

‘Contemplate the Lord and live justly’:  
Establishing the authorial intent behind *The  
Letter of Aristeas*

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# Declaration of Originality

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I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my own original work.

Portions of the introduction and abstract have been recycled from 'Assessment Task 2: Methodology Essay', submitted as part of the requirements for CLAS4006: Classics Methods and Evidence. Moreover, an earlier version of Chapter 1 was submitted as part of the requirements for ENG4020: Researching and Writing the Thesis: A Workshop.

All versions of the submitted thesis (regardless of submission type) are identical. This thesis did not require human research ethics approval.

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צִדְקָה צִדְקָה תְּרַלֶּךָ

# Abstract

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Sometime between the middle of the second century and the late first century BCE, an anonymous Jew of Ptolemaic Alexandria authored a fictional letter, containing a remarkable story of Jewish-Greek cooperation. Told through its fictional, Gentile narrator, Aristeas, the letter, known as *The Letter of Aristeas*, recounts the story of the Hebrew Torah's translation into Greek, commissioned by King Ptolemy II for the library of Alexandria but carried out by Jewish translators sent by Jerusalem's High Priest. Culturally, the *Letter* is a striking text. It frequently asserts the pre-eminence of the Biblical god and its prophet, Moses, alongside its recurrent and unapologetic use of Greek literary conventions and philosophy. In light of this remarkable tension, one might wonder what the author's intention was for such a text as this. Accordingly, this study will seek to ascertain the *Letter's* intended function and the author's likely impetus or motivation for writing his work.

Scholars, such as Tcherikover and, more recently, Wright have made many attempts to ascertain the purpose of the *Letter*, often involving claims that the author was seeking to persuade hesitant Jews to embrace Greek society and thus wrote the *Letter* to achieve this purpose. These scholars have often imagined the readership to be conservative Jews, cautious about embracing Greek society and culture. Moreover, even those who reject this theory and instead consider the *Letter* propaganda for the Septuagint, often view the text's readership as consisting of deeply faithful Jews. Therefore, scholarship has sadly tended to overlook the possibility that the *Letter's* author (known as Pseudo-Aristeas) might have been writing specifically for Jews with a weaker attachment to Judaism or, indeed, those who had abandoned Judaism altogether.

Following this line of thinking, this study, by considering the *Letter* itself and other Alexandrian sources, shall argue that Pseudo-Aristeas was actually addressing these Jews of limited religious conviction, whose insufficient religiosity, if not apostasy, served as Pseudo-Aristeas' main impetus in writing the *Letter*. Moreover, this text's overarching purpose, as I shall demonstrate, was to restore the Jewish identities of these wavering Jews by persuading them to re-embrace the traditions of their forefathers. Pseudo-Aristeas also sought to safeguard his readers' newly restored identities (assuming that they re-embraced Judaism) by providing them with ethical instruction that would prevent them from 'relapsing' into an insufficiently Jewish lifestyle.

# Introduction

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Ptolemaic Alexandria was a city of significant cultural interaction, and there are perhaps few greater testaments to this culturally variegated reality than the curious text known as *The Letter of Aristeas*. Written in Greek, *The Letter of Aristeas* (henceforth, the *Letter*) essentially tells the story of the translation of the Septuagint, or really the Torah portion of that famous translation, under Ptolemy II. Specifically, it depicts a fictional Gentile named Aristeas narrating to his fictional brother, Philocrates, how he participated in a royal embassy to the Jerusalemite High Priest, Eleazar. The aim of this delegation, as Aristeas tells us through his narrative, was to request Jewish translators to render the Torah into Greek so that it could be included in Ptolemy II's famed Library of Alexandria. Eleazar happily assented and, after passionately expounding the Jewish Law for his curious Gentile guests, he sent 72 of his most learned scholars to Ptolemy's court. The King offered a lavish reception, holding seven days of consecutive banquets in which Ptolemy put to his guests various philosophical inquiries regarding ethics and proper kingship. They skilfully answered these, mixing Greek philosophy with proud references to their Jewish god. Finally, the translation began, which the Jewish sages finished in exactly 72 days. Afterwards, Alexandria's Jewish community offered their resounding approval, forbidding any future emendations to the text, which they proclaimed to be perfect.

Although the *Letter* is ostensibly authored by a Gentile called Aristeas, who narrates the story in the first-person as though an eyewitness, in reality the actual author was almost certainly Jewish. This idea that the narrator Aristeas was merely a literary fiction designed to

conceal a Jewish author has long been acknowledged as far back as 1685.<sup>1</sup> For, although our author's precise identity is unknown (and shall henceforth be called Pseudo-Aristeas), his Jewishness is unmistakably revealed from both the distinctly Jewish nature of the piety expressed throughout the *Letter* and from resonances between the Greek Septuagint and certain sections of the *Letter*.<sup>2</sup> These features of the *Letter* could only have come from a Jewish author. Moreover, Ps.-Aristeas was evidently learned in Greek language and literature, judging from his use of Greek literary forms and devices, and was definitely Alexandrian, considering his significant familiarity with Ptolemaic bureaucratic language and royal customs.<sup>3</sup> It has therefore even been suggested that he was a member of the Ptolemaic court,<sup>4</sup> but the evidence currently seems too flimsy to support such a bold suggestion, as Wright has also noted.<sup>5</sup> At best, we can say that an Alexandrian Jew, possessing a notable Greek education, authored the *Letter*.

Regarding when Ps.-Aristeas was writing, although there is a broad consensus that the *Letter* should be dated to the mid to late second century BCE, I tentatively agree with White and Keddie, who together argue for a later date, specifically the mid to late first century BCE. Now, all scholarship agrees the *Letter* was written significantly later than Ptolemy II's reign,

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart Moore, "For the Sake of Mice and Weasels: Ethnic Boundaries and the "Cultural Stuff" in the Letter of Aristeas," in *Jewish Ethnic Identity and Relations in Hellenistic Egypt: with Walls of Iron* (Brill: Leiden, 2015), 204; see also Moses Hadas, "Introduction," in *Aristeas to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas)* (New York: Harper, 1951; repr., New York: Ktav, 1973), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin G. Wright, "Introduction," in *The Letter of Aristeas: 'Aristeas to Philocrates' or 'on the Translation of the Law of the Jews'* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, "Introduction," 17.

<sup>4</sup> Barclay is one scholar who has suggested the author of *The Letter of Aristeas* was quite possibly a member of the Ptolemaic court (John M. G. Barclay, "Cultural Convergence," in *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 139, 140-141).

<sup>5</sup> Wright, "Introduction," 17.



when our fictional Gentile author-narrator would have us believe he had written the *Letter*.<sup>6</sup> A majority of scholars have tended to view the *Letter's* true composition date as being somewhere in the second century, with the 145 to 125BCE date range being especially popular. This consensus of sorts is primarily based on Bickermann's major paper, in which he compared the *Letter's* epistolary and administrative formulae, found in the text's pseudo-official documents, with those found in authentic papyri and thus located the *Letter's* date of composition in the mid to late second century.<sup>7</sup> However, White and Keddie have very recently made use of newer papyrological discoveries, unknown to Bickermann, contending that Ps.-Aristeas actually wrote in the mid to late first century BCE. To complement this papyrological evidence, they have observed that the *Letter* "evinces striking thematic, formal, and lexical similarities with 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, and Greek Esther," reinforcing their argument.<sup>8</sup> Although a definitive answer to the question of the *Letter's* composition date is likely impossible for the time being, I consider White and Keddie's argument of Late Ptolemaic composition date to be convincing and will adhere to it.

Not unlike the dating, the question of the text's genre has provoked some controversy. A great many scholars since Hadas have rejected its classification as a letter completely, observing that it is plainly a narrative (διήγησις), since this is what our fictional narrator, Aristeas, calls it.<sup>9</sup> Certain scholars have added their own slant to this argument, such as

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<sup>6</sup> L. Michael White and G. Anthony Keddie, "The Epistle of Aristeas," in *Jewish Fictional Letters from Hellenistic Egypt: The Epistle of Aristeas and Related Literature* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 41; Sylvie Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," in *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the 'Letter of Aristeas'* (Florence: Routledge, 2003), 34.

<sup>7</sup> White and Keddie, "The Epistle of Aristeas," 36.

<sup>8</sup> White and Keddie, "The Epistle of Aristeas," 38.

<sup>9</sup> Hadas, "Introduction," 56.

Honigman, who contends that the *Letter* is a work of Hellenistic historiography, or Nickelsburg, who argues it is a written speech.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there has been a broad trend towards rejecting its classification as a letter. Yet, there has been some push back more recently from scholars who underscore the text's epistolary features. Notably, Doering has posited that the *Letter* is indeed a letter, specifically an epistolary treatise.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, I lean towards Wright, who has reconciled the two extremes by suggesting that the *Letter* is a blend of genres, specifically historiography and letter-writing, entirely typical of Hellenistic literature.<sup>12</sup> And perhaps accordingly, the best generic classification for the *Letter* would be an 'epistolary novella', as White has labelled the *Letter*, denoting a narrative expressed in the form of a letter.

The *Letter* contains a remarkable fusion of culture, as the above summary hinted, with its strong expressions of Jewish pride and yet also its frequent use of Greek literary conventions and philosophical concepts. In light of this striking tension, we might naturally wonder what the purpose was of such a text as this, and it is this precise issue, namely that of authorial intention, that I shall be examining throughout this thesis. Specifically, this will involve

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<sup>10</sup> Sylvie Honigman, "Enforcing the narrative veracity: the rhetoric of historiography in the Book of Aristeas," in *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the 'Letter of Aristeas'* (Florence: Routledge, 2003), 68. Nickelsburg is cited in White (L. Michael White, "The Social Reality of Fictional Letters," in *Jewish Fictional Letters from Hellenistic Egypt: The Epistle of Aristeas and Related Literature* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 3).

<sup>11</sup> Lutz Doering, "Letters in the Early Jewish Pseudepigrapha," in *Ancient Jewish Letters and the Beginnings of Christian Epistolography*. WUNT (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament) I, no. 298 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 217-232.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, "Introduction," 51. Honigman also observes that Hellenistic literature frequently displayed mixing of genres and literary forms and, indeed, acknowledges that there is genre-blending in the *Letter*; however, she ultimately designates the *Letter* as "a kind of historical monograph" (Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 14-15, 30).

ascertaining, as best one can regarding an anonymous work, the purpose or intended function of the *Letter* as well as Ps.-Aristeas' impetus in writing his work, that is, what spurred Ps.-Aristeas to write the *Letter*. It is crucial that we, as scholars, have an accurate understanding of the text's purpose for several reasons. Firstly, this would likely constitute important knowledge for historians interested in using the *Letter's* contents to reconstruct the origins of the Septuagint or the Library of Alexandria, for a text's purpose may affect its historical reliability positively or negatively, thus informing its usefulness as a source. For example, a text with a highly literary and ideological purpose would possibly be a less reliable historical source. Secondly, since purpose or function is a major aspect of any text, if not a text's guiding principle, then comprehending a literary work's purpose could lead to a more informed understanding of the text's various components, such as narrative structure or characterisation. Certainly, regarding the *Letter*, an inaccurate understanding of its purpose would only harm a literary scholar's understanding of the text overall. Accordingly, we need to develop as refined a comprehension of the *Letter's* intended function as possible, correcting any current misconceptions.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the question of authorial intent has preoccupied scholars of the *Letter* for over a century now. Before 1949, the old consensus held that the *Letter* was not a straightforward, accurate account of the Septuagint's origins, but was rather intended as a defence of Judaism aimed at making Gentiles view Jews as "worthy compatriots, philosophically advanced and loyal to the Ptolemaic kingdom."<sup>13</sup> For example, Friedländer called it self-defence against "the antagonists of Judaism," while Pfeiffer deemed the Septuagint narrative to be "merely a pretext for defending Judaism against its heathen

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<sup>13</sup> This is how Moore summarises the Hody's argument (Moore, "For the Sake of Mice and Weasels," 204).

denigrators.”<sup>14</sup> Yet, in 1949, Tcherikover famously refuted this argument, contending that the *Letter* was not a work of self-defence nor was it aimed at Gentiles, but was addressed to Jews so as to encourage them to interact with Greek culture and society by arguing for its compatibility with Judaism, while assuaging any anxieties among Jews.<sup>15</sup> For Tcherikover, the *Letter’s* purpose was hardly concerned with antagonism or self-defence; quite the opposite, namely the promotion of mutually beneficial, cultural interaction between educated Greeks and Jews. Tcherikover’s thesis became considerably popular and can be said to broadly constitute the current consensus today.<sup>16</sup>

However, a notable, alternative line-of-thinking arose parallel to Tcherikover, all broadly adhering to his belief in a Jewish readership, but which contended that the *Letter’s* purpose was to defend the Septuagint translation against other rival translations. An early proponent of this view was Hadas in 1951, who argued that Ps.-Aristeas’ main purpose was “to give official authority to the Greek version of the Bible,” likely a revised Septuagint, rather than the original third century translation (if one ever existed).<sup>17</sup> Hadas was following Kahle, who had made a similar argument in 1947.<sup>18</sup> In 1966, however, Jellicoe rejected this idea that Ps.-Aristeas sought to defend a revised Greek translation; rather, Jellicoe argued, the *Letter* was

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<sup>14</sup> Moriz Friedländer, *Geschichte der jüdischen Apologetik als Vorgeschichte des Judentums* (Zürich: Schmidt, 1903), 97. Pfeiffer is cited in Victor Tcherikover, “The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 51, no. 2 (April 1958): 59.

<sup>15</sup> Tcherikover, “The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas,” 69-71.

<sup>16</sup> For two scholars who have taken up Tcherikover’s argument in recent times, see Hacham (Noah Hacham, “The Letter of Aristeas: A New Exodus Story?” *Journal for the Study of Judaism (JSJ)* 36, no. 1 (2005): 1-20) and also More (Jonathan More, “Kingship Ideology: A Neglected Element in Aristeas’ Charter Myth,” in *Septuagint and Reception: Essays Prepared for the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa*, ed. Johann Cook (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 299-320).

