

Language as Symptom: Linguistic Clues to the Social Background of the Seventy

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Introduction

The question of the identity of the Septuagint translators, even if we limit the corpus, according to the original meaning of the term, to the Pentateuch, is not an easy one to answer. The date of the Greek Pentateuch can, with some assurance, be set between 280 and 260 BCE, while the place of origin is probably Alexandria in Egypt.¹ But who were the translators? Were they Jews of the Diaspora, or had they recently arrived from Palestine? What was their background? To what kind of community did they belong? And what were their ties to the larger society? The Letter of Aristeas, of course, gives answers to all these questions, but its reliability is in doubt. The aim of aggrandizing the prestige of the Greek version may have led its author to idealize the translators. Moreover, it is uncertain whether the author of the Letter, probably flourishing in the second century BCE, possessed authentic information on the production of the Septuagint a century earlier.² Modern scholars have formulated alternative answers on the basis of the translation

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¹ See M. Harl, G. Dorival, O. Munnich, *La bible grecque des Septante: Du judaïsme hellénistique au christianisme ancien* (Paris, 1988) 39–110. The recent attempt by Clancy to lower this date by about a century is ill-informed and ineffective, see F. Clancy, "The Date of LXX," *SJOT* 16 (2002) 207–225.

² For the date and provenance of the Letter of Aristeas, see R. Sollamo, "The Letter of Aristeas and the Origin of the Septuagint," in *X Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies. Oslo 1998* (ed. B.A. Taylor; Atlanta, 2001) 329–342, in particular 331–334; see also S. Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the Letter of Aristeas* (New York, 2003).

technique or the exegetical traditions used by the translators.³ No single hypothesis is agreed upon by a majority of scholars, however.

In the present study a number of linguistic clues will be presented that may throw some light on the milieu in which the original Septuagint originated. Language communicates not only what speakers or writers intend it to communicate, but reveals something also of their social background. From the way people speak, one may be able to determine not only where they come from but also which schools they attended. Of course, things are rather more difficult when one is dealing with a written text and a dead language. But the principle remains the same. The vocabulary, grammar, and style of a text provide incidental information regarding the author and sometimes also regarding his target group. The study will proceed from features that are relatively well-known to others that are more recondite.

1. Colloquialisms in the Septuagint

A striking characteristic of the Greek language of the Pentateuch is its colloquial quality.⁴ Many words and grammatical forms are rare or completely absent in literary texts, while being well-attested in the non-literary papyri. Two examples will illustrate:

— For “ass, donkey” the translators most often use the classical Greek word ὄνος (43 times). Alongside this term, however, they also use ὑποζύγιον (14 times). The latter word is well known in the meaning “beast of burden,” but unattested in the meaning “ass” in literary texts, from

³ See, e.g., A. van der Kooij, “Perspectives on the Study of the Septuagint: Who are the Translators?” in F. García Martínez and E. Noort, *Perspectives in the Study of the Old Testament and Early Judaism* (VTSup 73; Leiden, 1998) 214–229; F. Siegert, *Zwischen hebräischer Bibel und Altem Testament. Eine Einführung in die Septuaginta* (Münster, 2001) 30–31; G. Dorival, “La traduction de la Torah en grec,” in *Le Pentateuque d’Alexandrie. Texte grec et traduction* (ed. C. Dogniez and M. Harl ; Paris, 2001) 31–41.

⁴ For the history of research on the colloquial nature of Septuagint Greek, see N. Fernández Marcos, *Introducción a las versiones griegas de la Biblia* (2nd ed.; Madrid, 1998) 17–30: “El griego bíblico y su puesto dentro de la *koiné*.”

whatever period. In documentary papyri from the Ptolemaic period, the word ὑποζύγιον “ass” occurs frequently.⁵

— The verb ἤκω “to have arrived” is conjugated as follows in the Pentateuch: ἤκω ἤκεις ἤκει **ἤκαμεν ἤκατε** (once ἤκετε) **ἤκασιν**. This suppletive paradigm is alien to literary texts, but well known, again, from the papyri.⁶

