

THE ALEXANDRIAN SEPTUAGINT HISTORY

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[Early History](#)

[The Advent of Christianity](#)

[Akiba and Jamnia](#)

[The Dead Sea Scrolls](#)

[Textual Differences](#)

[The Ancient Chronology](#)

[Origen](#)

[The Arian Heresy](#)

[Athanasius](#)

[Thecla](#)

[Three Codices](#)

[And After](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[References](#)

[Discussion, questions, comments](#)

Early History

During the Persian period of dominance in the Mid-East, a significant Jewish community already lived in Egypt. *"Papyri from Elephantine show an established Jewish community there as early as 495 BCE. After Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire, Alexandria became the home to a large Greek-speaking Jewish population."*¹ By the 3rd century BC, the common language of the whole Mediterranean area was Koine Greek, sometimes called Alexandrian Greek or the Alexandrian dialect. It was the first or second language throughout the Greek Empire period and on into the time of Roman domination. Koine Greek was spoken by everyone from Egypt to India and throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East. It was used in shipping, trade politics, and education, much the way English is used today. This common language persisted through many of the lands of the Roman Empire until it finally fell into disuse in Europe in the Middle Ages.² Koine Greek was the language used by the Apostles, the Church Fathers and early Christians as they took the Gospel around the Empire and beyond.

By the 3rd century BC, Hebrew had become limited to the scholars and the well-educated. In synagogue services, a rough Greek translation was often given as the Hebrew Scriptures were read. A reliable Greek translation of the Scriptures was needed to facilitate understanding of Scripture in the synagogues. It was also needed for academic and lay discussions as well as for anyone who could read throughout the Empire.

In 289 B.C., Philadelphus became co-regent of the Ptolemaic Empire with his father, Ptolemy Soter. The Ptolemaic Empire was based in Alexandria, Egypt. In 285 Soter abdicated in favor of his 22 year old son, and died two years later at the age of 84.³ Towards the latter part of his reign, Soter had been very favorable towards the Jewish population. His son, Philadelphus, continued this policy by releasing many Jewish slaves, and placing some of them in responsible positions in the state as well as in the military.

Soter himself had been a scholar, and encouraged scholarship among the people. He gathered "men of learning" to his court. In addition, he invited the famous philosopher Strabo to tutor his son in Alexandria, while Euclid was one of the scholars whom he patronized.⁴ It was Ptolemy Soter who established the Great Library at Alexandria and personally appointed Demetrius Phalerius librarian, a man who had similar scholastic tendencies. Demetrius was commissioned to collect all available documents from around the world for the Library so that they could be available and consulted by anyone able to read.

It was a combination of Soter's love of learning and his appreciation of the Jews that led him to consider the

necessity of a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Due to Soter's advancing age, Josephus, the Jewish historian tells us Demetrius approached the co-regent, Ptolemy Philadelphus, and discussed the proposal. Ptolemy agreed to finance the exercise.⁵ Ptolemy sent Andreas, the Captain of his Guard, and one of his close confidants, Aristeas, who had represented Jewish interests on a number of prior occasions, to Eleazar, the High Priest in Jerusalem. They came with gifts for the Temple and a request that Eleazar send scholars who were fluent in both Hebrew and Greek to do the translation. It was suggested that there should be six from each Tribe. However, Josephus specifically refers to only 70 scholars doing the translation. It is from this fact that the translation was called the Septuagint (Latin for seventy) and abbreviated to LXX (in Roman numerals).

The Hebrew Scriptures of that time comprised what we refer to today as the Old Testament. They were written on scrolls in a form of Hebrew often called Paleo-Hebrew, which was more like script; the square, modern characters came later. This translation was done, then, from Paleo-Hebrew to Koine Greek. Josephus tells us the translators were taken over the causeway from Alexandria to the Island of Pharos to a place specifically set aside for them to do the work.

We can date these events fairly accurately from the historical data. After the death of Soter, a palace intrigue developed in which Demetrius had played a part. As a result, Demetrius was sent into exile in the desert where he died from a snake bite around 282 BC.⁶ Consequently, the arrangements and the start of the translation must have been made sometime between 289 and 283 BC when Philadelphus was ruling and Soter was still alive and supporting Demetrius. An extant *Letter from Aristeas* chronicled some of these events and mentioned that the "Law," that is the Pentateuch, had been translated by the 7th year of Philadelphus, which was 283 or 282 BC.⁷ Indeed, the year 282 BC is a commonly accepted date for the completion of the Law.⁸ These dates therefore fit in with the death of Soter and the demise of Demetrius, and present a consistent set of facts. Philo of Alexandria also supports this account of events in his *Life of Moses* (2.25-44).

After that, the translation of the complete canon of Jewish Scripture was apparently finished in stages. It is possible that it was completed during the reign of Philadelphus, since he was involved in the initiation of the project. If so, this would mean it was completed before his death in 246 BC. Some view its completion as late as the 1st century BC. However, documents earlier than the 1st century suggest otherwise. "*Around the middle of the second century [BC], Jewish historian, Eupolemos seems to have used a Greek version of Chronicles (Swete, Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek, 24-25). The Greek text of the Wisdom of Joshua ben Sira (also known as Sirach or Ecclesiasticus) dated about 132 BCE, contains a prologue that makes reference to a [Greek] translation of 'the law, the prophets, and the rest of the books.'*"⁹

These references suggest that the Greek canon of the Old Testament had been finalized, with copies made, distribution complete, and in general use by the middle of the 2nd century BC at the latest. This is supported by the fact that fragments of this Greek text include the John Rylands Papyrus 458, which dates from the 2nd century BC, and Papyrus Fouad 266 which originated about 100 BC.¹⁰ In addition other fragments of this Greek text include 2nd century BC fragments of Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Rahlfs nos. 801, 819, and 957), and 1st century BC fragments of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and the Minor Prophets (Rahlfs nos. 802, 803, 805, 848, 942, and 943).¹¹ So the evidence for the existence of the LXX in the second and first centuries BC is fairly extensive.