<sup>17</sup> Hadas, “Introduction,” 73. Hadas’ full examination of the *Letter’s* purpose stretches over pages 66-73.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Hadas (Hadas, “Introduction,” 73).

intended as propaganda for the original Septuagint, but in addition to that, he contended, Ps.-Aristeas also intended his *Letter* as a veiled attack on the Jewish temple at Leontopolis, which may have had its own rival Torah translation, while he also sought to defend the Jerusalem Temple as being the legitimate place of worship for Jews.<sup>19</sup> This argument concerning the temple at Leontopolis does not seem to have taken off. Nevertheless, the fundamental argument that Ps.-Aristeas' primary intention was to defend the Septuagint has persisted into recent times, finding a firm advocate in Honigman, who has argued Ps.-Aristeas' purpose was to endow the Septuagint with a charter myth. This, she argued, would give it the status of a definitive sacred text.<sup>20</sup>

Lastly, in the most recent times, certain arguments about Ps.-Aristeas' intentions have been made which do not fit perfectly into either of the two 'camps' mentioned above. Moore, for example, argues that Ps.-Aristeas' primary purpose in writing was to re-affirm a sense of "commitment to the homeland," namely Judaea, which Ps.-Aristeas felt to be lacking, and that, to accomplish this, he sought to associate the Septuagint with Judaea.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Moore, Wright argued that Ps.-Aristeas was interested in affirming Jewish ethnic identity as distinctive, but in a way that aligned the Jews of Alexandria with Greek Alexandrians.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, Ps.-Aristeas set out "to construct/reinforce a Jewish identity that would provide a solid justification for elite, educated Jews to participate in the larger Hellenistic world of Alexandria as Jews," and the basis of this identity was to be the Septuagint, for which Ps.-

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<sup>19</sup> Sidney Jellicoe, "The Occasion and Purpose of the Letter of Aristeas: A Re-Examination," *New Testament Studies* 12, no. 2 (1966): 149–50.

<sup>20</sup> Sylvie Honigman, "Introduction," in *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the 'Letter of Aristeas'* (Florence: Routledge, 2003), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Moore, "For the Sake of Mice and Weasels," 253-254.

<sup>22</sup> Wright, "Introduction," 67.

Aristeas created “a myth of origins.”<sup>23</sup> Wright has evidently fused Tcherikover’s belief that Ps.-Aristeas wanted to encourage Jewish-Greek interaction with Honigman’s argument about a charter myth. Lastly, Gruen sees Ps.-Aristeas as preoccupied with “advertis[ing] the advantages of Jewish tradition,” as being truly pre-eminent in terms of the text’s purpose<sup>24</sup>

Now, although I am evidently examining a question that previous scholars have already considered significantly, I will be approaching the question of authorial intent from a different angle, one which others have seemingly overlooked.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, scholars have tended to ignore the possibility that Ps.-Aristeas might be writing particularly for Jews with a weaker attachment to Judaism or, indeed, those who had abandoned Judaism, and that the text’s true purpose might be uncovered by considering such a readership. Tcherikover admittedly acknowledged the possibility that Ps.-Aristeas had in his sights those Jews who had begun to abandon some of the more ritualistic prescriptions of the Torah. But these seem to be a small secondary audience from Tcherikover’s point of view, who sees Ps.-Aristeas’ primary readership as Jews who were hesitant to fully embrace Greek culture. Moreover, no scholar after Tcherikover seems to have ever taken up this possibility that Ps.-Aristeas’ audience consisted primarily of Jews with little or no religious attachment. Moore is perhaps the only exception, for his argument revolves around the idea that Ps.-Aristeas was addressing Jews whose attachment to Judaea was lacking, but Moore nevertheless focuses solely on attachment to Judaea, imagining that the attachment of Alexandrian Jews to their own

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<sup>23</sup> Wright, “Introduction,” 66.

<sup>24</sup> Erich Gruen, “Jewish Literature,” in *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature*, ed. James J. Clauss and Martine Cuypers (Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 421.

<sup>25</sup> I am referring to Anglophone scholars here. I cannot definitively state that there exist no foreign-language scholars who share my views here on *The Letter of Aristeas*, since my knowledge of French, German, Italian and Hebrew is sadly quite minimal.

religion was entirely firm in Ps.-Aristeas' eyes and therefore not the concern of our anonymous author. In my opinion, when ascertaining the *Letter's* purpose, more consideration should be given to the possibility that Jews of limited or no religious attachment were a concern of Ps.-Aristeas.

Following this line of thinking, my thesis shall argue that Ps.-Aristeas wrote the *Letter* in response to a lack of commitment to Judaism, even to the point of apostasy, among certain Alexandrian Jews, largely due to the attractions of Hellenism. This Alexandrian phenomenon, in which Jews diluted their Jewish beliefs and practices, if not entirely forsaking their Jewish identity, is certainly evidenced in the ancient sources and, as I shall demonstrate, there are sensible justifications for believing that these Jews of diminishing or non-existent religious conviction were Ps.-Aristeas' primary intended audience. I shall contend that, due to this concerning religious phenomenon, Ps.-Aristeas wrote the *Letter* in the hope that he could restore his readers' Jewish identities. For this was the *Letter's* primary purpose, namely to persuade his readers to re-identify with Jewishness, specifically by portraying it in a highly attractive light and by undermining any rival Gentile ideologies or individuals. Ps.-Aristeas' secondary concern, deriving from his primary aim of restoring Jewish identity, was to give his readers the tools, in the form of moral instruction, that would enable them to maintain a proper Jewish lifestyle and ultimately uphold their newly restored Jewish identities. For Ps.-Aristeas did not want his readers to relapse into apostasy or whatever insufficiently Jewish lifestyle to which they had previously clung. In short, this thesis will make the case that restoring the waning or non-existent Jewish identities of his readers and then ensuring the longevity of these newly restored identities were the leading aims of Ps.-Aristeas and the purpose of his *Letter*.

**Chapter 1** of this thesis will formally establish and prove, using a process of elimination, that the *Letter's* intended readership consisted of those Jews who had a limited attachment to Judaism, if any at all, due to their excessive philhellenism. Then, it will explore how Ps.-Aristeas constructs an attractive portrayal of Jewishness by underscoring its superiority and framing it in distinctly Greek terms, to coax his readers back to identifying with Judaism. Next, **Chapter 2** will demonstrate how Ps.-Aristeas undermines major Alexandrian politico-cultural authorities, such as the Ptolemaic regime and rival ideologies, to further prove to his reader that Judaism is the ideology most deserving of support. Then, **Chapter 3** will investigate the secondary concern of Ps.-Aristeas, mentioned above, namely providing his readers with the tools, specifically moral instruction, to assist them in maintaining their newly restored identities. Importantly, this chapter will detail the nature of this moral instruction. **Chapter 4** will demonstrate that, despite this firm promotion of Judaism, Ps.-Aristeas did not believe that his readers needed to discard philhellenism, but rather that they could participate in Greek culture while being Jewish. The chapter will finally explore a significant caveat to this belief of Ps.-Aristeas, one with important implications for his readers.

Lastly, this study will not be able to explain every aspect or element of the *Letter* due to inevitable space constraints. Such an effort would require at least a full-blown monograph. Likewise, this thesis will not provide a full exposition of Ps.-Aristeas' ideology, which is outside the scope of my study. Naturally, however, it will be useful to consider his religious ideology to a certain extent, and this will be done whenever it is relevant to my aim of establishing the *Letter's* purpose.



# Chapter 1: Representing Jewishness

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By late Ptolemaic times, an unmistakable trend had begun sweeping through Alexandria. Certain Jews, lured by Hellenism's illicit delights, had started abandoning their Jewish customs and beliefs, if not entirely forsaking their ancestral religion. The chief aim of our author, Pseudo-Aristeas (Ps.-Aristeas), and the purpose of his *Letter*, was to re-instil Jewish pride among such Jews, re-affirm their waning Jewish identity and ultimately return them to a Jewish lifestyle. To accomplish this, Ps.-Aristeas advocates for Judaism by promoting an attractive representation of 'Jewishness', which projects, and thus asserts, the pre-eminence, if not superiority, of Jewish beliefs and practices.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Ps.-Aristeas often frames these markers of Jewishness in distinctly Greek terms, making them especially attractive to his philhellenic audience. In this way, Ps.-Aristeas presents his Greek-loving readers with an enthralling vision of Jewishness with which they can eagerly identify and which they must support due to its clear pre-eminence.

In this chapter, I shall firstly demonstrate the *Letter* was indeed aimed at Jews with waning religious convictions, as this claim may prove controversial. Secondly, I will explore Ps.-Aristeas' promotion of Jewish identity through his attractive portrayal of Jewishness in the *Letter*, demonstrating specifically how Ps.-Aristeas constructs this portrayal. This will involve

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<sup>26</sup> In this thesis, I have tried to distinguish between Judaism and 'Jewishness' so that Judaism refers to the religion or belief-system of the Jews, while Jewishness denotes the sum-total of everything that makes a person distinctively Jewish, being naturally centred around Judaism but not necessarily limited to it. This is, however, inevitable overlap with the two concepts.

examining Ps.-Aristeas' assertions of the supremacy of God and of Jewish knowledge and practices; then, his portrayal of the translated Torah as sacred and of high literary quality, as though a Greek literary classic; and lastly, his depiction of Judaea in the style of the utopian travel authors, alongside his representation of Jerusalem as the ideal *polis*. Finally, I will demonstrate that such a portrayal could only have been constructed by someone writing with the overarching purpose of persuading Jews to return to their ancestral faith.

Before venturing further, it is first necessary to establish Ps.-Aristeas' intended readership, as knowing this will shed light on his presentation of Judaism and his intentions behind it. Since 1685, scholarly consensus had held that the *Letter* was intended for Greeks as pro-Jewish propaganda.<sup>27</sup> However, in 1949, Tcherikover successfully refuted this thesis, arguing that Ps.-Aristeas had actually aimed his *Letter* at Greek-educated Jews to soften their apparent conservatism so they would engage more with upper-class Greek society.<sup>28</sup> This argument for a Jewish audience immediately proved popular,<sup>29</sup> and, despite some resistance today,<sup>30</sup> has remained widespread well into recent times. Honigman, for example, has affirmed it recently.<sup>31</sup> Wright likewise agrees, viewing Ps.-Aristeas' intended audience as

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<sup>27</sup>Naturally, there have many proponents of this theory – Tcherikover cites several of them, namely Stein, Pfeiffer, Schürer and Tramontano (Tcherikover, “The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas,” 59). The first proponent of this argument was Hody in 1685, who set forth the idea that the *Letter* was written for a Greek audience (Moore, “For the Sake of Mice and Weasels,” 204.)

<sup>28</sup>Tcherikover, “The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas,” 69-71. Tcherikover does not explicitly describe Ps.-Aristeas' audience as conservative, but that is certainly the overall picture that he paints of them in his article.

<sup>29</sup>Moses Hadas, for example, in 1951 soon embraced Tcherikover's thesis about Jewish readership (Hadas, “Introduction,” 60, 65).

<sup>30</sup>Barclay and Beavis both argue that the *Letter* was addressed to Greeks in addition to Jews (Barclay, “Cultural Convergence,” 148-149; M.A.L. Beavis, “Anti-Egyptian Polemic in the Letter of Aristeas 130-165 (the High Priest's Discourse),” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18, no. 2 (1987): 145-151).

<sup>31</sup>Honigman, “Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas,” 27-29.

educated Jews, anxious about fully participating in Greek culture due to their religiosity.<sup>32</sup> Hacham and More have additionally proposed that this Jewish audience may have also been anxious about embracing the Ptolemies.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, Dawson identifies those Jews who were insufficiently religious with their liberal interpretations as being part of Ps.-Aristeas' intended audience.<sup>34</sup>

As a useful methodological approach for determining Ps.-Aristeas' intended readership, I propose a process of elimination, whereby those possibilities which are unlikely on historical or textual grounds are ruled out, until only plausible candidates remain. I will begin by excluding the Greeks as the intended audience for several reasons. Although pre-Tcherikover scholars contended Ps.-Aristeas was writing to persuade Greeks of Judaism's worth, the *Letter's* hostility towards Greek customs, such as polytheism, seems more effective at alienating Greeks than persuading them.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Ps.-Aristeas' portrayal of King Ptolemy as obsequious to Jews and his depiction of Jewish intellectuals as surpassing Ptolemy's philosophers would have surely offended Greeks.<sup>36</sup> Equally, however, we should avoid viewing the *Letter* as an aggressive polemic aimed at Greeks to abuse their culture, since the *Letter* is somewhat tame compared to other Jewish-Greek literature, like the *Wisdom of*

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<sup>32</sup> Benjamin G. Wright, "Translation and Commentary," in *The Letter of Aristeas: 'Aristeas to Philocrates' or 'on the Translation of the Law of the Jews'* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 70.

<sup>33</sup> Hacham, "A New Exodus Story?" 18-19; More, "Kingship Ideology," 319.

<sup>34</sup> David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> See especially Eleazar's denunciation of polytheism and idolatry among the Greeks and Egyptians (*Let. Ar.* (= *The Letter of Aristeas*), 134-138). See footnote 1 for a list of some of these scholars.

<sup>36</sup> Gruen, "Jewish Literature," 427.

*Solomon*.<sup>37</sup> Overall then, it seems quite implausible that the *Letter* was addressed to Greek readers.

Excluding Greek readers leaves us with Jews as Ps.-Aristeas' likely intended audience,<sup>38</sup> but which Jews? Certainly, the broadly prevailing view that Ps.-Aristeas' audience were Jews hesitant to fully embrace Greek culture or serve Ptolemy cannot be true for textual and historical reasons. Firstly, this hesitance, which implies firm attachment to Judaism, is at odds with the *Letter's* contents. The text frequently asserts the primacy of Judaism, as this chapter will shortly demonstrate, yet pious Jews, afraid of compromising their Jewishness, hardly needed to be persuaded of Judaism's greatness. Similarly, moral instruction, notably about avoiding immoral people, pervades the *Letter*,<sup>39</sup> yet Ps.-Aristeas would not have needed to educate or persuade such vigilant Jews to avoid wicked people, since they would already have been learned in the Torah and apprehensive about engaging with non-Jews. Ps.-Aristeas' true audience must have been less familiar with Jewish teachings. Moreover, the *Letter* contains too many allusions to Greek authors, including obscure Hellenistic writers,<sup>40</sup> to be accessible for those Jews who, hesitant to participate in Greek society, naturally had limited knowledge of Greek literature. Ps.-Aristeas' audience was evidently educated, and thus integrated, in high Greek culture. Moreover, the claim that Ps.-Aristeas was addressing Jews who were hesitant to serve the Ptolemaic regime in order to reconcile the two presumes he viewed the regime positively, yet Ps.-Aristeas arguably portrays Ptolemy I and II quite unflatteringly,

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<sup>37</sup> Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 260-261.