The testimony of the papyri shows that words like ὑποζύγιον and forms like ἤκαμεν represent vernacular Greek. It is important to realize that they owe nothing to the Hebrew source text.⁷ They simply reflect the type of Greek employed by the translators. Theirs is not the Greek of the gymnasium, nor the Greek of philosophers and historians, nor the Greek of the royal court. It is the Greek of the street and the marketplace. The translators of the Pentateuch appear to have written the Greek language more or less the way they spoke it. When Marguerite Harl praises the “excellent mastery of Greek” of the translators,⁸ she captures an important characteristic of the version: the Seventy use the Greek language with precision and verve. However, the statement should not be taken to imply that the Greek of the Septuagint is itself of a high literary quality.⁹

It might be objected that Atticism was unknown in the third century BCE. Indeed, the explicit exigency to conform literary writing to the linguistic standards of the classics emerges much later. However, the distinction between written and spoken, between literary and vulgar language is not an invention of the Atticists.¹⁰ In the third century BCE, Alexandria was a cultured city that produced several authors whose writings have survived:

⁵ See A. Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Edinburgh, 1901) 160–161; J.A.L. Lee, *A Lexical Study of the Septuagint Version of the Pentateuch*, (SCS 14, Chico CA, 1983) 140–144.

⁶ See H.St.J. Thackeray, *A Grammar of the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge, 1909) 269.

⁷ Examples of non-literary vocabulary and morphology abound in the Pentateuch, as a glance at the works of Lee and Thackeray, quoted in the preceding notes, will show.

⁸ See Harl, Dorival, Munnich, *La bible grecque*, 229.

⁹ Harl herself well realized this: “...le lexique des livres de la LXX est celui de la **Koiné alexandrine**, plus populaire que littéraire”; see Harl, Dorival and Munnich, *La bible grecque*, 244.

¹⁰ See Fernández Marcos, *Introducción*, 22.

Aratus, Callimachus, Herondas, Lycophron, Theocritus.¹¹ Their literary style has nothing in common with the pedestrian prose of the Seventy. A closer analogue is Manetho's history of Egypt. This work was written in the same period as the Greek Pentateuch and treats similar subject matter. A comparison of the *Aegyptiaca* with the Septuagint is instructive. Although both writings reflect *koine* Greek, the former has clear literary pretensions absent in the latter. Thus Manetho uses the classical verb *πολιορκέω* "to besiege" while the Pentateuch knows only the Hellenistic *περικαθίζω* in this meaning.¹² Many words characteristic of literary Greek are common in Manetho but absent from the Pentateuch: *στρατεύω* "to make war," *ποθέω* "to desire," *ἠττάομαι* "to be vanquished," *ἐξουσία* "power," *συγχωρέω* "to consent," *πειθαρχέω* "to obey," *κελεύω* "to command," *στρατόπεδον* "army, camp." Clearly, the *Aegyptiaca* reflects a distinctly higher level of style than the Septuagint.

The colloquial nature of the Greek Pentateuch has embarrassed a long line of cultivated readers. Demetrius the Chronographer and other Jewish Hellenistic writers, quote the text of the Septuagint while correcting its style.¹³ Josephus rewrites the entire biblical story in literary Greek. Origen,

¹¹ See H.B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge, 1914) 293.

¹² See Deut 20:12, 19.

¹³ See Swete, *Introduction*, 370: "(The Jewish Hellenistic historians) wished to represent their national history in a form more acceptable to their pagan neighbours; but while avoiding the uncouth phraseology of the Greek Bible, they frequently betray its influence." An interesting example of such avoidance is the way Demetrius the Chronographer (ca. 220 BCE?) summarizes Gen 25:6:

LXX καὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν παλλακῶν αὐτοῦ ἔδωκεν Ἀβραὰμ δόματα καὶ **ἐξαπέστειλεν** αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔτι ζῶντος αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἀνατολὰς εἰς γῆν ἀνατολῶν

Demetrius φησὶ γὰρ τὸν Ἀβραὰμ παῖδας πρὸς ἀνατολὰς ἐπὶ κατοικίαν **πέμψαι**. While the translator of Genesis uses the Hellenistic verb *ἐξαποστέλλω* "to send away," Demetrius substitutes the more classical *πέμπω*. For these Greek verbs and the stylistic register they represent, see the thorough investigation of J.A.L. Lee, "Ἐξαποστέλλω," in *Voces biblicae: Septuagint Greek and its Significance for the New Testament* (ed. J. Joosten and P. Tomson; Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 49; Leuven, 2007) 99-113. For the text of Demetrius, see A.M. Denis, ed., *Fragmenta pseudepigraphorum quae supersunt Graeca* (Leiden, 1970).

