REVIEW of LXX book — final 03au2019/30au2019/21se2019

The Book

Aitken, James K. and James Carleton Paget. <i>*The Jewish-Greek tradition in antiquity and the Byzantine Empire</i>*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xxii, 359 p. $99.00. ISBN 9781107001633.

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A “Festschrift” is a congratulatory volume, usually on some special event such as a respected person’s birthday or retirement. This volume honors Nicholas Robert Michael de Lange for another type of recognition — the recovery of a largely overlooked aspect/period of Jewish history, namely the Jewish encounter with Greek culture from the earliest points of contact in antiquity to the end of the Byzantine Empire. Nicholas de Lange’s distinguished career has brought recognition to this undeservedly neglected field, in part by dispelling the common belief/claim that Jewish-Greek culture largely disappeared after about 100 CE and the rise of Christianity. The seventeen contributors to this collection examine literature, archaeology, and biblical translations, such as those collected in the old Greek anthology or “Septuagint,” in order to illustrate the substantial survival/appropriation of Jewish-Greek language and ideas. <i>The Jewish-Greek Tradition in Antiquity and the Byzantine Empire</i> demonstrates the enduring significance of the tradition and will be an essential handbook for anyone interested in Jewish studies, biblical studies, ancient and Byzantine history, or the Greek language [wording adapted from the publisher’s blurb]. So this is not a “Festschrift” in the usual sense, although it is noted (p.5) that the honoree is moving into his eighth decade of life (born 1944) while also continuing to teach at Cambridge University. The editors are former students of de Lange, and his bibliography (chronological to 2013) fills pp. 300-308.

As with many anthologies, this is not an easy volume to review. It begins with a eulogistic “Preface” [xi-xii] by the much decorated Hebrew literary giant, the late Amos Oz, which is a moving personal reflection on how de Lange met Oz and came to be the premier translator of his Hebrew works (especially the poetry) into English — a tribute to the honoree’s driving spirit and communicative talents. After the death of Oz in Dec 2018, de Lange commented similarly about first meeting Oz, adding that “There is something magical in the way Amos’s stories enter my head in Hebrew and come out again clothed in English words” [<i>The Jewish Chronicle,</i> 03 Jan 2019; available online].

After the expected Acknowledgements & Abbreviations [xiii-xxii, with some omissions, mislabels], comes an excellent Introduction by the editors, James K. Aitken (Cambridge) and James Carleton Paget (Cambridge) [01-11]: which includes an explanation of the subject of the book in relation to the work of de Lange along with brief chapter summaries. The contributions are arranged into four loose groupings — history [3 chs], historiography [2 chs], Greek bible and language [4 chs], and [Greek elements within Jewish] culture [8 chs]. The editors comment “The chapters in this volume, all written by friends and colleagues of Nicholas, reflect the range of his contribution to Judeo-Greek studies, in terms of both their chronological spread and subject matter (from the origins of the Septuagint to late Byzantine history) and their genre (from the general survey of a historical period or a central subject, to the more precise examination of a collection of Judeo-Greek manuscripts).” [5].

Part I: History

ch. 2. “Jews and Greco-Roman culture: from Alexander to Theodosius II,” by Günter Stemberger (Vienna) [15-36]: An excellent descriptive survey of the main developments as of the early 21st century, without much of an attempt to adjudicate (but see on Feldman, 35), and minimal discussion in the largely bibliographical notes. He refers to (assumes) the presence of “central aspects of Jewish life and thought” (35) as a criterion without attempting to be more specific. “He concludes his piece by warning that the tendency to see Hellenization and assimilation as the same thing misrepresents the evidence, noting [in agreement with Erich Gruen] that Judaism and Hellenism were overlapping, not clashing cultures” [editors’ summary, 5-6].

3. “The Jewish experience in Byzantium,” by Steven Bowman (Cincinnati) [37-53]: is a very confident syntheses, sometimes neglecting chronological relationships (compare the detailed following ch.) He “argues that a traditional periodization of the history of the Byzantine empire, which roughly falls into three parts, does less justice to the Jewish experience than one that falls into two parts, running from the fourth to the mid-tenth century, and from the last third of the tenth century to the middle of the fifteenth respectively …, argues strongly for evidence of ongoing interaction with the [Greek] language on the part of Jews and discusses major pieces of evidence supporting this view” [editors’ summary, 6]

4. “Jews and Jewish communities in the Balkans and the Aegean until the twelfth century,” by Alexander Panayotov (Bulgaria, independent scholar) [54-76]: is very detailed and needs an index and similar aids, but is also available online (03 Aug 2019) for such purposes. “The evidence … often shows that in the areas concerned Jews were a well-established presence in spite of the effect of anti-Jewish legislation” [editors’ summary, 6]