<sup>38</sup> I automatically presume that native-born Egyptians were not the likely intended audience of Ps.-Aristeas, as the *Letter* focuses primarily on Greek and Jewish subject-matter, almost ignoring the Egyptians completely (with a handful of exceptions, such as *Let. Ar.*, 6 and 138).

<sup>39</sup>For example, Eleazar's defence of the Law (*Let. Ar.*, 128-171) and the Symposia (*Let. Ar.*, 187-300).

<sup>40</sup> Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 27-28.

suggesting he had little goodwill toward the Ptolemies.<sup>41</sup> Lastly, it is unclear whether Jews who were apprehensive about participating fully in Greek society even existed in the late Ptolemaic period.<sup>42</sup>

With hesitant, conservative Jews excluded as possibilities, there remain only those Jews who were already culturally integrated in Greek society and perhaps less attached to Judaism. Accordingly, I propose that Ps.-Aristeas' primary intended audience was those Jews whose ardent philhellenism had led them to dilute, if not completely abandon, their Jewish beliefs and practices, an argument that, astonishingly, no Anglophone scholar seems to have yet made.<sup>43</sup> Certainly, this idea of a Jewish audience with a less-than-perfect knowledge of Judaism would explain the moral instruction in the *Letter*. Likewise, the absence of Jewish pride amongst these Jews would explain why the *Letter* repeatedly stresses Judaism's pre-eminence. Moreover, if we accept, as others have, that Philocrates, the *Letter's* fictional

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<sup>41</sup> This argument about portrayal will be argued more fully in Chapter 2. More and Hacham are both proponents of the argument that Ps.-Aristeas was trying to persuade Jews to embrace the Ptolemies (More, "Kingship Ideology," 318-319; Hacham, "A New Exodus Story," 14-19).

<sup>42</sup> By this time, Greek was certainly the main language and Greek names were common based on inscriptional and papyrological evidence, suggesting significant social and cultural integration (Joseph Méléze Modrzejewski, "A New Diaspora," in *The Jews of Egypt from Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 77-80, 84-85).

<sup>43</sup> Moore, perhaps, comes closest to my argument, asserting that Ps.-Aristeas' audience was comfortable with Hellenism but had a somewhat weak Jewish identity due to their lack of attachment to Judaea and Jerusalem (Moore, "For the Sake of Mice and Weasels," 234-5). Also, Tcherikover does propose that parts of the *Letter* might have been "directed against those who intended...to ease the burden of the practical prescriptions" (Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," 84), yet Tcherikover's article argues the *Letter* was primarily aimed at observant Jews, not those whose Jewishness was waning. Thus, my argument that Ps.-Aristeas' primary audience were Jews whose commitment to Judaism was waning or non-existent, seems to be unique among the extant Anglophone scholars.

addressee, reflects the *Letter's* actual intended readers on some level,<sup>44</sup> then we would expect Ps.-Aristeas' readers to share certain attributes with Philocrates, like his love of learning and his interest in philosophical self-improvement and literature.<sup>45</sup> Now, the Jews who most share these rather Greek attributes are naturally those individuals whose philhellenism was so intense that it had come to threaten their devotion to Judaism. Furthermore, such Jews undoubtedly existed in the Ptolemaic period, when the *Letter* was written. We know of a certain Dositheus who abandoned his Judaism, ultimately becoming a royal priest under Ptolemy III.<sup>46</sup> Philo, some decades after the Ptolemaic era, complains about Jews abandoning key practices and Jewish apostates who indulged in gluttony and sex.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Alexandrian Jewish literature, broadly contemporaneous with the *Letter*, often portrays Jews forsaking their Jewishness, usually in exchange for a Greek lifestyle,<sup>48</sup> likely

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<sup>44</sup> White and Keddie, "The Epistle of Aristeas," in *Jewish Fictional Letters from Hellenistic Egypt: The Epistle of Aristeas and Related Literature* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 41; Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 32; Lutz Doering, "Letters in the Early Jewish Pseudepigrapha," in *Ancient Jewish Letters and the Beginnings of Christian Epistolography. WUNT 1*, no. 298 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 223.

<sup>45</sup> Philocrates is associated with love of learning at *Let. Ar.*, 1, 7, 171, 300, with philosophy at *Let. Ar.*, 2 and 7, and with Greek literature at *Let. Ar.*, 2 (I interpret "ἱστορία" as a reference not merely to works of Greek historiography but also fictional works written in a similar style, like those of the utopian travel writers) and at §300.

<sup>46</sup> Modrzejewski examines the full papyrological and literary evidence in detail for the existence of Dositheus, son of Drimylus (Joseph Méléze Modrzejewski, "Alexandrian Judaism and Its Problems," in *The Jews of Egypt* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 56-61).

<sup>47</sup> For the abandonment of key practices, see Phil., *Mig Abr.*, 89-93; for these apostates, or literally "rebels from the Law" ("ἀποστάνας"), see Phil., *Virt.*, 182.

<sup>48</sup> For example, *2 Maccabees* (4.10-16), *3 Maccabees* (2.29-31) and *Greek Esther* (14.6-10). Barclay posits that *3 Maccabees'* anxieties about Jews abandoning their religion for the Dionysiac cult may reflect a social reality where some Jews compromised their religion for social advancement (John M. G. Barclay, "Levels of Assimilation among Egyptian Jews," in *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 105). For these texts being broadly contemporary with the *Letter*, see White and Keddie, "The Epistle of Aristeas," 37-38.

reflecting waning religious conviction in Ps.-Aristeas' time. Thus, for textual and historical reasons, we must conclude Ps.-Aristeas' audience were Jews who had abandoned their Jewish beliefs and traditions or had diluted them in some way, most likely tempted by Hellenism's charms.

In this context of waning religious belief, an observant Jew like Ps.-Aristeas would naturally have been quite anxious to stem the tide of apostasy by urging those Jews who had completely apostacised or had diluted their Judaism to return to a proper Jewish practice and thus a firm Jewish identity. Accordingly, I propose that this was Ps.-Aristeas' chief intention in writing the *Letter*, namely to instil Jewish pride in those Jews of diminishing or non-existent religious conviction and re-affirm their identification with Jewishness. To accomplish this, Ps.-Aristeas essentially advertises Jewish identity by attractively portraying Jewishness in all its manifestations, so as to entice his audience back to a Jewish identity. Specifically, this portrayal involves depicting Jewish beliefs, practices and symbols, everything that makes a Jew distinctively Jewish, as being supreme or, at least, highly positive, often framing these signifiers of Jewishness in attractive Greek terms.

Firstly, Ps.-Aristeas asserts the supremacy of the one God, a foundational Jewish belief that he continually reinforces throughout the *Letter*. The text establishes this notion early on through the character of Aristeas, who, despite being Gentile, describes God as "overseer and creator of all", who "guides and lords over all."<sup>49</sup> In the same section, Aristeas even equates God with Zeus,<sup>50</sup> king of the gods in Greek mythology. Thus, the text frames the Jewish god and his sovereignty in Greek terms that all polytheists could understand, including any Jews

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<sup>49</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 16 (translations are my own, unless otherwise stated).

<sup>50</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 16: "God...whom all people (us included, O King) worship also, addressing him differently as Zeus and Dis."

who had abandoned Judaism for the Greek religion. Having established this notion of God's omnipotence, the *Letter* then repeatedly underscores it throughout the remainder of the text. For example, Eleazar, the High Priest, declares that "God is one,...his might is manifest in all things, with every place filled with his sovereignty."<sup>51</sup> Ps.-Aristeas is unambiguous here: God's power is unrelenting and all-permeating. There is no escaping God. Likewise, this same notion of inescapable power is asserted and sustained throughout the symposia that Ptolemy holds for the Jewish translators upon their arrival in Alexandria, testing their wisdom by asking them questions (187-300). Here, nearly every answer given by the translators invokes God, often characterising him as directing all human affairs, such as when one translator declares, "God, acting as lord, accomplishes and guides the affairs of all of us."<sup>52</sup> Strikingly, this whole scene of intellectual discourse between Ptolemy and the translators in a symposium seems to resemble Greek symposium literature, a genre typically involving discourse between kings and philosophers.<sup>53</sup> Ps.-Aristeas has thus seemingly appropriated a Greek genre to express the Jewish god's supremacy, just as Zeus is invoked earlier to characterise God as sovereign. Overall then, Ps.-Aristeas portrays God, who is fundamental to Jewish identity, highly positively as all-powerful and without equal, communicating this supremacy through Greek language and forms.

Secondly, Ps.-Aristeas, through his characterisation of the Jewish Law and its lawgiver, Moses, asserts the perfection of Jewish religious practices, encapsulated in this Law. Early in

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<sup>51</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 132.

<sup>52</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 195. A by no means exhaustive selection of further examples can be found at *Let. Ar.*, 193, 197, 205, 221, 227, 234, 239.

<sup>53</sup> Murray draws several parallels between the symposium scene in the *Letter* and Greek symposium literature (Oswyn Murray, "Aristeas and Ptolemaic Kingship," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 18, no. 2 (October 1967): 346-347).



his defence of the Jewish Law, Eleazar makes it clear that God's monotheism and supremacy are the foundations of the Law, as these concepts, Eleazar says, are the very first principles that Moses taught the Jews.<sup>54</sup> Now, if the Law is rooted in God and God is supreme, then the Law, and all the religious practices mandated by it, must be supreme also. Beyond God, however, as Wright observes, Ps.-Aristeas emphasises Moses' role in giving the Law, with the Law deriving from Moses' rational mind, not divine prophecy.<sup>55</sup> Instead of a prophet, Moses is repeatedly described as a lawgiver ("νομοθέτης"),<sup>56</sup> such that he seems to resemble the famed, semi-mythical lawgivers of Greece, like Solon or Lycurgus. This implicit characterisation of Moses as a kind of legendary, 'Solonic' figure is a clear example of the *Letter's* tendency to re-frame classic Jewish concepts in a Greek fashion, and from the ardently philhellenic point of view of Ps.-Aristeas' readers, this Greek refashioning of Moses as a wise, prudent legislator must have been deeply appealing. Crucially for Ps.-Aristeas' portrayal of the Law, if the Jewish lawgiver is characterised positively, then logically the Jewish Law must be too. And so, we see how Ps.-Aristeas' rather Greek portrayal of the origins of the Jews' holy legislation, Moses, serves to characterise their Law, and the Jewish customs mandated therein, as highly positive, if not supreme.

Beyond broad characterisations of the Law, Ps.-Aristeas also focuses on justifying the Jewish dietary prescriptions, characterising them as highly rational, through his use of Greek philosophical logic and terminology. Ps.-Aristeas chiefly accomplishes this through Eleazar, whose defence of the Law centres on rationalising these dietary prescriptions, specifically by

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<sup>54</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 132: "first among all things, [Moses] taught that God is one...".

<sup>55</sup> Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 265. However, his assertion that "the net result is a depiction of the Law as an entirely human artefact" is a stretch, since Moses' rational mind is the product of God (*Let. Ar.*, 139). Moreover, the Law is later described as having come into existence through God (*Let. Ar.*, 313).

<sup>56</sup> Specifically, at *Let. Ar.*, 131, 139, 148, 153 during Eleazar's sermon.

offering an allegorical explanation. These dietary laws, Eleazar says, ostensibly about which animals are pure or impure, are not really concerned with animals themselves, but rather with the promotion of justice.<sup>57</sup> This is the laws' true purpose, having been drawn up allegorically by Moses.<sup>58</sup> For example, carnivorous birds, which unjustly oppress others, are forbidden in order to remind Jews that oppression is forbidden and that one must live justly.<sup>59</sup> The animals are merely symbols<sup>60</sup> that reflect moral concepts, which Jews must heed.<sup>61</sup> As Barclay has observed, Greek philosophical terminology is strewn throughout this section of the *Letter*.<sup>62</sup> For example, each dietary prescription is said to possess "profound logic" and to reflect "right reason", a Stoic term.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, as Honigman notes, Ps.-Aristeas associates *διάνοια*, a common philosophical term, with the Law.<sup>64</sup> In this way, Ps.-Aristeas packages the dietary laws in Greek, philosophical language, so that, for his philhellenic readers, who are highly receptive to this philosophically-flavoured argumentation, the dietary practices are thoroughly justified. And any stubborn readers who might criticise the dietary prescriptions

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<sup>57</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 144, 169 (this assertion that justice is the chief aim of these prescriptions is repeated throughout Eleazar's sermon).

<sup>58</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 150: "τροπολογῶν" (following Hadas' Greek text).

<sup>59</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 146-147.

<sup>60</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 147: "παράσημον", 148: "σημειοῦσθαι", 150: "σημεῖον".

<sup>61</sup> Wright, and Honigman before him, has plausibly argued that this symbolic or allegorical interpretation of the food laws is inspired by Pythagoras' very similar interpretations of food prohibitions, where an animal's characteristics reflect a moral concept or lesson (Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 281; Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas", 21).

<sup>62</sup> Barclay, "Cultural Convergence," 146-7.

<sup>63</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 143: "λόγον βαθύν", 161: "ὀρθοῦ λόγου". Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 149.

<sup>64</sup> Sylvie Honigman, "Jews as the Best of All Greeks': Cultural Competition in the Literary Works of Alexandrian Judaeans of the Hellenistic Period," *Shifting Social Imaginaries in the Hellenistic Period: Narrations, Practices, and Images*, ed. Eftychia Stavrianopoulou (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 217.

as being arbitrary or rooted in nonsense mythology,<sup>65</sup> essentially as irrational, are rebutted by the fact that Greek philosophical language, which exudes rationality, permeates Eleazar's sermon. Overall, then, Ps.-Aristeas portrays the Jews' dietary customs, a central Jewish practice, as legitimate and quite superior to any potential criticisms.

