

Jews in Egypt

The Special Case of the Septuagint

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After their ancestors' miraculous escape from Egypt (Mitzrayim), ending four centuries of slavery, what led the descendants of the Children of Israel back to Mitzrayim? How did they fare in the land of the later Pharaohs and what was their fate after Alexander the Great?

There were three main centers of "Jewish"¹ settlement in Egypt: Elephantine,² a fortress town at the first cataract of the Nile (present-day Aswan); Leontopolis (not far from Alexandria, Memphis and Heliopolis where the Nile fans into its delta); and Alexandria (the major port city on the Mediterranean founded by Alexander the Great near one of the mouths of the Nile). While it is the Alexandrian Jewish community that will be the main focus of this chapter, it is useful to examine the stories of the other communities to give a bit more context for the examination of what was, in its day, the most important Jewish Greek community outside of Jerusalem.

Alexandria was not the first location in Egypt where Jews had settled. About 528 miles to the south of Alexandria there had been a flourishing Jewish community on the island of Elephantine in the Nile for several centuries before the advent of Alexander. How long before is a matter of debate.

Jewish Military and Religious Presence in Elephantine

A case is made for the establishment of a Jewish presence on the island in the seventh century BCE when, during the reign of King Manasseh of Judah, Jews were either taken to garrison the island by Ashurbanipal as he reclaimed the area from the Nubians, Cushites, or Ethiopians³ in 667 BCE,⁴ or by Psammetichus I in 663 as the king sought to

solidify his position after the defection of the original (overworked) garrison. In his lively discussion of the origin of the colony at Elephantine, Egyptologist Emil Kraeling suggests that in return for manpower sent to Egypt by King Manasseh of Judah, this king received horsepower!⁵ The men-for-horses arrangement may have prompted the ban against such dealings found in Deuteronomy 17:16.⁶

It is also possible that mercenaries joined up in stages, some being sent during the Assyrian military campaigns, some during the consolidation, and some even years later. King Psammetichus I was in the neighborhood of Judah for almost three decades as he laid the longest siege on record against Ashdod.⁷ Kraeling suggests that men of Judah would have gotten familiar with the troops and decided to make their fortunes along with others of their countrymen who had gone on before them.⁸ But, although Kraeling adduces the testimony of the Letter of Aristeas,⁹ a document which will be discussed in more detail below, he is not entirely convinced that it was under Psammetichus I that the colony was founded. The narrator of the *Letter* mentions the presence of many other Jews in Egypt who had “been sent to Egypt to help Psammetichus in his campaign against the king of the Ethiopians.”¹⁰ Kraeling infers that this must have been during the reign of Psammetichus II in about 589 because there was no trouble with the Ethiopians under the first pharaoh of that name.¹¹

With the initiation of the Josianic reforms in 622, undertaken after the discovery of the scroll identified with the core of the book of Deuteronomy,¹² the availability of willing Jewish troops may have increased. In addition, those people of Judah unwilling to abide by the Deuteronomic laws might have emigrated at that time in order to continue their form of worship. There would have been many of the priestly class no longer able to serve throughout the kingdom once all worship was centralized in Jerusalem.

Indeed, one of the most surprising features of the Jewish settlement in Elephantine was its Temple to “The Lord of Hosts Who Dwells in Yeb.” This was a fully functioning institution complete with priesthood, sacrifices, and a system of mandatory tithing. The construction of the Elephantine temple may have predated the Josianic reforms which would have condemned it out of hand as a “high place” in competition with the Temple in Jerusalem. Or, it might have been built in the late seventh/early sixth centuries, during the reign of King Jehoiakim, King Josiah’s son and successor (2 Kings 23:34). Kraeling deduces that at least the later worship conducted there reflected a pre-Deuteronomic attitude.¹³

It is possible that the Jews in Elephantine were granted permission to build a Temple because of their exemplary military services. Had they merely served as overseers of the tariffs, or as traders, or quarriers of stone, it is unlikely that they would have been allowed to establish their house of worship (the only one on the island dedicated to a non-Egyptian deity) in close proximity to that of Khnum, the major Egyptian deity of the island.

The Elephantine Temple continued to function after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 586 and even after the building of the second Temple in

about 515. As historian Joseph Modrzejewski points out, during that time, it was “the only place in the world where Jewish sacrificial worship was practiced. In a manner of speaking, Elephantine had temporarily replaced Jerusalem.”¹⁴

While Modrzejewski holds that the Elephantine Temple stood even before the Josianic Reforms, Kraeling disagrees. Although he does not offer a firm date for the erecting of the building, he is troubled by the incident of Jeremiah and those Jewish worshippers of the Queen of Heaven who, among others, were responsible for forcing his reluctant feet into Egyptian exile (Jeremiah 42–44).

By the time that the second wave of captives were taken from Judah and Jerusalem, according to evidence in the book of Jeremiah (44:1), Jews had fled to Migdol, Tahpanhes, Noph, and Pathros.¹⁵ After the death of Gedaliah (586), when most Jews were sent into exile in Babylonia, some, dragging the prophet Jeremiah with them, fled to Egypt (Jeremiah 43:6).¹⁶ It would have made sense for a Temple to have been built at that time to make up for the loss of the sanctuary in Jerusalem. However, as Kraeling points out, Jeremiah’s prophecy that “no one of Judah living in Egypt would henceforth swear by the name of the Lord God (Jeremiah 44:26),” would have seemed ridiculous if there were a well-established Temple flourishing down the Nile.¹⁷

Part of the problem that Kraeling has with the dating for the construction of the Temple has to do with his rather late date for the creation of the Jewish presence on Elephantine. He argues for a date coinciding with the rise to power of a new pharaoh, Apries, at about the time of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (589/8).¹⁸ Apries, having goaded the malcontents in Jerusalem to rebel, failed to provide promised support. Defectors nevertheless streamed to Egypt as the end drew near for Judah.