It is customary today to refer to any one of a number of translations from Hebrew to Greek as a "Septuagint" or "LXX." However, what is being traced here is the earliest Septuagint, originating in Alexandria almost 300 years before Christ. This is commonly known as the Alexandrian Septuagint.

The Advent of Christianity

The earliest Christians were Jewish converts. They accepted that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah. As they spread the word about Him, they showed how the prophecies in their own Scriptures were fulfilled by Jesus -- often in ways no human could have controlled, such as the manner and place of His birth.

Throughout the first century A.D. as the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles were written, all of them contain references to material in the Jewish Scriptures, and often include quotes. Paul, in particular, was extremely educated in the Jewish Scriptures, having been trained as a Pharisee, and his references and quotes are numerous throughout all his writings.

In addition, letters from Christian to Christian written in the first century, which are still in existence, quote freely from both the writings of what came to be called the New Testament as well as the Jewish Scriptures themselves.

These quotes and references match the ancient Septuagint exactly, but, for an interesting reason, do not match

the form of the Old Testament we have now.

Akiba & Jamnia

Although the earliest Christians were Jewish converts, the spread of the Gospel through the Gentile regions soon resulted in the majority of Christians being Gentiles, or non-Jews. During this time there developed a great deal of animosity toward the Christian sect within the Jewish quarter. Before Paul was converted to a faith that Jesus was the Messiah, he was very intent on wiping out the new Christian sect and keeping the worship of the true God pure. The book of Acts records this conversion, and Paul became known as the Apostle to the Gentiles. As time progressed, the division between the Jews and Christians became heated and intense.

Toward the end of the first century A.D. there appeared on the scene a man named Bar Kokhba, who was determined to overthrow their Roman overlords by force. His personal charisma and abilities were such that he gathered a significant following, even to the extent that many Jews thought he was the long-awaited Messiah, who would conquer the world and rule from Jerusalem (as also prophecied in the Scriptures). At the same time, another man was coming to power, a rabbi named Akiba. He also desired power, and in a series of meetings referred to in later years as the Council of Jamnia, found a way to obtain it.

Since the Council of Jamnia is frequently claimed never to have existed, here are some historical facts. When Vespasian became Emperor, in fulfillment of a statement by Rabbi Yohannan ben Zakkai, this rabbi was given the imperial right to establish an Academy or Rabbinical School at Yavneh (Jamnia). Over a period of time, through a series of cunning manoeuvres, Rabbi Akiba gained control over the Academy. He had a passionate hatred of Jesus and he admired Bar Kokhba. Rabbi Akiba ended up supporting Bar Kokhba as the Messiah. Akiba came with a purpose in mind: to give rabbinical Judaism complete control over every aspect of Jewish life. This process did not happen overnight. However, over a period of time, this was achieved by Akiba and the Council of Jamnia.

This process is outlined in detail in Dan Gruber's book *Rabbi Akiba's Messiah*. He says

*Akiba's opposition to the [Christians] led him to sponsor a new rabbinical Greek Bible and a rabbinical, colloquial Targum [commentary]. It also led him to alter Pharasaic tradition. In his efforts to bring Jewish life under rabbinic authority, Akiba was consistent and relentless. Sometimes Akiba intentionally held to certain doctrines just to contradict the beliefs of the [Christians], as he had done in his struggle against Gamaliel.... He put the oral law in writing to increase his leverage against the traditional rabbis...*¹²

The new Greek translation was done by Akiba's pupil Aquila and was completed in 128 AD. We know that this was a Greek version of what is now called the Masoretic text. This means that the Masoretic text must have been Akiba's rabbinic version of the Hebrew Old Testament. All existing texts which were in accord with the LXX used by the Christians were then burnt. This is hinted at by Gruber's comment that "*The Rabbis decreed that even a Tanakh scroll should be burned if it was written by a [Christian]. 'R. Nahman said: We have it on tradition that a scroll of the Law which has been written by a [Christian] should be burnt.' R. Akiba says: One burns the whole thing, because it was not written in holiness.*"¹³ It was under these conditions that the Masoretic text came into being and every divergent text they could find was destroyed [Professor S.H. Horne, "The Old Testament Text in Antiquity."] Thus the process called the Council of Jamnia gave us the Hebrew Masoretic text in opposition to the paleo-Hebrew which gave us the LXX.

Rabbi Akiba and others at the Council of Jamnia denied that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah. The Christians, however, had been using the Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Savior, the Messiah. Thus, it was either the Council of Jamnia itself or a group related to or supported by them who literally re-wrote the ancient Scriptures. The most obvious thing they did was to write them in a more modern Hebrew type. The ancient, or Paleo-Hebrew was more like script and the modern Hebrew which they used was and is comprised of the square characters we see today. However, that was not all they did. They quietly changed a number of the prophecies used by the Christians so they would not appear to be fulfilled by Jesus, or at least not match what was being quoted in the Christian writings.¹⁴ They also, for a rather strange reason, chose to shorten the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11, effectively chopping off over 1800 years in total.

There is a systematic omission of 100 years from the age of the Patriarchs at the birth of the son in the chosen line in Genesis 5 and 11 in the Masoretic Text from Jamnia when compared with the ancient Septuagint, LXX. It needs to be noted that this omission was NOT there in the early work of Josephus prior to Jamnia. This is documented, as well, in the comments and responses to this article in the sections on the [genealogies](#) and the section on [Josephus](#). Why was this cipher for 100 omitted from so many ages of the men at the birth of their sons? There was a strong belief at the time that it was dishonoring to the Lord to wait for a long time before the

first child/son was born. What is interesting is that the men mentioned as being born in Genesis 5 and 11 are nowhere stated to be the firstborn sons. But evidently on the assumption that they were, the cipher for 100 was systematically chopped from the ages of the fathers at the sons' births, as this was felt to be more honoring to the Lord.

