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Original publication:

Kreuzer, Siegfried

The Septuaginta South of Alexandria – in Antiquity

in: Johann Cook / Gideon Rudolf Kotzé (eds.), *The Septuaginta South of Alexandria*.

Essays on the Greek Translations and Other Ancient Versions by the Association for the Study of the Septuaginta in South Africa (LXXSA), pp. 3–27

Leiden: Brill 2022 (Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 193)

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004521384\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004521384_002)

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## The Septuagint South of Alexandria – in Antiquity

Siegfried Kreuzer

“The Septuagint South of Alexandria” can be understood in different ways. It may refer to African, esp. South African scholarship on the Septuagint, which certainly is the main target of this volume. Nevertheless, it may also refer to Antiquity: The Septuagint South of Alexandria – in Antiquity.

### 1. Jewish population “South of Alexandria” and the origin of the Septuagint

As Alexandria is in the North West of the Nil Delta, almost all of Egypt is South of Alexandria, and as the Septuagint is a product of the Jewish people in Egypt, we start with a brief look at the Jewish population in Egypt.

For a long time, Egypt dominated Canaan, and it was always interested to exercise at least some control in the Southern Levant. This on the other hand led to some influx of people from that region. One may remember that according to 1 Kings 11 two opponents of Salomon fled to Egypt and later on returned from there in order to become kings: Jeroboam, the later king of Israel (1 Kings 11:26-40), and Hadad, the later king of Edom (1 Kings 11:17-22.25).

Centuries later, about 585 B.C., a group of fugitives carried off the prophet Jeremiah to Egypt (Jer 43:1-7). These people certainly did not travel into the unknown but one may assume that other Jews already lived there. The places mentioned in Jer 44:1 are Tachpanhes (southwest from Pelusium), Migdol, Memphis (the capital of the Ancient kingdom, 18 km south of Cairo), and Patros (so called Upper Egypt, the Nil valley south of Memphis).<sup>1</sup>

Not much later, there was a Jewish military colony at the Elephantine-island near the first cataract in the deep South of Egypt. In the Elephantine letters it is stated that it existed already as Cambyses came to Egypt in 525. The Jews from Elephantine corresponded with the Persian administration in Palestine in Aramaic, but one may assume that after several generations, this was not the only language they used. As there were Jews in the deep South, one may assume that there were many more Jews in the Northern parts of Egypt.

In the letter of Aristeas § 13, it is said that Ptolemy II had taken 100.000 Jews to Egypt as prisoners of war and that he gave them their freedom – as a gift for the translation of the Holy Scriptures (in this case the Pentateuch), i.e. which became the Septuagint and was presented to the library in Alexandria. This certainly is exaggerated in view of the numbers and also in view of the situation. However, there was certainly a good number of Jews that had come to Egypt, be it as captives, as soldiers, or as merchants. And one may assume that many of them moved to the newly founded town of Alexandria, because otherwise the number of Jews in that town would not have been so big.

But also in the countryside there were Jewish settlements. The papyri from Herakleopolis (a town between the Nile and the entrance to the Faiyum-oasis) testify to a larger Jewish population that even formed a *politeuma* with its own jurisdiction, and to other towns and villages with some Jewish population.<sup>2</sup> The papyri also show that the Greek language was

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on those places see the articles in Manfred Görg (ed.), *Neues Bibel-Lexikon*, 3 vols. (Düsseldorf-Zürich 1991-2001), and in D. N. Freedman et al. (eds.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York 1992).

<sup>2</sup> James M.S. Cowey and Klaus Maresch, *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis (144/3—133/2 v. Chr.) (P. Polit. Iud.)*. Papyri aus den Sammlungen von Heidelberg, Köln, München und Wien, Abhandlungen der Nordrhein-westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften; Sonderreihe: Papyrologica Coloniensia XXIX

used throughout; although one should not exclude that the Jews in Egypt also used the local language, i.e. Late Egyptian/Demotic in their everyday life and in contact with the original Egyptian population.

In about 170 BCE there came an other Jewish refugee from Palestine: Onias IV the son of the High Priest Onias III, who could not succeed his father. He was welcomed in Egypt and allowed to set up his own temple in Heliopolis / Leontopolis / Tell Yehudiye (today on the Eastern fringes of Cairo). Onias was accompanied by a number of important persons from Jerusalem and his undertakings attracted many Jews, so that – according to Josephus – for some time the area between Memphis and Pelusium, i.e. a part of the Eastern Delta, was called the land of Onias.<sup>3</sup> His sons, as many Jews in Egypt, performed military services; the even acted as generals under Cleopatra III (who reigned from 117 to 81 BCE).

This growing part of Jewish population in Egypt evidently not only had its juridical but even more its religious institutions. Several times a *proseuchē* in Egypt is mentioned.<sup>4</sup> This certainly was not only a place for worship, but a building where the people gathered for prayer and religious service, but most probably also for community activities. Not the least, the elite of the *proseuchē* and the *politeuma* were the people who could translate the Holy Scriptures and “produce” the Septuagint.

This is not the place to refer the long-standing debate about the reasons for the Greek translation of the Holy Scriptures of Israel. However, it may briefly be mentioned that British and American scholarship still tends to defend the letter of Aristeas and how it explains the initiative and the support of the Ptolemaic king for making that translation. On the other hand, continental scholarship largely is convinced that the letter is pure fiction and that the translation was made by inner Jewish reasons only. While the second position seems more plausible (and less fantastic), the first position may ask why such a tradition of the initiative by a non-Jewish librarian and a foreign king, that later on was criticized, should have been invented. Defenders of the first view also refer to the acts of benevolence of the Ptolemaic kings that were important means of communication between the king and specific groups and for maintaining loyalty to the king.<sup>5</sup>

In my view, the Septuagint was begun for inner Jewish needs and reasons, be it for study, education or liturgy, or all of that. On the other hand, the Ptolemaic kings, esp. with the library, had created an atmosphere of cultural competition where it became important to present oneself (one may think of Manetho’s presentation of the Egyptian history and of Berossos’ Mesopotamian history).<sup>6</sup> It was not the king himself, but the atmosphere of cultural competition, that challenged also the Jews of Alexandria to present themselves with their holy

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(Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag 2001); see also: Siegfried Kreuzer, „Jewish Life in Egypt in the Light of the Herakleopolis Papyri,“ *HeBAI* 10 (2021) (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae* 14.8, §1; Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 1.9, §4.