Whenever the military colony and Temple had been founded, there was an established community in Upper Egypt that attracted some Jews even during the Persian period, although Cyrus the Great (559–530) declared that Jews might return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1ff.). A huge find of Aramaic papyri from Elephantine offers insight into that Jewish community. We learn in one of the later letters that the Temple was revered by Cambyses who, as he conquered Egypt, sacked many shrines but left the Temple of the Lord untouched.¹⁹ That the rites should continue according to Jewish law was important enough to Darius II that in 419 he sent an order via his satrap at Elephantine reminding the colony to celebrate Pesach.²⁰

However, slightly later in the fifth century, there was a sudden surge of Egyptian “nationalism” as the native population sought to throw off the yoke of Persian rule. In the midst of the turmoil, the Egyptian community nearest the Jewish enclave at Elephantine lashed out at Jewish practice and, in 410, sacked the Temple. Ostensibly, the animal sacrifice practiced there was abhorrent to the Egyptians whose Temple to Khnum, a divinity represented by a ram, was in the same environs as the Jewish Temple. The Jews protested to the local satrap and, while he did not give permission to rebuild the Temple, he was able to quell the rebellion. In a politically savvy move, the Jewish community at Elephantine then sent a petition

to the satrap of Judah and to the civic governor of Samaria, appealing to them to grant permission for this most ancient institution to be rebuilt. The appeal worked. However, either as a matter of respect for the Jerusalem priesthood or out of concern lest there be a resurgence of violence instigated by the worshippers of Khnum, the authorities did not grant permission for the resumption of the sacrifice of animals. In about 406 the Temple at Elephantine was reconsecrated. However, the Egyptian rebellion reignited shortly after this and, slightly after 401, the entire Jewish population of Elephantine was destroyed.²¹

Jewish Hellenistic Experience in Alexandria

After the destruction of the colony at Elephantine, Jews did not have a good reason to remain in upper Egypt. However, the advantages of life in Alexandria under Ptolemy I (called Lagi or Soter; 323–282) attracted Jewish settlers. Although the settlement at Elephantine was older, the Alexandrian community was more cosmopolitan. Located near the seat of government, and near the remarkable Library,²² the Jewish citizens of Alexandria were familiar with the culture and shared the pride of the sophisticated majority. There is a tradition attributed to Aristobolus (second century BCE) and preserved in Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius (later Christian sources), that Alexandrian Jews believed that a very old Greek translation of parts of the Torah had existed and had exerted influence on the philosophical thought of Plato (428/7–348/7).²³ It is possible that this sense of pride colored the legends surrounding the composition of the Septuagint.

The Alexandrian Jewish community had enjoyed civic rights and even full citizenship from the start of their residency in the days of Alexander himself.²⁴ Jews were held in high esteem for having served loyally as mercenaries in Alexander's armies and they continued to be an important part of the city after his death. According to the philosopher Philo (20 BCE–50 CE), two of the five districts of the city were known as Jewish districts because of the high concentration of Jews.²⁵ While loyal to Jerusalem, the Jews of Alexandria were loyal to the government of the Ptolemies as well and were permitted to live under the direct rule of their own ethnarch. Even though Ptolemy I attacked Judea and carried off Jewish and Samaritan captives from Jerusalem and its environs, he settled them and granted them civic rights in Alexandria.²⁶ Such was the treatment of Jews under the Ptolemies that many more came to settle throughout the period of their control of the area (323 to 30).

According to a tradition stemming from Hecataeus (fourth century) and repeated in Josephus' apologetic *Against Apion* (I, 183–189), after the Ptolemaic victory in the third war among the successors of Alexander the Great (312), there arrived in Alexandria "a Jewish high priest" accompanied by a number of followers and, more significantly, carrying a Torah scroll.²⁷ The priest, Ezekias, read from the

scroll, like Ezra at the Watergate (Nehemiah 8:1ff.) or like Josiah upon the discovery of the book of Deuteronomy (2 Chronicles 34:29ff.). But the people of Alexandria, even if moved, did not thoroughly understand the Hebrew even then. This incident suggests two independent motives for the creation of the Greek translation of the Torah. First, the ruler of the region, having been involved in a decades-long struggle for control of the area, would have seen the advantage of obtaining a translation of the law code governing the people who made up a large and somewhat *sui generis* segment of his population. Second, a Greek translation would make the principles of the Book of the Law more widely accessible to the Jews of the area.

It appears that under Ptolemy II (285–246), a Greek translation of an *Egyptian* legal compendium was undertaken for a similar purpose. Modrzejewski suggests that there was a like interest in and need for a translation of the law of the Jews.²⁸ (There is even a hint of this need in the *Letter*. In that text, Demetrius of Phalerum, in his capacity as Chief Librarian, but evidently drawing on his expertise as former Athenian statesman and legal reformer, points out to Ptolemy that the Jewish law code would have to be translated into Greek to be understandable.) Although it was often the practice of the heirs of Alexander to encourage officials to subsume local laws under a growing Greek “common law,” Modrzejewski suggests that “the Ptolemies did not strive to unify the legal rules throughout the kingdom.”²⁹ Ptolemy II was himself the originator of a method of administering justice throughout his realm that depended on royal judges assigned to each nome (administrative division) as the permanent authority in legal matters for the nationality of their populace. This respect for ancestral law had been afforded to Jews under rulers as different as Artaxerxes, Alexander, and Antiochus III. But there needed to be texts available in the native language of the governed and the official Greek of the empire to assure that a litigant might expect the application of rule of law in his case.

The Septuagint

Thus, we proceed to the discussion of what was perhaps the most significant translation project undertaken in the ancient world: the production of the Septuagint. The Septuagint, strictly speaking, is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch produced in the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (285–247). In common parlance, however, Septuagint refers to the Greek translation of the entire corpus of the Hebrew Bible plus several extra-biblical books. The translation of the complete Hebrew Bible took place over time, progressing as the books entered the canon or as scrolls from Palestine arrived in Egypt.³⁰ By 132, according to the testimony of the author of the prologue to Sirach, an extra-canonical book, there were Greek translations of the Law, the Prophets, and “the rest of the books.”³¹ However,

not all the books of the Hebrew Bible seem to have been translated even by the first century CE. While the authors of the Gospels and other books of the Christian Bible generally cite the Greek version of *Tanakh*, they omit reference to several books.³²

There are three primary Greek sources that describe the creation of this, the earliest known Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, produced after the conquests of Alexander the Great: the Letter of Aristeas (purportedly second half of the third century BCE but “presumably written in the middle or near the end of the second century”³³), a reference in Aristobolus, and some citations in Philo.

By far the most important source concerning the origin of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch is the Letter of Aristeas. The *Letter* has been considered of spurious authenticity and even a literary forgery for over four and a half centuries. The Spanish scholar Ludovicus de Vives (1522) first cast doubt on its genuineness.³⁴ It was the English monk Humphry Hody (1684) who was able to show convincingly that the letter was not by a contemporary of Philadelphus. However, there are some elements in the work that can add to our understanding of the translation and its significance to the Alexandrian community.

The *Letter* is purportedly written by a philo-Jewish Alexandrian official at the court of Ptolemy II to the author’s brother, Philocrates, in which he describes his role in the arrangements made for a delegation of Jewish notables from Jerusalem to visit Alexandria in order to create and present a Greek translation of the Torah to Ptolemy’s famous Library and to the people of the Alexandrian Jewish community.

The *Letter* is a wonderful example of Alexandrian Greek literary style.³⁵ Indeed, the use of first-person narrative is a standard technique of Greek historiography and, embraced by Alexandrian authors, is used to convey not the historicity of the material but its truth value.³⁶ The *Letter*, as Orlinsky shows, was meant to gain for the Septuagint “the same sanctity and authority long held by the Hebrew original; in a word, to certify the divine origin of the Septuagint, to declare it canonical.”³⁷ Although there are anachronisms, these should not be read as carelessly included by a misinformed fraud, but rather as a trademark of Alexandrian literature, used to mark a work as fiction to the knowledgeable elite while not detracting from the edification and enjoyment of the *hoi polloi*, the common people.