Some scholars, however, are unwilling to view Eleazar's explanation of the dietary laws as an assertion of Jewish superiority. Wright, for example, interprets Ps.-Aristeas' use of Greek allegorical reasoning as being his way of framing the dietary laws as universally valid, particularly so he can demonstrate that "Jews and enlightened Gentiles share a common set of values."<sup>66</sup> For Wright, Ps.-Aristeas wants to bring Jews and Greeks together, not assert superiority. Similarly, Honigman sees Ps.-Aristeas' use of philosophical language as him inserting his ideology into Greece's philosophical tradition as being merely another Greek school of thought,<sup>67</sup> rather than framing Jewish customs as superior or separate from Hellenism. Such interpretations are probably reflections of wider historiographical trends that refuse to see Jewish history as characterised by conflict or resistance.<sup>68</sup> However, a more post-colonial outlook, as Charles believes, might be profitable here, which accepts the possibility of tension and resistance, particularly the idea that a colonised people might appropriate the coloniser's culture to use against them.<sup>69</sup> In this light, Ps.-Aristeas' use of

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<sup>65</sup> Ps.-Aristeas clearly anticipates some resistance from some of his readers at 168: "εἰκῆ", "μυθωδῶς."

<sup>66</sup> Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 282-283.

<sup>67</sup> Honigman, "'Jews as the Best of All Greeks,'" 213, 212-218.

<sup>68</sup> Michael L. Satlow, "Beyond Influence: Toward a New Historiographic Paradigm," in *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*, ed. Anita Norich and Yaron Z. Eliav (Providence, RI: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 37-38.

<sup>69</sup> Ronald Charles, "Hybridity and the Letter of Aristeas," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 40, no. 2 (2009): 246-248; John M. G. Barclay, "Jews in a Diaspora Environment: Some Analytical Tools," in *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 96-7. This idea that the colonised might appropriate the coloniser's culture is more fully explored in Chapter 4, due to the expansiveness

Greek philosophical terminology, far from presenting his ideology as Greek or universal, could most certainly signify superiority, in that his use of this philosophical language serves to implicitly frame the dietary laws as rational, thus rhetorically fortifying them against any accusation that these laws are irrational. Essentially, Ps.-Aristeas uses Greek philosophy against any critic who might root their own criticisms in philosophy. In this way, the food laws are represented, at least rhetorically, as impervious to attack, as though invincible.

In addition to Jewish beliefs and practices, Ps.-Aristeas' appealing portrayal of Jewishness also involves presenting the translated Torah as highly sacred. Besides explicit characterisations of the Torah as holy,<sup>70</sup> the chief way in which Ps.-Aristeas frames the translation as sacred is his construction of the narrative of the translation's reception (§308-317) in a way that mirrors the giving of the Law and its reception in the Bible.<sup>71</sup> For example, in the *Letter*, the translation is read out before Alexandria's Jewish community, just as Moses reads out the Law before the Israelites.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, the Alexandrian community, represented by their leaders, assent to the translation, much as the Israelites assent to God's commandments (i.e. the Law).<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the fact that modifications or emendations to

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of the debate about Ps.-Aristeas' ideology and the fact that Chapter 1's scope is limited to his portrayal of Jewishness, rather than non-Jews.

<sup>70</sup> E.g. *Let. Ar.*, 31: "the holiness and sanctity of the views contained in them [i.e. the books of the Torah]"; 313: "...the Law [i.e. the Torah] is holy and has come into existence through God."

<sup>71</sup> Ps.-Aristeas' interest in asserting the translation's sanctity has long been noted, such as by Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," 74-76; Hadas, "Introduction," 69; Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Septuagint as Holy Writ and the Philosophy of the Translators," *HUCA* 46 (1975), 94-98; Sylvie Honigman, "The central narrative: the transfiguration of history into charter myth," in *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the 'Letter of Aristeas'* (Florence: Routledge, 2003), 59; Hacham, "A New Exodus Story," 2-4.

<sup>72</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 308; Ex. 24:3, 7.

<sup>73</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 310-311; Ex. 19:8. Hacham has made this and the above point somewhat recently (Hacham, "A New Exodus Story," 3).

the Greek translation are forbidden clearly mirrors God's commandment that the Law should not be modified.<sup>74</sup> These correspondences between the *Letter's* narrative and the Bible's narrative implicitly frame the Torah translation as being just as holy as the Law that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. Undoubtedly, those of Ps.-Aristeas' readers still familiar with the Bible, such as those who had not abandoned Judaism completely, would have been receptive to these allusions. Thus, for these readers especially, the Greek translation of the Torah is presented as sacred, indeed, on par with the original commandments laid down by Moses.

In addition to sanctity, the Torah translation is portrayed as being of high literary quality as a kind of Greek classic, but nevertheless superior to all other Greek works. Early on, the *Letter* establishes that the Torah is to be translated for inclusion in the Library of Alexandria,<sup>75</sup> that great repository of Greek literature, thus implicitly framing the translation as a Greek literary classic.<sup>76</sup> The translation's literary excellence is then later confirmed by the fact that the translation is carried out by Jews well educated in Greek literature.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, as Honigman importantly notes, Demetrius' report at §29-32 on pre-existing Hebrew manuscripts of the Torah employs the language of Alexandrian textual criticism,<sup>78</sup> a discipline involving the emendation of classical texts, especially Homer, to arrive at the 'original' version of the text.<sup>79</sup> This apparent application of textual criticism, or at least its language, to the

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<sup>74</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 311-312; Deut. 4:2.

<sup>75</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 9-11.

<sup>76</sup> Honigman, "'Jews as the Best of All Greeks'," 228.

<sup>77</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 121.

<sup>78</sup> Honigman, "The central narrative: the transfiguration of history into charter myth," 44-45. For Demetrius' report, see *Let. Ar.*, 30-32.

<sup>79</sup> Tim Whitmarsh, "Building the Archive: Hellenistic Alexandria," in *Ancient Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 129.

Torah manuscripts implies the Jewish scriptures are deserving of this Alexandrian discipline and, therefore, are at least on par with the Greek classics, if not the Homeric epics specifically.<sup>80</sup> In reality, however, the Torah, and its Greek translation, surpass these texts because, as already demonstrated, they are sacred, being of divine origin, unlike any Greek text. Moreover, although the underlying Hebrew text might need to undergo emendation, the resulting Greek translation is perfect, with no additions or subtractions permitted,<sup>81</sup> quite unlike the Homeric text, which was always being emended without end.<sup>82</sup> Thus, Ps.-Aristeas frames the Torah translation as a literary Greek text, an attractive portrayal for his philhellenic audience, but the translation, being sacred, of non-Greek origin and ultimately perfect, also stands outside and above the Greek tradition as a superior text.

Moreover, Ps.-Aristeas also portrays locations of religious significance highly positively. Firstly, he depicts Judaea, the ancestral Jewish homeland, idealistically in the style of the Greek utopian travel authors. The genre of utopian geography was a fusion of “the Greek tradition of ethnographical geography...with the genre of philosophical speculation about the ideal *politeia*.”<sup>83</sup> Utopian works usually centred around a journey to, and a description of, an

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<sup>80</sup> Stewart has also argued that the historical Demetrius had a significant reputation as an accomplished philosopher and lawgiver (Tyler A. Stewart, “Jewish Paideia: Greek Education in the Letter of Aristeas and 2 Maccabees,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism (JSJ)* 48, no. 2 (2017): 190). If true, then Ps.-Aristeas, by having Demetrius describe the Law as philosophical and pure in this report (*Let. Ar.*, 31), uses Demetrius’ reputation as an ‘expert’ to corroborate the idea that the translated Law will be philosophically meaningful. This would only enhance the translation’s literary merit.

<sup>81</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 311.

<sup>82</sup> So endless and wild was the speculation of some Alexandrian Homer scholars that they at times became the laughing-stock of satirists, such as Timon of Phlius (Whitmarsh, “Building the Archive,” 129).

<sup>83</sup> Honigman, “Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas,” 24.

imaginary foreign land and polity, often a remote island.<sup>84</sup> Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been argued that Ps.-Aristeas' portrayal of Judaea (§112-120) follows certain conventions of utopian geography.<sup>85</sup> This is undoubtedly the case. For, although Ps.-Aristeas is Jewish and so Judaea is not truly foreign to him, nevertheless, he presents Judaea as foreign and distant through the guise of the Gentile narrator, Aristeas, who travels to Judaea and describes it from his outsider perspective, as though a Greek geographer visiting a far-off land. Also, although not an island, Judaea is described as surrounded by the Jordan River and natural defences,<sup>86</sup> as though a metaphorical island, remote and isolated, in accordance with the utopian genre. The historical reality of different kingdoms vying for control over Judaea is also absent. This is a pristine Judaea, kept apart from that historical world of geo-political turmoil. Moreover, Ps.-Aristeas' Judaea is naturally bountiful with its ever-flooding river that sustains a large population, all motifs that feature in utopian travel literature.<sup>87</sup> This depiction of Judaea, not according to historical accuracy, but in the utopian style, clearly constitutes an imagined, ideal portrayal,<sup>88</sup> and one which would have appealed especially to Ps.-Aristeas' cultured audience, for they were likely well-acquainted with the utopian writers, seeing that two such authors, Euhemerus and Theopompus, are referenced later in the *Letter*.<sup>89</sup> And so,

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<sup>84</sup> Kimberly Peterson, "Living on the edge: the travel narratives of Euhemerus, Iamboulos and Lucian" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2001), 4-5.

<sup>85</sup> Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," 78. Honigman has recently affirmed this argument.

<sup>86</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 116, 118.

<sup>87</sup> Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 24; *Let. Ar.*, 112-116.

<sup>88</sup> Utopian literature did not necessarily involve strictly ideal or perfect places (Peterson, "Living on the edge: the travel narratives of Euhemerus, Iamboulos and Lucian," 4), but these aforementioned descriptions of Judaea's natural abundance make clear that this is an ideal portrayal.

<sup>89</sup> Euhemerus (indirectly mentioned): *Let. Ar.*, 135-137. Theopompus: *Let. Ar.*, 314. Euhemerus wrote *Hiera Anagraphe* and Theopompus wrote *Meropis Ge* (Hadas, "Introduction," 49). It seems unlikely that Ps.-Aristeas would include references to these authors, if they were totally unknown to his own audience.

by adopting the conventions of utopian geographical literature, Ps.-Aristeas constructs an ideal image of the Jewish homeland that accorded with the literary sensibilities of his readers.

In addition to Judaea's idealism, Ps.-Aristeas also represents Jerusalem as the ideal *polis*, though firmly rooted in Biblical descriptions of the city. He conveys this idealism by framing Jerusalem according to the specifications expounded in Greek philosophical texts on the ideal *polis*. For example, Ps.-Aristeas places Jerusalem in the centre of Judaea in accordance with Plato's statement that a city should be as close as possible to its country's centre.<sup>90</sup> That the historical Jerusalem is not actually located in Judaea's centre merely demonstrates that this is an idealistic portrayal. Moreover, as Honigman notes, Ps.-Aristeas' description of the Jerusalem Temple's water-supply seems to be motivated by Aristotle's assertion that a city should have a sound water-supply.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Ps.-Aristeas, by including a citadel in his description of Jerusalem, may be portraying Jerusalem as a monarchy, following Aristotle's claim that citadels are suited to monarchy,<sup>92</sup> although, instead of a king, Jerusalem has a High Priest, as a kind of theocratic monarch.<sup>93</sup> Now, this presence of theocracy suggests that Ps.-Aristeas' Jerusalem is not merely an ideal Greek *polis*, but also a distinctly Jewish entity, since Greek monarchies had kings but never high priests. Indeed, Ps.-Aristeas' depiction of Jerusalem also corresponds with Biblical descriptions,<sup>94</sup> imbuing his portrayal with a pre-Greek, Biblical atmosphere. For example, his depiction of Jerusalem as being on a mountain

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<sup>90</sup> Pl., *Leg.*, 745b. This observation is taken from Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 196.

<sup>91</sup> Arist., *Pol.*, 1330b; *Let. Ar.*, 89. Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 23.

<sup>92</sup> Arist., *Pol.*, 1330b; *Let. Ar.*, 100-104.

<sup>93</sup> Honigman first suggested the idea of Jerusalem as a theocracy, totally separate from monarchy. Wright takes up this idea but considers the High Priest a kind of monarch as part of a broader Jerusalemite theocracy (Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 23-24; Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 216-217).

<sup>94</sup> Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," 77.



mirrors Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1.<sup>95</sup> In Ezekiel, the Temple faces east and has some kind of a water-supply, just as in the *Letter*.<sup>96</sup> And, as Hadas has already demonstrated, Ps.-Aristeas' description of Eleazar in the Temple employs vocabulary from the Septuagint.<sup>97</sup> These Biblical parallels seem to impart sanctity on Ps.-Aristeas' Jerusalem and, taken together with the apparent allusions to Plato and Aristotle's writings on the ideal *polis*, result in an imagined but highly idealistic portrayal of Jerusalem.

This, however, is more than a mere positive portrayal. It is an assertion of Jerusalem's superiority over other cities. Ps.-Aristeas makes this unmistakably clear through his comparison (or *synkrisis*) between Jerusalem and Alexandria (§107-109), in which the latter is implicitly portrayed as inferior to Jerusalem. Specifically, the comparison centres around the cities' respective sizes. Ps.-Aristeas states that Jerusalem is of suitable proportion and thus receives abundant agricultural yields. This, Ps.-Aristeas says, contrasts with large cities, whose great prosperity has attracted people from the countryside, leaving very few to cultivate the fields outside the city, producing little agriculture.<sup>98</sup> Significantly, Ps.-Aristeas gives Alexandria as an example of these vast cities where, unlike Jerusalem, agriculture has suffered, thus implicitly demonstrating that "Jerusalem may not be the bigger city, but it is nonetheless the better one."<sup>99</sup> Further justifying this assertion of Jerusalem's superiority are the undertones

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<sup>95</sup> Isa. 2:2 and Mic. 4:1 both state, "the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established" (New International Version).

<sup>96</sup> Ezek. 47:1: "the temple faced east" (NIV translation).

<sup>97</sup> The description (*Let. Ar.*, 96-99) specifically corresponds to vocabulary from Exodus 28-29 from the Septuagint (Hadas, "Text, Translation, Commentary and Critical Notes," in *Aristeas to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas)* (New York: Harper, 1951; repr., New York: Ktav, 1973), 137-139). Moore has recently affirmed this interpretation (Moore, "For the Sake of Mice and Weasels," 232).

<sup>98</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 107-108.

