

The Septuagint

*The Making and Afterlife
of the Greek Jewish Scriptures*

Ptolemaic translation, textual plurality,
and the Scriptures of Jews and Christians

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1 What, Historically, Is “the Septuagint”?

The familiar story is compact: a king wanted the Jewish Scriptures for the Library of Alexandria, seventy or seventy-two scholars translated them, and the resulting book became the Bible of the early Church. Every clause preserves part of an ancient memory. As a continuous account, however, it joins events separated by centuries and gives one name to several different objects.

The Septuagint was not one translation of one bound Hebrew Bible by one committee. It began with a Jewish Greek Torah in Ptolemaic Egypt during the third century BC; other books were translated or composed in Greek through later centuries by agents with different aims and source texts. Jewish readers authorized, revised, and debated these writings. Christians inherited them, made them their principal Greek Old Testament, and transmitted them in new book forms and textual combinations. The “Septuagint” is therefore both an originating translation and the history of a growing, pluriform corpus.

2 Alexandria and the Need for a Greek Torah

Alexander’s conquests did not make the eastern Mediterranean culturally uniform, but they made Greek the dominant language of administration and exchange across successor kingdoms. After Alexander’s death in 323 BC, the Ptolemies ruled Egypt from Alexandria. The new capital joined royal government, a court-sponsored scholarly establishment, Mediterranean trade, Egyptian institutions, and communities drawn from many regions. Jews were established in Egypt before this period; under the Ptolemies they became a substantial Greek-speaking diaspora population whose life cannot be divided cleanly into “Jewish” and “Hellenistic” halves.

The Torah remained a Hebrew text and a marker of Israel’s inherited law. Yet a community conducting public, commercial, educational, and domestic life in Greek needed forms of access that Hebrew alone could not provide for every member. Translation could teach, interpret, defend, and make the ancestral law intelligible. It could also acquire legal and civic significance for a community ordered by its own ancestral norms. None of those functions requires that Hebrew disappeared. The Greek Pentateuch’s close engagement with Hebrew wording instead implies continuing reference to a source text whose verbal shape mattered.

2.1 A royal library, a community project, or both?

The *Letter of Aristeas* makes the royal library the immediate cause: the librarian Demetrius advises Ptolemy II that the law of the Jews deserves inclusion, and the king secures a Jerusalem scroll and translators. Modern reconstructions offer other or additional motives—public reading, instruction, communal administration, apologetic prestige, or the needs of Greek-dominant Jews. The evidence does not permit one motive to eliminate all the others.

A royal-library setting is culturally intelligible in Ptolemaic Alexandria, where collection and textual scholarship served kingship. It is not therefore historically proved in the form narrated by Aristeas. Conversely, a communal need for Greek is a strong social inference, but no surviving meeting record identifies a synagogue committee or liturgical mandate. The most secure formulation is deliberately modest: a well-educated Jewish initiative in Ptolemaic Egypt, probably Alexandria, produced the Torah in Greek; the exact balance of patronage, law, worship, education, and cultural representation remains disputed.

Witness: Dirk Büchner’s survey of the Greek Pentateuch and the linguistic character of the translation

What it establishes: The impetus plausibly came from an educated Jewish sector still familiar with Hebrew; the Greek often keeps the source’s words and structures in view while attempting varied solutions.

Limit: Linguistic profile can illuminate translators and aims, but it cannot name a patron or reconstruct the institutional contract.

2.2 Scrolls before Bibles

The first translation belonged to a scroll culture. Biblical books and groups of books circulated separately; the technological and social world of a single-volume Christian pandect lay centuries ahead. “The Hebrew Bible was

translated” can therefore suggest an anachronistic source object. The Torah was a recognizable five-book collection, but the later Prophets, Writings, and other Jewish works did not arrive in Greek as one bound shipment.

Early Greek biblical artifacts confirm use while also enforcing humility. Rylands Greek Papyrus 458 preserves portions of Deuteronomy and is normally dated to the second century BC; it is a material witness to a Greek Torah not far removed from the originating period. Other papyri and the Greek Minor Prophets scroll from Naḥal Ḥever show that Greek Jewish Scripture circulated and was revised before the great Christian codices. They do not preserve a complete Alexandrian edition or a fixed table of contents.

Evidence	Approximate setting	What it shows	What it does not show
Greek Torah language	Third-century BC translation layer	Jewish command of Hebrew and Greek, sustained engagement with source order and vocabulary.	The translators’ names, exact workplace, or one exclusive motive.
Aristeas	Probably second-century BC Alexandrian Jewish narrative	A developed authorization story for the Greek Law and its public acceptance.	Eyewitness verification of Ptolemy’s commission or the whole later corpus.
Rylands 458	Second-century BC Deuteronomy fragments	Early physical circulation of Greek Torah.	A complete text, canon, or library copy.
Later codices	Fourth–fifth centuries AD, Christian	Large Greek Christian collections and important textual forms.	The exact contents or order of Jewish Scripture five or six centuries earlier.

The translation belongs, then, inside Jewish cultural agency. Greek was not an alien solvent poured over an unchanged Hebrew object. Jewish translators made their law speak in the common language of their world, while the resistant texture of their Greek kept announcing that another language stood behind it.

3 The Letter of Aristeas: Charter Narrative and Historical Core

The earliest surviving continuous account of the translation’s origin is the work conventionally called the *Letter of Aristeas*. It presents its narrator as a non-Jewish courtier reporting to Philocrates. Ptolemy II Philadelphus, on Demetrius’s advice, seeks the Jewish Law for the royal collection; an embassy goes to the high priest Eleazar in Jerusalem; six learned elders from each of the twelve tribes travel with an authorized scroll; and seventy-two men complete the Greek Law in seventy-two days.

The story is much larger than translation. It describes royal emancipation and gifts, the Temple and Jerusalem, the translators’ wisdom at a seven-day banquet, ideal kingship, Jewish law, and the compatibility of ancestral fidelity with high Greek culture. Most scholars locate the work in Alexandrian Judaism and date it broadly to the second century BC, though proposals extend on either side. Its assumed identity and court reportage are literary constructions. The interval between the reported reign and the work’s composition prevents treating it as a dispatch from Ptolemy’s chancery.

3.1 What the narrative actually says

Later retellings can quietly replace Aristeas. In §§301–307, the translators work together, compare their several results, bring them into agreement, and present the completed Law for public reading. The Alexandrian Jewish assembly approves it, invokes a sanction against alteration, and honors the translators. This is a scene of comparison, consensus, and communal ratification. Aristeas does not put the elders into isolated cells and report seventy-two independently identical translations. The miraculous unanimity familiar from later tradition is a development.

The object is equally important: Aristeas repeatedly speaks of the Law. It does not claim that the same delegation translated the Prophets, Psalms, Wisdom, Maccabees, or every book later bound in a Christian Greek Old Testament. Extending “the Seventy” from Torah to the whole later corpus is a history of the name, not a fact stated in the origin account.

