



Artscroll Through the Ages: Alexandria - Greek - Septuagint



Rabbi Chaim Metzger cmetzger@torontotorah.com

Talmud Bavli Megillah 9a (5th Century CE) (William Davidson Translation)

Rather, say in explanation of the *baraita*: **And our Rabbis permitted them to be written only in Greek. And it is taught** in another *baraita* that **Rabbi Yehuda said: Even when our Rabbis permitted Greek, they permitted it only in a Torah scroll**, and not for other books of the Bible, which must be written only in Hebrew.

The Gemara continues: **And this was due to the incident of King Ptolemy, as it is taught** in a *baraita*: There was **an incident involving King Ptolemy of Egypt, who assembled seventy-two Elders** from the Sages of Israel, **and put them into seventy-two separate rooms, and did not reveal to them for what purpose he assembled them**, so that they would not coordinate their responses. **He entered and approached each and every one, and said to each of them: Write for me a translation of the Torah of Moses your teacher. The Holy One, Blessed be He, placed wisdom in the heart of each and every one, and they all agreed to one common understanding.** Not only did they all translate the text correctly, they all introduced the same changes into the translated text.

אֵלָּא אִימָא רַבּוּתֵינוּ לֹא הִתִּירוּ
שְׁיִכְתְּבוּ אֵלָּא יוֹנִית וְתַנְיָא אָמַר
רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אַף כְּשֶׁהִתִּירוּ רַבּוּתֵינוּ
יוֹנִית לֹא הִתִּירוּ אֵלָּא בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרָה
וּמִשּׁוּם מַעֲשֵׂה דְתַלְמֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
דְּתַנְיָא מַעֲשֵׂה בְּתַלְמֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
שְׁפִינְס שְׁבַעִים וּשְׁנַיִם זְקֵנִים
וְהִכְנִיסוּן בְּשַׁבָּעִים וּשְׁנַיִם בְּתַיִם
וְלֹא גִיּוֹלָה לָהֶם עַל מָה פִּינְסוּ וְנִכְנְסוּ
אֶצְלָ קַל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד וְאָמַר לָהֶם
כְּתוּבוּ לִי תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה רַבְּכֶם נָתַן
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּלִבְּךָ קַל אֶחָד
וְאֶחָד עֲצָה וְהִסְבִּימוּ כּוּלְן לְדַעַת
אַחַת

Talmud Yerushalmi Megillah 1:9

Bar Kappara taught: “G-d should enlarge Yefet (*yafit*), and he shall dwell in the tent of Shem” (Gen. 9:27) – that they should speak the language of Yefet in the tent of Shem...

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel taught: even for [Torah] scrolls they only allowed them to be written in Greek. They checked and found that the Torah can only be translated fully properly (כל צורכה) into Greek. Rabbi Yirmiyah said in the name of Rabbi Chiya Bar Ba that Aquilas the Convert translated the Torah before Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua and they praised him. As it says in psalms 45: Beautiful things have come from man.

יָפֶת אֶל-הַיָּם לִיפֶת וַיִּשְׁכֶּן בְּאַהֲלֵי שֵׁם. שְׂיֵהוּ
מְדַבְּרִין בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ שֶׁל יָפֶת, בְּאוֹהֶלוֹ שֶׁל שֵׁם... תַּנִּי,
רַבִּין שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר, אַף בְּסִפְרִים לֹא
הִתִּירוּ שְׁיִכְתְּבוּ אֵלָּא יוֹנִית. בְּדָקוּ וּמְצָאוּ שְׂאִין
הַתּוֹרָה וְכוּלָּהּ לְהִיתְרַגֵּם כּל צוֹרְכָה אֵלָּא יוֹנִית
... רַבִּי יִרְמְיָהוּ אָמַר בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי חִיְיָה בַר בָּא,
תִּירְגַם עֲקִילָס הַגֵּר הַתּוֹרָה לְפָנַי רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר
וְלְפָנַי רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְקִילְסוּ אוֹתוֹ. אָמְרוּ לוֹ
(תְּהִלִּים מָה) יָפִיפִית מִבְּנֵי אָדָם