Two conspicuous anachronisms are (i) the inclusion of Demetrius as the influential librarian at the time of Ptolemy II and (ii) the prominence afforded the 72-man delegation as representatives of the 12 tribes, six from each tribe. Demetrius had been the Chief Librarian at Alexandria during the reign of the *first* Ptolemy, but had fallen from favor and been retired – if not murdered – by Ptolemy II. It is likely that Demetrius’ well-known name would have afforded a flavor of authenticity to the story. The more significant anachronism was the suggestion that the high priest Eleazar chose six sages from each of the 12 tribes for the delegation. As Orlinsky points out, the tribes no longer existed as such at that time.³⁸ The *Letter* uses both the contemporary authority of the high priesthood and the ancient

authority of the tribes and their elders to confer legitimacy on the Greek translation of the Torah.

An added measure of acceptability comes from the name of the work: "The Translation of the Seventy Men/Elders."³⁹ For years scholars and commentators ignored or misunderstood the significance of this title, considering it some sort of rounding out of the number of translators from 72 down to seventy. But, as Orlinsky notes, 72 is never otherwise thus treated.⁴⁰ Both 72 and seventy are significant numbers. Of this, the author of the *Letter* was aware. There were seventy elders who, in Exodus 24:1, were to accompany Moses and Aaron, Nadav, and Abihu when Moses was to receive the tablets of the Law. There were seventy other elders who, in Numbers 11:16–17, were chosen to receive some of Moses' prophetic powers and to help him minister to the people (a different system from the one proposed by Yitro in Exodus 18:21–26).⁴¹ Thus the number seventy had a special association for Jews. Calling the Greek translation of the Torah "The Translation of the Seventy Elders" improved its pedigree.

Orlinsky indicates several other ways in which the author of the *Letter* builds a case for the sanctity of the translation. The author uses language reminiscent of that in Exodus 24:3 and Nehemiah 8:1–6 to describe the acclamation accompanying the acceptance of the Law as official and binding. He has the Alexandrian Jewish community reflect the sentiment of Deuteronomy 4:1–2 that the sacred words are not to be added to or taken away from.⁴² Thus, that community resembles the original people at Sinai, and the 72 elders carry with them a gift of inspiration akin to that infused into the seventy at Sinai. In this instance, however, the elders are more important. They stand in the place once held by Moses in relationship with God insofar as they, as translators, were the ones who brought the words to the people.⁴³ Numerically and by careful designation, they represent all the tribes, all the people of Israel. In esteem, they are the equivalent of those chosen to share Moses' spirit. Their symbolic power is enormous. In an age when prophecy had been declared to be at an end, in a city far from Jerusalem,⁴⁴ the words of the Torah took on new life.

Most scholars accept Hody's appraisal that the author of the *Letter* was not a contemporary of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Indeed, it seems most likely that the author of the *Letter* (who, it is widely agreed, was a Jew and not an Egyptian courtier as his literary persona suggests) was roughly contemporary with Aristobolus, a prominent Alexandrian Jewish scholar,⁴⁵ who wrote about a century after the alleged date of the *Letter*.

Aristobolus' work, a commentary on the Pentateuch, was the first real evidence of the intellectual impact of Greek philosophy on Alexandrian Jewry. According to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Aristobolus interpreted the Pentateuch "in an allegorical fashion . . . to show that Homer and Hesiod, the Orphic writings, Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle had borrowed freely from a supposed early translation of the OT into Greek."⁴⁶ If there was a translation available, as

Modrzejewski suggests,⁴⁷ themes and ideas could certainly have been shared. But according to Victor Tcherikover,⁴⁸ there was a lack of interest in Judeo-Alexandrian writings on the part of Greek and pagan intellectuals. The author of the *Letter* and Aristobolus may have been writing to their own community to enhance the prestige of their own, now somewhat Hellenized, heritage.

Although the works of Aristobolus are only extant in fragments, pertinent citations are preserved in the work of the Church Father Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica*.⁴⁹ Aristobolus is known to have explained some of the anthropomorphisms in the Pentateuch metaphorically in order to decrease the distance between the Jewish material and Greek philosophy.⁵⁰ The best preserved explanation is found in the following letter by Aristobolus to Ptolemy VI Philometor (182–146), who had been questioning him (emphasis added):

WHEN, however, we had said enough in answer to the questions put before us, you also, O king, did further demand, *why by our law there are intimations given of hands, and arm, and face, and feet, and walking, in the case of the Divine Power: which things shall receive a becoming explanation, and will not at all contradict the opinions which we have previously expressed.*

But I would entreat you to *take the interpretations in a natural way, and to hold fast the fitting conception of God, and not to fall off into the idea of a fabulous anthropomorphic constitution.*

For our lawgiver Moses, when he wishes to *express his meaning in various ways, announces certain arrangements of nature and preparations for mighty deeds, by adopting phrases applicable to other things, I mean to things outward and visible . . .*

First then the word “hands” evidently has, even in our own case, a more *general meaning*. For when you as a king send out forces, wishing to accomplish some purpose, we say, The king has a mighty hand, and the hearers’ thoughts are carried to the power which you possess.

Now this is what Moses also signifies in our Law, when he speaks thus: “God brought thee forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand”; and again: “I will put forth My hand,” saith God, “and will smite the Egyptians.”

Whether or not he wrote primarily for Jews,⁵¹ Aristobolus either referred to the Letter of Aristeas in a letter of his own to Ptolemy VI Philometor, a descendant of Aristeas’ Ptolemy Philadelphus, or he knew the story independently. The following is preserved in Eusebius:⁵²

For others before Demetrius Phalereus, and prior to the supremacy of Alexander and the Persians, have translated both the narrative of the exodus of the Hebrews our fellow countrymen from Egypt, and the fame of all that had happened to them, and the conquest of the land, and the exposition of the whole Law; so that it is manifest that many things have been borrowed by the aforesaid philosopher, for he is very learned: as also Pythagoras transferred many of our precepts and inserted them in his own system of doctrines.

But the entire translation of all the contents of our law was made in the time of the king surnamed Philadelphus, thy ancestor, who brought greater zeal to the work, which was managed by Demetrius Phalereus.

Such a reference would have made sense only if Ptolemy was aware of the Septuagint and its royal sponsorship or of the legend surrounding the work.

Ptolemy Philometor (180–146) could have been aware of the law code of the Jews, referred to by Aristobolus. Living in close proximity to the multiple Jewish sections of Alexandria, he would have noticed the esteem in which the text was held by the citizenry. Evidence of the public nature of the Jews' attitude toward the text comes from our third principal source, Philo of Alexandria.