Witness: *Letter of Aristeas* §§28–32, 44–50, and 301–318, read in the 1913 English translation by Herbert T. Andrews

What it establishes: The work’s precise royal-commission narrative, Jerusalem delegation, collaborative procedure, public reading, communal acceptance, seventy-two-day chronology, and restriction of the project to the Law.

Limit: The pseudonymous, retrospective narrative cannot alone verify its patron, personnel, exact chronology, library mechanism, or speeches.

3.2 From authorization to miracle

Philo of Alexandria, writing in the first century AD, retells the event in *Life of Moses* II.25–44. His translators withdraw, receive inspired expressions, and produce corresponding wording as though under prophetic direction. Philo also describes an annual celebration on Pharos. His account is excellent evidence for the Greek Torah’s sacred prestige within Alexandrian Judaism by his own day. It is not independent contemporary confirmation of events three centuries earlier.

Josephus, in *Jewish Antiquities* XII.11–118, closely reworks the Aristeas tradition for a late first-century audience. He thus demonstrates the narrative’s continuing authority and its usefulness in presenting Jewish antiquity to the Greek-speaking world. Dependence on the earlier account means that agreement between the two is transmission, not corroboration.

Christian authors amplified the story again. Irenaeus describes separated translators whose texts agree by divine power. Augustine receives the Septuagint as a providential ecclesial witness and can treat meaningful differences from Hebrew as prophetic. The history of the legend is therefore not debris around a recoverable event. It records how successive Jewish and Christian communities articulated the authority of a translation.

3.3 What remains historically defensible

The narrative’s literary shaping does not make it useless. By the second century BC, an Alexandrian Jewish author knew an established Greek Torah and considered its legitimacy worth narrating. Alexandria, Ptolemaic rule, a Jerusalem connection, scholarly comparison, public reading, and communal authorization formed the explanatory world in which the translation made sense. Linguistic and comparative study independently supports a third-century BC Greek Pentateuch produced in Egypt, probably Alexandria.

The correct historical judgment is asymmetrical. The broad date, Jewish agency, Egyptian setting, Torah scope, and early authority are strong. The exact kingly commission, Demetrius’s role, a high-priestly master scroll, tribal arithmetic, banquet speeches, and seventy-two days remain unverified. “Legend” names the literary elaboration; it should not be used as a synonym for “nothing happened.”

Claim check: Seventy or seventy-two?

Aristeas counts seventy-two, six from each tribe. The conventional title “Septuagint” and the Roman numeral LXX preserve the rounded number seventy. Variation in the label belongs to reception history and supplies no evidence that two translators disappeared.

4 Making the Torah Greek

The Greek Pentateuch was probably produced in the middle or later third century BC. No colophon names its translators or gives a year. Differences among books and recurring agreements in vocabulary support a coordinated undertaking with more than one translator, but attempts to count hands precisely remain hypotheses. “Committee” is acceptable shorthand only if it does not import modern institutional procedures into the evidence.

4.1 A translation language of its own

The translators wrote intelligible Koine Greek, yet their work often follows Hebrew word order, coordination, repetition, and lexical patterning more closely than an independent Greek composition would. That texture is not simply bad Greek. It can mark reverence for the source, supply a stable correspondence for readers who knew both languages, and create a scriptural register whose unusual expressions became naturalized through repetition.

At the same time, the Greek Torah is not mechanically uniform. Translators transliterated some names, interpreted difficult expressions, selected Greek political and cultic terms, and sometimes made implicit relations explicit. Genesis can read differently from Leviticus; a rendering may be literal at the level of word order but interpretive in lexical choice. The usual line from “literal” to “free” is therefore too thin. Translation technique must ask what unit is being matched—morpheme, word, clause, discourse, or social institution—and what a Greek reader could understand.

The earliest project also created a lexicon for later translators. Greek equivalents for covenant, law, glory, righteousness, assembly, sacrifice, and named institutions became available for adoption, adaptation, or refusal. This is historical influence, not proof that every later translator worked in the same school or pursued one theology.

4.2 The source behind the Greek

The medieval Masoretic Text is indispensable for comparing Hebrew and Greek, but it is not the manuscript on the Alexandrian desk. When the Greek differs, at least five explanations must be tested:

1. the translator understood the same consonants differently;
2. the translator paraphrased, interpreted, harmonized, or made an error;
3. the translator’s Hebrew exemplar contained a different reading;
4. the Hebrew and Greek represent different literary editions of a book; or
5. later Greek or Hebrew transmission created the difference.

The existence of Hebrew textual plurality in the Judean Desert makes the third and fourth possibilities concrete. It does not make the Greek automatically earlier or better. Sometimes a Greek rendering transparently reflects interpretation or confusion; sometimes it preserves evidence for a Hebrew reading otherwise lost; sometimes no confident retroversion is possible. Textual criticism decides locally, not by awarding one tradition permanent victory.

Question	Evidence consulted	Responsible inference	Overreach
Did the translator have different consonants?	Greek syntax and vocabulary, surviving Hebrew variants, ancient versions, and the book’s internal pattern.	A proposed source reading with stated confidence.	Retroverting every Greek difference into an unattested Hebrew manuscript.
Is the rendering interpretive?	Consistent equivalents, contemporary Greek usage, context, and analogous passages.	The Greek presents an ancient Jewish reading of its source.	Calling every intelligible difference a deliberate theological correction.
Which form is earliest?	Full transmission history and criteria appropriate to the variant.	One reading may better explain the others.	Declaring either MT or LXX universally “closest to the original.”
Is there one translation technique?	Book-level and unit-level profiles.	Related translators share some inherited vocabulary while differing in execution.	Treating a striking verse as the method of the whole corpus.

4.3 Use before preservation

The Greek Torah was not only an artifact to be compared with Hebrew. It was read, copied, cited, interpreted, and made a basis for Jewish life in Greek. Aristéas’s public ratification, Philo’s exegesis, papyrus survival, and later

vocabulary show authority and use. The exact place of Greek in synagogue reading during the originating century remains less securely documented than is sometimes claimed. Translation surely served access; its first precise ritual setting is not recoverable.

The achievement was nevertheless radical. A law bound to the history and worship of Israel could inhabit Greek without surrendering its source language. That possibility made every later stage of the Septuagint imaginable.

5 Beyond the Torah: A Library Grows Book by Book

After the Pentateuch, further Hebrew and Aramaic books entered Greek through independent projects. Dates and places are often recoverable only in broad ranges. Many translations probably arose in Egypt during the second and first centuries BC; some evidence points elsewhere, and revisions could occur far from the place of first translation. “The Septuagint translators” is therefore least accurate precisely where the corpus becomes largest.

5.1 The anchor supplied by Ben Sira

The Greek prologue to Sirach is unusually valuable because a translator speaks in his own voice. He identifies the Hebrew author as his grandfather, reports arriving in Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of King Euergetes—conventionally understood as 132 BC—and explains the difficulty of rendering Hebrew into another language. He also refers to the Law, the Prophets, and other ancestral books in Greek.