<sup>4</sup> Carsten Claussen, “Meeting, Community, Synagogue – Different Frameworks of Ancient Jewish Congregations in the Diaspora,” in *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins to 200 CE*, eds. Olsson Birger and Zetterholm, Magnus, CB.NT 39 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003): 144–167: 147 fn. 14, gives the following list: “JIGRE 22.117 (246–221 B.C.E.); JIGRE 24.25.125 (140–116 B.C.E.); JIGRE 13.27.28 (2nd or 1st century B.C.E.); JIGRE 126 (1st or 2nd century C.E.); JIGRE 9 (2nd century B.C.E.?); JIGRE 20 (late Ptolemaic or Roman; perhaps not Jewish); JIGRE 105 (restored; mid–2nd century B.C.E.–early 2nd century C.E.); CPJ I 129 (218 B.C.E.); CPJ I 134 (late 2nd century B.C.E.); CPJ I 138 (second half of 1st century B.C.E.?); CPJ II 432 (113 C.E.). In addition to these JIGRE 16.17.127.129 may imply a synagogue.” JIGRE = William Horbury and David Noy (eds.), *Jewish inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt. With an index of the Jewish inscriptions of Egypt and Cyrenaica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> This point of view was especially emphasised by Tessa Rajak, e.g. in Tessa Rajak, *Translation and survival. The Greek Bible of the ancient Jewish Diaspora*. Oxford University Press (Oxford et al. 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Gerald P. Verbrugge and John M. Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho, introduced and translated*. Native traditions in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt (Ann Arbor 1996; repr. 2000).

book in Greek.<sup>7</sup> Be it as it may, beside its religious importance for education, cult and prayer, the Septuagint also became an important means for the identity of the Jews, not only in Egypt, but in the whole Jewish diaspora and also in the homeland.<sup>8</sup> It may be mentioned that while certainly most of the Septuagint was translated in Alexandria, other places cannot be excluded. Especially for the book of Isaiah an origin in Leontopolis (see above) was suggested.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. The transmission of the Septuagint in Egypt.

One of the earliest witnesses for the Septuagint is the preface to the Greek translation of the book of Ben Sira by his grandson in about 132 BCE. The translation was clearly made in Egypt. As is well known, the grandson speaks about the difficulties of translating from the Hebrew into Greek. For this he refers to the translation of the Law, the Prophets and the other Writings, which clearly indicates that at this time most of the (originally Hebrew books) of the Septuagint were already translated and also in use (because he refers to them for comparison).

The letter of Aristeas which was also written at about the same time not only explains the Origin of the Septuagint (as discussed above), but eventually also defends it (cf. the solemn obligation that it may not be altered).<sup>10</sup> The defense is most probably directed against criticism that the Septuagint not always follows the Hebrew text, at least not its proto-Masoretic version that more and more became normative in the time of the Hasmoneans.

One of the best and interesting witnesses for the use of the Septuagint are the many works of Philo from Alexandria. Philo almost exclusively quotes and discusses the Pentateuch and he does so according to his allegoric method. However, his quotations of the Septuagint are most important witnesses to its specific textual form. While in general they agree with what we know from the manuscripts, there are also specific readings. A very interesting phenomenon is, that his quotations often agree with quotations in the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament, not only in specific readings but also in the limitations of the quotation. It was suggested to explain this by the use of florilegia. Although there exist florilegia in Qumran, this explanation is not very probable for the relation between Philo and Hebrews. One may rather assume that they participate in common liturgical usage of such passages. Such liturgical traditions would have been shared in the Jewish communities.<sup>11</sup> If there were such common traditions between Philo and the letter to the Hebrews, so to say to the north of

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<sup>7</sup> Siegfried Kreuzer, "Origin and Development of the Septuagint in the Context of Alexandrian and Early Jewish Culture and Learning," in: Siegfried Kreuzer, *The Bible in Greek. Translation, Transmission, and Theology of the Septuagint*, SBL.SCS 63 (Atlanta, GA 2015), 3–46; Siegfried Kreuzer, "The Origins and Transmission of the Septuagint," in *Introduction to the Septuagint*, ed. Siegfried Kreuzer (Waco TX: Baylor 2019), 3–56, esp. 17–20.

<sup>8</sup> As can be seen from the Greek biblical texts in Qumran.

<sup>9</sup> See Arie van der Kooij, "Esaias/Isaias/Isaiah," in: Kreuzer, *Introduction*, 515–527, esp. 521f.

<sup>10</sup> On the letter of Aristeas see e.g. Kai Brodersen (ed.), *Aristeas: Der König und die Bibel, Griechisch-Deutsch*, Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 18576 (Stuttgart: Reclam 2008); Erich S. Gruen, "The Letter of Aristeas and the cultural context of the Septuagint," in: *Die Septuaginta - Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten. Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 20.-23. Juli 2006*, eds. Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus, WUNT 219 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2008), 134–156; Benjamin G. Wright, *The Letter of Aristeas. 'Aristeas to Philocrates' or 'On the Translation of the Law of the Jews'*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (Berlin: de Gruyter 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Gert J. Steyn, "Torah quotations common to Philo, Hebrews, Clemens Romanus and Justin Martyr: What is the common denominator?" In: *The New Testament interpreted. Essays in honour of Bernard C. Lategan*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Johan C. Thom, NTS 124 (Leiden: Brill 2006), 135 - 151.; Gert J. Steyn, *A quest for the assumed LXX Vorlage of the explicit quotations in Hebrews*, FRLANT 235 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2011).

Alexandria, it is most probable, that such traditions were common not only in Alexandria but also with the Jewish congregations “south of Alexandria”.

There is an interesting indication for the liturgical use of the Septuagint. There is the well-known phenomenon that from the late Persian or the Early Hellenistic period the pronunciation of the holy name of the God of Israel should be avoided. This led to the alternative reading <sup>ve</sup>*lohim* or <sup>a</sup>*donay*. The later one became the dominant reading and was rendered in the Septuagint by *kyrios*. In the Septuagint, not only the holy name of God should be avoided, but also the so to say very bad name of the god Baal: In the Pentateuch and in Joshua “Baal” occurs only in combinations as personal name and as place name; and even as the name of a deity in the Balaam-story it is Baal-Pegor. In the Greek Pentateuch, the Baal-element is rendered in forms somewhat different from Baal, e.g. Beer- or Bala- (like Bala[h]ermon) or hidden like Phogor in Num 31:16.

In Judges (e.g. 2:13; 3:7; 10:6, 16) and Samuel/Kings (e.g. 1 Sam 7:4; 1 Kings 18:19) and also frequently in the book of Jeremiah, Baal, is rendered as Baal but with the female article. This strange fact most probably signifies that one should read *aischyne* instead of Baal.<sup>12</sup> This explanation is supported by the observation that also in Hebrew *baal* sometimes is replaced by *boshät*, shame, e.g. in the name of Saul’s son Ishbaal who is renamed Ish-boshät (which king would name his son *boshät* = shame?) and that in 1 Kings 19:18 evidently *aischýne* intruded into the written text. While later on, in the Hebraizing texts (kaige- and semi-kaige texts) the so to say correct male article was used.<sup>13</sup> Baal with the female article is a kind of *ketib-qere* in Greek, indicating that instead of Baal one should read *aischyne*, shame. Although there are cross influences between the manuscripts, it is quite clear that in the original Greek translation (Old Greek) there was a reading tradition that replaced the abhorrent name of the god Baal by *aischynē*. This “Ersatzlesung” for Baal to my mind indicates liturgical use or at least public reading of the Septuagint, be it in the synagogue or in the “Lehrhaus” (“house of instruction”, cf. Sir 51:23).