<sup>99</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 109. The quote is taken from Moore, "For the Sake of Mice and Weasels," 233.

of Aristotelian moderation that run through the comparison. For, as Honigman observes, the notion that moderately sized cities are superior to cities of great size reflects “the Aristotelian prescription of a moderate size for the ideal city” from Aristotle’s *Politics*.<sup>100</sup> This distinctly Greek notion naturally bolsters Ps.-Aristeas’ argument about Jerusalem’s superiority, since his philhellenic audience, however sceptical about the bold claim that Jerusalem surpassed Alexandria, was undoubtedly receptive to this kind of philosophical thinking and could identify with it. In sum, then, Ps.-Aristeas leaves his reader with the unmistakable impression that Jerusalem is superior to all other cities, especially Alexandria, a claim reinforced by his Aristotelian reasoning.

Thus, the *Letter* portrays the various individual elements of Jewish identity, whether beliefs, practices or geographical symbols, as supreme and in a distinctly Greek manner. Significantly, these individual portrayals, when taken together, constitute a highly attractive portrayal of Jewishness for Ps.-Aristeas’ readers. For, by positively depicting different Jewish concepts as superior, Ps.-Aristeas makes Jewishness as a whole seem superior and thus exceedingly appealing, naturally instilling Jewish pride in his readers, who can be assured that they have a magnificent heritage. Then, there is Ps.-Aristeas’ habit of framing Jewish concepts in Greek terms, such as when he describes the dietary laws using Greek philosophical language or when he depicts Judaea according to the conventions of utopian travel literature. This tendency of Ps.-Aristeas necessarily intensifies this appeal of Jewishness already established by his assertions of Jewish superiority, since Ps.-Aristeas’ readers, being passionate philhellenes as I have argued, would have found this rather ‘Greek’ portrayal of Jewishness to be deeply attractive. And so, by employing attractive Greek language and

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<sup>100</sup> Honigman, “Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas,” 24; Arist., *Pol.*, 1326a-1326b.

literary forms, Ps.-Aristeas presents these readers with an ideology that is not only supreme, but also one which they, as philhellenes, would naturally want to support and identify with.

Thus, this evidently attractive portrayal of Jewishness draws Ps.-Aristeas' readers closer to Judaism and its culture, seemingly enticing them to re-embrace a Jewish identity. In essence, the portrayal constitutes a kind of implicit, but attractive promotion of Jewishness. For this is not a mere neutral, colourless representation of Judaism, but one that possesses a strong persuasive, almost argumentative quality. It is a portrayal that seems to urge the reader towards Judaism with its alluring use of Greek language and forms, and, with its proud assertions of Jewish pre-eminence, seems to inflame whatever Jewish pride the reader already possessed, intensifying their identification with Jewishness, or in the case of those who had abandoned Judaism completely, reviving their attachment that had come to be lost. Indeed, by portraying Jewishness in all its manifestations as supreme, Ps.-Aristeas implicitly frames the identity along with its religious ideology as one that must be supported and maintained, making the reader feel as though they are obligated to embrace and uphold such a way of life. In essence, then, this is a kind of 'promotional' representation of Jewishness, in that it seems to promote and encourage a Jewish identity, not by explicitly telling the reader to support Judaism, but by framing this religious identity in a highly positive and thus persuasive light.

This 'promotional' portrayal of Jewishness that seems to attract the reader to a Jewish identity is no accidental feature of the text, rather it is a reflection, and thus proof, of Ps.-Aristeas' overarching purpose: to re-affirm Jewish identity among those Alexandrians whose attachment to Judaism was waning or totally lost. For, logically, a portrayal which frames Judaism in so positive a light as to urge the reader towards the religion could only be the

handiwork of someone advocating for or promoting a Jewish identity. And so, we must conclude that Ps.-Aristeas, the author of this attractive portrayal, was writing to promote or advertise this identity. This 'advertisement' of Jewishness, moreover, was certainly not aimed at those Jews already quite attached to Judaism or comfortable in their identity, for they needed no persuasion. They were already adhering to Jewish beliefs and customs. Rather, this promotion of Jewishness must have been for those who had abandoned Judaism and thus their Jewish identity, or those whose devotion to Judaism had diminished,<sup>101</sup> for these individuals had little or no commitment to Judaism, and so, from the religious mindset of Ps.-Aristeas, they needed the *Letter's* persuasive portrayal of Jewishness the most. They, in short, needed to be brought back to the religion of their forefathers, and portraying this religious identity as supreme, while communicating it in a fashionable Greek manner, would have been an especially effective way of accomplishing this goal. Thus, on the balance of probabilities, we must conclude that Ps.-Aristeas' chief purpose in writing the *Letter* was to draw his readers, via subtle persuasion, back to a strong Jewish identity.

In summary, rather than being aimed at Greeks to convert them or defend Judaism, or at Jews to persuade them to embrace Greek culture, *The Letter of Aristeas* was in fact primarily addressed to ardent philhellenes with a Jewish upbringing, who had forsaken their ancestral religion or become less devoted to it. Ps.-Aristeas' purpose in writing was to attract them back to identifying with Judaism, that is, to re-affirm their identity. To accomplish this, Ps.-Aristeas sought to promote Jewish identity, naturally by crafting a highly attractive representation of Jewishness in all its forms. The attractiveness of this representation lay in its depiction of Jewish beliefs and customs as pre-eminent, while framing these signifiers of Jewishness in a

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<sup>101</sup> For the historicity of such individuals, see footnotes 20-22.

desirable Greek fashion. In this way, Ps.-Aristeas hoped to win back those Jews who had lost their way.

## Chapter 2: Undermining rivals

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Despite what has been discussed in Chapter 1, it is not enough for an author striving to revive Jewish feeling to merely portray Jewish identity attractively and to depict Judaism as preeminent. If Pseudo-Aristeas was to convincingly demonstrate that Judaism was the most valid ideology and the one most deserving of support, he also needed to refute any rival ideologies to which Jews might have been attracted in place of Judaism. And this, as this chapter shall demonstrate, is exactly what he does. For, throughout the *Letter*, Ps.-Aristeas undermines and subverts Alexandria's dominant politico-cultural authorities, namely the Ptolemaic kings and prominent authors and philosophers with their rival ideologies, while also denouncing certain potentially attractive aspects of Greek culture. In this way, Ps.-Aristeas removes the ideological competition, leaving only Judaism standing, thus demonstrating that there exists no ideological alternative to Judaism. And so, ultimately, by refuting alternative ideologies, Ps.-Aristeas bolsters his argument that Judaism is most legitimate, since no ideology can equal or surpass Judaism, and therefore it must be supported. With this knowledge, as well as Ps.-Aristeas' attractive portrayal of Jewishness, his readers could not help but re-identify with Judaism.

This chapter will firstly survey current scholarly opinion concerning Ps.-Aristeas' disposition to non-Jewish ideologies and worldviews and concerning his portrayal of non-Jews in the *Letter*. Secondly, I will demonstrate precisely how Ps.-Aristeas undermines Alexandria's various cultural and political authorities, beginning with his subversive portrayal of Ptolemy I and II. Then, I will examine the other forms of subtle mockery against Ptolemy II and also his royal philosophers. Further, I will argue that Ps.-Aristeas also competes with the Utopian

travel writers, particularly Euhemerus, both artistically and intellectually, ultimately aiming to replace their works with his own authoritative work, *The Letter of Aristeas*. Lastly, I shall explore Ps.-Aristeas' criticisms of certain aspects of Greek culture, such as polytheism.

Scholarly opinion regarding Ps.-Aristeas' disposition to non-Jews and their ideologies has fluctuated significantly over time, with more recent scholars now viewing the *Letter* as inclusive or even universalist in its outlook on non-Jews. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholarly consensus held that the *Letter* was a form of Jewish apologetics, even propaganda, aimed at defending Judaism against Greek criticisms.<sup>102</sup> However, this notion of a somewhat antagonistic Ps.-Aristeas was refuted by Tcherikover in 1949, arguing Ps.-Aristeas was seeking to unite Jews and educated Greeks under a universalist philosophy.<sup>103</sup> Many scholars, in more recent times, have found this idea of an inclusive Ps.-Aristeas very attractive, seeing little, if any, antagonism and certainly no mockery of non-Jews. Wright, for example, sees Ps.-Aristeas as promoting universalism and rejects any suggestion of mockery at Ptolemy's expense.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, Honigman is hesitant to see antagonism, other than against Egyptians. For Honigman, there is, at most, competition between Jews and non-Jews, but never hostile opposition.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, and importantly for the portrayal of non-Jews, More and Hacham both argue that Ps.-Aristeas sought to legitimise Jewish life in Egypt, portraying Ptolemy II positively to accomplish this goal.<sup>106</sup> Goldstein has argued much the same.<sup>107</sup> Certain

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<sup>102</sup> Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," 59

<sup>103</sup> Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," 69-71.

<sup>104</sup> Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 128, 282-283.

<sup>105</sup> Honigman, "'Jews as the Best of All Greeks'," 212-218.

<sup>106</sup> Hacham, "A New Exodus Story?" 18-19; More, "Kingship Ideology," 318-319.

<sup>107</sup> Jonathan A. Goldstein, "The Message of Aristeas to Philokrates: In the Second Century B.C.E., Obey the Torah, Venerate the Temple of Jerusalem, but Speak Greek, and Put Your Hopes in the Ptolemaic Dynasty," in *Eretz*

academics, however, such as Gruen and Charles, have dissented, particularly regarding Ptolemy II's portrayal. These argue that Ptolemy is portrayed highly positively on the surface, but beneath that surface runs a subversive undertone that gradually undermines this positive portrayal to a noticeable degree.<sup>108</sup> Lastly, Birnbaum views the *Letter* as expressing some antagonism towards certain Gentile practices, ultimately promoting the notion of Jewish superiority.<sup>109</sup>

Overall then, despite some dissent, current scholars broadly reject the idea that Ps.-Aristeas possessed a hostile disposition to non-Jews. However, I agree with the dissenters in that I believe the *Letter* is not wholly positive in its stance towards non-Jews, especially educated Greeks. Indeed, I contend that Ps.-Aristeas critiques, overtly or subtly, various non-Jewish 'authorities', whether political or intellectual figures or dominant Gentile ideologies, to demonstrate that no ideology could ever replace Judaism, the preeminent, and thus most legitimate, ideology – a crucial message for those who had abandoned Judaism for non-Jewish belief-systems.

Firstly, Ps.-Aristeas criticises the Ptolemaic regime, beginning with Ptolemy I, whom he associates with fear, relocation and slavery. For Ps.-Aristeas describes Ptolemy as relocating and enslaving people during his conquest of all Syria and Phoenicia, "subjugating all through

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*Israel, Israel and the Jewish Diaspora: Mutual Relations*, ed. Menachem Mor (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 1-21.

<sup>108</sup> Erich Gruen, "The Letter of Aristeas and the Cultural Context of the Septuagint," in *The Construct of Identity in Hellenistic Judaism: Essays on Early Jewish Literature and History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 422-429; Ronald Charles, "Hybridity and the Letter of Aristeas," *Journal for the Study of Judaism (JSJ)* 40, no. 2 (2009): 249.

<sup>109</sup> Ellen Birnbaum, "Allegorical Interpretation and Jewish Identity among Alexandrian Jewish Writers," in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen*, ed. David Edward Aune, Torrey Seland, and Jarl Henning Ulrichsen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 311.



terror.”<sup>110</sup> Notably, Ptolemy transports 100,000 Jews to Egypt, without any mention of their willingness, 70,000 of whom he enslaves, specifically the young, the elderly and women.<sup>111</sup> Admittedly, Ps.-Aristeas provides an excuse for Ptolemy’s enslavement of Jews (though notably not for his conquest), namely that he was compelled by his soldiers, but this is not surprising, since Ps.-Aristeas needed to be somewhat subtle in his criticisms to avoid punishment, which the regime sometimes inflicted on its critics.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, Ps.-Aristeas’ portrayal firmly associates Ptolemy I with terror, conquest and the enslavement of Jews.

Another, and far more crucial, way in which Ps.-Aristeas undermines Ptolemaic authority is his hyperbolic portrayal of Ptolemy II as obsequious towards the Jews. For Ptolemy displays a constant, and seemingly unrelenting, desire to please the Jews. He liberates Alexandria’s Jews, bestowing on them monetary benefits, commissions lavish gifts for Eleazar, arranges long symposia and, of course, orders the Torah translation. All these generous deeds, ostensibly positive, when taken together, go above and beyond the sort of kindness a Ptolemy might ordinarily show,<sup>113</sup> making Ptolemy seem remarkably obsequious. This is only underscored by further hyperbolic details, namely the incomprehensible intricacy of Ptolemy’s gifts, his prostration before the Torah seven times, his suspension of all business unrelated to the translators, and his constant approval of every Jewish translator during the symposia.<sup>114</sup> This blatant obsequiousness, moreover, gives the impression that Ptolemy is

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<sup>110</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 12, alternatively translated as, “making all subject to fear,” as though the terror that Ptolemy inflicts is inescapable and all pervasive, only adding to the drama.

<sup>111</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 12-13.

<sup>112</sup> For example, Ptolemy I had a poet drowned for criticising his marriage to his sister, Arsinoe (*Ath.*, 621a).

<sup>113</sup> Nowhere in Ptolemaic history does this kind of generosity to the Jewish community seem to be extended.

<sup>114</sup> For Ptolemy’s gifts, see 51-82; for his worshipping of the Torah, see 177; for his suspension of all business, 174-175; for his very frequent approvals of the Jewish translators, see 189-191, 193-198, 200-202, 206-213, 217,

subservient to the *Letter's* Jews, thus inverting the expected power dynamics between ruler and ruled. Such a subversive power reversal not only belittles and undermines Ptolemy, but also provokes humour at Ptolemy's expense, especially the hyperbole of a king gleefully enacting the will of his Jewish subjects,<sup>115</sup> a king who, by the narrative's end, is effectively a servant to the Jewish people.<sup>116</sup> The humour is also at the historical Ptolemies' expense, since such a subversive portrayal would have been humiliating to them, something which Ps.-Aristeas' audience would likely have been aware of. And so, Ps.-Aristeas' portrayal of Ptolemy the character as being in the power of his Jewish subjects strikes me as a kind of slap in the face to the regime, however indirect.