Tatian, Jerome and other church fathers defend the lack of art exhibited by the Greek Bible.¹⁴

How, then, is this paradox to be accounted for: the law of Moses written in the manner of a deed of sale? In regard to cultural importance, the Greek Pentateuch is a document second to none; yet, it is presented in a style devoid of literary ambition. These facts can hardly be explained other than by supposing that the translators were unable to write polished literary Greek. They did not, like Manetho, belong to the cultural elite. They were far removed from the royal court, and had little idea of what went on in the gymnasium. They represent a middle class where literacy was well developed, but literary training remained out of reach.

2. *Egyptian Elements*

The colloquial vocabulary of the Greek Pentateuch can most often be paralleled from Egyptian documentary texts. Partly, this may be due to the fact that almost all documentary papyri happen to have been preserved in Egypt. Nevertheless, a number of Greek words used in the Septuagint appear indeed to be specifically Egyptian. Deissmann already signalled many possible examples, some of which are very convincing, notably

¹⁴ See the testimonies collected by E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa* (2. Bd; Leipzig, 1923); Fernández Marcos, *Introducción*, 18; A. Leonas, *L'aube des traducteurs* (Paris, 2007) 134–140. Perhaps the earliest testimony of this kind may be found in the prologue to the Greek translation of Ben Sira: οὐ γὰρ ἰσοδυναμεῖ αὐτὰ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς Ἑβραϊστὶ λεγόμενα καὶ ὅταν μεταχθῆ εἰς ἑτέραν γλῶσσαν (“For the same things said in the original Hebrew do not have the same force when they are translated into another language”). According to a recent article by Ben Wright, what worries the translator is not the possibility that errors might have crept into his version, but the stylistic mediocrity of the goal text. In this connection, the translator excuses himself by referring to the Law, the Prophets and the other books: they too are less impressive in Greek than in Hebrew. See B.G. Wright III, “Access to the Source: Cicero, Ben Sira, the Septuagint and their Audiences,” *JSJ* 34 (2003) 1–27, in particular 11–20.

ἐνταφιαστής “embalmer,” ἐργοδιώκτης “taskmaster,” λίψ “West.”¹⁵ More recently, Lee, Passoni dell’Acqua and others have added additional cases.¹⁶

Particularly interesting are Greek words that appear to go back to the Egyptian language:¹⁷ θίβις “basket” (Exod 2:3, 5, 6), ἄχει “reeds” (Gen 41:2, 18), οἶφί “ephah” (a dry measure; Lev 5:11; 6:13; Num 5:15; 15:4; 28:5). These words render Hebrew words of similar sound, אָחַי, תְּבִי and אֵפֶי respectively.¹⁸ Nevertheless, they are probably not transcriptions of the Hebrew words, but Greek words borrowed from Egyptian. This is shown, firstly, by the form of the words, which diverges somewhat from the Hebrew while conforming to the Egyptian.¹⁹ Secondly, all three of them are attested in Greek documentary papyri from Egypt.²⁰ It appears, then, that these forms were used in vulgar Alexandrian Greek. The translators knew them from day-to-day life and found it natural to use them in rendering the nearly homonymous Hebrew words.

The vocabulary of the Septuagint Pentateuch is strongly indicative of the Egyptian origin of the translators. The version appears to have been made by Egyptian Jews, and for an Egyptian readership. It would be extremely

¹⁵ See Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, 120, 122, 141. For the occurrence of λίψ in the meaning “West” in the Pentateuch (Exod 27:9–13), see P.-M. Bogaert, “L’orientation du parvis du sanctuaire dans la version grecque de l’Exode,” *L’Antiquité classique* 50 (1981) 79–85. See, however, C. Boyd-Taylor in, *BIOSCS* 37 (2004) 58–72.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Lee, *Lexical Study*; A. Passoni Dell’Acqua, “Ricerche sulla versione dei LXX e i papiri,” *Aegyptus* 62 (1982) 173–194; “La terminologia dei reati nei prostagmata dei Tolemei e nella versione dei LXX,” in *Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Papyrology. Athens, 25–31 May 1986. Volume II* (ed. B.G. Mandilaras; Athens, 1988) 335–350; Dorival, “La traduction de la Torah,” 34.