### 3. Papyri and other writings as evidence for the use of the Septuagint South of Alexandria and to Nubia

A most important evidence for the use of the Septuagint “South of Alexandria”, i.e. in Egypt, are the papyri. For evaluating the papyri, one has to keep in mind that their preservation very much depends on the climate and on the place of preservation, i.e. in the dry area of the desert or in the dry place of a library or a monastery. Even for Egypt, the necessary conditions are not given in the rather humid climate of Alexandria, or in the Delta, but rather in Middle and Upper Egypt.<sup>14</sup>

This at the same time leads to some caveat for the interpretation: As there are practically only papyri from Egypt, readings that are found in papyri are not necessarily exclusive for Egypt and do not necessarily represent an Egyptian-only text type. The readings may have been in use in other areas as well, however, it is clear that it was used in Egypt.

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<sup>12</sup> This explanation was already suggested by August Dillmann, „Über Baal mit dem weiblichen Artikel,“ Monatsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Berlin, 1881, 601–620. See also the footnote to Judges 2:17 in Wolfgang Kraus and Martin Karrer (eds.), *Septuaginta-Deutsch* (Stuttgart 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Siegfried Kreuzer, “B or not B. The place of Codex Vaticanus in Textual History and in Septuagint research,” in: Kreuzer, *Bible in Greek*, 277-297: 288-289. – The procedure is not always the same. In 2Kings 1:2, 3, 6, 16 also in Codex Vaticanus “*Baal myian*” has the female article, while in the Antiochian manuscripts one finds the combination “*Baal myian prosochtisma*”. This indicates that also *prosochtisma* could be used as Ersatz-reading and that at this place the Ersatz-reading is combined with the specific designation *Baal myian*.

<sup>14</sup> By exception of the papyri from Qumran, practically all the papyri with biblical text come from the region along the Nile “south of Alexandria”.

The list of papyri in the updated “Verzeichnis” by Alfred Rahlfs and Detlef Fraenkel<sup>15</sup> mentions 19 places in Middle Egypt and 10 places in Upper Egypt, up to Elephantine, where papyri have been found, with over 100 Greek papyri of the Septuagint. There are even three places in Nubia. This shows the wide distribution of the Holy Scriptures and esp. the Septuagint, and it illustrates the expansion of the Christian Church in Egypt in Antiquity. There is not very much known about Christianity in Egypt for the first two centuries, but the papyri illustrate the wide use of the Septuagint, certainly both, for liturgy and for studying, in the churches and in monasticism. Considering the cultural context with its use of the Greek language, the use of the Septuagint is not surprising, yet its wide distribution even up to Nubia is impressive.

But not only in the church, already in the Jewish communities the Septuagint was widely used as some of the oldest papyri demonstrate: Probably the oldest (known) papyrus of the Septuagint is P. Rylands Greek III 458 = Ra957, with rather small fragments from Deut 23-28. It belongs to the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. and probably originates from the Fayum.<sup>16</sup>

The other quite old papyrus is P. Fouad 266a = Ra 942; 266b = Ra 848; 266c = Ra 847. Fouad is a place in the Faiyum oasis. The papyrus was found in 1939 and edited in 1966.<sup>17</sup> At first it was considered as fragments of one large scroll of about 15 m containing the whole Pentateuch, but the fragments evidently belong to three parts (therefore a, b, c). There are nine identifiable fragments from Genesis and Deuteronomy. The papyri originate from the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE and represent a text form that is close to the original Septuagint (the Old Greek).<sup>18</sup>

At this point, although in Hebrew, papyrus Nash may be mentioned, which most probably also comes from the Faiyum. It forms a single sheet that contains the Decalogue and the *Shema Yisrael*, probably used for (individual) instruction and devotion. It is to be dated ca. 150 – 100 BCE and it was the by far oldest manuscript of the Old Testament before the discovery of the Qumran texts.<sup>19</sup> The interesting case is that the text in some aspects agrees with the Septuagint against the proto-Masoretic text. This confirms the old text of the Septuagint.

Still from the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE or CE are the Oxyrhynchus Papyri 3522 = Ra 857 and probably also the recently published P 5101 = Ra 2227. P. Oxy 3522 with some verses from Job 42 has the Tetragrammaton in ancient Hebrew letters (i.e. not the square script) in midst of the Greek text.<sup>20</sup> P. 5101 has the fragments of a few Psalms.<sup>21</sup> Its text is influenced by some Hebraizing revision which demonstrates that the Hebraizing texts had reached Egypt. Also this papyrus has the Tetragrammaton in Ancient Hebrew script. For both papyri this indicates that they are Jewish papyri of the Septuagint– And all these early Jewish papyri indicate that there were synagogues where they manuscripts were used. .

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<sup>15</sup> Alfred Rahlfs and Detlef Fraenkel, *Verzeichnis der griechischen Handschriften des Alten Testaments / Die Überlieferung bis zum VIII. Jahrhundert*, MSU 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2004), 563–564.

<sup>16</sup> Rahlfs and Fraenkel, *Verzeichnis*, 241-242.

<sup>17</sup> Françoise Dunand, *Papyrus Grecs Bibliques (Papyrus F. Inv. 266). Volumina de la Genèse et du Deutéronome* (Cairo: L'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 1966).

<sup>18</sup> Rahlfs and Fraenkel, *Verzeichnis*, 170-177. They now give the date “um 50 v.Chr.” (170).

<sup>19</sup> William F. Albright, “A Biblical Fragment from the Maccabean Age: The Nash Papyrus.” *JBL* 56 (1937), 145–176.

<sup>20</sup> Rahlfs and Fraenkel, *Verzeichnis*, 304.

<sup>21</sup> See Jannes Smith, “The Text-Critical Significance of Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 5101 = R 2227 for the Old Greek Psalter,” *JSCS* 45 (2012), 5–22.

A much larger part of a manuscript is preserved in p967 from the end of the second or beginning of the third century. It comprised 118 leaves = 236 pages, containing Ezekiel, Daniel (incl. Bel et Draco and Susannah), and Esther. It probably comes from Aphroditopolis and probably is a Christian papyrus, but it has preserved some features that are Jewish or at least of Jewish origin: It follows the Septuagint sequence of the prophets, but it seems to be restricted to the Hebrew Scriptures. There is a wish of blessing for the writer and the readers at the end of Daniel although the same writer continues with Esther, which may indicate an older border of the canon and the debated state of the book of Esther. The wish of blessing is not expressed with *charis* but with *eirēnē*, which also may indicate a Jewish scribe at least of the Vorlage that was copied.<sup>22</sup> The Tetragrammaton is rendered in Greek by *kyrios*, but this is not necessarily an argument against a Jewish origin.<sup>23</sup>

An other large papyrus for the Septuagint is pBodmer XXIV = Ra 2110, a psalm manuscript containing almost all of Ps 17,46–53,6 and 55,8–118,44 and written in early 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE.<sup>24</sup> As p967 it is a pre-Hexaplaric manuscript, attesting a rather old textual form of the Septuagint psalter, however, it had undergone some Hebraizing revision.<sup>25</sup> – This fits to the time of the manuscripts because at that time the Hebraizing revisions easily may have spread out to Upper Egypt, especially for a book like the Psalms that was much used and therefore copied many times.