More argues that Ps.-Aristeas' portrayal of Ptolemy II is actually designed to present him as an ideal king in order to increase the Ptolemaic regime's appeal in the eyes of Jews.<sup>117</sup> However, although Ptolemy's eagerness to serve Jewish interests certainly makes him ideal from a Jewish perspective (albeit to the point of comical hyperbole), this ideal, fictionalised Ptolemy would have been very different to the historical Ptolemaic rulers, for these were, in reality, idolatrous polytheists, who deified deceased royalty and embraced the Egyptian

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220, 224-230, 232, 234, 237-241, 243-247, 249, 252-253, 255-258, 260, 264-273, 277, 279-284, 286, 288, 291, 293-294.

<sup>115</sup> I use 'humour' in the sense that Bremmer and Roodenburg use it, "any message – transmitted in action, speech, writing, images or music – intended to produce a smile or laugh" (Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, "Introduction: History and Humour," in *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 1).

<sup>116</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence that the very last deed of Ptolemy II at the end of the narrative is to put a request to High Priest Eleazar, the spiritual leader of the Jewish people, beseeching him to allow the Jewish translators to come back to visit him (*Let. Ar.*, 321).

<sup>117</sup> More, "Kingship Ideology," 318-319.

religion, contravening Jewish principles that Eleazar clearly expounds in his sermon.<sup>118</sup> Further, they practiced brother-sister incest and possibly persecuted Jews occasionally, such as under Ptolemy (IX) Lathyrus.<sup>119</sup> Thus, it seems highly implausible that Ptolemy's character in the *Letter* could be used to endorse the historical Ptolemaic rulers, since they differed enormously from Ps.-Aristeas' Ptolemy, something which Ps.-Aristeas' readers surely knew. His readers were simply unlikely to conflate the real Ptolemies with the Ptolemy of the *Letter* and view the actual regime positively in light of the fictional Ptolemy's kindness. If anything, Ptolemy II's extreme, even hyperbolic kindness to Jews, which More views as an ideal portrayal, would likely have brought into sharp focus the immorality of the historical Ptolemies, thus underscoring it. In this way, the fictionalised character of Ptolemy II undermines the authority of the Ptolemaic regime, especially from the point of view of those readers who still had some attachment to Jewish morality.

Additionally, Ps.-Aristeas employs other forms of indirect mockery against Ptolemy II, such as assertions of God's supremacy in the context of this Ptolemy, which make him appear inferior to the Jewish god. The most striking example of this is when Aristeas, having petitioned Ptolemy to release the Jewish slaves, prays to God to "dispose the king's mind to release them all," extolling God's power over humans.<sup>120</sup> And crucially, Ptolemy does grant Aristeas' request, suggesting that God did indeed sway Ptolemy to liberate the slaves, and this is confirmed three sections later, when Aristeas states outright that God compelled

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<sup>118</sup> In his sermon, Eleazar condemns idolatry (134-135), Egyptian theriolatry (138) and the practice of deifying humans (135).

<sup>119</sup> Aryeh Kasher, "Milestones in the political history of Jews in Egypt," in *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: the Struggle for Equal Rights* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 12.

<sup>120</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 17: "τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτοῦ κατασκευάσαι πρὸς τὸ τοῦς ἅπαντας ἀπολυθῆναι."

Ptolemy to grant his request.<sup>121</sup> This passage thus asserts God's control over Ptolemy, certainly making him look inferior, while underscoring God's power over all, even kings. It also seems reasonable to suggest that this portrayal hints to Ps.-Aristeas' readers that the historical Ptolemaic regime in their own time is not beyond God's sway, subtly undermining that regime's authority. Moreover, the idea of God swaying Ptolemy towards being favourably disposed to Jews also explains his mysteriously positive conduct during the *Letter*. Whereas, before Aristeas' prayer, Ptolemy seemingly accepted the Jews' slavery (for Aristeas had to persuade him to release them) and showed some hesitancy in freeing them,<sup>122</sup> afterwards, Ptolemy is extremely eager to support his Jewish subjects, as previously demonstrated. It would seem, then, that God was responsible for Ptolemy's positive actions throughout the *Letter*, making him act kindly toward the Jews, as though a puppet of the divine.

Ps.-Aristeas continues this theme of Ptolemy II's smallness in the face of God, only providing further mockery, albeit subtle, at his expense. For example, as Charles has noted, during the symposia, the translators profusely praise Ptolemy's manifold virtues, such as his righteousness and humanity, specifically as being gifts from God.<sup>123</sup> Such praise is

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<sup>121</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 19-20. Trotter also agrees with my argument here that God coerces Ptolemy to release the slaves (Jonathan Trotter, "The Homeland and the Legitimation of the Diaspora: Egyptian Jewish Origin Stories" *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigraphy (JSP)* 28, no.2: 101).

<sup>122</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 17: "The king paused for not too long a time" ("Οὐδε πολὺν χρόνον ἐπισχών,..."). The king, admittedly, does not hesitate for a considerably long time, but he does nevertheless pause for a short while. Also, when Ptolemy does give his reply, he lifts his head up (*Let. Ar.*, 19), as though he had been deep in thought – another sign of hesitancy.

<sup>123</sup> Charles, "Hybridity and the Letter of Aristeas," 249. There are countless examples of this praise to be found in the symposium, becoming particularly frequent on the last two days: *Let. Ar.*, 199, 219, 224, 229, 249, 267, 270, 271, 272, 274, 276, 280, 282, 287, 290, 291, 292.

undoubtedly positive, and yet it is superficial and arguably subversive, because Ptolemy is not the source of these qualities. It is God who bestows them. Ptolemy's greatness is therefore dependent on God and, crucially, is nothing without God. So, as the translators praise Ptolemy, they simultaneously humble him also. In the same vein, Ps.-Aristeas makes clear that Ptolemy is only a human, having a translator urge Ptolemy to remember that he is human and that God destroys the arrogant,<sup>124</sup> implying that he should not think himself a god. Considering the historical context of the *Letter*, in which deceased royals were deified, it is difficult to avoid seeing this as a repudiation of the Ptolemaic practice of deifying dead kings and queens. These royal cults were, in essence, religious and ideological competitors to Judaism with state support and so, naturally, Ps.-Aristeas would want to dissuade his readers from these cults by pointing out the foolishness of believing that kings, dead or alive, could ever be anything more than human.<sup>125</sup> Thus, again, we see mockery at Ptolemy the character's expense, but with implications for the historical regime also.

Beyond Ptolemy himself, Ps.-Aristeas also undermines the standing of Greek philosophers and their ideologies, especially Ptolemy's own philosophers. Ps.-Aristeas accomplishes this unmistakably in the symposia, for, here, the narrator, Aristeas, describes how Ptolemy's philosophers praise the Jewish translators, because, as Aristeas notes, they far surpassed the royal philosophers in their conduct and reason.<sup>126</sup> Here, the *Letter* clearly undermines the competence and thus prestige of Ptolemy's philosophers, asserting that the Jews' command

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<sup>124</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 263.

<sup>125</sup> Eleazar makes an even more direct attack on deifying important men in his sermon at *Let. Ar.*, 135.

<sup>126</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 235: "ταῖς ἀγωγαῖς καὶ τῷ λόγῳ πολὺ προέχοντες αὐτῶν ἦσαν." "ἀγωγαῖς" could even be taken as "education" or "line of argument" (LSJ, s.v. ἀγωγή, A.II.3) and "λόγῳ" as "discourse" (LSJ, s.v. λόγος, VI.3), both of which still serves to compliment the Jewish translators' intellectual abilities.

of philosophical reasoning, exemplified by the translators, outshines that of the Greeks. Moreover, the reason why the Jewish philosophers excel is because, as Aristeas says, they made God the starting point or foundation (*καταρχή*) of their reasoning, a common theme during the symposia.<sup>127</sup> By incorporating God, the philosophical wisdom of the Jewish translators has been thoroughly enriched, but that is not all, for, as the translators note frequently, the benefits of Greek philosophy cannot be accessed without God. For example, a translator will often give a philosophically Greek response to Ptolemy's questions, but then state words to the effect that none of this advice is possible without God's will. So, at section 237, moderation (*"σωφροσύνη"*) is recommended, but this is unattainable "unless God disposes one's mind to it."<sup>128</sup> The implications of this are enormous. The very efficacy of Greek philosophy (which is certainly not worthless from Ps.-Aristeas' point-of-view) becomes entirely dependent on God's will. Without God as the foundation of one's philosophising, one's philosophy has no power. Thus, Ps.-Aristeas conveys a crucial message for his Greek-loving readers, namely that Greek philosophy is no replacement for God; one must incorporate God, or else philosophy is simply worthless.

Now, if God is necessary for philosophical ideas to truly have power, then one needs to be Jewish to have this access to God, because Greeks only have limited access to God, according to the *Letter*. Though non-Jewish Greeks seem to have some access to God, such as being able to pray to him,<sup>129</sup> nevertheless their access, and likewise knowledge, of God is limited. To

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<sup>127</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 235: "ὡς ἂν ἀπὸ θεοῦ τὴν καταρχὴν ποιούμενοι." Almost verbatim statements appear at *Let. Ar.*, 189, 200 and 201 also.

<sup>128</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 237: "ταύτης [i.e. τῆς σωφροσύνης] δὲ οὐκ ἔστι τυχεῖν, ἐὰν μὴ θεὸς κατασκευάσῃ τὴν διάνοιαν εἰς τοῦτο." Countless more examples of this tendency to restrict the efficacy of philosophical advice to what God permits abound throughout the *Symposia*, *Let. Ar.*, 226, 227, 245, 246, 248, 251, 252, 256, 265, 266, 268, 269.

<sup>129</sup> E.g. Aristeas' prayer to God (*Let. Ar.*, 17) and the prayers of Theopompus and Theodectes (*Let. Ar.*, 314, 316).

demonstrate, Aristeas, the one Gentile who knows the most about Judaism in the *Letter*, is still ignorant enough to have to ask Eleazar to clarify certain doctrinal issues. Aristeas might be a so-called 'enlightened Gentile', but he is no match for a Jew intellectually.<sup>130</sup> Further demonstrating their limited access is the fact that Gentiles seem to be forbidden from divulging Jewish knowledge, especially the Torah, to the non-Jewish masses, for Demetrius recounts how Theopompus and Theodectes both tried to include Biblical content in their works and so God punished them.<sup>131</sup> Though Aristeas divulges knowledge about Judaism to Ptolemy, this has positive consequences and is thus divinely permitted,<sup>132</sup> but, in general, non-Jews seem barred from divulging Jewish knowledge, specifically that of the Torah, or so Ps.-Aristeas would have his readers believe.<sup>133</sup> Jews, on the other hand, such as Eleazar and the translators, can freely reveal Jewish wisdom without divine punishment. To have this kind of access to Judaism, and thus to God, without whom philosophy is useless, Ps.-Aristeas' readers would simply have to re-embrace their Jewish heritage.

Besides Ptolemy's philosophers, Ps.-Aristeas also clashes with prominent philosophical authors, namely the Utopian travel writers, such as Euhemerus and perhaps Theopompus,

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<sup>130</sup> Wright is a proponent of this idea that certain characters, like Aristeas and Ptolemy II, are 'enlightened Gentiles,' who understand and happily tolerate Judaism and thus are different from other Greeks, namely non-elite ones (Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 252). However, I will contend with this theory more fully in Chapter 4.

<sup>131</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 314, 316. God even states the reason for the punishment outright, "[Theopompus], in his meddlesomeness, had been wanting to reveal divine concerns to the common people" (*Let. Ar.*, 315).

<sup>132</sup> Aristeas tells Ptolemy about the Jewish god, which leads to the Jewish captives being freed (*Let. Ar.*, 16-20).

<sup>133</sup> Ps.-Aristeas might also be pushing this idea to urge his audience not to believe what they read about Jews in Gentile literature, as Alexandrian Jews had been forced to deal with pervasive slanders by Egyptians, such as Manetho, who alleged that Moses was really the leader of a leper mob that was ultimately expelled from Egypt (John M. G. Barclay, "Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt," in *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 33-34).

competing with these authors, intellectually and artistically, even seeking to replace their works with his own. To demonstrate, Ps.-Aristeas imitates the genre of the Utopian travel writers, for, as already demonstrated in Chapter 1, he writes in a Utopian style throughout Aristeas' description of Jerusalem and Judaea. But there is an element of competitiveness here, because, unlike the Utopian authors, who wrote about invented places, Ps.-Aristeas applies the Utopian style to genuine, sacred places. His work is intended to have more substance, I believe, to be more meaningful. This would certainly explain Ps.-Aristeas' reference to the books of the *μυθολόγοι* at 322, where he sets his work apart from those of these authors, declaring that his book will be more enjoyable, that is, superior.<sup>134</sup> Now, although *μυθολόγοι* is ambiguous and Hadas translates it as 'romancers' (inappropriately, I believe),<sup>135</sup> Ps.-Aristeas is arguably referring to Utopian authors here, especially since Ps.-Aristeas earlier uses "μυθοποιήσαντες" to denote proponents of Euhemerism, most famously Euhemerus, a Utopian author.<sup>136</sup> If *μυθολόγοι* refers to such writers, Ps.-Aristeas' message becomes clear: one should read his work, not the Utopians', who tell meaningless fables. This desire to compete against rival authors might also explain why Ps.-Aristeas describes Theopompus, another Utopian travel author,<sup>137</sup> as being blinded by God, since this humiliation would disparage one of Ps.-Aristeas' likely pagan competitors.

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<sup>134</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 322: "I think that these [books/writings] shall delight you more than the books of the fable-tellers will" ("τέρπειν γὰρ οἴομαί σε ταῦτα ἢ τὰ τῶν μυθολόγων βιβλία").

<sup>135</sup> I believe that *μυθολόγος* has a derogatory meaning here, one which might be used loosely for any author whose work is perceived to be false or fictitious, exactly as Aristotle alleges of Herodotus using the same word (*Arist., Gen. an.*, 756b6). Here, in the *Letter*, I believe Ps.-Aristeas is using it for the Utopian authors to express the worthlessness of their works. But this derogatory meaning is not particularly captured by the English term 'romancer'.

<sup>136</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 137.

<sup>137</sup> Theopompus was the author of *Meropis Ge* (Moses Hadas, "Introduction," 49).