Part II. Historiography:

ch. 5. “<i>*Origen and the Jews</i>* and Jewish-Greek–Christian relations,” by William Horbury (Cambridge) [79-90]: is a somewhat turgid but mainly on target survey, with focus on the influence/legacy of de Lange’s book by that title. “Origen’s work, according to Horbury, is an important witness to the Jewish-Greek tradition, a reminder ‘that debate with Jews and inquiry from them could go hand in hand, and that Jewish-Christian relations were often relations between Christians and Jews who both spoke Greek’” [editors’ summary, 6, citing p. 90]

6. “Jewish-Greek studies in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Germany: a brief overview,” by Giuseppe Veltri (Hamburg) [91-102]: “changing attitudes to the study of the Jewish-Greek tradition are delineated and discussed … scholars came to assert the superiority of the Greek tradition, seeing it as the forerunner of a Christian universalism … Against this background he draws attention to the interest shown by the <i>*Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>* movement in the Jewish-Greek tradition” [editors’ summary, 6-7]

Part III. Greek Bible and Language:

ch. 7. “The origins of the Septuagint,” by James Carleton Paget (Cambridge) [105-119 ]: A well balanced treatment based mainly on publications from 1945 onward. No attention to realia issues [scrolls, papyri]; reasonable, if vague, conclusions. Suggests that “there are some indications that the original translation was collective in its inspiration … although involvement of a Ptolemaic monarch is probably unlikely” [editors’ summary, 7].

8. “The language of the Septuagint [Pentateuch] and Jewish-Greek identity,” by James K. Aitken (Cambridge) [120-134]: A careful evaluation of claims about a Jewish-Greek dialect behind the Pentateuch translation. “The Septuagint [Pentateuch] translators are comparable to the more skilled … Egyptian bureaucratic scribes, having not [displaying no evidence of having] achieved the highest level of education, but having acquired enough rhetorical skills and learned enough of classical literature [literary vocabulary] to use it in their work” [132, adapted in the editors’ summary, 7] This “Ptolemaic Greek” of the Pentateuch “established terms and vocabulary that would be adopted by Jews and become distinctive of a Jewish-Greek sociolect” [134, my comment: much like the “King James” translation in English for many Protestant Christians?]

9. “Afterlives of the Septuagint: a Christian witness to the Greek Bible in Byzantine Judaism,” by Cameron Boyd-Taylor (Trinity Western) [135-151]: Detailed explication of complex textual phenomena in glosses attributed to something called “<i>*to Ioudaikon,<*i*>*” in two Greek MSS and especially from Deuteronomy in the Ambrosian MS “F.” He concludes that “there are enough idiosyncracies in the tradition to which the glosses give evidence to ‘point to a source (or sources) independent of Christian transmission history,’ and to imply [as de Lange also argued] the existence within Byzantine Judaism of an evolving tradition of free and colloquial translation into Greek with possibly ancient roots” [editors’ summary 8, based on 151]

10. “Medieval and early modern Judaeo-Greek biblical translations: a linguistic viewpoint,” by Julia G. Krivoruchko (Cambridge) [152-170]: Very detailed focus on interpretations of the “Constantinopolitan Pentateuch,” a Greek rendering in Hebrew transliteration, concludes that ”the Greek of this text, and biblical Judeo-Greek more generally, should be seen to reflect not a common spoken Greek, but one deeply affected by the Hebrew from which it was translated: a translationese that represented nobody’s mother tongue” [editors’ summary 8, based partly on 169] Various theories and models are discussed and largely dismissed before the author concludes “informed ignorance is certainly preferable to misplaced knowledge” [editors’ summary 17]

Part IV. [The Greek element within Jewish] Culture:

ch. 11. “Philo's knowledge of Hebrew: the meaning of the etymologies,” by Tessa Rajak (Reading & Oxford) [173-187]: A good survey of the issues; “none of the arguments usually arraigned against Philo’s knowledge of Hebrew as this pertains to the etymologies are [sic!] decisive … scholars should be more open to the possibility that the etymologies in Philo … imply a knowledge of the language of Shem on the part of this Platonizing Jew” [editors’ summary 8]. Even if Philo used existing onomastic source-material “created by a different Greek-speaking Jew,” the etymologies are sometimes so ‘inextricable from the web of Philo’s allegorical interpretation” to suggest that “the mind of the master himself might be responsible?” [187].