The old original form of written Hebrew, used at least from the time of the Exodus, was called Paleo-Hebrew. Its appearance was rather like a semi-pictogram-script form when compared with the square 'modern' Hebrew characters. A comparison of the two can be found in the [Wikipedia article](#) on the two. Paleo Hebrew was used right up until 135 AD by which time Modern Hebrew had taken over completely. The Dead Sea Scrolls show that Paleo-Hebrew was often used for Scriptural work up until 70 AD. However, around 100 AD, the Council of Jamnia, under Rabbi Akiba, produced a version of Scripture written in the square 'modern' characters, without the vowel pointings. This meant the Jews had to depend on the rabbis to tell them what the words actually were (hill? hell? hall? etc.), thus reinforcing Rabbinical tradition rather than remain true to the original text. Dan Gruber, in *Rabbi Akiba's Messiah, the Origins of Rabbinic Authority*, explains it in the following:

*"The Rabbis are the source of their own authority to annul the Torah. .. The Rabbis could establish conditions and practices that contradicted and even nullified the Torah. According to the Rabbis, God Himself would obey whatever they decided. ... The Rabbis claimed the sanction of the Torah for whatever they decreed, even if it was the uprooting of Torah. ... This was more than the assertion of a different 'religious' system. The Torah governs every aspect of the life of Israel. By governing the Torah, the Rabbis would govern Israel. ... The objective was to bring Israel under the rule of the Rabbis. If the Scriptures stood in the way, the Scriptures had to be uprooted. ... There was a radical and irreconcilable conflict between the Torah and the Rabbis as to the basis and structure of authority, as well as its source and administration. That is why the Rabbis gave themselves the right to alter, revise, trespass and uproot the original commandments. ... R. Akiba sought to fence the people off from the Torah and from all other influences that would have challenged rabbinic authority. In the system he erected, no one else had the right to interpret Torah. Not the am ha'arets, nor the priests, nor the prophets, nor the Sadducees, the Qumran Covenanters, the Talmudei Yeshua, nor anyone else. Not even God." [Daniel Gruber, *Rabbi Akiba's Messiah: The Origins of Rabbinic Authority*, pp.82-85, Elijah Publishing, 1999 with references].*

The changes we find dating from the time of the Council of Jamnia are deliberate. There are too many of them in specific places to be the result of accumulated errors by isolated copyists over the centuries or millennia. Evidence of the many changes dispels any impression that Akiba's "*scribes were careful not to lose a jot or tittle*," as rabbinic tradition has indicated. That is simply not true. Akiba and his colleagues had a specific agenda to fulfill and they left no stone unturned to accomplish that

Professor S.H. Horn (Archaeology, Andrews University, Michigan) writes:

"However, the facts - that a unified [Hebrew] text suddenly became the standard at the end of the first century and that not one copy of a divergent text survived (except the Dead Sea scrolls that had already been hidden when Jamnia convened), indicate clearly that the Council of Jamnia must have taken action in this matter. Moreover, the fact that Aquila, one of Akiba's pupils, soon thereafter produced a new Greek translation that slavishly translated the [new] unified Hebrew text for the use of the Diaspora Jews gives credence to the idea that Akiba must have been a key influence in the standardization of the Hebrew text."¹⁵

In other words, the Masoretic text that is in common use today originated at the Council of Jamnia around 100 AD, and Aquila's Greek translation from Akiba's Masoretic was finalized about 128 AD.

By 100 A.D., when Akiba and the Council of Jamnia were altering the Old Testament Scriptures, the New Testament Gospels and letters had already been written. However we know from the letters written back and forth by the early church fathers that the quotes being used by them and referred to by them were from the ancient Septuagint and not from the Masoretic. It would take over 200 more years for the Masoretic text to be accepted by the church, as a result of a request Constantine made.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) provide us with more evidence. The DSS fall into two distinct groups: those written before 70 A.D. and those written after 100 A.D. The earlier DSS were written between 250 BC and 68 AD. At this time there were three distinct groups of Jewish leaders: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. The Essenes lived in the caves near Qumran, and had in their possession some of the ancient Scriptures. In addition to preserving these, they also copied some of the scrolls themselves between 150 BC

and 68 AD.¹⁶

This first group of DSS contains at least 170 manuscripts from the 11 Qumran caves as well as Biblical fragments from Masada.¹⁷ These all originated prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by Titus and his armies. They include fragments of the Pentateuch and the book of Job in the pre-exilic, paleo-Hebrew text. Interestingly, the Sadducees only accepted the Torah of Moses and Job as canonical. Consequently, Professor Horn suggests that these paleo-Hebrew texts may perhaps represent the texts that the Sadducees used. The Samaritan Pentateuch is also in paleo-Hebrew and it has retained that style in the Samaritan community up until the present. It is important to note that the Samaritan Pentateuch closely very follows the ancient LXX text, with very few variations, those following some traditions held by the Samaritan community.

By the 2nd century AD the Pharisees became dominant with their Rabbis, and the Sadducees and Essenes had faded out of existence.¹⁸ It was at this time the second group of DSS appear to have been hidden. These manuscripts were found in the other desert caves in the Wadi Murabba'at, the Nahal Hever and the Nahal Se'elim. These second century manuscripts are practically identical with the Masoretic text.¹⁹

Horn compares the accuracy of the Alexandrian LXX with the Masoretic saying *"In an article dealing with one of the Samuel scrolls from Qumran Cave 4, Frank Cross informed the scholarly world of new developments in our understanding of the pre-Masoretic text form. Cross showed that this particular manuscript agrees more with the Septuagintal than with the Masoretic text."*²⁰

[Biblia Hebraica](#) concludes from these and other facts: *"Recent Aramaic findings among the Dead Sea Scrolls read most closely with the LXX, and not with the Masoretic text. ... This suggests that the older LXX may be more accurate than the newer Masoretic text which was given to Jerome."* [When Jerome translated the Latin Vulgate, he was preparing to use the ancient LXX text. But his Jewish friends convinced him that the newer Masoretic Hebrew text was superior ²¹].