While in general, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. onwards, Coptic, esp. Sahidic translations of the Septuagint can be found, also the use of the Septuagint continued. There are three known texts even from Nubia / Sudan: In Kasr el-Wizz there is an inscription (RA 2190= in a church from the 10<sup>th</sup> cent., containing verses from Dan 3 = Odes 8 in an interchange of Greek and Nubian.<sup>26</sup> In Old Dongola in Sudan an Ostrakon with two verses from Ps 22 in Greek language was found. (Ra 1577).<sup>27</sup> The excavations showed the importance of that town with its several churches. Besides Nubian and Coptic, also many Greek texts, mainly from everyday life were found. The heydays of these Nubian Christian empires was in the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> cent.<sup>28</sup> The Christian states in Nubia originated in ca. 400 and existed until ca. 1400.

<sup>22</sup> Siegfried Kreuzer, "Papyrus 967. Its Significance for Codex Formation, Textual History, and Canon History," in: Kreuzer, *Bible in Greek*, 255–271.

<sup>23</sup> Maria Victoria Spottorno and Diaz Caro, "The Divine Name in Ezekiel Papyrus 967" in *La Septuaginta en la Investigación Contemporánea* (V Congreso de la IOSCS), ed. Natalio Fernández Marcos (Madrid: Editorial Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas 1985), 213–218, strongly defends that also Jewish papyri use *kyrios*.

<sup>24</sup> The first edition was: Rodolphe Kasser and Michel Testuz, *Bodmer XXIV. Psaumes XVII–CXVIII* (Cologne-Genève: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana 1967). See also: Rahlfs and Fraenkel, *Verzeichnis*, 58–61.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jonathan Hong, *Der ursprüngliche Septuaginta-Psalter und seine Rezensionen. Eine Untersuchung anhand der Septuaginta-Psalmen 2; 8; 33; 49 und 103*, BWANT 224 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2019).

The relatively high age of the P. Bodmer XXIV and its close relation to the Hebrew text evidently became a stimulus for Albert Pietersma's "interlinear paradigm" which he applied to the origin of the Septuagint and to more or less all of its books. Albert Pietersma, *Ra 2110 (P. Bodmer XXIV) and the Text of the Greek Psalter* in: *Studien zur Septuaginta. Robert Hanhart zu Ehren aus Anlaß seines 65. Geburtstages*, ed. Detlef Fraenkel, MSU 20 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1990), 262–286.

<sup>26</sup> Rahlfs and Fraenkel, *Verzeichnis*, 178–179.

<sup>27</sup> To have a psalm text on an ostrakon may at first sight be surprising, but it is not unusual. In view of an ostrakon although in Coptic language Andrea H explains: "Individual Psalms and Psalm verses are very popular in Egypt, we encounter them on all kinds of writing support, with scripts showing different levels of proficiency, and as there are not that many complete Psalms extant in Coptic, each such individual Psalm passage is very valuable. Also such ostraca may give us an idea about (some) everyday writing, reading and learning habits of the Copts. They may have been used as *aides mémoires*, for a priest in his sermon, or during the process of preparing to become a priest; for private piety, written down to better remember it or to use it for meditation."

<sup>28</sup> Derek A. Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia. Pagans, Christians and Muslims on the Middle Nile* (London: British Museum Press 2002).

Christianity was brought by Byzantine missionaries. Byzantium strongly influenced also the Nubian churches. Interestingly, Nubia was the southernmost expansion of Christianity and with it also of the Septuagint “south of Alexandria”.<sup>29</sup>

At this point also the famous minister of the queen Candace who had travelled to Jerusalem and who on his return read the Septuagint and who – according to Luke in Acts 8: 26-39 – became the first African Christian, should be mentioned. Luke calls him an Ethiopian, however, Ethiopia designated the area south of Egypt, i.e. Nubia, at that time “the kingdom of Meroe, the queens of which traditionally were called ‘Candace’.”<sup>30</sup> Ethiopia in the sense of Nubia was not unknown in the Ancient world, it was mentioned already by Homer and other authors, and Herodotus describes the people in a very positive way.<sup>31</sup> While this court official who is called the treasurer of the queen evidently held an elite position, his original religious position is not so easy to determine. In view of Deut 23:2 (but see also Isa 56:4–5), his being a Eunuch makes it doubtful if he could have been a full member of the Jewish community. Maybe he was one of the so-called God-fearers, who was attracted to Judaism.<sup>32</sup> However, he had undertaken the certainly interesting but also cumbersome pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and he not only had bought a scroll of the book of Isaiah, but he studied it on his way home. While Luke tells us this story as the story of the first person from the (then) “end of the earth” (Acts 1:8) who had become a Christian, for our subject it is also an interesting illustration of one possibility, how the Septuagint was distributed into the countries of the diaspora, in this case into the deep “South of Alexandria”.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, we don’t know about the local background nor about the continuation of the story, but it is not improbable that there were Jewish people (maybe originally as merchants and soldiers as in Egypt) and local persons who were interested in Judaism and in Christianity.

#### 4. The Coptic translation of the Septuagint

As already mentioned, not much is known about the beginnings of the Christian church in Egypt. Certainly Alexandria was an important starting point, but probably also the area of the Eastern Delta which was closer to Palestine. As Christianity spread out to the south, i.e. to Middle and Upper Egypt, and as it reached the original Egyptian population, the ancient language of the country became more important.

There had been attempts to write demotic texts from the temples with Greek letters, sometimes called Old Coptic. However, while useful because the texts were much easier to read, these attempts, mainly by temple scribes, for transliterating magical and astrological texts, were not very successful.

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<sup>29</sup> On the origins and the early history of Christianity in Nubia see: Siegfried G. Richter, *Studien zur Christianisierung Nubiens*, Sprachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients 11 (Wiesbaden: Reichert 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Beverly R. Gaventa, “Ethiopian Eunuch,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2: 667; cf. Christoph Stenschke, “Ethiopian Eunuch,” *EBR* 8, 2014, 150-152.

<sup>31</sup> See Gaventa, “Ethiopian Eunuch,” 667. see also: Nancy Klancher, “Candace”. *EBR* 4, 2012, 879: “The title appears in several classical texts roughly contemporary with the NT, including Strabo (Geogr. 17.1.54), Cassius Dio (RH 54.5.4–5), and Pliny (Nat. 6.35.186). Bion of Soli (2nd cent. BCE) states that the Candace ruled over the so-called kingdom of Meroe”. On Herodotus’s Ethiopian passages see esp. László Török, *Herodotus in Nubia*, Leiden: Brill 2014.

