

# Septuagint

Contributed by Stephen Langfur

On the basis of the scrolls from the Book of Exodus , Frank Moore Cross (Hershel Shanks, ed. *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, New York: Vintage, 1993. Shanks, ed. p. 148) has distinguished three Hebrew textual "families." All derive from a common archetype of the 6th century BC, the turbulent time of exile and return. Then different versions began to appear.

1. One he calls the "Babylonian textual family," because he thinks it arrived from there. Under the influence of the sage Hillel, who immigrated to Palestine from Babylon in the early 1st century BC, this version became definitive for the Hebrew Bible as we know it.

2. Another he calls the "old Palestinian textual family." This was the dominant group at Qumran. The Samaritan Pentateuch also derives from it.

3. Out of the Palestinian textual family grew a third, which took hold in Egypt in the 3d century BC, becoming the basis for the Greek translation (Septuagint, pron. sep-too-ah-jint).

As to why the Rabbis insisted on standardizing the Hebrew version, Cross points out that the time of the Maccabean victories coincided with expulsions of Jews from Mesopotamia by the Parthians. Jews swarmed to Jerusalem from Babylonia and Syria, as well as from Egypt. They brought competing local texts of the sacred books, "causing considerable confusion, as reflected in the library at Qumran" (Ibid., p. 149). When party strife developed among Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes, each group adducing proofs from different versions, it was clear to the rabbis that an authoritative text was needed. When the Temple too went up in smoke (70 AD), there was only scripture to hold the Jewish people together. For the sake of unity in dispersion, the founders of normative Judaism could no longer tolerate variant texts.