A [more recent comment](#) concerning the Dead Sea Scrolls is also relevant: *In a review of some of this scholarship, Hershak Shanks notes that "...many Hebrew texts [are available] that were the base text for Septuagintal translations...". Further he notes that what "...texts like 4Q Sama show is that the Septuagintal translations are really quite reliable" and "...gives new authority to the Greek translations against the Masoretic text". Quoting Frank Moore Cross (a co-author of the book under review), Hershak continues "We could scarcely hope to find closer agreement between the Old Greek [Septuagintal] tradition and 4Q Sama than actually is found in our fragments".*²² Modern scholarship on the DSS therefore supports the contention that the ancient LXX text is in accord with the original Hebrew Old Testament as it existed in the 1st and 2nd centuries BC and the early 1st century AD.

Textual Differences

Another reference to some difference between the Masoretic and LXX translations can be found on [this site](#). As it says, *"There are multiple internal variations between the LXX and the MT. The texts read differently in many places, giving a much more Christological tone to the LXX which was deliberately avoided when the Masoretes were putting together their anti-Christian canon. These differences in wording are the evidence that the Apostles were using the LXX."* There then follow some examples of differences in wording.

Another striking example occurs in Hebrews 1:6. There we read, *"And again, when God brings his first begotten into the world He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship him'."* This is referenced as a quote from Deuteronomy 32:43 in both the ancient Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as in the footnotes of a number of modern translations. However, when you try to look it up in our modern translations (all of which are from the Masoretic), it does not exist in Deuteronomy 32. Our modern translations only read *"Rejoice, O Gentiles with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants ..."* It is in the ancient versions we find the words: *"Rejoice you heavens with him, and let all the angels of God worship him; rejoice you Gentiles with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons..."* Thus the Masoretic text from Rabbi Akiba deletes a key passage pointing to the deity of Christ, a passage which the Apostles used in their presentation of the Gospel and which was part of their Old Testament.

Again in Hebrews 10:5, we find a difference. The writer quotes Psalm 40:6 from the ancient LXX. (Note that some Psalms in the LXX are numbered differently from the standard usage today. Thus Psalm 40 in our Bibles is actually Psalm 39 in the LXX). Hebrews quotes the Psalm, saying *"Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me'..."* Again, we cannot find these words in the modern translations. The Masoretic text is contorted by Rabbi Akiba to omit these words in Psalm 40. They have been replaced with *"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire; my ears you have opened..."* Thus, any implication regarding the Incarnation was deleted. These are but two of the many

examples of quotes used by writers of the New Testament which do not match what we read today in our Old Testaments.

Abegg et al. summarize the situation by saying:

*"The Septuagint is important for several reasons. First, almost all the books it contains were translated from an earlier Hebrew or Aramaic form. ... This means that the Septuagint gives readers a window on an ancient Hebrew form of the Old Testament that is earlier than the time of Jesus. Second, the Septuagint sometimes offers striking evidence of different ancient forms of biblical books (for example, Jeremiah is about 13 percent shorter in the Greek than in the Masoretic Text) as well as different ancient readings in specific passages. Third, because the Septuagint was the Bible of Hellenistic Judaism, it offers important insights into how Greek-speaking Jews used and understood Scripture. Fourth, since the Septuagint is quoted in the New Testament and was used by early Christian authors, it constitutes the Bible of the early church and helps to explain early Christian exegesis of Scripture. ..."*²³

In addition, in the 1st century AD, both Josephus and Philo also quoted extensively from the ancient LXX text. This indicates that this text was in common use among the wider Jewish community in the Middle East in the 1st century AD. It is therefore beyond contention that the ancient Alexandrian LXX existed and was quoted in the 1st Century BC and was in common use in the 1st century AD, quite apart from the evidence we have in the New Testament.

The use of the ancient Septuagint in scholarly discourses as well as the use of the older chrono-genealogies up until the time of the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. offer strong evidence that this was the text used by the early church fathers. This is further substantiated by the fact that they rejected the newer, and shorter, genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 created by the Masoretic. The ancient LXX has a different chrono-genealogy in Genesis 5 and 11 to that of the Masoretic text. While the Masoretic chrono-genealogy gives the time of Creation around 4000 BC, the older LXX gives a significantly earlier date of close to 5500 BC. Josephus not only quoted the LXX, as Philo also did; he also specifically followed the LXX chrono-genealogies.

The Ancient Chronology

The material in this section is taken from A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds, *"The Ante-Nicene Fathers,"* [10 vols. W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994.]

Theophilus, the apologist and sixth Bishop of Antioch (AD 115-181) calculated that the world was 5698 years old by the time of the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 AD. He says *"All the years from the creation of the world amount to a total of 5698 years, and the odd months and days."* [*Theophilus to Autolychnus* 3.28]. Because of the extra *"odd months and days,"* Theophilus allowed a margin of error of 200 years in his calculations [*Theophilus to Autolychnus* 3.29]. The conclusion is that Theophilus was using the ancient LXX, not the new Masoretic that had just been finalized. The same can be said about the Old Testament used by Christian chronologist, Julius Africanus, who died about 240 AD. He had this to say: *"The period ... to the advent of the Lord from Adam and the Creation is 5531 years."* [Julius Africanus *"Fragments of the Chronography,"* Frag. 18.4]. This chronology can only be derived from the ancient LXX which was obviously in existence and still in general use at that time, despite the availability of the new Masoretic text. It appears that the newer Masoretic text was ignored by the Church fathers and the LXX alone was held as valid.

There is another interesting piece of evidence from this time. There was a general belief in the idea of what some have called "The Earth's Great Week." This idea suggests that, as the Creation took 6 Days and the Lord rested on the 7th Day, so also there would be 6 Days of 1000 years each for human history, following which the Lord would return and rule mankind for a period of 1000 years, or the Millennium of rest found in Revelation 20. Since the ancient LXX text indicated the world was formed about 5500 BC, or perhaps a little earlier, there was the common feeling among many of the ante-Nicene Fathers that the 6000 years of human history were coming to a close, and that the Lord's Return to usher in the Millennium was indeed immanent. This idea was based entirely on the ancient LXX chrono-genealogies. The Masoretic chrono-genealogy did not support this concept at all since it had a much shorter time-scale back to Creation.