This is strong evidence that several classes of Jewish Scripture had Greek forms by the late second century BC. It is not a table of contents, a declaration that every later canonical book had been translated, or proof of a closed tripartite canon. The repeated, flexible description identifies an inherited scriptural world without listing its borders.

5.2 Translations, compositions, and additions

Not everything transmitted within later Septuagint manuscripts is a translation from Hebrew. The wider Greek corpus contains at least four literary relationships:

Relationship	Representative cases	Historical consequence
Greek translation of a Semitic book	Pentateuch, many Prophets, Psalms, and other books.	Requires study of translation technique and a recoverable Hebrew or Aramaic source text.
Greek form of a different literary edition	Jeremiah and parts of Samuel–Kings are central test cases.	Difference may precede translation and illuminate the book’s literary growth.
Greek expansions or alternative forms	Esther and Daniel; the longer and shorter Greek forms of Tobit illustrate further plurality.	“Addition” and “original” must be defined by book and witness; later codices may transmit hybrid texts.
Work composed in Greek	Wisdom of Solomon and 2 Maccabees are leading examples.	Calling the whole collection a “translation” erases Greek Jewish authorship.

Modern Catholic “deuterocanonical” and Protestant “Apocrypha” classifications concern later canon reception. They cannot simply be projected onto Jewish authors or the first Greek scrolls. Alison Salvesen’s study of these books emphasizes both their Jewish origins and the variety of contents and groupings in later Christian codices. Some works once existed in Hebrew or Aramaic and survive substantially through Greek and daughter versions; others were Greek compositions from the outset. Their preservation by Christians proves reception, not one ancient Alexandrian list.

5.3 A chronology with different clocks

Books could be translated, revised, expanded, and collected at different times. A Greek version's latest datable vocabulary or historical allusion may help place it, but translation Greek is conservative and source-bound. A manuscript's date establishes when that copy was made, not when its underlying translation originated. A patristic citation establishes use by that author, not the first appearance of the cited form.

The result is a layered chronology:

- third century BC: the Greek Pentateuch supplies the foundational model and vocabulary;
- second and first centuries BC: many further translations and Greek Jewish compositions appear, with Sirach's prologue providing a firm late-second-century horizon for substantial prior activity;
- first centuries BC and AD: existing versions are revised toward emerging Hebrew reference forms, while Jewish authors continue to cite and interpret Greek Scripture;
- second and third centuries AD: new Jewish Greek translations and Christian editorial work multiply the recoverable forms;
- fourth and fifth centuries: large Christian codices gather texts whose histories began in separate scrolls.

No point on this timeline is "the completion of the Septuagint" in the way a modern publishing house completes one edition. The absence of a single finishing date is one of the history's principal conclusions.

Claim check: An "Alexandrian canon"

Neither Aristea's Law, Ben Sira's threefold description, nor the great Christian codices supplies a fixed Alexandrian Jewish table of contents. The codices differ among themselves and belong to a later Christian setting. Canon history must be argued from explicit judgments and patterns of use, not inferred from the modern contents page of a printed Septuagint.

6 Four Books, Four Textual Histories

A general theory of "the Septuagint text" becomes trustworthy only after it survives book-level testing. Samuel, Jeremiah, Job, and Daniel present four different problems. In one, the Greek may preserve readings from a Hebrew exemplar unlike the later dominant Hebrew form; in another, two literary editions stand behind the witnesses; in a third, an abbreviated Greek translation was later supplemented; in a fourth, one Greek version displaced another. None permits the same explanation to be applied automatically to the next.

6.1 Samuel: translation, source text, and later revision

The Old Greek of Samuel is often closely aligned with Hebrew wording, yet it also contains difficult Greek, apparent mistakes, interpretive freedom, and readings that presuppose a Hebrew text different from the medieval Masoretic form. Hebrew manuscripts from the Judean Desert make that last category historically concrete: some readings once known principally through Greek have Hebrew analogues. A critical reconstruction must still distinguish four factors locally: the translator's work, the Hebrew source, early Jewish revision, and secondary doublets. This does not prove that the Greek is always right or always earlier. It proves that "Greek difference" cannot be treated as another name for translator error.

Samuel also exposes later intervention inside Greek transmission. Parts of the books of Kingdoms were revised more closely toward a proto-Masoretic Hebrew reference text. Corrective alternatives could also move from margins into the running text and produce doublets that then spread across the manuscript tradition. A manuscript or printed Bible can therefore place older translation, correction, and later revision in the same continuous work. Before using a reading historically or theologically, the investigator must ask which Greek layer is speaking.

Witness: Anneli Aejmelaeus, "Challenges in Preparing the Critical Edition of 1 Samuel," read with Eugene Ulrich's survey of the Judean Desert scrolls

What it establishes: The Greek translator can be close and occasionally free or mistaken; some substantial differences reflect an ancient Hebrew source, while early Jewish revision and secondary doublets add further layers. **Limit:** The evidence supports local reconstructions, not a presumption that either the Greek or the Masoretic form is uniformly prior.

6.2 Jeremiah: two literary editions

Greek Jeremiah is substantially shorter than the Masoretic form and arranges a major block of oracles against the nations differently. A once-common explanation made the Greek translator chiefly responsible for abbreviation and relocation. The shorter Hebrew Jeremiah manuscripts from Qumran, especially 4QJer^b and 4QJer^d, altered the question: they demonstrate that a shorter Hebrew edition related to the Greek translator’s source actually circulated.

The result is not a simple verdict that one edition is “original” and the other corrupt. The shorter and longer forms represent stages in the literary history of Jeremiah. Emanuel Tov reconstructs the Greek-related form as a shorter first edition and the Masoretic form as an expanded second edition. That model accounts for substantial patterns, but it remains a modern reconstruction: the Qumran fragments align with the shorter form locally and do not preserve the translator’s complete source scroll. The relative history of particular passages still requires argument.

6.3 Job: a shorter translation made longer

The earliest recoverable Greek Job is markedly shorter than the received Hebrew book. Its translator sometimes condenses repetitive speeches, renders freely, or omits material; not every missing line implies a shorter Hebrew scroll. Later readers faced a Greek Job that did not correspond in extent to the Hebrew text before them. Origen’s editorial work supplied absent material from other Greek forms and marked the intervention with critical signs.

The signs did not remain equally intelligible in ordinary copying. Much ecclesial transmission consequently preserves a hybrid: Old Greek wording together with later supplements. “Septuagint Job” may therefore mean the shorter translation reconstructed by an editor, an expanded Hexaplaric form, or the text of a named codex. The label alone cannot decide which.

6.4 Daniel: a version displaced

Daniel survives in an Old Greek form and in the distinct Greek form conventionally called Theodotion. The latter replaced the former in most Christian biblical transmission. Papyrus 967 is important because it witnesses Old Greek Daniel outside the later great-codex pattern and preserves a different ordering of some material. Susanna and Bel and the Dragon likewise participate in more than one Greek textual history.