Regarding intellectual competition, Ps.-Aristeas notably rejects a prominent ideology held by one particular Utopian author, namely Euhemerus, mentioned above. Ps.-Aristeas attacks this ideology, called Euhemerism, roughly the belief that “the gods were originally men who had contributed greatly to...mankind,” through Eleazar’s sermon. For, here, the High Priest mocks polytheism, specifically targeting those who worship idols and “claim that these are the images of those who invented some useful thing,”<sup>138</sup> a Euhemerist belief. Then, the notion that this usefulness somehow justifies deifying such people is derided by Eleazar as foolish and mindless.<sup>139</sup> Admittedly, Ps.-Aristeas strangely associates Euhemerism with polytheism, when other ancient authors viewed it as anti-polytheistic, including a fellow Jewish Alexandrian.<sup>140</sup> But, Ps.-Aristeas plainly associates Euhemerism with idolatry,<sup>141</sup> seemingly viewing the idea that the gods were originally important men as potentially legitimising polytheistic idolatry, and thus a threat to monotheism, hence Ps.-Aristeas’ attack. It is as though Eleazar, having begun a generic attack on idolatry, anticipates a Euhemerist rebuttal along the lines of, “But our idols depict most useful individuals, who deserve veneration for their services to humanity,” thus motivating Eleazar to attack the Euhemerists specifically. And it makes sense for Eleazar to suspect a Euhemerist rebuttal, since, despite Honigman’s argument, Euhemerism was very prominent in Hellenistic times, with Ennius in Italy and

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<sup>138</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 134-137.

<sup>139</sup> “ἀνόητον”, “κενὸν...μάταιον” (*Let. Ar.*, 136).

<sup>140</sup> For example, Sextus Empiricus considered Euhemerus to be atheistic (Sext. Emp., *Math.*, 9.51), as did Plutarch (Plut., *De Is. et Os.*, 359f-360b), while Cicero seemed to think that Euhemerus’ ideas did away with religion altogether (Cic., *Nat. D.*, 1.42). Lastly, and most interestingly, the Jewish author of *The Wisdom of Solomon*, probably written in Alexandria, seemingly embraces Euhemerism to argue that polytheism was foolish because the ‘gods’ being worshipped were not really gods at all, just notable men from the past (*The Wisdom of Solomon*, 14.16-17). For this text as being Alexandrian, see Wright, “Translation and Commentary,” 260).

<sup>141</sup> After all, those who build and worship the idols are the same people (i.e. the Euhemerists) who invoke the argument that these idols represent historical individuals who made some useful invention (*Let. Ar.*, 135).

Polybius in Greece being notable adherents, while its critics were still discussing it in the Imperial period.<sup>142</sup> Accordingly, Euhemerism needed to be refuted, and Ps.-Aristeas does just that through Eleazar.

This attack on the ideology of one particular Utopian author brings us to the final, but nevertheless significant, object of Ps.-Aristeas' condemnation, namely his criticism of certain illicit, yet attractive, aspects of Greek culture. Firstly, he condemns polytheism, especially idolatry, through Eleazar's speech, as noted above. Despite beginning as an attack on polytheism among various peoples, his shift towards specifically criticising Euhemerism makes clear that Ps.-Aristeas is focusing on Greeks rather than native Egyptians, especially since Eleazar only attacks Egyptian theriolatry briefly and in passing afterwards.<sup>143</sup> Honigman has argued that the attack on Euhemerism actually shifts the heat of Eleazar's criticism away from the Greeks to a specific philosophical movement, but I see the attack on Euhemerism as part of Eleazar's larger criticism of Greek polytheism (and polytheism generally), rather than a shift away from Greeks. Euhemerism is simply singled out because Ps.-Aristeas sees it as a major threat to monotheism. Moreover, Ps.-Aristeas' criticisms are harsher than sometimes accepted by scholars, such as Wright recently, who follows Tcherikover in arguing Ps.-Aristeas' criticisms are comparatively mild. Yet, while Jewish literature certainly contains much more virulent attacks on polytheism, we must remember that Ps.-Aristeas' audience is

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<sup>142</sup> Notably, Plutarch, who criticises it heavily (Plut., *De Is. et Os.*, 359f-360b). Honigman argues that Euhemerism was on the margins of Greek society, relying on Plutarch's criticisms in the Imperial Period to argue that it was heavily criticised in the Hellenistic period (Honigman, "'Jews as the Best of the Greeks,'" 219-220). I think it is questionable to use the presence of criticism by Plutarch to argue that Euhemerism was marginalised in the Hellenistic period some 200 years earlier.

<sup>143</sup> I disagree with Honigman's argument that Egyptians, or 'snake-worshippers' as she calls them, are a main target of Ps.-Aristeas' (Honigman, "'Jews as the Best of the Greeks,'" 207).

the intellectual, philosophically inclined reader, and so the attacks concerned with reason (or lack thereof), like “unintelligent” and “foolish”,<sup>144</sup> which Ps.-Aristeas employs, would certainly have had some sting. Thus, Ps.-Aristeas does attack Greek polytheism, using stronger language than some have previously acknowledged.

The other potentially alluring aspect of Greek culture that Ps.-Aristeas criticises are certain sexual practices, forbidden by the Law, namely homosexuality and incest. As with polytheism, Eleazar is Ps.-Aristeas’ mouthpiece for denouncing these practices, for at 152, Eleazar declares that “most of the rest of humanity defile themselves by having sex, performing great injustice,” specifically mentioning, as examples, homosexual sex and incest with one’s mother or daughter.<sup>145</sup> Now, this denunciation refers to more than just Greeks, but it must certainly include them, especially given Ps.-Aristeas’ reference to homosexuality and the broader Alexandrian context, in which homosexual sex was realistically taking place. As for incest, Ps.-Aristeas could be responding to Chrysippus, who, as Honigman has perceptively noted, deemed incest with mothers, daughter and sisters acceptable,<sup>146</sup> with Ps.-Aristeas perhaps interpreting Chrysippus’ beliefs as being reflective of Greek society. Chrysippus’ reference to sisters has admittedly been excluded from Eleazar’s denunciation, yet, as Hadas suggests, Ps.-Aristeas may be implicitly criticising Ptolemaic brother-sister marriages also,<sup>147</sup> with the explicit reference removed due to fear of being punished for such an overt criticism of the Ptolemies. These accusations of sexual impropriety seem also to link with Eleazar’s accusation

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<sup>144</sup> e.g. “μάταιον,” “ματαίως,” “ἀναισθησίαν,” “ἀνόητον,” “πολυματαίων” (*Let. Ar.*, 134-148).

<sup>145</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 152: “οἱ γὰρ πλείονες τῶν λουπῶν ἑαυτοῦς μολύνοθσιν ἐπιμισγόμενοι”.

<sup>146</sup> Honigman, “‘Jews as the Best of the Greeks,’” 221.

<sup>147</sup> Hadas, “Text, Translation, Commentary and Critical Notes,” 160.

that non-Jews, by-and-large, are men of food, drink and *σκέπη* (clothing? Shelter?),<sup>148</sup> as though hedonists or materialists. This contrasts with Jews, whom Eleazar declares have dietary laws in order to protect them from such people and to promote contemplation of God.<sup>149</sup> Overall then, we see that Ps.-Aristeas attacks certain Gentile sexual practices, tying them into a broader condemnation of non-Jewish lifestyle.

Moreover, it is significant that the cultural aspects chosen for denunciation are all potentially attractive and easy, even painless, to commit, hence the reason why Ps.-Aristeas felt they needed criticism. Firstly, polytheism, especially idolatry, was potentially tempting for the simple fact that Greek statuary was aesthetically appealing<sup>150</sup> and even non-religious statues may have been viewed as a potential ‘gateway drug’, and moreover, the ruling Ptolemies gave political legitimacy to both Egyptian and Greek religions. Certainly, since monotheism was the *καταρχή* or foundation to Ps.-Aristeas’ Judaism,<sup>151</sup> polytheism was philosophically catastrophic and so no chances could be taken with his readers, some of whom had likely abandoned Judaism. Secondly, regarding sexual practices, homosexuality was more accepted among Greeks, and therefore Ps.-Aristeas probably worried that there was a high risk of it happening, assuming there had not been any incidents already. Furthermore, incest with one’s mother or daughter may have been less likely in Greek society,

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<sup>148</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 140.

<sup>149</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 142, 144.

<sup>150</sup> This might, at first, seem overly speculative, yet the potential beauty and broader artistic excellence of statues and idols seem to have been a concern of certain Alexandrian Jews. For example, a rather more hostile Alexandrian Jew, namely the anonymous author of *The Wisdom of Solomon*, speaks harshly of the “wicked inventiveness of human art...the fruitless efforts of painters...a figure marked with different colours” (*The Wisdom of Solomon*, 15.4, translation my own).

<sup>151</sup> See note 24 above. Eleazar even describes God in his omnipotence and omniscience as being the *καταρχή* of the Law (and thus, Judaism) right before he denounces polytheism (*Let. Ar.*, 133-134).

but Ps.-Aristeas may have been concerned the followers of Chrysippus (i.e. Stoics) might practice it, given their teacher's writings. After all, Greek *poies* were known for other sorts of incest, such as uncle-niece marriages.<sup>152</sup> Thus, these Greek cultural aspects were seen as especially dangerous, because it was particularly likely that Jews might embrace these specific practices.

So, overall, as I have demonstrated, Ps.-Aristeas refutes any politico-cultural figures, rival ideologies or even cultural practices which his audience might have preferred to Judaism. This is evident in how he undermines their validity and thus their authoritativeness, whether through humour and hyperbole, assertions of God's supremacy in the context of Judaism's 'competitors' or even direct vilification. Now, crucial to what I see as Ps.-Aristeas' overall purpose of restoring or reaffirming Jewish identity is the fact that, by refuting these non-Jewish 'authorities', Ps.-Aristeas removes Judaism's ideological competition, which might have drawn his audience even farther away from a Jewish identity. The significant implication here of removing this ideological competition is that, if no non-Jewish ideology, person or practice can equal or surpass Judaism, then there surely exists no legitimate alternative to the Jewish religion, and thus to a Jewish identity. There is simply no plausible replacement for Judaism, as it is unparalleled in its validity, with all the likely alternatives to be encountered in Alexandria having been refuted.

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<sup>152</sup> Uncle-niece marriages are among the most well-known types of incestuous marriage in Greece, involving an *ἐπίκληρος* ("heiress") in families that lacked a male heir. The *ἐπίκληρος* would inherit their family's property (though without every truly owning it) and marry a close male kinsman, such as their uncle, who would then inherit the *ἐπίκληρος*' property. (Sarah Pomeroy, "Women and the City of Athens," in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, & Slaves* (London: Pimlico, 1975), 60-61).

Now, if there is no replacement for Judaism, since the ideological competition has been removed, then Judaism, being the only ideology left standing, cannot be ignored. As though via a kind of process of elimination, the reader is forced into a position where only Judaism remains as a legitimate ideology, as the various other ideologies and major politico-cultural figures, one by one, are delegitimised, that is, 'eliminated'. And so, Ps.-Aristeas, by making Judaism the only valid ideology left standing, makes it known that the Jewish religion cannot be ignored or disregarded and thus his readers must naturally consider and support Judaism. Of course, this is the idealistic way that Ps.-Aristeas would want his *Letter* to be received, but I would nevertheless argue that pushing his reader into the direction of supporting Judaism (so as to restore their Jewish identity) is his intention or purpose. Certainly, this would be the natural effect of 'eliminating' or undermining non-Jewish ideologies. Moreover, as already demonstrated in Chapter 1, Ps.-Aristeas' attractive portrayal of Jewishness is seemingly oriented towards promoting Jewish identity by drawing the reader to Judaism, and when we view Ps.-Aristeas' tactical undermining of non-Jewish ideologies in this context, it seems difficult to deny that this undermining here is also oriented towards ultimately promoting Jewish identity, here by tacitly encouraging the support of Judaism through the criticism of any possible alternatives.

To conclude, Ps.-Aristeas demonstrates to his readers that they must support Judaism, in accordance with his overarching purpose in writing his *Letter*, namely to re-affirm their Jewish identity. Ps.-Aristeas effects this by undermining various major 'authorities,' which he sees as being potentially attractive to his Jewish audience, such as political and cultural figures and their ideologies that rival Judaism. For example, Ps.-Aristeas undermines both the characters of Ptolemy I and II as well as the historical Ptolemaic regime, while, at other times, he

undercuts certain philosophers and prominent authors, especially the Utopian travel writers. Moreover, Ps.-Aristeas also denounces certain aspects of Greek culture which he sees as a major risk to one's Jewishness, notably polytheistic idolatry. By critiquing these various peoples, ideologies and practices, Ps.-Aristeas removes the ideological competition for Judaism, thus demonstrating that there exists no ideological alternative to Judaism, and, with this being the case, that Judaism cannot be reasonably ignored. In this way, Ps.-Aristeas tacitly but surely urges his readers, many of whom may have stopped practicing Judaism, to support their ancestral religion once more.

## Chapter 3: Upholding the Law

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If we accept my premise, as previously argued, that Ps.-Aristeas was writing to reaffirm waning Jewish identity, then, once his audience had decided to recommit to Judaism and a Jewish identity, Ps.-Aristeas needed to ensure that, firstly, they would adhere to a proper Jewish practice and, secondly, would not ‘relapse’ into apostasy. To accomplish this, Ps.-Aristeas provides ethical instruction for his readers to follow, centred around the importance of following the Law, specifically the Septuagint translation, as this would ensure that their Jewish practice would be legitimate and would remain legitimate well into the future. Ps.-Aristeas mainly communicates this moral instruction in Eleazar’s sermon, where the Law is expounded with a certain emphasis on the concepts of separation and memory, but also in the Symposia section. The persuasiveness of this moral instruction is then enhanced by the epistolarity that runs throughout the *Letter* and, likewise, by the rhetorical quality of Eleazar’s sermon and the translators’ responses during the Symposia.