It is in this context that the comments of other Church Fathers in the period prior to the Council of Nicaea also indicate that they are using the ancient LXX text. Thus we have Justin Martyr who lived from about AD 100 to 165 supporting the LXX chronology in his *"Dialogue with Trypho,"* 81. So did Irenaeus, who lived from about 120 to 202 AD, in his work *"Against Heresies,"* 5.28.3. Hippolytus, the polemicist and Bishop of Rome, who died about 236 AD, held the same view and stated that 500 years *"remain to make up the 6000."* [Hippolytus, *"Fragments from Commentaries - On Daniel"* 2.4-6]. The *"Treatises of Cyprian,"* 11.11 indicate that Cyprian,

Bishop of Carthage, who lived from about 200 to 258 AD, held the same chronology and hence was using the ancient LXX text. So did Commodian who died about 275 AD [*"The Instructions of Commodianus,"* 80], along with Victorinus of Petau, who died about 304 AD [Victorinus, *"On the Creation of the World"*]. The 3rd century Bishop of Olympus was Methodius. He agreed with the conclusions of the "*clever arithmeticians*" like Theophilus and Julius Africanus and so accepted the LXX text as being canonical [Methodius, Fragment 9]. Finally, Lactantius, who died in 320 AD, just before the Council of Nicaea, concluded that "*the last day of the extreme conclusion [of the 6000 years] is now drawing near.*" He went on to explain that, while small differences exist in the calculation "*yet all the expectation does not exceed the limit of two hundred years.*" [Lactantius, *"The Divine Institutes,"* 7.14 and 7.25].

As a result of this accumulation of evidence, it can be seen that the existence and persistent use of the ancient LXX can be traced from about 282 BC right through until 325 AD. Its common use is attested to by the quotations from it by the Jewish historian Eupolemos in the 2nd century BC and by the Dead Sea Scrolls from the 1st and 2nd centuries BC and 1st century AD. The Jewish writers Philo and Josephus also testify to its existence and use in the 1st century AD. From there, Christ, the Apostles, and the Church Fathers affirm its presence and validity right up until the period of the Council of Nicaea. It is around the time of this Council, and for some time after, that the next development takes place. The ancient LXX existed, then, as a generally available manuscript, but its existence became threatened by the orders of the Emperor Constantine in 331 AD. In order to understand the problem, and the historical background behind it, we need to examine the events of that time in a little more detail.

Origen

Origen was a third century scholar from Alexandria who later settled in Caesarea.

*He was heavily influenced by Platonic and Gnostic thought. As a consequence his defense of the faith tended to sacrifice important teachings. He denied the historicity of critical sections of Scripture; he taught the preexistence of the soul and universalism (the belief that all will eventually be saved) and denied that Jesus was raised from the dead in a physical body. These positions were condemned as heretical by later church councils.*²⁴

Origen was interested in coordinating the different translations of Scripture in existence. By this time the Jews had moved away from the ancient Alexandrian LXX as well as their own old form of Hebrew writing, known as paleo-Hebrew. They had gravitated toward the Masoretic Scriptures, which had been formulated in an effort to discredit the use of Old Testament Scripture being used by the Christians to show those Scriptures prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. Discussions between Jews and Christians had shown the ancient LXX and the newer Masoretic texts had some definite differences, especially in matters of Christology. Origen attempted to address the differences between them. By 250, he had completed his six-column comparison of Scripture versions, called the Hexapla.²⁵

It is agreed that the six columns of Origen's Hexapla in order were 1). The Masoretic Hebrew text, 2). A transliteration of the Masoretic Hebrew into Greek, 3). The Greek version of the Masoretic text produced by Rabbi Akiba's pupil Aquila, 4). An overall precise Greek version of the Masoretic produced by Symmachus at the end of the 2nd century AD, 5). The ancient LXX Greek version, 6). Theodotion, who used the LXX but corrected it freely to conform it with the Masoretic text.²⁶ [Extant evidence](#) shows that Origen made every effort to reconcile the different versions of Scripture present at his time. His goal was to produce an updated version of the ancient LXX, and in doing so, he changed parts to conform to the Masoretic..

The Arian Heresy

In 319 AD, the Arian controversy broke out and spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Its origin is uncertain, although it may have started via Origen. But however it started, this theology denied the deity of Jesus. In 321AD, Arius -- after whom the heresy was named -- was denounced by the Synod of Alexandria for his denial of Jesus' deity. Arius went into Palestine under the protection of the historian Eusebius, who became the Bishop of Caesarea about 314 AD. He was also protected by another Eusebius, the Bishop of Nicomedia. It was here in Caesarea, which was now held by Eusebius as Bishop, that Origen's manuscript was still stored.

It must also be noted that Eusebius of Caesarea's' tutor had been Pamphilus, and together they had written the "*Defense of Origen.*"²⁷ Thus the works of Origen were viewed with favor by Eusebius and [colored his theology](#).

It is against this background of the Arian heresy, that another event occurred which is important in the context of the ancient LXX. In 331 AD, 12 years since the Arian heresy broke out, the Emperor Constantine asked his friend and historian, Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, to make 50 copies of the Bible. Which version was he going

to choose? Would it be the LXX which the church had used for over 300 years, or would he choose the newer Masoretic text, and if so, why?

The fifty copies were made from Origen's attempts to update the ancient LXX, bringing it in line with the Masoretic. The impetus for Eusebius to do this followed from his appreciation of Origen and the adherence of both of them to the heresy which did not accept Jesus as God. Interestingly, Rabbi Akiba, who had commissioned that same Masoretic text at the Council of Jamnia, had not accepted Jesus' claims either. (He supported Bar Kochba as Messiah instead.) Thus, the Masoretic from which our Old Testament translations come today, was the result of Akiba, Origen, and Eusebius, none of whom believed in the deity of Jesus Christ.