The traditional name “Theodotion” does not solve the chronology. Readings associated with that style occur before the late-second-century date traditionally assigned to a reviser named Theodotion, and the relation among early revision, the historical person, and the received Daniel text remains disputed. Here reception selected one Greek form without making the displaced form cease to be ancient evidence.

Book	Visible difference	Best-supported explanation	Methodological lesson
Samuel	Numerous readings and mixed Greek strata.	Translation decisions, a sometimes different Hebrew exemplar, and later Greek revision all contribute.	Classify the variant before judging it.
Jeremiah	Shorter Greek and different placement of the nations oracles.	A shorter Hebrew literary edition underlies much of the Greek.	Translation can preserve a lost editorial stage.
Job	Old Greek substantially shorter than received Hebrew.	Translational condensation and omission, followed by Hexaplaric supplementation.	A transmitted church text can be intentionally composite.

Book	Visible difference	Best-supported explanation	Methodological lesson
Daniel	Old Greek largely displaced by “Theodotion.”	Reception and revision produced two major Greek forms with complex antecedents.	The dominant form need not be the first Greek form.

Claim check: Does the Septuagint prove that the Hebrew Bible was changed?

It proves that ancient Hebrew textual plurality was real and that some Greek differences reflect source texts or literary editions unlike the later Masoretic form. It does not prove that every Greek reading rests on an older Hebrew exemplar, that every longer Hebrew passage is an addition, or that one corpus-wide ranking can replace variant-by-variant analysis.

7 Jewish Use, Revision, and Re-translation

The Septuagint did not pass from Jewish hands into Christian hands at one datable border. Greek-speaking Jews continued to read inherited translations, revise them, and make new versions. Christian use eventually changed the social setting of the older Greek corpus, but the textual evidence resists a story in which Judaism simply abandoned Greek Scripture as soon as Christians cited it.

7.1 Sacred Greek within Jewish life

Philo of Alexandria supplies the fullest first-century Jewish reception of the origin story. In *Life of Moses* II.25–44, the translators become inspired interpreters, and an annual gathering on Pharos celebrates the event. Philo’s exegesis elsewhere assumes that the Greek wording can sustain close scriptural argument. His testimony establishes Alexandrian Jewish reverence in his own period; its theological enlargement of Aristeas does not independently verify the third-century translation event.

Josephus retells Aristeas in *Jewish Antiquities* XII.11–118 and elsewhere uses Greek biblical material in ways that cannot be reduced to dependence on one uniform version. He shows both the cultural value of the royal origin narrative and the continued availability of Greek Jewish Scriptures in the late first century. His agreement with Aristeas about the origin is literary reception, not a second eyewitness.

7.2 Revision before a Christian monopoly

The Greek Minor Prophets scroll from Naḥal Ḥever, designated 8HevXIIgr and dated palaeographically to the late first century BC, preserves a Jewish revision of an older Greek form toward a Hebrew text close to the developing proto-Masoretic tradition. Fragments announced in 2021 sharpened the comparison. Timothy Lee shows that the reviser could replace distinctive or idiomatic Old Greek equivalents with vocabulary common elsewhere in the Greek Scriptures. A familiar-looking Greek equivalent may therefore be secondary: standardization is not visible only in conspicuously Hebraizing words. The scroll is material evidence that Hebrew-oriented Greek revision was underway within Judaism rather than invented as a reaction centuries later by Christian copyists.

Related patterns are conventionally called *kaige* revision. The category is useful because it explains revised portions of Samuel–Kings and readings once assigned anachronistically to Theodotion. Anneli Aejmelaeus argues that the evidence is better explained by a revisional tradition or school operating over time than by one person or one uniform edition. Her proposed Jerusalem-centered social setting remains a reasoned hypothesis, and the scroll itself did not become the source of all later *kaige* readings. Dating, extent, diffusion, and the relationship between *kaige* and the later Theodotion tradition remain active questions.

Witness: The Greek Minor Prophets scroll 8HevXIIgr, read through Timothy Lee’s full accepted manuscript and Anneli Aejmelaeus’s study of *kaige* origins

What it establishes: A Jewish revisional tradition adjusted an existing Greek text toward a Hebrew reference

form and regularized translation equivalents before the great Christian codices.

Limit: One late-first-century-BC scroll does not establish a single transregional recension, a Jerusalem workshop, or the identity of every reviser.

7.3 Aquila, Symmachus, and the Theodotion problem

The version attributed to Aquila survives principally in fragments, marginal readings, patristic discussion, and later indirect witnesses after its inclusion in Origen's Hexapla. Its strongly Hebrew-oriented method made it valuable both to Jewish readers seeking close correspondence and to Christian scholars comparing versions. Ancient reports about Aquila's identity and conversion belong to reception history; the surviving text does not provide a translator's colophon.

Symmachus is likewise fragmentary. His Greek is generally more lucid and idiomatic than Aquila's while remaining aligned with a Hebrew reference text. Proposals about his religious affiliation, identity, and political purpose are disputed and should not be converted into biography. "Theodotion" is more complex still: early Theodotion-like readings and the received Greek Daniel cannot be explained safely by assigning every feature to one late-second-century individual.

These versions show a continuum rather than a binary. Jewish translators could value close Hebrew correspondence, comprehensible Greek, inherited renderings, and new interpretive choices in different proportions. Origen later placed several of these forms beside one another because plurality was already there.

7.4 Rabbinic memory: privilege and unease

Rabbinic witnesses do not speak with one chronological voice. Mishnah Megillah 1:8 preserves a ruling that privileges Greek among non-Hebrew languages for writing scriptural books. Babylonian Talmud Megillah 9a retells the Ptolemy story with seventy-two elders placed separately and divinely guided to make the same protective alterations. This is a later form of the miracle narrative, not the collaborative scene in Aristeas.

Tractate Soferim 1:7–8, a still later compilation, compares the day of translation to the making of the golden calf because Torah could not be rendered adequately. That negative judgment is real evidence for its own reception setting. It cannot be projected backward to erase Philo, the Greek scrolls, the mishnaic privilege given to Greek, or continuing Jewish use and revision.

Claim check: Did Jews reject the Septuagint at Jamnia?

No checked source establishes a council that issued one universal rejection of the Greek Bible. Preference for increasingly standardized Hebrew forms, new Jewish Greek versions, Christian appropriation, regional language change, and rabbinic evaluation developed over time. "Rejection at Jamnia" turns that long, uneven history into an unsupported decree.

8 From Jewish Greek Scripture to Christian Old Testament

The first Christians did not create the Septuagint. They inherited Greek Jewish scriptural language, arguments, and books already in circulation. Their use transformed the corpus's institutional home and future transmission, but its vocabulary and earliest translations remain products of Jewish antiquity.