Philo, who quotes extensively from many of the books of the Greek Bible, brings information of a yearly celebration of the completion of the Septuagint translation. Although the *Letter* mentions that, when the work was read to them, the people acclaimed both the translators and the translation,⁵³ there is no mention of any festivities to mark the occasion. But Philo describes a festival attended by Jews and all other people of the community, held yearly even in his day, on the island of Pharos, connected to the city by a magnificent causeway, the Heptastadion. Thus, Philo's report is independent evidence of the importance of the Septuagint in the life of the Alexandrian Jewish community.⁵⁴

Philo also contributes a detail about the 72 scholars that differs slightly from the *Letter* but bears out what may be seen in the Talmudic account of Megillah 9a:⁵⁵ the scholars are sequestered apart from one another and produce identical results.⁵⁶

It is this combination of documented fact and impossible fantasy that has been misunderstood by centuries of scholars, even as early as St Jerome (342–419 CE). What they failed to understand was that these earlier Alexandrian authors were using literary conventions to establish the primacy of the Septuagint translation. According to Alexandrian Greek literary authority Sylvie Honigman,

the narrative paradigms in which the author cast his account are crucial in conveying meaning to the story told in [the] B[ook of] Ar[istees]. Such a resort to a literary pattern rather than to explicit exposition in order to convey meaning is somewhat reminiscent of the characteristics of traditional myth telling. The use of this methodology by the author of B. Ar. strongly suggests that in informing his account with narrative paradigms, his purpose in writing B. Ar. was more than the immortalization of a past event by relating its story. The intent was to *transfigure* it.⁵⁷

The conclusion that one must draw is that the Septuagint was not considered sacred at the actual time of its creation or it would not have needed the very strong push from the later *Letter* or from Aristobolus. It is not unusual for a contemporary work to be held in lower esteem than something of more remote vintage. It is likely that the translation became more and more familiar to the Jews of Alexandria over

time,⁵⁸ and that it thus gradually picked up the luster that is the reward of long acquaintance.

Contemporary Political Situation in Judea

There was a good motivation for the activity of both Aristobolus and Aristeeas during the reign of Ptolemy Philometor. Their activity may have built on the political situation brewing in Judea at the time. Until then, possession of Judea had passed from the Ptolemies to the Seleucids and back again about five times.⁵⁹ In 201, Antiochus III had wrested control back into the Seleucid Empire. The conquests of this ruler were so costly that when his son, Antiochus IV, came to the throne, he was forced to undertake wars of conquest against Egypt (among other areas) in order to attempt to gain money to pay enormous debts. In 169 Antiochus IV invaded Egypt, then under Ptolemy VI. While Antiochus was in the field, the political situation in Jerusalem raged out of control. Menelaos, whom he had appointed high priest in return for promised contributions to his war chest, was pinned in the citadel in Jerusalem by a pretender to the position of high priest, Jason, whom Antiochus had considered for the position until he was outbid by his rival. Returning from his incursion into Egypt to settle the situation in Judea, he frightened off Jason and restored Menelaos. In the next season, Antiochus' invasion was peremptorily ended by Rome, which had declared Egypt a protectorate back in 198. Still desperate for money and in disgrace, he returned to Judea where he began to impose laws that would bring about the homogenization of his realm.⁶⁰ These laws, because they seriously compromised Jewish practice, led to the well-known Maccabean Revolt.

At about the time when Antiochus appointed first Jason and then Menelaos as puppet high priest, the legitimate high priest, Onias, was assassinated, probably by Menelaos. His son, Onias IV, had been sent to Egypt earlier, probably to keep safe the heir to the priesthood of the Temple in Jerusalem. Between the time of the assassination and the start of Antiochus' desecration of the Temple, Onias IV had grown in stature among his Egyptian hosts.⁶¹ Realizing that the situation in Judea was desperate, Onias petitioned Ptolemy for land in a remote part of Leontopolis on which to build a Diaspora Temple to God Most High. He planned to clear the land that had once housed an Egyptian temple, use the overabundance of trees and animals and provide for the servitors. The ostensible purpose of this request, according to the letter quoted by Josephus, was "that the Jewish inhabitants of Egypt may be able to come together there in mutual harmony and serve your [i.e., Ptolemy and Cleopatra's] interests."⁶² Given the past tensions between Jews from Judea and the Ptolemies and given the recent wars and economic devastation caused by the Seleucids, "mutual harmony" might have meant a shift of loyalties toward Egypt and away from the idolatrous tyrant Antiochus IV, orchestrated by Onias.

It is interesting to note that, after his initial objection that the location might not show the proper reverence for God, what prompted Ptolemy's agreement was that Onias cited a biblical verse "There shall be an altar in Egypt to the Lord God (Isaiah 19:19)" to validate his request. That the king acquiesced for this reason is not as surprising as Modrzejewski makes out. If Ptolemy was familiar with Jewish law through the medium of the Septuagint, which had been in use for about a century by that time, its authority would have carried weight.⁶³

The timing of this request is so close to that of the works of Aristobolus and the Letter of Aristeas that, with just a little imagination, we may posit an effort being undertaken to raise the legitimacy of the Greek translation in the eyes of the Jews and the Egyptians. If there was to be a Temple again on Egyptian soil, there ought to be *sacred* scripture, too. While the Letter of Aristeas sought to establish the sacredness of the translation, the work of Aristobolus sought to establish its rationality, its similarity or recognizable "Greekness." Thus, indeed, there might be "mutual harmony" among worshipers in Ptolemy's land.

Talmudic Attitudes toward the Septuagint

The Talmud, on the other hand, expresses what can only be termed ambivalence about the Septuagint. The passage from Megillah 9a mentioned above is closest to neutral. It shows familiarity with a version of the legend of the quasi-miraculous translation (or possibly with the *Letter* itself). But two other sources are not neutral. The notice in Megillat Ta'anit, an ancient pre-Mishnaic scroll of the holidays, declares a fast,⁶⁴ because: "on the eighth of Tevet, during the rule of King Ptolemy, the Torah was written in Greek, and darkness fell on the world for three days."

The post-Talmudic tractate Masekhet Soferim 1:7–8 presents a similar opinion but gives an explanation. It also repeats the material from Megillah 9a and from Masekhet Sefer Torah (emphasis added):

Once there were *five* elders who wrote the Torah in Greek for King Ptolemy, and that day was as hard for Israel as the day the golden calf was made, for the Torah could in no way be translated adequately. According to another story, King Ptolemy gathered together seventy-two elders and placed them into seventy-two houses, without revealing to them why he had summoned them. Then he went to each and every one of them and told them to write for him the Torah of Moses your Teacher; the Omnipresent put wisdom into the heart of each one of them, so that they became all of one mind and wrote him the Torah itself, making thirteen changes.⁶⁵

Masekhet Soferim was edited rather late; according to Strack and Stemberger, it cannot be dated earlier than the mid-eighth century CE.⁶⁶ However, they point out that parts of the material may be from earlier traditions.⁶⁷ The reading "five elders,"

as Orlinsky points out, “derives from nothing more than a scribal corruption.” Both the Hebrew definite article (“the”) and the letter used to represent the number five use the same Hebrew letter. One scribe read “the elders,” another read “five elders.”⁶⁸ The reference to the 72 scholars placed in 72 houses clearly reflects material in Megillah 9a.