Athanasius

A key player in the drama from this time was Saint Athanasius, who was head of the Church in Alexandria, Egypt, from 327 to 373 AD. Another was Gregory, an important friend of Athanasius, who had been appointed Bishop of Nazianzen in Cappadocia (central Turkey) in 329 AD. Gregory was sometimes known as the "Trinitarian Theologian". Fifty years later, in 379 AD, Gregory was appointed Archbishop of Constantinople in 379 AD. He died on January 25th, 389 AD. To indicate the level of this friendship, we note that Gregory wrote about his close friend Athanasius (Orat., xxii. 9) that he was: fit *"to keep on a level with common-place views yet also to soar high above the more aspiring, as accessible to all, slow to anger, quick in sympathy, pleasant in conversation, and still more pleasant in temper, effective alike in discourse and in action, assiduous in devotions, helpful to Christians of every class and age, a theologian with the speculative, a comforter of the afflicted, a staff to the aged, a guide of the young."*²⁸

Given this understanding of the character of Athanasius, and the support he received from Gregory, we now proceed to outline the problem that arose, and then the action that Athanasius took to provide a remedy.

*There is no distinct evidence of the connection of Athanasius with the first contentions of Arius and his bishop, which ended in the exile of the former; and his entrance into Palestine under the protection of Eusebius the historian, who was bishop of Caesarea and subsequently of his namesake the bishop of Nicomedia. It can hardly be doubted, however, that Athanasius would be a cordial assistant of his friend and patron Alexander; and that the latter was strengthened in his theological position by the young enthusiastic student who had already expounded the nature of the divine Incarnation, and who seems about this time to have become archdeacon of Alexandria. At the Council of Nicaea, in the year 325, he appears prominently in connection with the dispute. He attended the council, not as one of its members (who were properly only bishops or delegates of bishops), but merely as the attendant of Alexander. In this capacity, however, he was apparently allowed to take part in its discussions, for Theodoret (i. 26) states that "he contended earnestly for the apostolic doctrines, and was applauded by their champions, while he earned the hostility of their opponents."*²⁹

A few months after the Council, Alexander, the old Patriarch of Alexandria, died and Athanasius was appointed Patriarch in his place. Thus Athanasius, who had confronted the two Eusebii and the Arian heresy head on, was now in a position of authority.

It would therefore come as no surprise if he requested that some new copies of the ancient LXX be made in order to preserve the purity of the version which the Church had used for three centuries. It may also have been necessary to replace the original manuscript of the ancient LXX that had been held there at Alexandria for over 500 years as it would have been deteriorating badly. There were undoubtedly a number of copies being used throughout the Christian world through those years, but the one in Alexandria may have been either the original or a direct copy of the original. This original Septuagint was now under the control of Athanasius and he had the power to command other copies be made. However resources were limited which meant that only one copy could be produced at a time. As the first copy was in the process of being produced, Eusebius received the request from the Emperor for 50 fully complete Bibles. This added an urgency to the task that Athanasius was undertaking. Since Constantine was ordering the full Bible to be copied, Athanasius then felt the pressure to do the same, so the New Testament would have to be copied in addition to the ancient LXX .

Arius himself was still living, and his friend Eusebius of Nicomedia rapidly regained influence over the Emperor Constantine. The result of this was a demand made by the Emperor that Arius should be re-admitted to communion. Athanasius stood firm, and refused to have any communion with the advocates of a *"heresy that was fighting against Christ."* In the summer of 335 AD, Athanasius was peremptorily ordered to appear at Tyre, where a council had been summoned to sit in judgment upon his conduct. The most conspicuous leaders of this Tyrian council were the two Eusebii. The council then condemned Athanasius and restored Arius to church communion. On the 6th November 335 AD, Athanasius was falsely charged by the Eusebii before Emperor

Constantine, and was accordingly banished to Trier in the Rhineland. About two years later Constantine fell seriously ill and was baptized by Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia, shortly before he died on 22 May 337 AD. Soon after that, Athanasius was able to return to Alexandria, which remained his base of operations throughout his life..

However, Constantine's son, the new Emperor Constantius II, was sympathetic to the Arian position and re-imposed the banishment in 338 AD. Athanasius remained at the center of a theological tug of war through five emperors, alternately being banished and then restored, then banished again. Regardless of his place of abode, however, his writings continued and some important works of his were circulated. In his 39th Festal Letter in spring of 367 AD he detailed the books of the Bible that were considered canonical. His listing was historically the first that is exactly the same as our Old and New Testaments today. It is the same as that of the Council of Laodicea in 364, but included Revelation, which they omitted. Shortly after, (about 370 AD), he instructed Marcellinus about the approach he might adopt to Psalms. After a very fruitful and eventful life, he died on the 2nd May 373 AD.³⁰

Thecla

When Athanasius was ready to authorize a copy of the ancient LXX to be made, he needed someone he trusted entirely to supervise the transcription process; someone who supported his theology. If the documentation that has come down to us is reliable, there was one obvious choice, a woman called Thecla. According to the tradition of the Church at Alexandria, Thecla was a noble Egyptian lady who was the transcriber of the Codex Alexandrinus. This tradition indicates that the name "Thecla" had been written at the end of the first folio as a colophon. The first folio transcribed the LXX text from Genesis to 2 Chronicles. Thus it is stated that *"According to the Arabic note on folio one, the Codex was written by Thecla, the martyr from Egypt, just after the Council of Nice in 325."*³¹

As late as 1600 AD, the Codex was still held in Alexandria as part of the treasures of the church there. As a consequence, Cyril Lucar, Patriarch of Alexandria in the early 1600's, had the Codex in his care as part of the Church treasures. In 1621 he was appointed as Patriarch of Constantinople, (in other words, the head Patriarch of the Greek Church), and he brought the Codex with him. He sent it as a present to James I of England who died before it could be presented. Sir Thomas Roe transferred the Codex to King Charles I who had indicated that he would accept it. Today it resides in the British Library.