¹⁷ See J.-L. Fournet, “Les emprunts du grec à l’égyptien,” *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 84 (1989) 55–80, in particular 73, 68 and 71. I thank Katrin Hauspie for drawing my attention to this article.

¹⁸ The similarity in sound is due to the fact that the Hebrew words were borrowed, much earlier, from the same Egyptian words.

¹⁹ For the Egyptian words, see Fournet.

²⁰ For the attestations in the papyri, see Fournet; for θίβις, see also Lee, *Lexical Study*, 115.

hard to explain the language of the version on the supposition that it was created by Palestinian Jews, as suggested by the Letter of Aristeas.²¹

3. Semitic Elements and the Jewish Sociolect

A further characteristic of the Septuagint Pentateuch is its tendency to incorporate Semitic words. A few Hebrew words are not translated but transcribed:

Gen 3:24 καὶ ἔταξεν τὰ χερουβιμ “And he stationed the *cherubim*.”

Similarly μαν “manna” (in Exod 16) and the measures ιν and γομορ. The reason these words were transcribed seems to be that the translator found no precise equivalent in Greek. The phenomenon encountered in Kingdoms and some other books, which consists of transcribing difficult words the meaning of which appears to have escaped the translators, is not attested in the Pentateuch. The translators of the Pentateuch knew what *cherubim*, *manna*, *hin* and *gomor* were.²²

Other words are not from Biblical Hebrew but from Aramaic. The clearest case is that of γειώρας “proselyte,” in Exod 12:19 (for Hebrew גֵּר).²³ Moreover, πασχα “Pesach,” σαββατα “Sabbath,” μαννα “manna” (in Num 11 and Deut 8), and σικερα “strong drink” also belong here: the final alpha reflects the Aramaic article.

Like the transcriptions from Hebrew, these words represent institutions and *realia* peculiar to Judaism. Their Aramaic form indicates they are not *ad hoc* transliterations but existed previously in the Jewish Greek idiom of the

²¹ There may of course have been some kind of collaboration between Egyptian and Palestinian translators. Nonetheless, it appears there is no hard evidence for such collaboration.

²² Perhaps the word κόρος “kor (a dry measure)” should also be included here. The Grecized form of the word may indicate, however, that it had been borrowed in the Egyptian *koiné*. The word is attested in a papyrus dated 259/8 BCE (LSJ 1996 Supplement).

²³ For the attestation and variant forms of this word, see P. Walters, *The Text of the Septuagint: Its Corruptions and their Emendation* (Cambridge, 1973) 33–34.

translators.²⁴ Indeed, these elements suggest that, before the adoption of Greek, Aramaic may have been the language spoken by this group.²⁵

From a stylistic point of view, the Semitic expressions are equally as surprising as colloquialisms in a venerated text like the Greek Pentateuch. They indicate that the translators had no feel for *belles lettres*. In addition, the foreign words indicate that the translation was made for a Jewish audience familiar, to some extent, with the Bible and its world.²⁶ Non-Jewish Greek readers would have been completely baffled by these foreign elements. The language of the Greek Pentateuch is that of a community conversing among themselves on subjects of interest only to them.

Some of the Greek words employed in the Septuagint may also reflect the idiom of this Jewish group, notably προσήλυτος “proselyte,” ἀκροβυστία “foreskin,” ἄζυμα “unleavened bread,” εἶδωλον “idol.” These genuine Greek words are nevertheless used in a way that is fully comprehensible only in the framework of Jewish practice and beliefs.

4. *The Profession of the Translators*

Based upon the testimony of the language they use, the translators of the Septuagint Pentateuch are unlikely to belong to the upper classes. The Seventy are not the likes of Aristobulus, that Jewish philosopher and historian, preceptor of king Ptolemy VI Philometor (181-146); they are not the likes of Philo, who conducted a Jewish delegation to the Roman emperor; nor are they comparable to Flavius Josephus, who at one time had the high command of all Jewish troops in Galilee. The translators belong to

²⁴ Note that σαββατα is attested in the Zenon papyri (III BCE), see V.A. Tcherikover, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, (Cambridge MA, 1957) 1:136 (no. 10).