Letter of Aristaes to Philokrates (2nd or 3rd century BCE) (Summary)

The Septuagint Version is first mentioned in a letter of Aristaes to his brother Philokrates. Here, in substance, is what we read of the origin of the version. Ptolemy II Philadelphus, King of Egypt (284-47) had recently established a valuable library at Alexandria. He was persuaded by Demetrius of Phalarus, chief librarian, to enrich it with a copy of the sacred books of the Jews. To win the good graces of this people, Ptolemy, by the advice of Aristaes, an officer of the royal guard, an Egyptian by birth and a pagan by religion, emancipated 100,000 slaves in different parts of his kingdom. He then sent delegates, among whom was Aristaes, to Jerusalem to ask Eleazar, the Jewish high priest, to provide him with a copy of the Law, and Jews capable of translating it into Greek. The embassy was successful: a richly ornamented copy of the Law was sent to him and seventy-two Israelites, six from each tribe, were deputed to go to Egypt and carry out the wish of the king. They were received with great honor and during seven days astonished everyone by the wisdom they displayed in answering seventy-two questions which they were asked; then they were led into the solitary island of Pharos, where they began their work, translating the Law, helping one another and comparing their translations in proportion as they finished them. At the end of seventy-two days their work was completed. The translation was read in presence of the Jewish priests, princes, and people assembled at Alexandria, who all recognized and praised its perfect conformity with the Hebrew original. The king was greatly pleased with the work and had it placed in the library.

Megillat Ta'anit Batra (5-6th century CE)

On the eighth of Tevet, the Torah was written in Greek in the days of King Ptolemy, and darkness came to the world for three days	בשמונה בטבת נכתבה תורה בימי תלמי המלך יונית והחשך בא לעולם שלשה ימים.
---	---

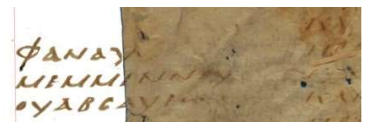
Masechet Sofrim Chapter 1 7-9 (Translation A. Cohen Soncino Press 1965)

<p>[The sacred texts] may not be written in [obsolete] Hebrew characters,¹⁴<i>The script must be 'Assyrian' (the modern Hebrew square characters) and the language 'the holy tongue'</i>. or in the Aramaic, Median or Greek languages.¹⁵<i>According to Meg. 9a (Sonc. ed., p. 48) it is permitted to write the Torah in Greek although this is not allowed in the case of tefillin and mezuzoth.</i> If they were written in any other language or in any other characters they may not be used for the lection [in the statutory services], since they must be written in the Assyrian [script].</p> <p>It once happened that five elders wrote the Torah for King Ptolemy¹⁶<i>Presumed to be Ptolemy Philadelphus who reigned over Egypt 285-247 B.C.E. He arranged for the Greek Version, the Septuagint, to be made, as narrated in the next paragraph. [The Tractate gives two accounts of the translation, the present one being the later which reflects the harmful effects which the Septuagint had in arresting the development of exegesis among the Hellenistic Jews (cf. Weiss, Dor, I, p. 90).]</i> in Greek, and that day was as ominous for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made, since the Torah could not be accurately translated.</p> <p>It also happened that King Ptolemy assembled seventy-two elders and placed them in seventy-two [separate] rooms without telling them the reason for which he had assembled them. He then went to each one of them and said to him. 'Write for me [a translation of] the Torah of Moses your master'. The Omnipresent inspired them. and the mind of all of them was identical, so that each on his own wrote the [same translation of the] Torah, introducing [the same] thirteen alterations</p>	<p>אין כותבין לא עברית ולא ארמית ולא מדית ולא יונית. כתב בכל לשון בכל כתבים לא יקרא בו עד שתהא כתובה אשורית:</p> <p>מעשה בה' זקנים שכתבו לתלמי המלך את התורה יונית והיה היום קשה לישראל כיום שנעשה העגל שלא היתה התורה יכולה להתרגם כל צרכה :</p> <p>שוב מעשה בתלמי המלך שכנס ע"ב זקנים והושיבם בשבעים ושנים בתים ולא גלה להם על מה כנסם וכנסם לכל אחד ואחד מהם אמר להם כתבו לי תורת משה רבכם. נתן המקום עצה בלב כל אחד ואחד והסכימה דעתן לדעת אחת וכתבו לו תורה בפני עצמה וי"ג דבר שינו בו.</p>
--	--