8.1 The New Testament inside a Greek scriptural world

New Testament authors frequently cite or echo Greek forms of Jewish Scripture, and Septuagintal language supplies a large part of their scriptural vocabulary. The relationship is not captured by a single quotation percentage. An author can reproduce an Old Greek form, adapt it, translate or remember Hebrew differently, combine passages, or cite a Greek form not identical with the later codices. Citation study must therefore compare each wording rather than assume that "the Septuagint" was one apostolic desk copy.

The deeper influence is not limited to formal quotations. Greek biblical diction gave Christian writers a language for covenant, righteousness, glory, worship, promise, and fulfillment. That inheritance helps explain why the Church's proclamation could move among Greek-speaking communities without first inventing a biblical register.

Witness: David Lincicum's survey of citations in the New Testament

What it establishes: The Septuagintal corpus functions as a major predecessor text for New Testament language, concepts, and patterns of citation.

Limit: The influence does not establish one uniform quotation source, one fixed first-century corpus, or an exact count applicable to every New Testament book.

8.2 Authority defended through the origin story

Second-century Christian controversy intensified claims about the Greek text. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 71, Justin charges Jewish teachers with rejecting or removing scriptural material favorable to Christian interpretation. His accusation shows a live dispute over texts and exegesis; without manuscript demonstration it is not neutral proof that Jews had recently falsified Scripture.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.21.2, retells the origin with translators separated from one another and miraculously producing the same result. The amplification answers a Christian need: if the Greek translation is providentially concordant, it can stand securely against opponents and variant renderings. It also marks a clear difference from Aristaeas, whose translators compare their work together.

By Augustine's time, the Septuagint was an inherited ecclesial Bible. In *City of God* XVIII.42–43 he treats the translators as sharing prophetic assistance and defends the Church's reception of their work even when the Greek and Hebrew differ. This is major evidence for Latin Christian theology of the translation. It does not supply new information about the Ptolemaic workshop.

8.3 One inheritance, several collections

Christian communities copied the translated books together with Greek compositions, expanded forms, and other texts received for reading. Those collections were not identical everywhere. The surviving great codices differ in order and contents, and patristic writers distinguish books in different ways. "The Christian Septuagint canon" therefore also requires a named community, author, codex, or ecclesial judgment.

The later doctrinal reception of particular books is real history, but it is a different evidence class from their language of composition or first translation. A Catholic judgment that a book is canonical does not require the historian to pretend that it came from the seventy-two translators. Conversely, demonstrating separate origins does not decide the book's ecclesial authority.

The Greek Scriptures also became sources for further translations, including Old Latin and several eastern Christian versions. Each daughter version can preserve a Greek reading older than its surviving Greek manuscripts, but only after its own translation and revision history is analyzed.

8.4 Hebrew truth and ecclesial Greek

Jerome's turn to Hebrew in translating Old Testament books into Latin sharpened an existing problem: should a Christian translation follow the Hebrew texts available to Jewish teachers or the Greek Bible long used by the churches? Augustine feared that abandoning the received Greek inheritance could estrange congregations and weaken the common scriptural language. Jerome emphasized access to Hebrew and denied that the later miraculous-cell story described the origin adequately. Their disagreement concerns translation, text, and ecclesial reception at once; it should not be flattened into faith versus scholarship.

Claim check: "The Bible of Jesus and the apostles"

The phrase correctly signals the Septuagint's importance for the New Testament and early Church, but it can imply one closed Greek volume used identically by every speaker and author. The defensible claim is narrower:

Greek Jewish Scriptures supplied many New Testament citations and much early Christian biblical language, in textual forms that must be identified passage by passage.

9 Origen, the Hexapla, and the Great Codices

By the third century, a Christian scholar confronting “the Greek Old Testament” encountered inherited Old Greek, Hebrew-oriented revisions, alternative translations, and manuscripts already changed by copying. Origen’s response and the later great codices stand at different points in that history: one was a comparative scholarly project, the others monumental Christian books.

9.1 The Hexapla as comparison

Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VI.16, reports that Origen investigated the versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, set them beside the Hebrew, and produced works called the Hexapla and Tetrapla. The conventional reconstruction describes six parallel columns: Hebrew, Hebrew transliterated into Greek letters, Aquila, Symmachus, the Septuagint, and Theodotion. That outline is useful, but the surviving evidence is meagre and almost every detail—extent, exact columns, purpose, sequence, critical signs, and relation of Hexapla to Tetrapla—has been disputed.

Origen did not make the pre-existing plurality disappear. He displayed it. His edited Septuagint column used critical signs to register relationships with Hebrew and incorporated material from other Greek forms where the received Greek lacked corresponding text. Later copying could retain the added wording while obscuring or losing the signs. The Hexaplaric tradition is therefore both an indispensable record of comparison and a source of secondary material within transmitted Septuagint manuscripts.

Witness: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VI.16, together with Peter Gentry’s evidence review

What it establishes: Origen assembled Hebrew and several Greek versions in parallel and the project influenced later textual transmission.

Limit: The complete work is lost; the familiar six-column diagram is a reconstruction whose configuration and scope must not be narrated as though an intact master copy survived.

9.2 From separate scrolls to Christian pandects

The codex made it physically possible to gather many scriptural books in a more compact sequence than a library of rolls. By the fourth and fifth centuries, large parchment Bibles joined Greek Old and New Testaments, though survival is incomplete and their contents differ. The act of collection encouraged readers to perceive one Christian Bible while the texts inside retained their separate translation and revision histories.

Witness	Date and location	What survives or is established	Historical limit
Codex Vaticanus (B), Vat. gr. 1209	Commonly dated to the fourth century; Vatican Apostolic Library.	A principal Christian Greek biblical witness and later base manuscript for diplomatic editorial work.	It is neither complete nor identical with every other codex, and it is centuries later than the translations.
Codex Sinaiticus (N)	Mid-fourth century; leaves now in four institutions.	Just over 400 surviving leaves: roughly half the Old Testament and Apocrypha, the complete New Testament, Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas.	Much of Genesis through 1 Chronicles is lost; surviving contents cannot be treated as an Alexandrian Jewish list.
Codex Alexandrinus (A), Royal MSS 1 D V–VIII	Fifth century; British Library.	A four-volume Christian Bible whose sequence and appended Christian works differ from Sinaiticus.	Its later Alexandrian custody does not prove Alexandrian production or third-century contents.

Witness	Date and location	What survives or is established	Historical limit
Earlier papyri and rolls	Second century BC through early Roman period; Egypt and Judean Desert.	Book fragments and revision evidence closer to Jewish production and use.	No surviving artifact contains the whole corpus later called the Septuagint.

9.3 Collection is interpretation

Order, adjacency, headings, corrections, and the inclusion of other Christian writings affect how a codex is read. Yet material inclusion is not by itself a complete doctrinal judgment about every book's status. Sinaiticus includes Barnabas and the Shepherd after the New Testament; Alexandrinus includes Clementine material. Those facts establish the codices' contents and use, not a universal canon decree.