<sup>32</sup> On the debate about the religious status and possible interests of this person see the commentaries and e.g. Andreas Lindemann, “Der ‘äthiopische Eunuch’ und die Anfänge der Mission unter den Völkern nach Apg 8-11,” in: Andreas Lindemann, *Die Evangelien und die Apostelgeschichte. Studien zu ihrer Theologie und zu ihrer Geschichte*, WUNT 241 (Tübingen: Mohr 2009), 231 - 251.

<sup>33</sup> That it was a Greek text of Isaiah is not mentioned but is most probable. One can hardly assume that a man from Nubia, even if highly educated, would know Hebrew and be able to read Isaiah, while Greek was used all along the way through Egypt and also in Jerusalem and Judaea.



The Christian missionaries by addressing also the lower classes took up the language of the people (which by that time – in the shadow of Greek – had become a language without a writing system for everyday life), and devised a writing system that took up the Greek and added six (in some varieties seven) specific signs from demotic to adapt it for the late Egyptian language that was spoken in the country. The results of this process became visible in the course of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. This Coptic language became the base for the last phase of the Egyptian language and literature. Although Greek remained dominant throughout Late Antiquity until the Arab conquest, especially in Middle and Upper Egypt Coptic became the basic language for liturgy and life of the Christian Church. In this context, the Greek bible was translated into Coptic,<sup>34</sup> and the biblical texts became the probably most important, although not the only expression of the literary production.<sup>35</sup> The Coptic language is divided mainly into Sahidic as its southern dialect and in Bohairic, spoken in the Lower Egypt. Sometimes Fayyumic and other dialects like Akhmimic (in the south) or Mesokemic (= middle Egyptian)<sup>36</sup> are discerned.

Most probably, the beginnings of the translation of the Septuagint into Coptic are to be located in a center or in centers in Middle Egypt where the Sahidic dialect was used. That at least the beginnings of the Coptic, esp. the Sahidic translation of the New Testament and the Septuagint most probably belong to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century is supported by the story that Antonius became Christian by hearing Mt 19:21 read in the church, which must have been in Coptic because he did not understand Greek. The other observation is that Pachomius in his rules for the monastery required that an applicant for the monastery had to know a large number of Psalms and other passages from scripture by heart.<sup>37</sup> This does not mean that every applicant owned e.g. a psalms scroll, but there must have existed a reliable and obligatory version of the Coptic text.

Interestingly, there are first traces of translational activity in form of Coptic glosses in Greek manuscripts. It is debated if there were different translations into the different dialects (Sahidic, Achmimic, Faiyumic, proto-Bohairic, Bohairic).<sup>38</sup> In my view, there is not so much difference because also for a new translation the translators most probably looked into

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Stephen Emmel, “Coptic Language,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:180–188: 181–182: “Standardization of the Coptic Alphabet and Birth of Coptic Literature. ... Probable role of the Christian mission. There is no direct evidence for when, where and by whom the standardization of the Coptic alphabet was brought about. The oldest surviving Coptic manuscripts were copied in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. They are mostly translations of books from the bible like an early 4<sup>th</sup>-century codex in the British Library that contains Deuteronomy, Jonah, Acts, and the Beginning of the Apocalypse of Elijah.... The evidence of such manuscripts suggests that the impetus to provide colloquial Egyptian with a new written form came from the Christian mission. ... The first Egyptian Christians no doubt spoke Greek, and at some point, the new religion won converts who spoke both, Greek and Egyptian. Probably beginning in the later part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Christian mission reached deeper into the population and embraced native Egyptians who knew little or no Greek. In order to win these converts, it was necessary to express the Christian message orally in Egyptian. To a religious movement increasingly dependent on an authoritative corpus of writings, the advantages of having written translations of the Holy Scriptures would have been obvious.”

On the use of the Bible in Egyptian monasticism see e.g. Heike Behlmer, „Die Bibel im koptischen Mönchtum der Spätantike,“ in *Zwischen Exegese und religiöser Praxis. Heilige Texte von der Spätantike bis zum Klassischen Islam*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt (Tübingen: Mohr 2016), 143-175.

<sup>35</sup> See the impressive presentation in: Samuel Moawad, *Die koptischen Autoren und ihre literarischen Werke im ersten Jahrtausend* (Münster: Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität 2020).

<sup>36</sup> This term may be misleading. *Kemet* is the original Egyptian word for Egypt. In our context, *mesokemic* does not designate the period of the Middle Kingdom but the geographic region of Middle Egypt.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. e.g.: Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius. The Making of a Community in Forth Century Egypt*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, vol. 6 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1985).

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament. An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica. Third Edition. Revised and Expanded by Alexander Achilles Fischer*, translated by Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2014), 149: “Accordingly in the various parts of the country there were various (independent) translations.”

existing translations.<sup>39</sup> The Sahidic translation seems to be the oldest one, while the Bohairic became dominant around the turn of the millennium.

Unfortunately, practically all the textual witnesses are spread out to museums and institutes practically all over the world. It is assumed that in the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. only in the famous White Monastery there still existed about 100 codices, but they were torn apart and sold in pieces and therefore spread out in many countries.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, Karlheinz Schüssler started a large research project “Biblia Coptica” at the University of Salzburg, Austria, for at first gaining an overview of all the dispersed fragments and for later on bringing together the parts of the manuscripts.<sup>41</sup> After the premature death of Schüssler in an accident, the whole project was transferred to Vienna, Austria and in its larger part to Göttingen, Germany, where Frank Feder is responsible for the project. In the meantime, there is now a cooperation with the New Testament Institut in Münster, Germany, and also a coordinated designation of the manuscripts because many contain the Old and the New Testament.

The text critical relevance of the Coptic biblical texts for the Septuagint varies, or, to express it differently: The Coptic biblical texts reflect the development of the Septuagint. This is quite understandable in the “country of the Septuagint” and in view of the close relation between Greek and Coptic and because also in the local Coptic churches there certainly also was a number of people who spoke both languages.<sup>42</sup>

Understandably, the oldest i.e. esp. the Sahidic translation are the most important ones for Septuagint studies. The Greek *Vorlagen* for the Sahidic translation originated before Origen’s Hexapla. However, especially because of the Qumran texts we also know more about earlier developments of the Septuagint: The Greek Dodekapropheton Scroll from Nahal Hever led to the discovery of the so-called kaige-recension. This is a strongly Hebraizing reworking of the Old Greek towards the then authoritative proto-Masoretic text, by the use of specific words, by adaptation to the Hebrew word order and by specific understanding of scripture (esp. that the translation should not only be close to the Hebrew in its meaning but that it should be transparent to its Hebrew origin. Dominique Barthélemy who had identified the kaige-recension also found it in a number of other books as well, e.g. in the Vaticanus-version of the book of Judges or in Ruth, and in the so-called kaige sections of Samuel-Kings.<sup>43</sup> Barthélemy not only identified the *kaige*-recension, he also asked if there still exists its Old Greek

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<sup>39</sup> Frank Feder, „Die koptische Übersetzung des Alten und Neuen Testaments im 4. Jahrhundert,“ in: *Stabilisierung und Profilierung der Koptischen Kirche im 4. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jürgen Tubach and Sophia G. Vashalomidze (Halle: Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg 2007), 65-93, tends to separate initiatives, which however, does not exclude cross influences.

