter's* reliability is beside the point. Rather, the *Letter* represents a historical charter myth of Alexandrian Jewry, which articulates the same idea of mutual Judaization and Hellenization.[2] By representing the Jewish sages as Greeks, the *Letter* asserts Jewish participation in the cultural revitalization of Athenian culture in Ptolemaic Alexandria. According to Rajak, the *Letter* essentially demonstrates that Jews can be better Greeks especially when it comes to Hellenizing, but ultimately appropriate Hellenism on their own terms: unlike other Greeks who came to the king's table and stayed, the Jewish Greeks returned to Jerusalem.

Accepting the historicity of Ptolemaic involvement in the translation of the Greek Bible, in chapter 2, "Going Greek: Culture and Power in Ptolemaic Alexandria," Rajak defends the apparently unfathomable interest of the king in a Jewish text. Ptolemies were interventionist monarchs who typically enlisted non-Greeks in their program of Hellenization as a way of performing the hierarchical relationship between ruler and ruled. Moreover, Ptolemaic pomposity along with an Aristotelian investigative impulse and the real political and economic significance of Palestine lend further credence to the grandiose project described in the *Letter*. In chapter 3, "The Jewish Diaspora in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," Rajak rejects the binary conception of Hellenism and Judaism in favor of "a complex interweaving of traditions" (p. 115). Diaspora need not necessitate a choice between two cultural systems. Diaspora complicates identity, cultural self-expression, and hierarchies of power. Without the Greek Bible, claims Rajak, Jews could not simultaneously use Greek for everyday life as well as religious contexts. For example, the Greek Bible coined the term "proselutos" (proselyte) confirming a status for non-Jews interested in Judaism. Rajak astutely ascribes to

this term an opening of boundaries that actually reinscribes self-separation.

Rajak has persuasively argued that the idea of the Greek Bible reflects and mediates the complexity of Jewish life in a Greek world. Chapter 4, "Staying Jewish: Language and Identity in the Greek Bible," and chapter 5, "Representing and Subverting Power," contain the philological heart of the book. Here Rajak masterfully applies close readings of the Septuagint to explain the precise relationship between the Greek and Jewish worlds. To begin with, in chapter 4, she convincingly articulates a nuanced assessment of Septuagintal Greek. Drawing on translation studies theorist Lawrence Venuti (*The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* [1995]), Rajak characterizes the language of the Septuagint as a distinctive, foreignizing Greek rather than bad Greek or a Yiddish-like Judeo-Greek. This position explains why the Greek Bible rarely renders certain unique Hebrew constructions with an exact, yet horrendous equivalent in Greek. Rather, we primarily find grammatically possible Greek constructions, albeit less common and thereby more distinctive. Similarly, Rajak astutely notes that as an auditory experience, the Septuagint would have sounded Greek, even while evoking its Hebrew origin. Incorporating Hebraisms while maintaining a coherent, if unusual, Greek proves that the translators mastered both languages. Citing Benjamin G. Wright's work on Ben Sira, Rajak notes that a translator can compose a preface in perfectly normal Greek and then foreignize the translation proper.[3] The effect of Hebraisms is to valorize the Hebrew language, not require an interlinear reading with the Hebrew Bible as Albert Pietersma has argued.[4] Such simultaneous transference to Greek with an effort to return to the Hebrew represents an act of cultural resistance. According to Rajak, "Septuagint language in its nature, with its deliberate mirroring of Hebrew balance, syntactic patterns, and semantic structures ... reflects ... a reluctance to accede totally to a Hellenizing 'project,' which by the same

token, could not be ignored" (p. 158). She extends this act of resistance even further. English derivatives like diaspora, proselyte, idol, devil (*diabolos*), holocaust, synagogue, and ecclesiastical, all show how the LXX infused new Jewish content into Greek words. Since Hebrew plays a role in Jewish identity, a foreignizing translation in place of a slavishly literal translation offer self-protection and self-assertion against the ethnic violence of cultural imperialism.

In chapter 5, Rajak extends the idea of resistance through language with a close reading of references to monarchy in the Septuagint. Here she differentiates her position from Erich Gruen who portrays the diaspora as a model of contented integration and self-confidence (*Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* [2002]). According to Rajak, however, the LXX subtly resists the Hellenistic monarch on whose good will Jews depended. While the idea that the Bible speaks about divine rule in human terms and distinguishes God from human monarchs may be commonplace, Rajak explores the specific impact of Greek language and culture in translating the concept of kingship. Thus, apparent additions in the Greek that refer to monarchs (Proverbs 24:22a) or a conversation about the relative power of kings, women, and wine in Greek 1 Esdras represent a kind of political theory unique to the Septuagint. Greek also provides vocabulary for representing God, such as *pantokrator* (ruler of all), that enhances God's power as well as differentiates the divine from the human king. Here Greek vocabulary becomes crucial—the LXX prefers the term *eidola* (phantoms/idols) to characterize the opposite of God-worship. Since kings are epitomized by their feeble idols, critique of idol worship becomes homologous to the critique of human kings. The Septuagint exposes the pretensions of human kings who are subordinate to a supreme God. Moreover, according to Rajak's reading, *Bel and the Dragon*, a Greek addition to the book of Daniel, equates worshipping idols to supporting a tyrant. Consequently, worshipping God means re-

jecting tyranny. Criticizing the Hellenistic ruler could be dangerous, but, argues Rajak, the Septuagint advocates patience, not violent revolution: power is a fact of life whose misuse is finite so do not attack tyrannical Greek and Roman authorities. Moreover, this message depends on a subtle, intertextual reading of the text available only to those raised on the Greek Bible. Thus, the Hellenized biblical Greek enables the Greek Bible to function as a manual for survival under foreign rule.