Hexapla (By Origen 240 CE) Oldest Fragment of Origen's Hexapla: T-S 12.182



(פגיו)	φανα]υ
(ממנו)	μεμμ]εννου
(ובשונו)	ουαβσ]αυεω



The text of the Hexapla was organized in the form of six columns representing synchronized versions of the same Old Testament text, which placed side by side were the following:

1. the [Hebrew](#) consonantal text **2.** the [Secunda](#) – the Hebrew text [transliterated](#) into Greek characters including vowels **3.** the translation of [Aquila of Sinope](#) into Greek (2nd century) **4.** the translation of [Symmachus the Ebionite](#) into Greek (late 2nd century) **5.** a [recension](#) of the [Septuagint](#), **6.** the translation of [Theodotion](#)^[6] into Greek (mid 2nd century) (Wikipedia)

Community of Alexandria

Gemara Sukkah 51b (William Davidson Translation)

It is taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Yehuda says: One who did not see the great synagogue [*deyofloston*] of Alexandria of Egypt never saw the glory of Israel. They said that its structure was like a large basilica [*basileki*], with a colonnade within a colonnade. At times there were six hundred thousand men and another six hundred thousand men in it, twice the number of those who left Egypt. In it there were seventy-one golden chairs [*katedraot*], corresponding to the seventy-one members of the Great Sanhedrin, each of which consisted of no less than twenty-one thousand talents of gold. And there was a wooden platform at the center. The sexton of the synagogue would stand on it, with the scarves in his hand. And because the synagogue was so large and the people could not hear the communal prayer, when the prayer leader reached the conclusion of a blessing requiring the people to answer amen, the sexton waved the scarf and all the people would answer amen.

And the members of the various crafts would not sit mingled. Rather, the goldsmiths would sit among themselves, and the silversmiths among themselves, and the blacksmiths among themselves, and the coppersmiths among themselves, and the weavers among themselves. And when a poor stranger entered there, he would recognize people who plied his craft, and he would turn to join them there. And from there he would secure his livelihood as well as the livelihood of the members of his household, as his colleagues would find him work in that craft.

תנא, רבי יהודה אומר: מי שלא ראה דיופלוסטון של אלכסנדריא של מצרים, לא ראה בכבודן של ישראל. אמרו: כמין בסילקי גדולה היתה, סטיו לפנים מסטיו. פעמים שהיו בה (ששים רבוא על ששים רבוא), כפלים פיוצאי מצרים. והיו בה שבעים ואחת קתדראות של זהב, פנגד שבעים ואחת של סנהדרין גדולה, כל אחת ואחת אינה פחותה מעשרים ואחד רבוא כפרי זהב. ובימה של עץ באמצעיתה, וסנו הכנסת עומד עליה והסודרין בינו. וכיון שהגיע לענות אמן, הלה מניף בסודר וכל העם עונין אמן. ולא היו יושבין מעורבין, אלא זהבין בפני עצמן וכסףין בפני עצמן ונפחין בפני עצמן וטרסיים בפני עצמן וגרדיים בפני עצמן. וכשעני נכנס שם, היה מכיר בעלי אומנתו ונפנה שם. ומשם פרנסתו ופרנסת אנשי ביתו.