²⁵ There are many other indications of Aramaic influence on the Septuagint translators, see J. Joosten, “The Septuagint as a Source of Information on Egyptian Aramaic in the Hellenistic Period,” forthcoming in a volume on Aramaic studies to be edited by Margaretha Folmer and Holger Gzella.

²⁶ Contrast Josephus who, upon introducing the word, adds a comment as to the meaning of the word in Hebrew (*Ant.* 1.1.1.). Similarly, the New Testament writers usually add a translation whenever they insert a Semitic word or expression (see, e.g., Mark 5:41; 15:34; but note the exception in 1 Cor 16:22).

a more modest class of people. In a way, they are rather more like Paul the apostle: Paul, who worked for his livelihood; who knew Hebrew and was somewhat advanced in Jewish learning but whose native language was Greek; who could read and write well enough but had no idea that his prose would one day be considered world literature.

Paul was a maker of tents. The translators of the Pentateuch would have been professionals as well, setting time and money aside for the realization of their great project. Is there a way to know their occupation in day-to-day life? This is a hard question to answer on the basis of language alone. Nevertheless, there is one clue worth investigating.

It is a striking linguistic peculiarity of the Greek Pentateuch that it at times exhibits military terms in non-military contexts. The most remarkable instance of this phenomenon is the use of the noun ἀποσκευή in a number of passages. The original meaning of this word is “baggage.”²⁷ In military contexts, however, both in Polybius and in the papyri, the word takes on a secondary meaning of “wife and children.” Each soldier had his ἀποσκευή which included not only his material belongings but also his wife and children. In a few papyri, the word even refers exclusively to a soldier’s family. In the Septuagint, the word occurs a few times with the meaning “baggage,” rendering Hebrew שַׂכָּר (e.g. Gen 14:12). Elsewhere, however, the word renders Hebrew הַיָּת, “children, family”:

Gen 43:8 εἶπεν Ιουδας πρὸς Ἰσραηλ τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ ἀπόστειλον τὸ παιδάριον μετ’ ἐμοῦ καὶ ἀναστάντες πορευσόμεθα ἵνα ζῶμεν καὶ μὴ ἀποθάνωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς καὶ σὺ καὶ ἡ ἀποσκευὴ ἡμῶν. “Judah said to his father Israel, ‘Send the boy with me, we will arise and go, so that we may live and not die, we, you and our **people**’.”²⁸

This is a remarkable usage. The meaning of the word corresponds exactly to the one found in Polybius and the papyri, but the context is different. Indeed, nothing suggests that Judah and his brothers are soldiers. One

²⁷ See J.A.L. Lee, “ἌΠΟΣΚΕΥΗ in the Septuagint,” *JThS* 23 (1972) 430–437; Lee, *Lexical Study*, 101–107. See also M. O’Connor and J.A.L. Lee, “A Problem in Biblical Lexicography: The Case of Hebrew *šakār* and Greek *aposkeuē*,” *ZAW* 119 (2007) 403–409.

²⁸ See also Exod 10:24; 12:37 and other passages.

might submit that the usage found in the Pentateuch was in fact common and that the lack of attestation of the meaning “family” in non-military contexts in non-biblical texts is due to accident. This is possible. It is also possible, however, that the use of ἄποσκευή in the meaning “family” reflects the idiom of the Jewish community we are looking for. If the translators themselves were soldiers, they would have referred to their own families as ἄποσκευή. From here, it would have been a small step to use the term to designate the families of the patriarchs or of the Israelites of the Exodus.

Of course, the Septuagint employs technical vocabulary of many sorts. Where technical terms are accounted for by the subject matter, they show only that the translators have a good mastery of Hellenistic Greek. The use of military vocabulary in military contexts is unremarkable and no argument as to the background of the translators can be drawn from it. However, where military vocabulary occurs in non-military contexts, as in the case of ἄποσκευή, this is not just a sign of the translators’ competence. The phenomenon appears to reflect a kind of professional jargon used among the community within which the version came into being. The use of military language out of context suggests that the translators were soldiers.