<sup>40</sup> Frank Feder, §1.4.2. Coptic translations,” *Textual History of the Hebrew Bible (THB) IA* (Leiden: Brill 2016), 331–345: 335: “The ‘White Monastery’ alone probably possessed about 100 biblical codices ((Old and New Testaments). Unfortunately the leaves of the manuscripts and sometimes even parts of leaves of manuscripts were sold separately and dispersed almost all over the world between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. This dispersal remains today the major obstacle to a reconstruction of the Sahidic bible. However the remains of the library of the Archangel Michael Monastery, although they also suffered from dispersal, had a better fate, because the bulk of the 1910 find was purchased by the wealthy American collector Pierpont Morgan for his collection in New York.”

<sup>41</sup> Karlheinz Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica, Die koptischen Bibeltexte*. Forschungsinstitut für Ägyptenkunde und Koptologie der Universität Salzburg. From 1995 to 2011 there appeared four volumes with ca. 2000 pages. Schüssler was successful in uniting many dispersed manuscripts.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. the above mentioned strong influence of Greek language and Byzantine culture even until Nubia and still in late Antiquity.

<sup>43</sup> Dominique Barthélemy, *Les Devanciers d’Aquila. Première Publication Intégrale du Texte des Fragments du Dodecapropheton trouvés dans le désert de Juda, précédée d’une étude sur les traductions et recensions grecques de la Bible réalisées au premier siècle de notre ère sous l’influence du Rabbinate Palestinien*, VTS 10, 1963.

predecessor and he found it – at least for the Historical books – in the Antiochian (Lucianic) text.<sup>44</sup>

However, there is not only the so to say strong Hebraizing kaige-revision, there evidently was also a milder Hebraizing revision that could be called *semi-kaige*. Such milder Hebraizing reworking was even found in the Pentateuch, but also in the *non-kaige* sections of Samuel and Kings and not the least in the Psalms.<sup>45</sup> For these discoveries, the Qumran biblical texts were most helpful, but many of the changes can also be identified by just applying the text critical rules.<sup>46</sup>

Taken together, these insights mean that there were two phases of the translation and transmission of the Septuagint. The first phase of the transmission happened (mainly) in Alexandria in the third and second cent. BCE. The second phase was that of the Hebraizing recension, beginning probably at the end of the second century already, but mainly taking place in the first century. The reworked texts spread out (mainly) from Jerusalem (and Palestine) and reached also the diaspora. This second wave so to say gradually overlapped the first wave. This explains the surprising phenomenon that so to say in the outer areas the Old Greek texts were preserved better and longer: This is reflected in the North (Syria) by the Antiochian text, in the West by the *Vetus Latina* (Old Latin), and in the South by the Sahidic translation.<sup>47</sup>

This development has also influenced the Coptic/Sahidic manuscripts. There are Sahidic manuscripts that are evidently based on the Old Greek, there are manuscripts that reflect a

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<sup>44</sup> The sequence of the chapter titles nicely illustrates his path of research. At first he found that the two versions belong closely together and that they cannot have originated separately but that they are related („*Identité de base entre la forme antiochienne et la forme palestinienne du texte grec*“; 92–102). The specific characteristic of the Palestinian (=kaige) form of the text is very close to the Hebrew text („*La forme palestinienne diffère essentiellement par un souci de plus grande fidélité au texte hébraïque*“; 102–110). The following analysis leads to the basic insight: The Antiochian text cannot have emerged from the Palestinian text by corruptions („*La forme antiochienne ne peut être issue de la forme palestinienne par abâtardissement*“; 110–113). After analyzing the mutual influences „*Contamination réciproque de la Septante ancienne et de la recension palestinienne*“; 113–126) Barthélemy come to the decisive consequence: it is wrong to assume a Lucianic recension („*La prétendue ,recension lucianique*“; 126–128), instead, the Lucianic text is the text of the original Septuagint, although with corruptions (that occurred during its transmission). Because “Lucianic” is a late and secondary designation, Barthélemy suggested using the neutral designation as Antiochian text. But one should not consider this Antiochian text as the result of a separate recension or as representing a ‘special edition’. It is basically the Old Septuagint, although with more or less corruptions („*Mais ne considérons pas ce ‘texte antiochien’ comme le fruit d’une recension autonome ou, pour employer le langage ancien, comme constituant une ‘édition’ spéciale. C’est essentiellement la Septante ancienne, plus ou moins abâtardie et corrompue.*“; 127).

<sup>45</sup> Innocent Himbaza, “What are the consequences if 4QLXXLev<sup>a</sup> contains earliest formulation of the Septuagint?,” in: *Die Septuaginta. Orte und Intentionen*, eds. Siegfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser, and Marcus Sigismund, WUNT 361 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2016), 294–308; Siegfried Kreuzer, „Älteste Septuaginta und hebraisierende Bearbeitung. Old Greek und Semi-kaige im nicht-kaige Text von 2Samuel (mit einer Analyse von 2Sam 4,1-5),“ in *Die Septuaginta – Text, Wirkung, Rezeption*, ed. Wolfgang Kraus, Siegfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser, and Marcus Sigismund, WUNT 325 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 73–88; Hong, *Septuaginta-Psalter*.

<sup>46</sup> For an analysis of a number of texts from the historical books see Kreuzer, “B or not B?”; Siegfried Kreuzer, “‘Lukian redivivus’ or Barthélemy and beyond?,” in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010*, ed. Melvin Peters, SCS 59 (Atlanta, GA 2013), 243–261; Siegfried Kreuzer, “Old Greek und Semi-Kaige. Zur Frage hebraisierender Bearbeitung in den Nicht-Kaige-Abschnitten der Samuel- und Königebücher,” in *In the Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes. Studies in the Biblical Text in Honor of Anneli Aejmelaeus*, CBET 72 (Leuven 2014), 391–416.