12. “The plain and laughter: the hermeneutical function of the sign in Philo of Alexandria,” by Francis Schmidt (Paris) [188-199]: Very instructive; “Philo’s use in his exegesis of the technical term <i>*semeion*,</i> connected with Stoic thought. … — the term acts as a link connecting literal [the plain] and allegorical [Isaac = laughter] exegesis” [editors’ summary 8-9, based on 199]

13. “Jewish archaeology and art in antiquity,” by David Noy (Wales) [200-214]: Very detailed; solid; little that is new or startling. “He proceeds to examine four sites which have been held to be Jewish synagogues (Delos, Ostia, Apamea and Mopsuestia), showing how fragile the evidence for such an identification in fact is and suggesting that there is no such thing as a distinctive Jewish architecture — products ‘of a material culture which was not fundamentally different for pagans, Christians and Jews’ [editors’ summary 9, citing 214]. Undeniably Jewish features tend to be late additions [post 100 C.E.], and not architecturally original.

14. “Jewish-Greek epigraphy in antiquity,” by Pieter van der Horst (Utrecht) [215-228]: inscriptions “give us information about the extent of the diaspora,

Jewish names, the average age of death, and the existence of a Judaism which seems unaffected by rabbinic Judaism; … the majority … are preserved in Greek, contradict[ing] the view that Jewish culture expressed in that language ended in the first century CE as was once uncritically contended” [editors’ summary 9, based on 228] — “better than the literary sources, inscriptions bring before our eyes the extraordinary diversity of Jewish life and thought in late antiquity” [228]

15. “The Rabbis, the Greek Bible, and Hellenism,” by Philip Alexander (Manchester) [229-246]: Sometimes is somewhat “reductionist” in general statements about “the Rabbis,” etc., while also well aware of diversity; especially instructive on the terminology of translation/interpretation and even somewhat adventurous on relationships to traditions attributed to Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus. Argues that “rabbinic knowledge of Greek was limited and … this in part accounts for the relative absence of knowledge of the Greek Bible in literature associated with the Rabbis. … He also highlights evidence of a growing negative attitude to the Greek Bible on the part of the Rabbis and argues that this was strongly influenced by the rise of Christianity with its reliance upon the Septuagint in particular. … The Rabbis may have attempted to influence the western diaspora through the Greek recension associated with Aquila, which he tentatively ascribes to their patronage” [editors’ summary 9-10, based on 244-246]

16. “Greek-Hebrew linguistic contacts in late antique and medieval magical texts,” by Gideon Bohak (Tel Aviv) [247-260]: Finds “different types of encounters between Hebrew (and, more rarely, Aramaic) and Greek, including both bilingual and trilingual texts and texts that use one writing system to transliterate phrases in the other language” — reflecting Judaism at ‘ground level’ [editors’ summary 10, citing 259f.]

17. “Jewish and Christian hymnody in the early Byzantine period,” by Wout van Bekkum (Groningen) [261-278]: Suggests that piyyut may itself derive from Greek term for poet(ry); “ … examines a piyyut, written by the possibly late fifth-/early sixth century poet Yehudah” [in Byzantine Hebrew from the Cairo Genizah] and translates it, “giving us a vital insight into the ethos of the Byzantine Jewish communities for which the poems were written” [editors’ summary 10, reviewer’s adaptation]

18. “On the Hebrew script of the Greek-Hebrew palimpsests from the Cairo Genizah,” by Judith Olszowy-Schlanger (Paris) [279-299]: Detailed, but with little attention to technical paleographical conventions on how letters were actually written— e.g. base line relationships, end strokes etc.; on historical conjectures, no mention of previous Christian use of Ben Ezra synagogue, or trade in used MSS; “Argues that the [Hebrew] script of the palimpsests is a distinctive sub-type of the oriental square script, which may well pre-date most of the texts held in the Genizah. She concludes tentatively, on the basis of the Greek sub-text, that the palimpsests are from Egypt, and reflect a multilingual setting in which Greek played an important part” [editors’ summary 11]

General index [349-351]:

Index of Biblical References [352-354]

Index of Other Sources [355-359]

[No Index of Authors or of Places]

Overview:

This book is a treasury of information and ideas relating to Jewish-Greek in its various connections/contexts, an appropriate homage to Nicholas de Lange and his groundbreaking efforts in these subject areas. The editors and publication staff are to be congratulated for a relatively “clean” text of highly complex materials — errata are few.[[1]] Many users, however, may be disappointed with the well-intentioned readers’ aids: the two bibliographies are predictably full, and can now be supplemented with items not yet published when the contributions were collected (2013) — e.g. de Lange’s continued output such as <i>*Japheth in the Tents of Shem: Translations in Byzantine Judaism</i>.* Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 30 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); or related detailed studies such as “The Religious Provenance of the Aquila Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah,” by Edmon L. Gallagher <i>*Journal of Jewish Studies</i>* 64 (2013): 283–305 [but his 1912 book on Hebrew Scripture is listed in the bibliography], or A. Kulik, “Judeo-Greek Legacy in Medieval Rus,” <i>Viator</i> 39 (2008): 51–64.