Examining the "afterlife" of the LXX, chapters 6-9 confirm Rajak's view that the Greek Bible powerfully inculcates Jewish identity within the complex cultural negotiations inherent in the Hellenistic-Jewish encounter. In chapter 6, "The Uses of Scripture in Hellenistic Judaism," and chapter 7, "Parallels and Models," Rajak approaches the question of whether we can speak of a Hellenistic Judaism. Rajak concludes that while not all Greek speaking Jews were the same, they shared a common devotion to the Bible. Thus, Rajak distinguishes between providing the vocabulary for articulating Jewishness and being the official manual of Hellenistic Judaism. Hellenistic Judaism lies somewhere in between Qumran sectarianism and the universalizing Greek society. The Qumranites utilize scriptures to reject their environment, the Greeks established connections through the common cultural vocabulary of Homer, and the Greek Bible simultaneously resists and invites. In chapter 8, "The Bible among Greeks and Romans," Rajak reconsiders the claim that non-Jews are silent about the Bible. By expanding the body of non-Jewish biblical references, Rajak strengthens her contention that the Greek Bible influenced the non-Jewish Greco-Roman world. In chapter 9, "The LXX between Jews and Christians," Rajak explains the popularity of the LXX legend among Christians and offers a new reading of why Jewish attitudes toward Greek translations developed in creative directions. Christianized versions of the LXX legend reinforced the ideas of Jewish enslavement to the Hebrew text and abandonment

of Greek scriptures, major arguments for supersessionism. The reality belies the myth. As the evidence of Justinian's Novella 146 (553 CE) proves that Jews did not in fact abandon the Greek, Rajak offers an explanation why. The rabbis advocated Hebrew and the Hebraized Greek Bible, in order to foster Hebrew culture in the Greek speaking Jewish world. The Hebraic character of the Greek Bible can inscribe Jewish identity.

This last point makes Rajak's central argument all the more compelling. Justinian's Novella attempts to encourage conversion to Christianity by regulating the Greek text utilized in the synagogue. Thus, on the eve of the emergence of Islam and the profound effects it would have on the Jewish world, the Greek Bible continued to play a prominent role in Jewish life and was essential to the formation of Jewish identity. So I find Rajak's major premise convincing. To be sure, in such a richly detailed work, many will take issue with particular details. For example, Rajak refers to Walter Benjamin as one of many theorists advocating a slavishly literal foreignizing interlinear translation that returns the reader to *the* original language, i.e., the Hebrew. Rather, in "The Task of the Translator," Benjamin urges returning to the original language, i.e., the pure language of philosophical discourse.[5] One even finds some surprising lacunae, such as the absence of any reference to Giancarlo Rinaldi's collection of Greco-Roman references to the Bible (*Biblia Gentium: primo contributo per un indice delle citazioni, dei riferimenti e delle allusioni alla bibbia negli autori pagani, greci e latini, di età imperiale* [1989]). Nonetheless, these minor quibbles do not detract from the persuasiveness of the book as a whole. Not only the idea of the Greek Bible but also the text itself played a formative role in simultaneously acculturating and preserving Jews and Judaism in the Greco-Roman world.

Generally well edited, the following errata should be noted: on page 97, note 10, the page number is listed as p.000; also on page 97, Rajak

erroneously attributes the martyrdom stories of Second Maccabees to chapters 7 and 8, not 6 and 7. Page 133 seems garbled: Rajak cites the Hebraism *ti soi estin* (Psalm 113, LXX) which does not appear in the quotation (verse 5 has been omitted), *eis ta opiso* appears in the note as *eis ta piswta* (it should be *eis ta opisw ta*), and note 25 has *exodw* without iota-subscript while "Hebraism" should be "Hebraisms." On page 177, note 4, the Marcos 2000 citation has incorrect pagination (67-2000). On page 205, the author misspells Humphries as Humphreys (correctly spelled in note 56). On page 254, note 49 refers to L. Alexander 2005 (but the source is not in bibliography). Finally, page 295 has the infelicitous "They would have scored an own goal."

Notes

[1]. Rajak rightly prefers the term "Greek Bible" while recognizing the inescapable conventionality of "Septuagint."

[2]. Here Rajak expands on the work of Sylvie Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the Letter of Aristeas* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[3]. Benjamin G. Wright, "Why a Prologue? Ben Sira's Grandson and His Greek Translation," in Shalom M. Paul, Robert A. Kraft, and Weston W. Fields, eds., *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 633-644.

[4]. Albert Pietersma, "A New Paradigm for Addressing Old Questions: The Relevance of the Interlinear Model for the Study of the Septuagint," in Johan Cook, ed., *Bible and Computer: The Stellenbosch AIBI-6 Conference, Proceedings of the Association Internationale Bible et Informatique, "From Alpha to Byte," University of Stellenbosch, 17-21 July 2000* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 337-364.

[5]. Walter Benjamin, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (1923) found in English translation by Harry Zohn in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken,

1969), 69-82. In fairness it should be noted that Rajak acknowledges the complexity of Benjamin's essay. My point is that while Benjamin certainly promotes literalism, his position as a whole would be highly critical of Rajak's assessment of the Greek Bible. Instead of enabling both Greekness and Jewishness, the translation ought to efface these differences in favor of a universal pure language.

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