<sup>47</sup> See Siegfried Kreuzer, “Old Greek, kaige and the *trifaria varietas* – a new perspective on Jerome’s statement,” *JSCS* 46 (2013), 74–85; see also: Siegfried Kreuzer, “...et a plerisque nunc loukianeios dicitur”: Jerome’s Statements on the Greek Biblical Texts and Modern Septuagint Scholarship, *ZAW* 130 (2018), 69–85; and Kreuzer, “Origins and transmission”, 41–43: “6.4.1: Jerome’s comment and Recent Research on the Septuagint”. This perspective is now taken up by Andres Piquer Otero, “The Secondary Versions of Kings. Variants and Renderings between Vorlagen and Ideology,” in *Die Septuaginta – Geschichte, Wirkung, Relevanz*, eds. Martin Meiser, Michaela Geiger, Siegfried Kreuzer, and Marcus Sigismund, WUNT 405 (Tübingen: Mohr 2018), 244–255, and illustrated with a number of interesting examples (“Coincidence[s] in Unrelated Versions”).

varying degree of Hebraizing revision. These observations and considerations are not only useful for explaining the different text forms of the Greek texts, but also for the Sahidic (and later on the other Coptic) texts.

This is now also expressed by Frank Feder: “Like VL [= *Vetus Latina*], the Coptic versions are important for the textual history of the Greek text as they were translated before most extant Greek manuscripts were copied. These versions may open a window to early Greek text traditions, which are not transmitted in the Greek manuscripts. We have both, text types that reflect the earliest Greek text type (OG), and text types that reflect early recensions.”<sup>48</sup>

The larger manuscripts often show a combination of different books for the Old and the New Testament, and sometimes beyond. But there are also manuscripts of single books. Two of them may be mentioned: The manuscript of Samuel from the Pierpont Morgan collection and the Al-Mudil psalter.

The Samuel manuscript Pierpont Morgan Library M. 567 comprises 1 and 2 Kingdoms / Samuel and is the most comprehensive (known) manuscript on these books. It was edited by James Drescher, together with all other extant Sahidic manuscripts of Samuel and also a translation of the main text.<sup>49</sup> It is a very interesting manuscript for the history of the Coptic bible but also an important tool for comparing the related Greek texts. Drescher is very reluctant in interpreting the readings, however – from the state of research in his time – he says: “One [of the problems that would need to be treated] is the relation of the Coptic to the Greek. It is easy enough to see that the Coptic Version is based mainly on a Greek text of the B (Codex Vaticanus) type with, however, many Hexaplaric and 'Lucianic' readings. But for a precise estimate of the Coptic-Greek relation an exhaustive, detailed collation of MSS. would be necessary; and this has not been attempted here. One's impression is that it would be a daunting task; for the Coptic seems to agree in one place or another with almost every possible combination of the Greek MSS.”<sup>50</sup>

According to today's knowledge, Codex Vaticanus in Samuel contains a *kaige*-text (in the *kaige*-section from 2Sam 10 onwards and a slightly revised (*semi-kaige*) text. The so-called Lucianic (or better: Antiochian) readings represent, according to Barthélemy and to what is said above, more or less the Old Greek. “Hexaplaric” readings is – as often when it is used in scholarship – a somewhat difficult term, because it is unclear if this refers to Origen's old base text or to his corrections. Anyway, with this mixture of the text, the codex is not untypical for the Coptic/Sahidic tradition. Although being written rather late (evidently 892/893) the text comprises a longer textual history and reflects a Greek text that reaches far back and finally also underwent some local, i.e. Faiyûmic influence: “According to the colophon the MS. was donated to the Monastery of St. Michael at Phantau in the Faiyûm. As with other MSS. from Phantau its Sahidic has some Fayyûmic contamination.”<sup>51</sup> However, although comparatively late, this manuscript, together with the other, mainly older but fragmentary manuscripts,<sup>52</sup> presents an interesting witness not only for the Sahidic but also for the Greek text.

Although older (late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> cent.), the Al-Mudil psalter codex represents a similar confluence of textual traditions. The codex was carefully edited and analyzed by Gregor

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<sup>48</sup> Feder, “Coptic translations,” 331.

<sup>49</sup> James Drescher, *The Coptic (Sahidic) Version of Kingdoms I, II (Samuel I, II)*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 313, Scriptorum Coptici 35 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO 1970).

<sup>50</sup> Drescher, *Kingdoms I, II*, V (Preface).

<sup>51</sup> Drescher, *Kingdoms I, II*, XII.

<sup>52</sup> Drescher, *Kingdoms I, II*, XVIII: “It should be noticed that the earliest MS. fragments of Kgs., I, J, F, E, S, ranging from the 4th. to the 7th. century, have a text closely conforming to that of M. It is evidently the standard, classical text.”

Emmenegger.<sup>53</sup> It was discovered in 1984 in the village Al-Mudil about 45 km north of Oxyrhynchos and about as much south of the Faiyum oasis. Interestingly, it was placed under the head of a girl's mummy as the only burial gift in the tomb. It has 498 pages and as such is the most comprehensive Coptic bible manuscript.

According to the region where the codex was found its language is Mesokemic, which is somewhat between Sahidic and the (later) Bohairic. The interesting question is its relation to the Septuagint. Emmenegger shows that there are different influences. It is close to P. Bodmer XXIV, but also to other forms of the Greek text.<sup>54</sup> This means that it is, as also in other regards, a mixed text, which also indicates, that there was quite some interaction between the different traditions, both in Greek and in Coptic. However, its main relation is to Upper-Egyptian texts.<sup>55</sup> Also the Greek reference text shows different stages, the Old Greek, some Hebraizing revision and probably also some Hexaplaric readings.

The most interesting observation in view of our question about the Septuagint south of Alexandria is the ongoing lively interaction between the Septuagint and the Coptic texts, not only for their translation but also for their transmission. Emmenegger presents this observation not only in view of the al-Mudil but also of other codices, as the use “certainly Sahidic and Greek, probably also Bohairic” Vorlagen.<sup>56</sup>

## 5. The Septuagint and the Ethiopic Bible.

There is an other large area of the Septuagint south (or better: south-east) of Alexandria, this is Ethiopia. The history of Ethiopia is very complex.<sup>57</sup> For most of the time, it was rather the history of kingdoms and tribes, and the sources are fragmentary and often legendary. For our topic, the kingdom of Axum is the most relevant one. The town and the kingdom of Axum is mentioned in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (*Περίπλους τῆς Ἐρυθρᾶς Θαλάσσης*), a description and handbook for the trade in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean (also called the Red Sea), over to India and down along East Africa from the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, with the starting point in Alexandria. Besides the information it gives, this handbook also illustrates the wide use of the Greek language. The Greek inscriptions, partly from before the Christian time already, also demonstrate the use of the language.

It is hard to decide when Christianity came to Axum. According to Rufin's additions to the “Ecclesiastical History” of Eusebius (based on information from Gelasius from Caesarea), Frumentius and Aedesius, two merchants from Tyre, brought Christianity to the king Ezana.