The codices remain essential because many critical reconstructions begin from their readings and because they show mature Christian reception. Their lateness is not a reason to discard them. It is a reason to compare them with earlier fragments, daughter versions, quotations, and identifiable revisions instead of allowing one codex to impersonate the translation event.

Claim check: Is there an ancient complete copy of "the Septuagint"?

No surviving manuscript is both complete and close to the originating translations. The great codices are later Christian collections with losses, corrections, different contents, and different textual mixtures. Modern complete editions are scholarly reconstructions assembled from many witnesses.

10 From Manuscript Witnesses to Critical Editions

A printed Greek text removes the handwriting, corrections, gaps, marginal readings, and competing witnesses from the reader's immediate view. A responsible edition restores those differences through an apparatus and states what kind of text it is trying to print. The history of Septuagint editions is therefore part of the history of the Septuagint itself.

10.1 Diplomatic and critical aims

A diplomatic edition prints one selected manuscript as its base and records other evidence around it. A critical edition attempts to reconstruct the oldest recoverable Greek form for a book or section from all relevant witnesses, including manuscripts, ancient translations, citations, and controlled conjecture. Neither is a neutral transcription of "the original." The first privileges an artifact; the second publishes an argued historical judgment.

The Cambridge tradition illustrates the diplomatic approach. H. B. Swete's handbook presented the Greek Old Testament chiefly from Codex Vaticanus, supplemented where necessary. The larger Cambridge edition begun by A. E. Brooke, Norman McLean, and H. St J. Thackeray assembled a much fuller apparatus but remained unfinished when the project ceased in 1940.

10.2 Rahlfs and the Göttingen project

Alfred Rahlfs's 1935 *Septuaginta* supplied a compact, semi-critical text for the whole corpus. Robert Hanhart's 2006 *editio altera* corrected and supplemented the Greek text and apparatus at more than a thousand points. Rahlfs–Hanhart remains the practical one-volume reference edition, but the economy that makes it usable also prevents it from replacing a full book-specific edition.

The Göttingen Septuaginta-Unternehmen began its work on 1 April 1908. The first volume of its *editio maior*, Alfred Rahlfs's *Psalmi cum Odis*, appeared in 1931; the book-by-book critical edition continues through successor projects. Its larger editions normally distinguish evidence for the Old Greek text from Hexaplaric material and document

manuscript groupings and revisions in extensive apparatuses. Because the textual history differs by book, completion cannot be achieved responsibly by applying one base manuscript or one editorial rule to the entire corpus.

Witness: The International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies statement on critical editions
What it establishes: Cambridge and Göttingen pursue distinguishable diplomatic and critical aims; Göttingen is the preferred full critical edition where a volume exists, while Rahlfs is a semi-critical handbook.
Limit: Every reconstructed reading remains an editorial conclusion open to revision as witnesses, collations, and models of transmission improve.

10.3 A modern English window: NETS

A New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS), edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, appeared as a complete volume in 2007; the official electronic edition reflects the corrected 2009 printing and later posted corrections. Its translators normally use the best available critical Greek edition for each book and deliberately preserve features of translation Greek that a fully idiomatic English Bible might smooth away.

NETS is consequently useful for studying the Greek as translation. It is not an ancient witness, and its English wording cannot settle a Greek variant independently of its base edition. It is also copyrighted third-party material. This account paraphrases its Sirach prologue and does not reproduce its biblical text.

Resource	Proper use	Misuse to avoid
Named manuscript or facsimile	Study one artifact’s actual readings, corrections, order, and lacunae.	Treating that witness as the complete original Septuagint.
Rahlfs–Hanhart	Consult a compact whole-corpus Greek text and concise apparatus.	Assuming its printed line is the unanimous manuscript reading.
Göttingen volume	Study a book-specific reconstructed Old Greek and extensive evidence.	Confusing a critical reconstruction with a surviving autograph.
NETS	Read a scholarly English representation of the selected critical Greek text.	Using English alone to prove the translator’s Hebrew source or a manuscript reading.

Claim check: Which edition is “the Septuagint”?

No edition exhausts the historical object. Cite the Göttingen volume where available for critical argument, identify Rahlfs–Hanhart when using the handbook, and name the manuscript when its wording matters. A translation should identify both its Greek base and its own edition.

11 Claim Audit: What the Evidence Will Bear

Popular summaries are useful when they preserve scale and sequence. They become misleading when they make a late witness contemporary with the event, a book-specific judgment corpus-wide, or an ecclesial reception claim into a manuscript description. The following audit states the shortest defensible replacement for recurrent claims.

Shorthand claim	Evidence verdict	Historically responsible formulation
“Ptolemy ordered the whole Old Testament translated.”	Rejected.	The earliest origin narrative concerns the Law. A Jewish Greek Torah arose in Ptolemaic Egypt in the third century BC; further books entered Greek through separate projects.

Shorthand claim	Evidence verdict	Historically responsible formulation
“Seventy-two scholars worked in isolation and produced identical texts.”	Later amplification.	Aristeas depicts seventy-two elders comparing their work and reaching agreement. Philo, Irenaeus, and rabbinic retellings differently intensify divine concord.
“The royal-library story is either literal history or pure fiction.”	False alternative.	Aristeas is a retrospective Jewish charter narrative. Its broad Egyptian, Jewish, Torah, and authorization setting fits independent evidence; its named commission, personnel, speeches, and timetable remain uncorroborated.
“The Septuagint is one uniform translation.”	Rejected.	The name covers the Greek Torah, book-specific Old Greek translations, Greek compositions and expansions, revisions, and later Christian collections. The intended sense must be named.
“A Greek difference proves that Jews changed the Hebrew.”	Rejected as a general rule.	A difference may arise from another Hebrew literary edition, another source reading, interpretation, error, revision, or later transmission. Samuel and Jeremiah establish real Hebrew plurality; they do not decide every variant.
“The great codices preserve the original Alexandrian Bible.”	Rejected.	Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus are fourth- and fifth-century Christian collections. They preserve indispensable readings but differ in contents, order, corrections, and textual form.
“There was a fixed Alexandrian Jewish canon matching a modern Septuagint.”	Not established.	Aristeas names the Law, Sirach’s prologue uses flexible group descriptions, and the later Christian codices differ. None supplies the required Alexandrian Jewish list.
“Jews rejected the Septuagint at a council of Jamnia.”	No checked source supports the decree.	Hebrew-oriented revision, new Greek translations, Christian appropriation, language change, and varied rabbinic judgments developed across regions and centuries.
“The Septuagint was simply the Bible of Jesus and the apostles.”	Important but overcompressed.	Greek Jewish Scriptures deeply shaped New Testament diction and many citations. Each citation still requires comparison, and no one closed Greek pandect is thereby established for every author.
“A modern printed Septuagint reproduces one ancient manuscript.”	Rejected for critical editions.	A diplomatic text foregrounds a named witness; a critical edition reconstructs a book’s oldest recoverable Greek from many witnesses. Rahlfs–Hanhart, Göttingen volumes, NETS, and a codex facsimile answer different questions.

