The text of 1–2 Kings is problematic in many respects: first many words or even verses are difficult to understand; second, in comparison with the Greek versions, it is quite different in order and content; third, the parallel portions in 2 Chronicles sometimes appear to have a more original text.*

Josephus’ Biblical paraphrase is somewhat loose, but it allows us to characterize his sources broadly. From Ant. 7:343 through 10:185, i.e. from the last days of David until the fall of Jerusalem, he follows 1–2 Kings and 1–2 Chronicles, adding some data from Jonah, Nahum, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as scattered Jewish traditions and quotations from Greek historians.

This paper aims at demonstrating two statements: first, he never used any known Greek translation of the Bible for 1–2 Kings, although he was aware of the Letter of Aristeas (incidentally, the same is true from Genesis through 1 Maccabees); second, his source for 1–2 Kings has some contacts with the source of Antiochian (Lucianic) recension (£), but on the whole it is quite close to the Massoretic text (MT), however, it has some peculiar features which suggest that he did not have 2 Chronicles as we know it.

1. Josephus’ Hebrew Bible

Josephus himself tells us that he has “translated” (μεθηρμηνευμένην) from the Hebrew Scriptures, as stated in the prologue of the Antiquities (1:5). The same claim is sometimes made within the narrative, even more clearly. About Jonah, he feels compelled to tell of the miracles as written “in the Hebrew books” (9:208). Later he insists

* NB. In addition to the usual abbreviations, £ for the Antiochian (Lucianic) recension; + after a reference indicates that the feature quoted appears elsewhere.
(10:218): “In the beginning of this history, I have said that I intended to do no more than translate (or ‘paraphrase’ μεταφράζειν) the Hebrew books into the Greek language.” About the book of Daniel, which Josephus uses extensively, he warns his reader that should he want to know the secrets of the future, he must scrutinize the text by himself, a difficult task he has done privately (Ant. 10:210); we may surmise that he does not refer to a Greek book, which suggests that he addresses the Jews. In Ag. Ap. 1:54 he states: “I have translated (μετηρμήνευκα) the Archaeology from the holy books.”

In the same prologue of the Antiquities, he alludes, as a precedent to his own work, to the story of the Greek translation of the Pentateuch made in Alexandria upon a request of Ptolemy II; indeed he knew the Letter of Aristeas, which he used thoroughly at its chronological place (12). Then he adds (1:12–13): “But [the king] did not obtain all our writing at that time: those who were sent to Alexandria as translators gave him only the books of the Laws, while there are a vast number of other matters in our sacred books, for they contain the history of five thousand years.”

This paper will conclude that we may trust Josephus when he states: 1. that he translated or paraphrased from the Hebrew; 2. that he is the first to render into Greek the historical books (former Prophets), at least in connection with an official request, which implies some protection of the works in public libraries.

1.1. Status Questionis

It is obvious, however, that the Antiquities has many contacts with LXX against MT; therefore many commentators have not taken Josephus’ statements seriously, out of the assumption that the only Hebrew Bible extant in his time was MT, supposed to have been fixed at the Yabneh academy after the war and immediately diffused everywhere.

A considerable stir was elicited by A. Mez1 when he showed that from Joshua through 2 Samuel Josephus’ paraphrase has a significant relationship with a then recently rediscovered form of LXX, called “Lucianic recension” (£). Later, H. St. J. Thackeray, who had prepared the Loeb edition of the Antiquities and who had studied LXX a great

1 A. Mez, Die Bible des Josephus, untersucht für Buch V–VII der Archäologie (Basel: Jaeger und Kober, 1905 [1895]).