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<sup>53</sup> Gregor Emmenegger: *Der Text des koptischen Psalters aus al-Mudil. Ein Beitrag zur Textgeschichte der Septuaginta und zur Textkritik koptischer Bibelhandschriften, mit der kritischen Neuausgabe des Papyrus 37 der British Library London (U) und des Papyrus 39 der Leipziger Universitätsbibliothek* (2013), Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 159 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Emmenegger, *al-Mudil*, 155: „Dieser Befund bestätigt die bisherigen Beobachtungen: Während 2110 und Sa natürlich gewachsene Texte sind, handelt es sich bei M um einen Text, der unter Verwendung verschiedener Vorlagen entstanden ist. Eine dieser Vorlagen muss Parallelen zu 2110 aufgewiesen haben, weil die Mischlesart von Ps 117 nur so erklärt werden kann. Inwiefern diese Vorlage sich mit 2110 deckt, ist letztlich nicht zu bestimmen. Aufgrund des zeitlichen Abstandes zwischen M und 2110 kann davon ausgegangen werden, dass manche gemeinsamen Sonderlesarten eine noch weitere Verbreitung gefunden haben.“

<sup>55</sup> Emmenegger, *al-Mudil*, 166–167; these observations may be considered as indications “dass es sich beim vom Redaktor verwendeten sahidischen Text um einen älteren sahidischen Psalter handelt, der noch einige archaische Züge geboten hat, die in 2013 und SaB ebenfalls zu finden sind.“ (167).

<sup>56</sup> Emmenegger, *al-Mudil*, 225. He assumes that the similarities to the Bohairic texts come from Greek texts that (later on) became the Vorlage for the Bohairic texts.

<sup>57</sup> For the following see: Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, „Geschichte des aksümisches Reiches,“ in *Christentum am Roten Meer*, vol. 1, ed. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl (Berlin: de Gruyter 1971), 393–483; Friedrich Heyer, “Äthiopien,” TRE 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter 1977), 572–596, esp. 575–576; Stuart C. Munro-Hay, *Aksum. An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1991).

Axum became the first Christian state in Africa in 330 C.E. Frumentius went to Alexandria, where he was consecrated as bishop, which established the long-lasting and close relation of the Ethiopian church with the Coptic patriarchate of Alexandria. It is also reported, that already before that time there were trading posts where also Christians lived. Beyond those reports, there are Christian inscriptions in Axum and coins with a cross from the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. which also give a *terminus ad quem*. The high time and also the greatest expansion of the kingdom of Axum was from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, before Muslim forces occupied the coast and Axum was cut off from the routes of trade and exchange. The most important achievement of this period is the translation of the Greek Bible into Ge'ez, the Old Ethiopian language.<sup>58</sup>

“Ethiopia has several traditions regarding translators and revisers of Scripture in Ethiopic. These include Saint Frumentius, the founder of Ethiopian Christianity, the so called nine saints who purportedly arrived in Ethiopia in the late-fifth or early-sixth century D.E. and, besides translating Scriptures, introduced monastic life to Ethiopia, and Metropolitan Salama (ca. 1348 to ca. 1490), called ‘the Translator’ who is known to have translated many works from Arabic to Ge'ez.”<sup>59</sup>

The translation of the biblical texts certainly happened in the first generations of the Ethiopic church. This is confirmed by the fact that Axumic inscriptions from the late fourth and early-fifth centuries contain quotations from different books of the Old and the New Testament.<sup>60</sup> There were studies on the Ethiopic language and also on the Ethiopic biblical texts from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, however, serious scholarly work only began around 1900, e.g. by August Dillmann. One huge problem is that most of the manuscripts from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium have been destroyed by the Islamic conquest in the Middle age. There were a number of studies, but often only on the base of a small number of manuscripts.<sup>61</sup> However, there are now projects to retrieve and to evaluate more manuscripts and for getting a broader basis for further studies.<sup>62</sup>

“That the Vorlagen [of the Ethiopic Old Testament] were Greek has been established beyond doubt. Previous theories about Syriac influence depended upon faulty philology, failure to distinguish between Old Ethiopic witnesses and those having been revised against an Arabic translation of the Peshitta and uncritical interpretation of the Nine Saints legend.”<sup>63</sup>

An other reason for assuming an influence via the Arabian Peninsula was the observation of agreements with Lucianic readings that supposedly came this way from Syria. However, with the insight that the Lucianic/Antiochian text represents the Old Greek that can also be found in Greek texts in Egypt,<sup>64</sup> this assumption has become improbable.

Even though many questions, both of the origins and of the early transmission of the Coptic bible, need more research or maybe will remain unanswered, it is clear that the Coptic translation is not only based on the Septuagint but also remained in close relation to the Septuagint throughout Antiquity. “Claims about the precise Greek *Vorlage* of the Axumite

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<sup>58</sup> Heyer, “Äthiopien,” 576: “Bedeutendstes Werk der aksumitischen Periode ist die Schöpfung der Ge'ez-Bibel. Das Alte Testament wurde aus der Septuaginta erstellt, aber nicht in einem Zuge.“ See also Girma A. Demeke and Ephraim Isaac, “Ethiopic Language,” *EBR* 8, 2014, 154-157;

<sup>59</sup> Steve Delamarter, Curt Niccum, and Ralph Lee, “1.3.3 Ethiopic translation(s)“, *THB IA*, 346. On the subject see also: Isaac, E., “The Bible in Ethiopic,” *The New Cambridge History of the Bible, vol. 2: From 600–1450*, ed. Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012), 110–122.

<sup>60</sup> Delamarter, Niccum, and Lee, “Ethiopic translation(s)“, 346.

<sup>61</sup> See Delamarter, Niccum, and Lee, “Ethiopic translation(s)“, 348-349: “1.4.3.5 History of Scholarship and the production of Editions of Individual Books”,

<sup>62</sup> E.g. at the University of Marburg, Germany, there is the project of a critical edition of the book of Jeremiah by Prof. Stefan Weninger and Dr. Konrad Martin Heide, with the publication announced for 2022.

<sup>63</sup> Delamarter, Niccum, and Lee, “Ethiopic translation(s)“, 350.

<sup>64</sup> See the explanations above p. 9–10, fn. 39–42.

Bible are, in many cases, going beyond the evidence. Still the translations of the various books bear some of the distinctive readings of the various *Vorlagen* from which they were translated. Even where representations are relatively free, portions of the underlying text can often be reconstructed. For example Eth-Dan derives from a text similar to minuscule LXX<sup>130</sup> and Eth-3Ezra (= MT-Ezra-Neh) was copied from a Greek manuscript virtually identical to Codex Vaticanus (LXX<sup>B</sup>). However, Eth-2Chr may attest to Lucianic or a proto-Lucianic recension of the Greek. What this means is that the corpus of Old Testament books was probably not translated from a standard form of the Greek text. Individual books are therefore likely to have an individual character with reference to the Greek.”<sup>65</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

This survey may have demonstrated that the Septuagint was of great importance not only in the East, North, and West of its place of origin, but also “South of Alexandria”, i.e. in Egypt as the very “country of the Septuagint”, but – together with the New Testament – also far to the south and to the southeast, deep into Africa.

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<sup>65</sup> Delamarter, Niccum, and Lee, “Ethiopic translation(s)“, 350.