11.1 Findings with different levels of confidence

Finding	Confidence	Reason and limit
A Jewish Greek Torah was produced in Ptolemaic Egypt, probably Alexandria, during the third century BC.	High.	Linguistic analysis, early use, physical witnesses, and the later Alexandrian origin tradition converge; the exact date, patron, and workplace do not survive.

Finding	Confidence	Reason and limit
The project involved multiple translators and some coordination.	Moderate to high.	Book-level differences and shared solutions fit coordinated plurality; no colophon identifies hands or procedure.
Many later books were translated independently before the end of the second century BC.	High in aggregate, variable by book.	Sirach's prologue provides a dated horizon; individual dates and locations remain uneven.
Some major Greek differences preserve a distinct Hebrew source or literary edition.	High for demonstrated cases.	Judean Desert Hebrew evidence makes the category certain, especially for Jeremiah and parts of Samuel; application remains local.
Jewish revision toward Hebrew reference forms preceded Christian manuscript dominance.	High.	8HevXIIgr supplies material evidence; its precise date and relationship to every kaige feature remain debated.
The seventy-two-day royal commission happened exactly as Aristeeas narrates it.	Unverified.	The work is retrospective and literary; no contemporary administrative or manuscript record corroborates the details.
A single first-century Jewish or Christian table of contents can be called "the Septuagint canon."	Not established.	The evidence records collections, use, and judgments in distinct communities rather than one transregional list.

The audit does not reduce the Septuagint's authority or importance. It identifies which historical object a claim concerns. That discipline makes the translation's actual achievement larger, not smaller: Jewish translators did not merely reproduce one finished book; they created and repeatedly renewed a Greek scriptural world.

12 Conclusion: A Translation with More Than One Beginning

The origin story remembers a decisive act correctly at its center. Jewish scholars in Ptolemaic Egypt made the Torah Greek, and Greek-speaking Jews received that Law as an authoritative rendering of their ancestral text. What history cannot sustain is the later compression of everything else into the same room, reign, committee, and day. The Prophets, Psalms, wisdom books, narratives, Greek compositions, additions, and revisions have their own translators, dates, places, source texts, and afterlives.

That distributed production explains the corpus's most conspicuous feature: difference. Greek books vary in style and technique because translators made different judgments. Samuel and Jeremiah can witness Hebrew forms not identical with the medieval Masoretic tradition. Job was translated in an abbreviated form and later supplemented. Daniel circulated in two major Greek forms, one of which largely displaced the other. These are not four illustrations of one mechanism. They are four warnings that textual history must begin again with each book.

The same plurality governs reception. Aristeeas authorizes the Greek Law through king, priest, translators, and community. Philo interprets its concord as inspired and celebrates it within Alexandrian Judaism. Jewish revisers align older Greek more closely with Hebrew reference forms; Aquila, Symmachus, and the complex Theodotion tradition offer further Greek choices. Christians inherit this Jewish scriptural world, cite it, defend it, collect it, and transmit it into new languages. Origen displays versions beside one another; the great codices gather books whose histories had begun on separate scrolls.

No one of those stages can substitute for all the others. A Christian codex does not reveal a third-century Jewish table of contents. A later rabbinic judgment does not cancel Jewish Greek use in Philo's age. An ecclesial claim about providential reception does not function as a Ptolemaic archive. A modern critical edition is neither an autograph nor a vote among manuscripts; it is an argued reconstruction whose quality depends on respecting every recoverable layer.

Three durable conclusions follow.

1. **Name the object.** “Septuagint” may mean Torah, an Old Greek book, a wider Greek corpus, a codex, or an edition. Historical argument begins by saying which.
2. **Classify the difference.** No Greek–Hebrew divergence explains itself. Translation, source text, literary edition, revision, and transmission must be tested rather than assumed.
3. **Date the witness.** Aristeas, Philo, Irenaeus, a Qumran scroll, Origen, Vaticanus, and Göttingen answer different questions because they stand in different centuries and evidence classes.

The Septuagint’s unity is therefore real but historical. It lies in the durable Greek scriptural culture initiated by the Torah, extended by Jewish translators and authors, contested and revised within Judaism, inherited and reshaped by Christianity, and reconstructed by modern editors. Its history is not the decline of a perfect original into plurality. The plurality belongs to the evidence from the beginning, and attending to it is the surest way to honor both the translators and the texts they transmitted.

A Scope, Terms, Evidence, and Limits

A.1 The object and the reader

At its narrowest, *Septuagint* names the Greek translation of the Torah—Genesis through Deuteronomy—whose origin was remembered in the *Letter of Aristeas*. In textual scholarship, *Old Greek* usually means the earliest recoverable Greek translation of a particular Hebrew or Aramaic book, whether or not it belonged to that first project. In ordinary Christian usage, *Septuagint* can mean the wider Greek Old Testament transmitted by the Church: translations, books composed in Greek, expanded Greek forms, and later revisions gathered in different combinations. Finally, a printed “Septuagint” is an editor’s text reconstructed from manuscripts that are much later than the first translations. These meanings overlap; they are not interchangeable.

This account asks four connected questions. What can be recovered about the production of the Greek Torah? How did further scriptural books enter Greek? Why do their texts differ from later Hebrew forms and from one another? How did Jewish translations become Christian Scripture without ceasing to be evidence for ancient Jewish interpretation?

It is written for a serious reader who may know the Septuagint chiefly through claims about the “Bible of Jesus,” the deuterocanonical books, or differences from the Masoretic Text. It does not adjudicate inspiration or define a canon. It reconstructs the histories that those theological questions presuppose.

The historical range begins with the Greek Torah in Ptolemaic Egypt in the third century BC and follows later translation, Jewish revision, Christian codices and reception, and modern critical reconstruction through 17 July 2026. Its geographic center is Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean; other regions enter only where a manuscript, ancient witness, daughter version, or modern edition materially bears on that history. Daughter versions are used as textual witnesses, not given complete independent histories.

A.2 Terms that prevent false precision

Term	Meaning in this account	Boundary
LXX / Septuagint	The Greek Torah when discussing origins; the wider Greek scriptural corpus when context makes that usage explicit.	Never a claim that all books share one translator, date, source text, or textual history.
Old Greek (OG)	The earliest Greek form recoverable for a particular translation unit.	A scholarly reconstruction, not necessarily an extant manuscript or a claim of verbal access to the translator’s copy.
Source text / Vorlage	The Hebrew or Aramaic form from which a Greek translator worked.	Not automatically identical with the medieval Masoretic Text or any surviving scroll.