Famous Figures –

Philo of Alexandria, - Wrote allegorical commentary on Torah in Greek based on the Septuagint. Didn't necessarily speak Hebrew

Onias – made a temple in Alexandria to offer sacrifice during time of 2nd Temple

Philo of Alexandria, On the Life of Moses II 38

Philadelphus..., being a sovereign of this character, and having conceived a great admiration for and love of the legislation of Moses, conceived the idea of having our laws translated into the Greek language; and immediately he sent out ambassadors to the high-priest and king of Judea, for they were the same person. And having explained his wishes, and having requested him to pick him out a number of men, of perfect fitness for the task, who should translate the law, the high-priest, as was natural, being greatly pleased, and thinking that the king had only felt the inclination to undertake a work of such a character from having been influenced by the providence of G-d, considered, and with great care selected the most respectable of the Hebrews whom he had about him, who in addition to their knowledge of their national scriptures, had also been well instructed in Grecian literature, and cheerfully sent them....

On which account, even to this very day, there is every year a solemn assembly held and a festival celebrated in the island of Pharos, to which not only the Jews but a great number of persons of other nations sail across, reverencing the place in which the first light of interpretation shone forth, and thanking G-d for that ancient piece of beneficence which was always young and fresh.

*Old Testament in Greek
(Septuagint)*

*The Septuagint in English
(Brenton)*

Biblia Hebraica (Stuttgartensia)

1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν.

In the beginning G-d made the heaven and the earth.

בראשית ברא א-להים את השמים ואת הארץ

(1) **And they wrote for him: G-d created in the beginning [bereshit]**, reversing the order of the words in the first phrase in the Torah that could be misinterpreted as: “*Bereshit* created G-d” (Genesis 1:1). They did so to negate those who believe in the preexistence of the world and those who maintain that there are two powers in the world: One is *Bereshit*, who created the 2nd, G-d.

(2) **And they wrote: I shall make man in image and in likeness**, rather than: “Let us make man in our image and in our likeness” (Genesis 1:26), as from there too one could mistakenly conclude that there are multiple powers and that G-d has human form.

(3) Instead of: “And on the seventh day G-d concluded His work” (Genesis 2:2), which could have been understood as though some of His work was completed on Shabbat itself, they wrote: **And on the sixth day He concluded His work, and He rested on the seventh day.**

(4) They also wrote: **Male and female He created him, and they did not write** as it is written in the Torah: “Male and female **He created them**” (Genesis 5:2), to avoid the impression that there is a contradiction between this verse and the verse: “And G-d created man” (Genesis 1:27), which indicates that G-d created one person.

(5) Instead of: “Come, let us go down, and there confound their language” (Genesis 11:7), which indicates multiple authorities, they wrote in the singular: **Come, let me go down, and there confound their language.**

(6) they replaced the verse: “And Sarah laughed within herself [*bekirba*]” (Genesis 18:12), with: **And Sarah laughed among her relatives [*bikroveha*]**. They made this change to distinguish between Sarah’s laughter, which G-d criticized, and Abraham’s laughter, to which no reaction is recorded. Based on the change, Sarah’s laughter was offensive because she voiced it to others.

(7) They also altered the verse: “For in their anger they slew a man and in their self-will they slaughtered an ox” (Genesis 49:6), to read: **For in their anger they slew an ox and in their self-will they uprooted a trough**, to avoid the charge that Jacob’s sons were murderers.

(8) Instead of: “And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon a donkey” (Exodus 4:20), they wrote: **And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon a carrier of people**, which could be understood as referring to a horse or a camel rather than the lowly donkey.