There is, however, a strong philhellenic tradition to be found farther along in Megillah 9b:

R. Simeon ben Gamaliel says, “In addition, regarding [the other] books [of Tanakh], they allow that they be translated only into Greek.” Rabbi Abahu said that Rabbi Yochanan said, “The halachah is like R. Simeon b. Gamaliel.” And Rabbi Yochanan said, “What is R. Simeon b. Gamaliel’s reason? The Bible said ‘May God broaden Yaphet that he might dwell in the tents of Shem.’ May Yaphet’s words be in the tents of Shem.” Why not say, rather ‘Gomer[’s words] and Magog[’s tents]’? Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba: “This is the reason: because it is written ‘May God broaden Yaphet’ – may Yaphet’s beauty (*y’phiuto*) be in the tents of Shem.”

Simeon b. Gamaliel, father of Yehudah haNasi, compiler of the Mishnah, was, according to Alfred Kolatch,⁶⁹ learned in Greek philosophy. He passed the training to some of his children. This characteristic was shared by Abahu,⁷⁰ whose relationship with the authorities was such that he was able to effect the annulling of some harsh anti-Jewish legislation. They saw the use of Greek to translate “Tanakh” as in keeping with the biblical verse from Genesis 9:27 that hinted at the peaceable relationship that might grow between the progenitors of the Greek and Jewish peoples.⁷¹ But these sages may have been reacting to the translation of sacred texts by Jewish scholars such as Aquila, student of Rabbi Akiva. After all, Simeon b. Gamaliel was a second-century Palestinian Tanna who survived persecution by going into hiding during the times of terror that cost Akiva his life. His approval for the Greek translation, marked by its being linked to a proof text, may have served the same purpose for Aquila’s work as the *Letter* served for the translation of the Torah.

Putting the Puzzle Together

I suggest that there was a political motive prompting the author of the *Letter* to seek to transfigure the Greek translation into something more than an aid to understanding. This same motive may have been at work in the mind of Aristobolus, prompting him to allude to what was familiar as a legal text in terms suggesting it as sacred literature and as a literature replete with links to Greek philosophy, making Egyptian Jews more understandable and thus more sympathetic to the rulers. There seems to be an implied criticism of the actions of the Seleucid oppressor

Antiochus IV in the high praise bestowed on Ptolemy Philadelphus for liberating “no less than 100,000 [Jewish slaves].”⁷² It would seem that the elevation of the importance and legitimacy of the Septuagint has a connection with the building of the Temple in Leontopolis by Onias IV, priest-in-exile from Jerusalem. Taken together, these suggestions seem to point to the Alexandrian Diaspora’s stance as loyal supporters of their Ptolemaic rulers and proud Hellenistic Jews.

The End of Jewish Alexandria

We turn now to the end of the splendid community of Diaspora Jews in Alexandria and to the fate of the Septuagint. The holy Jewish-Greek scrolls were just about the only things saved from the terrible slaughter of the Alexandrian community. They were smuggled out of the conflagration by early Christians who were able to escape the murderous frenzy attendant upon the revolt of 115–117 CE.

That revolt had been brewing at least since the decree of Augustus Caesar in 30 BCE which revoked the privileged status of Jews in Egypt that had been granted by Alexander the Great and all rulers subsequent to him. The Jews outside of Alexandria found themselves subject to a head tax, which had been created to draw a distinction between true Greek citizens and mere Egyptians. Jews, accustomed to identifying themselves as Hellenes and disassociating themselves from the Egyptian natives, suffered a painful loss of personal status and sense of security.⁷³ The resentment constantly clawing at the Egyptians and the Greek citizens vis-à-vis Jews began to manifest itself. According to Josephus, “the numerous punishments inflicted daily on the rioters of both parties by the authorities only served to embitter the quarrel.”⁷⁴

With hostilities building under each successive emperor and governor, it was a relatively light thing for Flaccus, the Roman governor in the late 30s CE to set the Greek and Egyptian citizenry of Alexandria against the Jews in the city. When the latter refused to place statues of Caligula in their synagogues, Flaccus, trying to show himself valuable to the mad ruler, proclaimed them “foreigners” at the mercy of all. The mob rose to the occasion, as Philo describes in his bitter invective *Against Flaccus*.⁷⁵

After the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE and the defeat of the fighters on Masada in 73, it is believed that some insurgents escaped to Egypt where they began to stir up a passion for revenge. To quell the rebellion before it could ignite, Vespasian ordered the Egyptian prefect, Tiberius Julius Lupus, to tear down the Temple of Onias in Leontopolis. Although recognizing that this Temple was a reminder of days of glory and independence for the Jews, Lupus at first merely shut the Temple’s doors lest it become a rallying point for further unrest.⁷⁶ Within a year, his replacement closed the site permanently.

Anger, shame, and frustration were not so easily banished. Great resentment was resident among the Jews of Egypt not only because of the loss of two Temples

but because of the loss of status and security mentioned above. Thus, the uprising that began in 115 CE among Jews in Cyrenaica on the eastern coast of Libya spread with great rapidity to Egypt and Cyprus. Some say the desperate Jews of Cyrene planned to interfere with the Roman corn supply grown and exported from Egypt. Others suggest that the revolt was due to messianic or apocalyptic fervor spread by Zealots fleeing from Judea. But others see the hostilities as a continuation of the deteriorating relations among Jews, Greeks, and Egyptians. The Emperor Trajan, suspecting that Mesopotamian Jews would rise, too, directed that they be “cleaned out of the province.”⁷⁷ Jews faced not only heavily armed Roman soldiers, but infuriated mobs of Greeks and Egyptians and their slaves, hungry for plunder and out for blood. When the dust and ashes settled, when the tens of thousands had fallen after two full years of war, there were no Jews left in Alexandria.