Patriarch Lucar stated that the name of Thecla appeared in a subscription appended to the Codex, but it had been destroyed before his time. Sir Thomas Roe, who transferred the Codex to King Charles I, states in a letter dated 27th February 1627 that *"The patriarch doth testify under his hand that it was written by the virgin Thecla, daughter of a famous Greek, called Abgierienos, who founded the monastery in Egypt upon Pharaos tower, a devout and learned maid, who was persecuted in Asia, and to whom Gregory Nazianzen hath written many epistles."* Gregory Nazianzen addressed four epistles to Thecla.³²

There are those who reject this story about Thecla for several reasons. First, there was a legendary female, Thecla, who was meant to have accompanied the Apostle Paul, who wrote an apocryphal book, *"Acts of Paul and Thecla"* and become one of the first martyrs. Many Christian girls were named Thecla after the martyr in this novel. This legendary Thecla is sometimes confused with Thecla the scribe, and the discrepant dates that result are used to discredit the report. Others question the validity on the basis of women being used as scribes. That is answered effectively in an article by Kim Haines-Eitzen, entitled "Girls trained in beautiful writing: Female Scribes in Roman Antiquity and Early Christianity." The abstract states:

*"Embedded within Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History is a rather curious reference to female calligraphers (HE 6.23). This article seeks first to contextualize Eusebius' remarks by surveying the evidence--both literary and epigraphic--for female scribes in Greco-Roman antiquity and early Christianity. The appearances of women as amanuenses, notariae, and librariae in Latin literature and inscriptions are explored. The article then turns to the evidence for women copying texts in late-ancient Christian monasticism. The central proposal of the article--that some of our earliest Christian manuscripts may have been copied by women--offers a new dimension to the history of the textual transmission of early Christian writings."*³³

On this basis, the story of Thecla as a Christian monastic woman who copied an original text to give us the Codex fits the situation exactly. There is other indirect evidence of the truth of the story since it is correct historically about the monastery system itself in Egypt in that era. For example,

"... priories of what are today called nuns were already established long before Saints Anthony and Pachomius even began their work in AD 305. Indeed, it is women who are to be truly credited with

the origin of the monastic vocation. Unlike monasteries in the West, the monasteries of Egypt and the surrounding area had no centralized orders; rather, each one was an autonomous unit. Many of the early monasteries in the East were founded and maintained by the rulers and nobility, others by groups of the citizenry wishing to have prayers said for themselves and their families." ³⁴

There are four things to note here. First, the date is right as Thecla held her monastic vocation sometime after 325 AD when she began her work on the Codex. Second, the scenario is also typical of that era. Her father was a noble Grecian citizen who founded the monastery she worked in. It is also possible that he may have supplied at least part of the finance for the transcription process, as the cost of animal skins was an expensive part of the exercise. Third, Gregory Nazianzen's letters show she lived in the same time period as both he and Athanasius did. Fourth, her persecution in Asia may well have been the result of her holding the Trinitarian views of Athanasius and Gregory contrary to the prevailing atmosphere of Arianism in Asia generally at that time. So on all these counts the story is credible.

An additional note concerns the subscription of Thecla on the Codex being torn off. This was not unique for early Christian manuscripts in the Mid East because of the extermination of Christians and Christian documents in Egypt by Muslims. Because the story of Thecla was well-known in Egypt, the name of Thecla may have been torn off and destroyed so that the Codex itself might be saved. But the memory and the tradition were observed. This is credible since there are a number of leaves missing from the Codex. Other books of the early Christians in Egypt are similarly in disrepair.³⁵

Three Codices

We have already seen that the Masoretic text has a different wording in Deuteronomy 32:43 and Psalm 40:6. In addition chapters 5 and 11 of Genesis have a much shortened chronology. Therefore, given these and the other variations, it is a simple matter to determine if the text of a Scripture version is following that of the ancient LXX used by the Apostles and Church fathers, or is following the Masoretic text which came about 400 years later. If the Bible text does not have the full chronology in Genesis 5 & 11, or the full rendering of Deuteronomy 32:43 or the correct wording for Psalm 40:6 (39:6), then it is not following the ancient text, but is from the changed Masoretic text.

It has been claimed by some that Codex Vaticanus, Codex Siniaticus and Codex Alexandrinus, all of which date from the 4th century AD, are the corrupted texts produced by Eusebius. A glance at them shows that they were not. They all have Psalm 40:6 (39:6) correctly rendered. In addition, Codex Vaticanus and Alexandrinus both have Deuteronomy 32:43 correctly worded, but that segment is missing from Siniaticus. Codex Alexandrinus has the full genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11, while those pages are missing from both Vaticanus and Siniaticus. Thus Codex Alexandrinus is the most complete copy of the ancient LXX that we have.

Text	Psalm 40/39	Deut. 32:43	Genesis 5 and 11
Vaticanus	yes	yes	no
Siniaticus	yes	no	no
Alexandrinus	yes	yes	yes

The fact that all three of these texts contain the ancient rendition of the Psalm 40 as it is referenced in the New Testament means that none of these texts were written to be in line with the Masoretic. There is the additional evidence in both the Vaticanus and the Alexandrinus that they were not produced from a Masoretic document as they both contain the ancient version of Deuteronomy 32:43.

There are several other reasons why none of these three versions could be the product of Eusebius. First, he was in control of the Caesarea scriptorium where the 50 copies of the Masoretic text were quickly produced for the Emperor. There would have been a degree of uniformity in the production of those versions. This is not found in these three Codices. For example, Alexandrinus only has two columns of writing per page, while Vaticanus has three and Siniaticus has four. Vaticanus has a more archaic style of writing than the other two. There is no ornamentation or capitals in the lettering in Vaticanus and Siniaticus, but there is in Alexandrinus. Vaticanus has no introduction to the Psalms which became standard around 325 AD, whereas Siniaticus and Alexandrinus do. Alternatively, Vaticanus and Alexandrinus both have very similar canons but they differ from that of Siniaticus and all three differ from each other in the order of books. Alexandrinus has major chapters with their titles; the others do not. Finally, the way that each of the three Codices are bound is entirely different.

All these factors argue against these volumes being the production of a scriptorium where some degree of standard practice would be used to fill the large order of an Emperor who was paying well. In view of the fact that there was a timely delivery on Constantine's order, the argument can be made that the scriptorium at Caesarea must have employed at least 50 scribes and a scribal dictator. This arrangement would be necessary as there was probably only one copy of the Hexapla at hand that was available for reproducing. Any other arrangement would be unworkable and time-consuming. This process is known to have been employed in later times when multiple copies were being made, so it is likely that this procedure was used on this unique occasion.³⁶ Under these circumstances, the differences in the three Codices that were mentioned above definitely preclude them as being part of this joint production of 50 Bibles from the Caesarea scriptorium.