(9) Instead of: “And the residence of the children of Israel, who resided in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years” (Exodus 12:40), which when read literally is imprecise, for they did not dwell in Egypt that long, they wrote: **And the residence of the children of Israel, who resided in Egypt and in other lands, was four hundred years.**

(10) Instead of: “And he sent the youth of the children of Israel, who brought burnt-offerings” (Exodus 24:5), which evokes the question of why young men were sent to perform that service, they wrote: **And he sent the elect [*za’atutei*] of the children of Israel.** The same term was substituted again several verses later, rendering the verse: “And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand” (Exodus 24:11), as: **And upon the elect of the children of Israel He laid not His hand.**

(11) Instead of Moses’ assertion: “I have not taken one donkey [*hamor*] from them” (Numbers 16:15), they wrote in more general terms: **“I have not taken one item of value [*hemed*] from them,”** to prevent the impression that Moses took other items.

(12) To the verse that discusses the worship of the sun and the moon, about which it is written: “Which the Lord your G-d has allotted to all the nations” (Deuteronomy 4:19), they added a word to make it read: **“Which the Lord your G-d has allotted to give light to all the nations,”** to prevent the potential misinterpretation that the heavenly bodies were given to the gentiles so that they may worship them. The verse: **“And has gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or the moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded”** (Deuteronomy 17:3), could be understood as indicating that G-d did not command their existence, i.e., these entities created themselves. Therefore, when these Elders translated the verse they added a word to the end of the verse to make it read: Which I have not commanded **to serve them.**

(13) **And in the list of unclean animals they wrote for him: The short-legged beast [*tze’irat haraglayim*]. And they did not write for him: “And the hare [*arnevet*]” (Leviticus 11:6), since the name of Ptolemy’s wife was Arnevet, so that he would not say: The Jews have mocked me and inserted my wife’s name in the Torah.** Therefore, they did not refer to the hare by name, but by one of its characteristic features. (William Davidson Translation Megillah 9a)

(1) אֱ-לֹהִים בָּרָא
בְּרֵאשִׁית

(2) אֶעֱשֶׂה אָדָם
בְּצַלְמִי וּבְדְמוּתִי

(3) וַיְכַל בְּיוֹם
הַשְּׁשִׁי וַיְשַׁבּוּת
בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

(4) וַיִּכְרַח וַיִּנְקְבָה
בָּרָא וְלֹא כָתְבוּ
בְּרָאָם

(5) הִבָּה אַרְדָּה
וְאִבְלָה שָׁם שְׁפָתָם
(6) וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה
בְּקִרְבָּיהָ

(7) כִּי בְּאָפָם
הִרְגוּ שׁוֹר
וּבְרִצּוֹנָם עִקְרוּ
אֲבוֹס

(8) וַיִּקַּח מִשָּׂה
אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת
בָּנָיו וַיִּרְכִּיבֵם עַל
נוֹשָׂא בְנֵי אָדָם

(9) וּמוֹשֵׁב בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר
לָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם
וּבְשָׂאָר אַרְצוֹת
אַרְבַּע מְאוֹת שָׁנָה

(10) וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת
זְאֲטוּטָי בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵל
זְאֲטוּטָי בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שְׁלַח
יָדוֹ

(11) לֹא תִמַּד
אֶתְד מִקֶּהם נִשְׂאָתִי
(12) אֲשֶׁר תִּלַּק
הִ' אֶל-הַיָּד אֶתְם
לְהֵאִיר לְכָל
הָעַמִּים וַיִּלְךְ
וַיַּעֲבֹד אֱ-לֹהִים
אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא
צִוִּיתִי לַעֲבֹדָם

(13) וְכָתְבוּ לוֹ
אֶת צְעִירַת
הַרְגָלִים וְלֹא
כָתְבוּ לוֹ אֶת
הָאַרְנֶבֶת מִפְּנֵי
שְׂאִשְׁתּוֹ שֶׁל תַּלְמִי
אַרְנֶבֶת שְׂמָה שְׁלֹא
יֹאמֵר שְׁחָקוּ בִּי
הַיְהוּדִים וְהִטִּילוּ
שָׁם אִשְׁתִּי
בְּתוֹרָה :