The Fatal or Fateful Rescue of the Septuagint

The Alexandrian Christians fled, taking the Septuagint with them, and did not return until several decades had passed. But the Jewish seed had been planted deep and an offshoot emerged, clinging to the Septuagint as the ancient stock had clung to the Torah. By that time, Christianity had taken hold in most of the Mediterranean, in the East and in parts of Europe and Africa. Copy upon copy of the sacred text had to be made and changes began to creep in. At the same time, despite upheavals in Judea that left Jerusalem in ruins, a new Greek translation was made by Aquila from the now fixed Hebrew text possibly using exegetical translation methods approved by Rabbi Akiva.⁷⁸ Just a few years later, between 170 and 200 CE, another Jewish translation was undertaken. This one, by Symmachus for the Caesarean community, is described as combining “the best Biblical Greek style, remarkable clarity, a high degree of accuracy regarding the Hebrew, and the rabbinic exegesis of his day: it might be described as a Greek Targum, or Tannaitic Septuagint.”⁷⁹ Slightly later than these was the translation of Theodotion who is believed to have been a convert to Judaism from Ephesus, a city in Anatolia. He, too, probably based his work on a Hebrew exemplar, bringing the existing Greek translation into line with the new fixed text. The Three, as these scholars were known, produced translations that differed in substance and in method from the text of the Septuagint.

Revisions and copies proliferated very rapidly. Some time in the third century CE, Origen set out to categorize and display the differences to be found among the main translations of the times. His *Hexapla* was a six-columned comparison of the text of the Hebrew Bible as it existed in his day (a version that differed from the one that would have been used for the original Septuagint Pentateuch), those of the Three, and that of the Septuagint. Scholars do not agree as to whether that column contained

the standard Septuagint text as it existed in Origen's day or whether he used that column to correct the Septuagint in order to bring it into line with the "new" Hebrew text. The remaining column contained a transliterated Hebrew text which may have been a pronunciation guide for those not fluent in Hebrew. Had that work been widely available, perhaps the devastating disputations that took place over the centuries would have been forestalled. For, in some cases, a glance would have shown that the argument rested on a reading present in one version but not in another. However, the work, when it was finished, stretched some 6000 pages bound into about 15 volumes. It was probably never copied in full. It was consulted, however, as references to its contents exist in the works of other scholars.

Jobs and Silva point out the complexity of tracing the history of the Greek Bible. What emerges from their clearly written book is that we do not have the text of the Septuagint that was hailed by the Alexandrians so long ago and we do not have the Hebrew *Vorlage* of that translation. We have a composite text that has gone through many recensions and accidental changes. Those whose research includes searching for manifestations of the translators' ideological or cultural outlook have an excruciatingly difficult task. The conclusion that the authors reach is:

Although it may seem natural to expect the LXX to reflect theological perspectives, one must always remember that the people who produced the Greek texts were translators. They had the well-defined task of producing a translation of an existing text, the Hebrew Scripture, not of writing a treatise on the eschatology of their day.

While each translator probably did have a certain messianic concept and view of the afterlife – views undoubtedly shaped by the times in which they lived – it is not obvious that, given the nature of their task, the text they produced would strongly reflect those views. In contrast, books that were composed during the same period might be expected to reflect more directly the perspectives of their authors, who were not constrained by an existing text. Commentaries and midrashim on the Greek Scriptures produced in the Hellenistic period would provide a better window into the development of theological ideas during that time. Unfortunately, such material is rare.⁸⁰

Readers of the Masoretic (traditional, fixed, canonized) Text of Hebrew Scriptures might be surprised at the state of what is now called the Septuagint. Variant readings vie for legitimacy; passages with no partner in the Hebrew Scriptures appear; word choice reveals that the Greek translators had different Hebrew texts before them than either we or even Jerome had when he sat down to render the Hebrew into Latin. But there are times when the Septuagint sheds a bright light by which we may understand a difficult Hebrew word or idea. As such times, we do not lament but rejoice that

on the eighth of Tevet, during the rule of King Ptolemy, the Torah was written in Greek.

Notes

- 1 Although the terms “Jews” and “Jewish” are anachronistic, they will be used throughout this article to replace the unwieldy “people of Judea” or “former inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom.”
- 2 It is called in papyrological documents “Yeb” which is said to mean “elephant.” The name may have to do with the location of the center of trade of these animals with Nubia.
- 3 Not to be confused with the modern country. These three names were roughly synonymous in biblical usage.
- 4 All dates are BCE – Before the Common Era – unless specified as CE – Common Era.
- 5 Emil G. Kraeling, ed., *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri. New Documents of the Fifth Century B.C. from the Jewish Colony at Elephantine*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953, repr. Arno Press, 1969, pp. 43–44. Henceforth, Kraeling.
- 6 That is, if one accepts the theory that Deuteronomy was written shortly before its discovery in Josianic times. If one follows a more traditional approach, the wicked king Manasseh was deliberately breaking the Deuteronomic law stated in this verse.
- 7 According to Herodotus, *The Histories*, 2:157, as cited in Kraeling, p. 44 n.19.
- 8 Kraeling, p. 44.
- 9 The complete Greek text is reprinted in Henry Barclay Swete, *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900, rev. edn 1902. Henceforth, Swete. The English translation is that of R. H. Charles, *The Letter of Aristeas*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913. Henceforth, references will be to the *Letter*.
- 10 *Letter*, section 13.
- 11 Kraeling, p. 45
- 12 According to the description in 2 Kings. The account in 2 Chronicles suggests a three-phase approach.
- 13 Kraeling, pp. 83ff.
- 14 Joseph Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt from Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian*, trans. Robert Cornman, Philadelphia and Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1995, p. 36. Henceforth, Modrzejewski.
- 15 Migdol is the northernmost Jewish outpost; Tahpanhes (Daphnai) is the site of the present Suez Canal; Noph (Memphis) is near Cairo; Pathros (Pa-ta-rsy or Land of the South) may refer to an area rather than a city.
- 16 See [http://www.jafi.org.il/JewishAgency/English/Jewish + Education/Compelling + Content/Jewish + History/3760 + BCE + 79 + CE/Suppression + of + Judah + to + Syrus + defeat.htm](http://www.jafi.org.il/JewishAgency/English/Jewish+Education/Compelling+Content/Jewish+History/3760+BCE+79+CE/Suppression+of+Judah+to+Syrus+defeat.htm) (accessed November 21, 2011). According to the time line on this website, that Jewish settlement took root between 585 and 582.
- 17 Kraeling also suggests (p. 46) that, had there been no Temple then, it would have taken quite some time for people to have conceived a desire for such an institution. Such quibbles are unnecessary. Jeremiah’s angry words were meant to strike fear in the Elephantine worshippers, those in the Delta area and all those in between! He seems oblivious to the words of Isaiah 19:19 that predicted an altar of the Lord in the land of Egypt.