Second, there is a similarity of writing styles between Vaticanus and Siniaticus which have caused some to claim that the same hand has written parts of both codices. Others have stated that, *"In addition, similar colophons appear at the end of some of the individual books."* This suggests that these codices were probably written in the same scriptorium.³⁷

Third, there is a time problem among the three texts.

- Vaticanus does not have the introduction to Psalms which came in around 325 AD, whereas Siniaticus and Alexandrinus do. Since this dates Vaticanus at about 325 AD or earlier, it must therefore pre-date Constantine's order in 331 AD.
- Siniaticus has some references to the church fathers in the marginal notes which did not apply after 360 AD, which means it had to be written sometime between 325 and 360 AD.
- Alexandrinus contains the order of books that was set by Athanasius in 367, which means Alexandrinus must have been transcribed after that date. Further, since it also includes the Letter to Marcellinus from Athanasius on Psalms, it must date from about 370 AD.

In other words, there is a spread of at least 45 years, and perhaps close to 50 years, in the production time of these three Codices. This would not have been an acceptable situation for Constantine.³⁸

Therefore it seems that although these three Codices originated from the same scriptorium over a period of 50 years, the question becomes, "Which scriptorium, and why?" After producing the 50 copies of the Bible for the Emperor, it is unlikely that the scriptorium at Caesarea would be involved in the production of three rival versions which used a different text to that of the Hexapla. Indeed, Kenyon points out that there is not the slightest evidence for them to have been produced at either Caesarea or Constantinople.³⁹ Furthermore, Kenyon, Gardthausen, Ropes and Jellicoe all conclude that at least some of the three were written in Egypt, probably at Alexandria.⁴⁰ The evidence outlined above suggests that if one was produced at Alexandria, then probably all three were.

The question that remains is why should these Codices be produced in Alexandria from 325 to 370 AD? Recall what had just happened with the Arian controversy, the Eusebii and Athanasius in 321, and that Athanasius had just become the head of the Church in Alexandria in 327 AD. Arius and the Eusebii had probably been quoting Origen's Hexapla and the Masoretic text in support of their position that Jesus was not God. As a consequence, the righteous opposition of Athanasius to this *"heresy that was fighting against Christ"* would inevitably be directed against the Hexapla and the Masoretic version of the Old Testament.

And After

The comment about Muslim violence against Christians is true as well, but the following comment also reveals the time when this problem began to arise:

"The Christian face of Egypt started to change by the beginning of the second millennium A.D., when Copts, in addition to the "Gezya" tax, suffered from specific disabilities, some of which were serious and interfered with their freedom of worship. Slowly but steadily, by the end of the 12th century, the face of Egypt changed from a predominantly Christian to a predominantly Muslim country and the Coptic community occupied an inferior position and lived in some expectation of Muslim hostility, which periodically flared into violence."⁴¹

It would therefore be sometime during the 13th century or thereafter that the Christian name "Thecla" was removed from the end of the first folio in the Codex, whether by the Christians for the sake of safety for the Codex, or by the Muslims for vengeance. Other books would have been damaged about the same time, just as Patriarch Lucar of Alexandria stated.

Thus the evidence is that the original, ancient LXX, which remained in Alexandria for 500 years, was copied, at

least in part, by Thecla at the behest of Athanasius. When Emperor Constantine ordered 50 copies of the complete Bible to be produced, Athanasius deemed it prudent to add a final folio with the New Testament to the ancient LXX text. In all, three copies were made over a period of 50 years, with one being kept at Alexandria. That Codex Alexandrinus was then taken from Alexandria to Constantinople by Patriarch Lucar in 1621 AD and presented as a gift to King Charles I in 1627. It now resides in the British Library. The other two Codices ended up in the Vatican Library in Rome and the Monastery at Mount Sinai.

Conclusion

These three Codices were all transcribed during the lifetime of Athanasius, and produced in Alexandria, which was a Trinitarian strong-hold against the Arian heresy of Origen and Eusebius that swept the Middle East. Athanasius fully held to the ancient LXX text of the Old Testament with its strong Christological emphasis. It has been stated that these three Codices "... are indeed the oldest surviving nearly-complete manuscripts of the Old Testament in any language; the oldest extant complete Hebrew texts date some 600 years later, from the first half of the 10th century. While there are differences between these three codices, scholarly consensus today holds that one LXX — that is, the original pre-Christian translation — underlies all three."⁴²

It was in this way that the ancient Alexandrian Septuagint was preserved. As the Alexandrinus, it stands still today as the Scriptures used by our Lord, his Apostles in their letters, and the early church fathers. It shows where the Council of Jamnia altered the original text to produce the Masoretic, from which our Old Testaments today have been translated. It answers the questions which arise regarding references used in the New Testament which do not seem to appear in our Old Testaments. It also answers many other questions, including historical dating problems which plague those using the shortened chronologies of the Masoretic. Although none of our modern Bibles have lost the message of man's sin and God's remedy through Christ Jesus, the details in the ancient Alexandrian/Alexandrinus LXX are entirely consistent with the New Testament references and history. A study of the history of this codex shows that it is, indeed, the text translated by Hebrew scholars from paleo-Hebrew to Koine Greek almost 300 years before Christ.

Note: [Brenton's LXX with the footnotes](#) denoting where the ancient Alexandrian text is different from the given text can be found online now. Formerly it was only available as a hard copy book.

March 2016: the following three websites are very good at giving more information. The last of the three has the entire Old Testament in the LXX parallel with the King James.

<http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/comparisons.html>

<https://theorthodoxlife.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/masoretic-text-vs-original-hebrew/>

<http://ecmarsh.com/lxx-kjv/>

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Note: All URL's were retrieved by March 24th, 2010.

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[return to GSR home page](#)

[return to Scripture](#)