Term	Meaning in this account	Boundary
Masoretic Text (MT)	The consonantal tradition with medieval vocalization and notes represented in standard Hebrew editions.	A central witness to the Hebrew Bible, not a time machine into every translator’s exemplar.
Revision / recension	Deliberate alteration of an existing Greek version, often toward a Hebrew reference text or an editorial standard.	Must be demonstrated by patterns; not every variant is a recension.
Great codex	A large Christian parchment Bible such as Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, or Alexandrinus.	A fourth- or fifth-century collection, not a direct inventory of third-century Alexandrian Judaism.

A.3 Method and limits

The earliest physical witnesses are fragmentary and the full codices are Christian and centuries later. Ancient authors write for apologetic, historical, or theological purposes. Modern editors must reason backward through revision and scribal transmission. Accordingly, this study distinguishes four evidence classes: early artifacts; ancient narrative witnesses; later Jewish and Christian reception; and modern text-critical reconstruction. A date stated as a range marks the limits of the evidence rather than indecision to be concealed.

No manuscript image, facsimile, modern translation, or extended third-party passage is incorporated. Brief ancient wording, where needed, is attributed to an identified public-domain human translation; modern translations are paraphrased. Online records, full scholarly studies, and mutable project descriptions were checked through 17 July 2026. The source audit and evidence map record the full claim-to-source alignment, exact loci, access dates, negative results, and rights decisions.

Claim check: “The Septuagint says”

A responsible use of this phrase must identify at least the book and, when the reading matters, the Greek form or edition. Greek Daniel is not one simple text; Greek Tobit is pluriform; the Old Greek of Job was supplemented; and the large codices disagree. The singular title is convenient only after the historical plurality is made visible.

A.4 Publication boundary

This is a source-audited historical study, checked through 17 July 2026. It is not a critical edition, a project translation of Scripture, or an ecclesiastical judgment about canon or inspiration. Independent historical and text-critical review remains outstanding.

B Timeline: Event, Witness, Reception, and Edition

Dates for translations and manuscripts are approximate unless the witness supplies a firmer anchor. The “class” column prevents a later report about an event from being mistaken for contemporary documentation of it.

Date	Act or witness	Class	Historical significance and limit
323 BC and after	Hellenistic successor kingdoms; Ptolemaic Alexandria	Setting	Greek becomes the principal language of government and exchange across much of the eastern Mediterranean; Jewish life in Egypt remains both Greek-speaking and connected to ancestral Hebrew texts.

Date	Act or witness	Class	Historical significance and limit
Third century BC	Translation of the Torah into Greek	Reconstructed event	Linguistic and comparative evidence supports Jewish production in Ptolemaic Egypt, probably Alexandria. No contemporary colophon names a patron, translators, or year.
Probably second century BC	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>	Narrative witness	Supplies the earliest continuous royal-library and seventy-two-translator account, restricted to the Law; it is retrospective, pseudonymous, and literary.
Second century BC	Rylands Greek Papyrus 458, Deuteronomy	Artifact	Early physical witness to circulation of the Greek Torah; fragmentary and not a corpus or canon list.
132 BC, conventional reckoning	Greek prologue to Sirach	Near-contemporary preface	The translator reports arriving in Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of Euergetes and presupposes Greek forms of the Law, Prophets, and other books; he gives no table of contents.
Second–first centuries BC	Further translations and Greek Jewish compositions	Reconstructed production	Many books enter Greek through independent projects. Dates, locations, source languages, and techniques vary book by book.
Late first century BC	8HevXIIgr, the Greek Minor Prophets scroll	Artifact and revision	Material evidence for Jewish revision of an older Greek form toward a Hebrew reference text before the great Christian codices; its relation to a wider kaige tradition does not make it the source of every later revised reading.
First century AD	Philo, <i>Life of Moses</i> II.25–44	Jewish reception	Treats the translation as inspired concord and describes a Pharos commemoration; establishes Alexandrian prestige in Philo’s time, not the original procedure.
Late first century AD	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> XII.11–118	Jewish reception	Retells Aristeas for a new audience; dependence transmits the tradition rather than independently corroborating it.
First century AD	New Testament writings	Christian reception	Cite and echo Greek Jewish Scriptures extensively but with author-, passage-, and text-form variation; do not establish one apostolic pandect.
Second century AD	Aquila; later Symmachus and the received “Theodotion” tradition	Versions and revision	Demonstrate continued Greek translation and Hebrew-oriented comparison; biographical reports and the unity of “Theodotion” remain disputed.
Late second century AD	Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i> III.21.2	Christian reception	Adds separated translators and miraculous agreement to the origin story; important for authority claims, not as origin documentation.
Third century AD	Origen’s Hexapla and Tetrapla	Scholarly edition	Places Hebrew and Greek versions in comparison and marks differences; the complete works are lost and their configuration is reconstructed.
Fourth century AD	Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus	Christian artifacts	Monumental Greek Bibles preserve principal textual witnesses and differing collections; both are centuries later than the first translations and neither survives as a complete original artifact.

Date	Act or witness	Class	Historical significance and limit
Fifth century AD	Codex Alexandrinus	Christian artifact	Preserves another large Christian collection with its own order, contents, and textual forms; later Alexandrian custody does not prove place of manufacture.
Late fourth–early fifth century AD	Jerome and Augustine debate Hebrew and ecclesial Greek	Christian reception	Makes the relation between Hebrew source texts, received Greek Scripture, and church use explicit; does not collapse either textual tradition into the other.
1887–1894	H. B. Swete’s three-volume handbook	Diplomatic edition	Prints a practical text chiefly based on Vaticanus, supplemented where that manuscript is absent.
1906–1940	Larger Cambridge Septuagint volumes	Diplomatic project	Publishes extensive manuscript evidence for selected books; the project remained incomplete.
1 April 1908	Göttingen Septuaginta-Unternehmen begins work	Critical project	Establishes the long-term book-by-book project for a major critical edition; institutional founding is distinct from publication of its first volume.
1931	Rahlfs, <i>Psalmi cum Odis</i>	Critical edition	First volume of the Göttingen <i>editio maior</i> ; subsequent volumes appear independently because textual histories differ.
1935	Alfred Rahlfs, <i>Septuaginta</i>	Semi-critical edition	Supplies a compact whole-corpus scholarly text; convenience does not make it a full critical edition for every book.
2006	Rahlfs–Hanhart <i>editio altera</i>	Revised edition	Corrects and supplements the handbook text and apparatus at more than a thousand points while retaining its compact purpose.
2007; corrected printing 2009	<i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i>	Modern translation	Renders the best available selected Greek editions into study-oriented English; it is a copyrighted modern aid, not an ancient witness.
March 2021	Five new 8HevXIIgr fragments announced, three previously unidentified	Material discovery	The fragments permitted closer testing of the scroll’s standardizing revision; they do not turn the surviving remains into a complete Minor Prophets edition.
17 July 2026	This account’s cutoff	Editorial judgment	The named online records, full scholarly studies, and edition descriptions were checked through this date; independent historical and text-critical review remains outstanding.

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