- 18 Kraeling, p. 45. This is very close to the reign of Psammetichus II.
- 19 Cited in Modrzejewski, p. 43.
- 20 A. Cowley, ed. and trans., *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923, repr. with new foreword and bibliography by K. C. Hanson, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005. Cited at <http://www.kchanson.com/ANCDOSCS/westsem/passover.html> (accessed October 25, 2011). Some of the laws, e.g., a prohibition on drinking intoxicants, are unique to this papyrus.
- 21 Modrzejewski, pp. 39–43. The pattern of civic service, settlement, accommodation or assimilation, flourishing, and sudden destruction prefigures not only the history of the Jews in Alexandria but elsewhere.
- 22 Established during the reign of Ptolemy I, but expanded by his successor who was said to be an intellectual giant and connoisseur of all fields of knowledge. He was not above forcefully appropriating manuscripts from travelers and having them hastily copied for his collection. He is said to have returned the copies and kept the originals!
- 23 See discussion on Aristobolus below.
- 24 Alexandria was founded in 331. There is a legend describing Alexander’s good treatment of the Jews as stemming from a dream he had concerning a man whom he subsequently recognized as the priest of the Temple in Jerusalem. In the dream, the priest had encouraged him concerning his conquest of Asia. (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 11.317–345.) Stylistically, the legend has many earmarks of Alexandrian fantasy. See discussion of Alexandrian literary style below.
- 25 Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus the Contemporary of Josephus, Translated from the Greek*, London, H. G. Bohn, 1854–1890), at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/index.html>, cited by http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Egypt#Ptolemaic_and_Roman_28400_BC_to_641_AD.29 (accessed November 21, 2011).
- 26 It is interesting to note that the Letter of Aristeas mentions the ransoming of Jewish slaves by Ptolemy as one of the author’s first orders of business, before he relates how he delivered the royal invitation to sages from Jerusalem to translate Jewish texts. (See *Letter*, sections 12–27.)
- 27 As Modrzejewski points out, this was “the Law, the Torah of Moses in the form that Ezra had established a century earlier,” p. 99.
- 28 Modrzejewski, p. 99 ff., especially ch. 5, “A Law for the Jews of Egypt.”
- 29 Modrzejewski, p. 107.
- 30 Swete, p. 24.
- 31 Sirach (also called Ben Sira), Prolog 1:25, *ta loipa ton biblion* “the rest of the books.”
- 32 Swete, pp. 25–26. He mentions Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and some minor prophets as missing from Greek works cited in the Christian Bible. He reports that Philo’s works omit references to Ruth (possibly attached to Judges), Lamentations (possibly attached to Jeremiah), Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Esther, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Swete is baffled by missing citations from Ezekiel, as he cannot imagine that the work of a major prophet should have been missing.
- 33 Modrzejewski, p. 121.
- 34 But it is the sense of scholars today that the harsh language used to describe “Aristeas” and his letter reveals a misunderstanding of Alexandrian literature. See, e.g., Sylvie Honigman, *Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of*

- the Letter of Aristeas*, Oxford: Routledge, 2003, p. 68 and *passim*. Henceforth, Honigman. The *Letter* was never intended as an historical document in the modern sense, but Swete does find some historicity in it.
- 35 All its Alexandrian elements, from its use of documents to its ekphrasis (poetic expatiation) on the gifts, to its symposium are described by George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Stories of biblical and early post-biblical times*, in Michael E. Stone, ed., *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, ch. 2, pp. 33–87.
- 36 Honigman, p. 68.
- 37 Harry M. Orlinsky, “The Septuagint and its Hebrew Text,” *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 2, *The Hellenistic Age*, eds W.D. Davies and L. Finkelstein, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ch. 15, p. 540. Henceforth, *Cambridge*.
- 38 *Cambridge*, p. 540.
- 39 In Latin: *Interpretatio septuaginta virorum* (or: *seniorum*).
- 40 *Cambridge*, p. 539.
- 41 Rashi (1040–1105) author of commentaries on the Talmud and Tanakh (on Numbers 11:26) suggests that Moses would have wanted six from each tribe (much like Aristeas) but understood that there could be only seventy *in toto*. He asked the tribes to draw lots to ascertain which two men were not designated to receive the prophetic powers. Eldad and Medad modestly bowed out.
- 42 *Letter*, section 310.
- 43 Here one should also consider the words of Megillah 9a: “*HaKadosh Baruch Hu placed counsel into the heart of each one.*”
- 44 Modrzejewski suggests that the prominence of the elders serves to strengthen the ties between Alexandria and Jerusalem at a time when the Ptolemies had lost their control of the latter, p. 121.
- 45 Tcherikover suggests that he was “counselor for Jewish affairs,” of Ptolemy Philometor (in Modrzejewski, p. 121). Arnaldo Momigliano insists that Aristobolus preceded Aristeas. “Aristobolus was . . . the first to give authority to the tradition that the LXX translation was due to the initiative of Ptolemy Philadelphus and his adviser Demetrius Phalereus. He almost certainly wrote his book, which was dedicated to Ptolemy Philometor, before the publication of the *Letter of Aristeas* and may indeed have inspired it.” Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 116. Henceforth, Momigliano. The possibility of the two working in concourse for a greater purpose is also intriguing; see below.
- 46 M. Cary *et al.*, eds, sv. “Aristobolus (2),” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, p. 91.
- 47 Modrzejewski, p. 121. To show that Aristobolus’ claim is not mere boasting, Modrzejewski adduces Oxyrhynchos papyrus XLI 2944, which contains a Greek version of the Judgment of Solomon similar to that in 1 Kings 3:16–28, dating from “prior to the death of Plato.” While it is not a full biblical translation, it would have been available to the Greek authors.
- 48 As cited in Modrzejewski, p. 67; cf. Momigliano, p. 76.
- 49 E. H. Gifford, *Eusebii Pamphili Evangelicae Praeparationis, Libri XV*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903, vol. 3, part 1, published online by Roger Pearse, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_pe_00_eintro.htm (accessed October 25, 2011). The

Greek text for Aristobolus is *The Online Critical Pseudepigrapha* (<http://ocp.tyndale.ca/>). In this collection, it is possible to read Aristobolus' preserved citations of some of the Classical authors whose works he believes were influenced by pre-Septuagint Greek translations of Hebrew originals. The wording of the Biblical citations differs slightly from Rahlfs' Septuagint text (Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX Interpretes*, 4th edn, for the American Bible Society, New York, Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1950), as is to be expected. All translations of Eusebius below are by Gifford.