This reasoning may seem excessively speculative. The identification of Jews in Alexandria in the first half of the third century BCE as soldiers is anything but farfetched, however. According to Flavius Josephus, the first Jews were settled in Alexandria by Alexander the Great himself, in recognition of their help during the campaign against the Egyptians.²⁹ Other historical writings confirm that the first Jewish residents in Alexandria were mercenaries.³⁰ Papyrological data also point in this direction: the *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* contains, after the Zenon papyri, a long section, covering 15 documents, on “Jewish Soldiers and Military Settlers in the Third and Second Centuries B.C.,” all of them from Egypt.³¹ One should recall that Jews had been mercenaries in Egypt a long time before Alexander

²⁹ Josephus, *J.W.* 2:487–488.

³⁰ See A. Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights* (TSAJ 7; Tübingen, 1985) 38–48.

³¹ Tcherikover, *Corpus*, 147–178.

the Great. The Jewish colony in Elephantine, too, consisted largely of soldiers.

Moreover, the remarkable usage of ἀποσκευή does not stand alone. Other words can be found that involve the same process, whereby technical terms of military language are used in non-military contexts:

Gen 12:9 καὶ ἀπῆρην Αβραμ καὶ πορευθεὶς ἐστρατοπέδευσεν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ
 “And Abram marched away and as he travelled, he **camped** in the wilderness.”

The use of ἀπαίρω in the meaning “to depart” probably reflects military language, and the use of στρατοπεδεύω “to encamp” certainly does so. Abram’s voyage is presented in the image of a military campaign. There is nothing in Genesis 12 to call forth such martial connotations.³²

Gen 32:8 ἐφοβήθη δὲ Ιακωβ σφόδρα καὶ ἠπορεῖτο καὶ διεῖλεν τὸν λαὸν τὸν μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς βόας καὶ τὰ πρόβατα εἰς δύο **παρεμβολάς** “Jacob was greatly terrified, and was perplexed; and he divided the people that was with him, and the cows, and the camels, and the sheep, into two **camp**s.”

In Hellenistic Greek, παρεμβολή is a military camp or army. In the Septuagint the word becomes the standard equivalent of Hebrew **ַּמַּחֲנֶה**, a word that does not have the same military implications, as can be seen in the example.

Other words could probably be listed.³³ The ones included here have been encountered haphazardly in the course of cursory reading. A systematic investigation may turn up more cases. As an initial sample, the three examples offered here suffice. They indicate that the translators belonged to a community composed of Jewish soldiers in the service of the Ptolemies.

³² See also Exod 13:20; 14:2, 10; Num 24:2; Deut 1:40. It is possible that some of these passages do have a military connotation, however.

³³ Casevitz has noted that the verb διασπείρω is used mainly in military contexts outside of the Septuagint, see M. Casevitz, “D’Homère aux historiens romains: le grec du Pentateuque alexandrine,” in Dogniez and Harl, *Le Pentateuque d’Alexandrie* (n. 3) 82.

Conclusions

According to the Letter of Aristeas, the translation of the Pentateuch was undertaken at the initiative of King Ptolemy and under his sponsorship. Upon completion, the Greek document was read out to the king, who expressed his delight and surprise. This narrative is difficult to reconcile with the stylistic register characterizing the version. Judged by the way they write Greek, the translators must have been people of rather modest social standing, far removed from the king and his presumed cultural policy. The document itself would have been unfit for reading to a non-Jewish audience: the colloquialisms shocking, the foreign words incomprehensible to boot.³⁴

The translators wrote the Greek version of their sacred scriptures in a language close to the vernacular, apparently because they had not mastered literary Greek. Their use of Greek indicates they were Jews of the Egyptian Diaspora writing for a local Jewish audience. A number of details suggest that the group among which the version came into being consisted largely of soldiers.

³⁴ It is sometimes affirmed that the Pentateuch could not possibly have been translated into Greek without official approval and support. The accuracy of this statement is difficult to determine. Surely, not all Jewish literature produced during the third century BCE was applauded by the Ptolemaic administration. If there is any truth in the idea of royal favour, the king's patronage may have been extended rather indirectly or at arm's length.