But the near failure to include any items from the plethora of otherwise unpublished relevant online materials (as well as published) deserves mention and censure — a problem that is only getting more serious for editors and publishers (not to mention authors) as time goes on [welcome exceptions appear on p. 4 n. 14, and p. 40 n.8].

Making indices is a thankless and demanding task. A good index can greatly increase the value/usefulness of a work. But this “General Index” at points is a joke: it lists “Byzantine Judaism” as occurring on only two pages, “Hellenism, Jewish acceptance of” lists one page, “Judeo-Greek, neglected field” refers to a single page! Many similar index entries appear which are completely out of place (superfluous) given the topic and title of the anthology! Even more serious, is the absence from the index of such obviously important items as the KAIGE translation (mentioned on pp. 155 and 245; the closely related Aquila and Symmachus verstons are incompletely indexed, but Theodotion is absent — all three appear together on 46 and 110, at least). If one is interested in Jewish “messianic" allusions in the volume, there is no listing. And so on. There is inconsistency in the treatment of ancient authors as well — in the general index, Origen gets two page references (neither of which is to the chapter devoted to him!), but he is absent from the “Index of Other Sources,” and has one listing in the “Abbreviations” on p. xii; Philo, on the other hand, appears amply in all three of these aids, as does Josephus. And so on. These “helps” are unpredictable and thus often of limited assistance.

The treatment of Old Greek Scriptural materials merits some comment in closing, since that is one of my own main interests. There is no discussion of the technology related issues arising from the fact that most of the Old Greek translations were created in the world of scrolls and only later came to be included in the “Septuagint” anthology when codex technology permitted such a development. [P.135 comes close.] Even for the Pentateuch, the idea of a single original physical entity is unlikely, How this might affect the historical and textual reconstructions is not yet clear. Similarly, the story of an ancient Jewish-Latin scriptural translation tradition, hinted at in a few places, is yet to be worked out in detail. While it is refreshing to see recognition of the relevant pioneering work by D.S.Blondheim (1925!) mentioned several times in this volume (there is no index of modern authors, although such information could easily have been included in the general bibliography; a partly searchable internet copy in Google Books offers some consolation). The earliest surviving evidence for the history of Latin Jewish scriptures is very similar to that for the Old Greek, and deserves a closer exploration. Probably similar things could be said concerning non-Hebrew Semitic Jewish scriptural traditions in Aramaic/Syriac. Much remains to be done on such early materials, and the volume under review helps map the way.

Despite such caveats, this is an excellent work, highly recommended to serious students of the subjects covered. That it is not perfect is no surprise, but many of the shortcomings can be overcome by informed/experienced use of the internet. It greatly advances our knowledge, and suggests many new avenues to explore.

[[1]] Errata and some noteworthy variant spellings and ambiguities:

p. 6, end of line 5: His chapters [read chapter] concentrates on

66 punct. of Philo, from Arad [omit comma?]

67 date for Justin’s Dialog & etc — not 1st century

70 n. 3 close parenthesis

143 [Deut 18.2] F<sup>b</sup> reads Λευί [not Greek Levi] for αὐτῷ?

176 line 5 from below Aristoboulos for Aristobulos

179 line 7 from below Philo nic for Philonic scholars [remove space]

187 not to press enquire [inquiry?]

198 n. 34 insert 190 for 000

234 omit “?” Tanhuma Vayyera 6.6 Buber

262 names? Qillir Yannai(os)

72 last line is not as — either ok

129 in other words [read works?] in everyday use

133 learning or using (either ok)

Hebrew transliterations appear in variety of versions

30 war of Qitus/Quitus [29f Quietus]

46 Talmai [46, 238-242]/Tolmi for Ptolemy in rabbinic references [[2]]

[[2]] A key passage on p.46 from Neubauer’s Seder Olam on Jewish translations of scripture is all but invisible in the indices/helps! Very frustrating!

Significant Latin refs

18 embassies to Rome

24 Jews in Rome

29 inscriptions in Jerusalem

34 names

226 (Prov 10.7 quotes)

42 apocryphal stuff

46 Sedar Olam passage

//end, 30au2019//

See Boyd-Taylor 2008 online =? n.21 “forthcoming” on p.138 ?

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At long last, and after recovering from a “tiny” stroke in November 2018, I have completed the review of

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It is a valuable collection, and the review is much longer than the suggested 2000 words. I’d like to add the full review to my online publications (home page), but need your advice on how to proceed since it was originally a BMCR assignment in 2014(!). The review is currently nearly 20 screens long (18 separate contributions summarized), in LibreOffice odt format (easy to convert, I think) – my old Toshiba computer died a few weeks ago and I’ve converted to a MAC, and am still learning its secrets. Would you care to look at the full review and recommend what to do next, or perhaps just forget about it for BMCR purposes? I apologize for the delay and the problems, but having come this far, I did not want to just abandon it.