- 50 This fact is quite suggestive. For, if Aristobolus found it necessary to explain anthropomorphisms, it stands to reason that his text, which would have been available for anyone in Alexandria, *did not lack those anthropomorphisms*. The claim of Charles T. Fritsch that the translators of the LXX sought to avoid anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms is thus weakened. See Charles T. Fritsch, *The Anti-Anthropomorphisms of the Greek Pentateuch*, Princeton Oriental Texts, 10, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943, and the counterclaims of Orlinsky, Soffer, Hurwitz, Zlotowitz, and Kershenbaum: Harry M. Orlinsky, Studies in the Septuagint of the book of Job, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 28, Cincinnati, 1957, pp. 53–74; vol. 29, Cincinnati, 1958, pp. 229–271; vol. 30, Cincinnati, 1959, pp. 153–167. Arthur Soffer, The treatment of anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms in the Septuagint of Psalms, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 28, Cincinnati, 1957, pp. 85–107. Harry M. Orlinsky, The treatment of anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms in the Septuagint of Isaiah, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 27, Cincinnati, 1956, pp. 193–200 and Marshall S. Hurwitz, The Septuagint of Isaiah 36–39 in relation to that of 1–35, 40–66: [Appendix: Comparison with 2 Kgs 18–20], *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 28, Cincinnati, 1957, pp. 75–83; Bernard M. Zlotowitz, *The Septuagint Translation of the Hebrew Terms in Relation to God in the Book of Jeremiah*, New York: Ktav, 1981; Peg Kershenbaum, The treatment of anthropomorphisms, anthropopathisms and verbs describing God in the Septuagint translation of the book of Judges, unpublished rabbinical thesis, The Academy for Jewish Religion, New York, 2008.
- 51 Aristobolus' discomfort with the anthropomorphisms of the text is a feeling expressed over the centuries when Jews live in areas pervaded by Greek culture. There is a desire to show that our sacred scriptures partake of that admirable rationalism demonstrated by Greek philosophers and are, therefore, worthy of their attention. There is not much evidence that the Greeks did pay attention. But the insecurity may have given "permission" to other groups to challenge the Hebrew texts with lack of sophistication.
- 52 Eusebius, *Evangelicae Praeparationis*, 13.12.
- 53 *Letter*, sections 308–310.
- 54 It is unfortunate that we do not know when the celebration began. Since neither the *Letter* nor Aristobolus mentions it, it is possible that it began not after the initial translation was completed but after the importance of the translation became clear. Recognition of the importance was fostered by the works of the author of the *Letter* and by Aristobolus.
- 55 "Talmud" refers to the entirety of the monumental work comprised of layers of early and later grappling with profound issues, folkways, and laws of Jewish life based on material preserved and debated orally by generations of sages dating back, according to Jewish tradition, to Moses on Sinai. The material in the Mishnah, upon which the rest of

- the work (called Gemarah) is based, was gathered and compiled in the early third century CE. Thus, to oversimplify a bit, “Talmud” includes “Mishnah” + “Gemarah.” The Babylonian Talmud was redacted in the fifth or sixth century, the Jerusalem Talmud in the fourth.
- 56 Philo’s version of the legend is most similar to that preserved in the Church Fathers (second century CE). According to Swete (p. 14) the rather unlikely occurrence of 72 identical translations emerging without communication made St Jerome reject the usefulness of the Septuagint text as being not a translation but a result of prophecy! Honigman (p. 119) suggests that the collaboration pointed out in the *Letter* gives the document the type of authority that would be given a contemporary edition produced by the scholars at the Library of Alexandria. The manner in which the Talmud treats the legend brings to mind the recasting of the human military victory of the Maccabees into the miracle of the oil.
- 57 Honigman, p. 37. Notice the similarity between this author’s premise and that of Orlinsky in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. The latter points out the Jewish themes that elevate the work; the former highlights the scholarly methods employed by the Alexandrians of the Library. Both methods were necessary to transfigure the work in the eyes of the sophisticated Alexandrian Jewish community.
- 58 It was cited by Demetrius the Chronographer (not the same as the Demetrius in the *Letter*), active during the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (221–204) although it is not clear who his audience might have been.
- 59 Lawrence Schiffman, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Ancient_and_Medieval_History/539_BCE-632_CE/Palestine_in_the_Hellenistic_Age.shtml?HSAM (accessed November 15, 2011).
- 60 W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilisation*, 3rd edn, New York: Meridian Books, 1952, p. 215.
- 61 See Modrzejewski’s brilliant reading of an official document sent to Onias in September of 164, p. 124.
- 62 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13, 64–68, cited in Modrzejewski, p. 126.
- 63 The original Septuagint covered only the first five books of Moses. More came to be translated over the years as manuscripts were sent to Egypt.
- 64 This fast is still observed by some Orthodox Jews on the tenth of Tevet, the culmination of three days of terrible events beginning with the completion of the Septuagint on the eighth of the month.
- 65 Translated by Aryeh Reich, *The Greek Bible – Light or Darkness?*, Bar Ilan University’s Parashat Hashavua Study Center, 2004, <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/vayigash/rei.html> (accessed October 25, 2011).
- 66 H. L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, p. 228.
- 67 Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, pp. 54–55. Unattributed statements may be calculated as either very early opinions that are undisputed or very late statements by modest scholars chary of setting their names alongside the former greats.
- 68 *Cambridge*, ch. 15, p. 539, n. 2.
- 69 Alfred J. Kolatch, *Masters of the Talmud, Their Lives and Views*, Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 2003, pp. 353–354.
- 70 Kolatch, *Masters of the Talmud*, p. 94

- 71 “May God broaden Yaphet, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem” (Genesis 9:27).
- 72 *Letter*, section 19.
- 73 The loss of status was thrown into the face of the community not only by local adversaries but by the Emperor Claudius in a decree dated 41 CE, warning that hostilities must stop. In that decree was a dark warning that Jews were under suspicion of planned sedition through welcoming in ‘fellow travelers’ from Syria and the Egyptian countryside. Although the unwanted characters alluded to by Claudius were probably early Christians, when trouble did come, it came from some of those locales.
- 74 Josephus, *The Jewish War*: 2, 451–489. Cited in Modrzejewski, p. 165.
- 75 One may find echoes of his description of the ensuing carnage and horrors in the savagery depicted in part of the liturgy for the Jewish High Holy Days. Even if one removes the impassioned and inciting language, the bottom line is the same: “These things I remember as I pour out my heart: How the wicked have devoured us” (translation from *Gates of Repentance: The New Union Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*, New York: CCAR Press, 1978).
- 76 Bernard M. Zlotowitz (personal communication) is struck by the similarity between the Roman official’s action in this incident and that of the German police chief of Berlin, Wilhelm Krutzfeld, who, in the face of Nazi rioting on Krystallnacht, forbade the torching of the historic synagogue in the city. A number of years ago, a plaque in memory of this brave man was placed at the site of the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue by a delegation from the New York City Police Department.
- 77 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4, 2, 1–2, ed. K. Lake, cited in Modrzejewski, p. 198.
- 78 See, e.g., Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 73. They reference D. Barthelemy, *Les Devanciers d’Aquila*, Leiden, 1963, who shows the similarity of method. They also reference the opposing view of L. L. Grabbe, Aquila’s translation and rabbinic exegesis, *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 33 (1982), pp. 527–536.
- 79 Alison Salvesen, Symmachus in the Pentateuch, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Monograph 15, Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1991, pp. 296–297, cited in Karen Jobes and Moises Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000, p. 40. Henceforth, Jobes and Silva.
- 80 Jobes and Silva, p. 302.