Ps.-Aristeas’ moral instruction throughout the *Letter* specifically revolves around a central message, namely that one must follow the Law. This is stated outright at 127, when Eleazar declares that “living well exists in observing the laws,”<sup>153</sup> naturally the Jewish laws. Ps.-Aristeas’ message is simple and direct: a good life is one that complies with Jewish law. Ps.-Aristeas then explains precisely why observing the Law is so crucial to a good life, when he has Eleazar state that Moses created the Law to ensure that the Jews would remain “pure in

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<sup>153</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 127: “τὸ γὰρ καλῶς ζῆν ἐν τῷ τὰ νόμιμα συντηρεῖν εἶναι.”



body and spirit, liberated from foolish opinions, worshipping the one, mighty god.”<sup>154</sup> Ps.-Aristeas is clear: the Law enables Jews to be pure, which is essentially Ps.-Aristeas’ way of saying ‘monotheistic,’ liberated from polytheistic belief,<sup>155</sup> focused solely on God. Now, if following the Law ultimately maintains one’s Jewish monotheism, then it naturally also ensures one’s Jewish identity, which is rooted in Judaism. In this way, Ps.-Aristeas provides his readers with a means, namely observing the Law, by which to safeguard their own Jewish identities and prevent a ‘relapse’ into an immoral lifestyle.

It is not enough, however, merely to state that the Law must be followed. Ps.-Aristeas needs to explain the Law to his readers. As hinted above, a significant way in which Ps.-Aristeas communicates this moral instruction concerning the Law is Eleazar’s sermon, for in his speech the High Priest expounds the fundamentals of the Law, with a particular focus on the dietary laws. Honigman has already noted the presence of moral instruction in the *Letter*, arguing that the so-called digressions, namely Eleazar’s sermon, the ekphrasis of Ptolemy’s gifts, the descriptions of Judaea and Jerusalem and the Symposia together constitute a “cultural translation of the Law” for an Alexandrian audience.<sup>156</sup> Honigman argues that, in the case of Eleazar’s sermon, Ps.-Aristeas ‘translates’ the book of Leviticus for his readers, turning this Biblical book, with its various legalistic themes, into an oration delivered by Eleazar. Though Honigman would likely reject my argument about the *Letter’s* intended audience, I believe

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<sup>154</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 139: “ἀγνοὶ καθεστῶτες κατὰ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ ψυχὴν, ἀπολελυμένοι ματαίων δοξῶν, τὸν μόνον θεὸν καὶ δυνατὸν σεβόμενοι”. Specifically, the text refers to Moses as fencing the Jews in with iron walls to keep them pure, but I consider this to be metaphor for legislating the Jewish Law, as Birnbaum does (Birnbaum, “Allegorical Interpretation and Jewish Identity,” 311).

<sup>155</sup> I take “foolish beliefs” (“ματαίων δοξῶν”) to refer to polytheism, considering that *μάταιος* (or as an adverb, *ματαίως*) is one of Ps.-Aristeas’ favourite words for referring to polytheism and idolatry (*Let. Ar.*, 134-138: “μάταιον,” “ματαίως,” and “πολυματαίων”).

<sup>156</sup> Honigman, “‘Jews as the Best of All Greeks’,” 244.

she is correct in viewing the sermon as a work of moral instruction rooted in the Biblical Law, and, in this chapter, I will demonstrate that this sermon, with its explanation of the workings of the Jewish law, is specifically aimed at promoting and safeguarding a proper Jewish practice and identity for Ps.-Aristeas' readers.

As stated earlier, Ps.-Aristeas' key ethical message is that one must observe the Law since it makes and keeps Jews pure, that is, monotheistic or, essentially, a good Jew. Eleazar's sermon demonstrates to the reader precisely how the Law accomplishes this, with the first reason being because the Law teaches Jews to remain separate from immoral people. Eleazar states this at section 139, when he declares that Moses fenced the Jews about "with uninterrupted palisades and iron walls so that [they] would not mingle in any way with any of the other nations."<sup>157</sup> This is not a literal statement but rather seems to be a metaphorical one wherein the Law is conceived of as a set of fortifications that keep Jews separate from the other nations, who presumably threaten Jewish purity.<sup>158</sup> And so, it is by creating separation that the Law works to ensure the purity of Jews. Using the dietary laws as a specific example, Eleazar explains that these laws keep Jews separate from others, thus protecting them from the moral pollution that comes with associating with the vulgar ("φάυλοις").<sup>159</sup> Similarly, Eleazar explains, the Biblical reference to the "parting of the hoof" symbolises that Jews are set apart from others, such as those who engage in illicit sexual practices.<sup>160</sup> Overall then, Ps.-

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<sup>157</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 139: "ἀδιακόποις χάραξι καὶ σιδηροῖς τείχεσιν, ὅπως μηθενὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἔθνῶν ἐπιμισγώμεθα κατὰ μηδέν".

<sup>158</sup> I interpret "ἐπιμισγώμεθα κατὰ μηδέν" as referring to any sort of interaction with non-Jews, though I accept Moore's observation that *ἐπιμίσγω* can connote sexual behaviour in particular (Moore, "For the Sake of Mice and Weasels," 223). I would argue that this connotation is active here, but simply to colour the literal meaning, namely 'interaction,' with a sense of immorality.

<sup>159</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 142.

<sup>160</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 151-52.

Aristeas teaches his readers that the Law works to keep Jews pure or monotheistic by separating them off from those who do not follow the Law and are thus impure.

Besides encouraging separation, the Law also upholds the moral purity of Jews by instructing Jews to be morally discerning, as Eleazar explains. The dietary laws again serve as Eleazar's example here, for he declares that these laws were not drawn up for the sake of the animals, but rather "for the sake of justice, with a view to sacred contemplation [i.e. monotheism] and perfecting character."<sup>161</sup> Eleazar then elaborates, stating that the different pure and impure animals are actually symbols that promote certain types of behaviour. For example, wild, carnivorous birds that unjustly oppress other birds are considered impure and are thus forbidden in order to remind Jews not to practice injustice, while non-carnivorous birds, which act peacefully, are permitted as food as a way to remind Jews to cultivate justice and oppress no one.<sup>162</sup> In the same vein, Eleazar states that the Biblical reference to the "parting of the hoof" is merely a symbol, and one that denotes not only separation from immoral people, as noted above, but also the separation of right action from wrong action, that is, the symbol urges Jews "to discriminate in each of [their] actions with a view to what is right."<sup>163</sup> With this focus on justice and ethical action, the Law accordingly keeps Jews morally discerning and thus pure, always avoiding unethical deeds in favour of a just life.

Thus, Ps.-Aristeas demonstrates that the Law, with its encouragement of separation and moral discernment, creates and sustains Jewish purity. It is no accident that Ps.-Aristeas, in his explanation of the Law, chooses to emphasise the concepts of separation and moral

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<sup>161</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 144: "πρὸς ἀγνήν ἐπίσκεψιν καὶ τρόπων ἐξαρτισμὸν δικαιοσύνης ἔνεκεν".

<sup>162</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 145-47.

<sup>163</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 150: "σημεῖόν ἐστι τοῦ διαστέλλειν ἕκαστα τῶν πράξεων ἐπὶ τὸ καλῶς ἔχον" (Hadas' translation used here).

discernment, for these aspects of the Law, with their advancement of Jewish purity, serve as powerful tools for cultivating a proper Jewish practice and preventing one from reverting to a Gentile lifestyle. To demonstrate, keeping separate from non-Jewish people removes potential distractions which might threaten to derail a person's Judaism. For example, by keeping apart from Greek society, or at least certain sections of it, a Jew would be less likely to take up undesirable Greek practices, which would taint one's Jewish practice and potentially coax one into a Gentile lifestyle. In this way, separation would prevent a person, such as one of Ps.-Aristeas' readers, from 'relapsing' into a non-Jewish way of life. Similarly, being morally discerning would certainly ensure a good Jewish practice, since such a person would never engage in any unethical activities but would, instead, focus on behaving morally according to Jewish principles. Indeed, a Jew who, by chance, encountered some unethical, Gentile act or person would need not worry about being coaxed into such a life, so long as they reminded themselves that what they were witnessing was morally wrong. Thus, Ps.-Aristeas provides especially useful moral instruction to his readers, who may have been unable to practice complete separation and thus needed additional strategies for dealing with the non-Jewish phenomena they would encounter in Alexandria.

Yet, Eleazar does not stop at separation and moral discernment. The Law, he explains, also assures monotheistic purity through its injunctions that Jews should cultivate memory, especially remembrance of God. For example, after dealing with the importance of separation, Eleazar states that the Biblical reference to pure animals which "chew the cud" plainly denotes the trait of memory,<sup>164</sup> which Jews are presumably required to cultivate, imitating these animals, just as they must imitate non-carnivorous birds by cultivating peace

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<sup>164</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 153.

and justice. Indeed, Eleazar confirms this when he says that Jews are commanded by Scripture to remember the Lord, for he has performed great and wondrous deeds, such as the complex workings of the human body, deeds which urge Jews to contemplate God's power.<sup>165</sup> This injunction to remember God then provides Eleazar with the opportunity to point out that the Law has appointed various occasions for remembering God, such as before meals and upon sleeping and waking.<sup>166</sup> Likewise, Jewish clothing contains a "mark of remembrance", interpreted by Hadas as ritual fringes, while Jews must place Bible verses on their doorposts and bind them onto the hands, all for the sake of remembering God.<sup>167</sup> Thus, we see that Ps.-Aristeas, through Eleazar, demonstrates the role that memory plays in ensuring the purity, that is, the monotheism of his Jewish readers.

Ps.-Aristeas has quite deliberately emphasised memory and, indeed, provided specific commandments to cultivate this memory, since this would ensure the longevity of his readers' Judaism and broader Jewishness. Firstly, and most obviously, remembrance of God works to keep one's mind away from any possible distractions or temptations and focused solely on God. The specific commandments to remember God on various occasions, such as before meals, or even to wear specific clothing then provide tangible ways for Ps.-Aristeas' readers to cultivate this remembrance. Indeed, the nature of these commandments would ensure that his readers would be constantly focused on the divine throughout daily life. For they would remember God when they woke up and went to sleep, when they had their meals, when they left the house (for they would see the Biblical verses on their doorposts), even when they saw another Jew, for they would see their ritual fringes and remember the Lord. With

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<sup>165</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 155-56.

<sup>166</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 157-158, 160.

<sup>167</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 158-59. Hadas, "Text, Translation, Commentary and Critical Notes," 162.

this near constant focus on God, Ps.-Aristeas could be certain that his readers, once they had regained their attachment to Judaism, would never lose their religion again. There would be no chance of 'relapse.' Furthermore, these ritual practices had another but similar purpose, namely these commandments make one look very visibly Jewish. By wearing Jewish clothing, a Jew would stand out as distinctive. Likewise, if a Jew bound their hand with Bible verses (i.e. *tefillin*) while praying, he would surely stand out. Even a Jewish house with its gates and doorposts inscribed with Bible verses would appear unique when compared to other houses. Crucially, for Ps.-Aristeas, the predominant effect, and thus purpose, of these commandments is that they ensure that Jews appear visibly different or distinctive to non-Jews, acting as a set of ethnic markers that signify and shore up one's Jewishness in contrast to Gentile identities. So, by following these commandments, Ps.-Aristeas' readers would remain not only adherents of Judaism but also firmly Jewish on a broader social and cultural level.

Besides Eleazar's sermon, the Symposia section also acts as a significant vehicle of moral instruction, rooted in the Law. For example, the responses of the Jewish translators during the Symposia frequently emphasise the importance of praying to God.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, the translators' broader focus on God and his power, particularly regarding the efficacy of philosophy,<sup>169</sup> communicates that one must keep God in mind, an important aspect of the Law that Eleazar's sermon also expresses. This emphasis on remembering God links in with the foundational idea of always making God one's starting-point, discussed in Chapter 2. Such a focus on God, whether through prayer or by simply having an awareness of God's power, would certainly ensure that Ps.-Aristeas' readers would always remain monotheistic.

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<sup>168</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 193, 227, 248, 256.

<sup>169</sup> See Chapter 2 for this motif in the translators' responses.

Furthermore, the translators also stress the importance of practicing justice (*δικαιοσύνη*),<sup>170</sup> which constitutes Jewish moral instruction too, for, while some have sought to characterise this as Greek,<sup>171</sup> these references to justice can easily be construed as Biblical, and thus Jewish. This is because the Greek Torah (specifically the Septuagint) makes frequent reference to justice, either using the word *δικαιοσύνη* or some other word based on *δίκαιος* (corresponding to the Hebrew *הַרְטָוּ* and *רָטָוּ*).<sup>172</sup> This use of concepts that could be Greek or Jewish is typical of Ps.-Aristeas, probably motivated by a desire to present a version of Judaism that would appeal to his philhellenic readers, as we see with Ps.-Aristeas' depiction of Jerusalem in line with both Greek philosophical specifications and Biblical descriptions.<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless, the translators' emphasis on justice certainly complements Eleazar's emphasis on moral discernment and living justly, ideas which he bases on the Jewish dietary laws. So, it seems clear then that Ps.-Aristeas also uses the Symposia section to communicate his Jewish ethical instruction, founded in the Law, as part of his broader purpose to keep his audience Jewish.

Moreover, the persuasiveness of this moral instruction in the *Letter* is enhanced by the distinctly rhetorical quality of both Eleazar's sermon and the responses of the Jewish translators during the Symposia. White and Keddie have already observed that the *Letter's* epistolarity, namely the fact that the text is framed as a letter between Aristeas and Philocrates, the recipient, facilitates moral instruction for the reader. For this "epistolary

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<sup>170</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 189, 209, 212, 232.

<sup>171</sup> Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," 65. More, "Kingship Ideology," 306-307.

<sup>172</sup> E.g. Gen. 18:19 ("ποιεῖν δικαιοσύνην"), Gen. 18:23 ("δίκαιον"), Ex. 23:7 ("δίκαιον"), Lev. 19:15 ("ἐν δικαιοσύνη"), Deut. 33:19 ("δικαιοσύνης"), Deut. 16:20 ("δικαίως τὸ δίκαιον διώξῃ", *Let. Ar.*, 232 seems to allude to this Biblical verse, despite not being a verbatim match).

<sup>173</sup> See Chapter 1 for this.

conceit puts the audience in the position of receiving moral instruction”, with Philocrates acting as a stand-in for the Jewish readers.<sup>174</sup> Similarly, I believe, the rhetorical nature of Eleazar’s sermon and the Jewish translators’ responses in the Symposia enhance the effectiveness of Ps.-Aristeas’ moral instruction in these specific sections. For the fact that Eleazar and the translators communicate their teachings verbally, indeed oratorically in Eleazar’s case, to an audience using second person verbs places the *Letter’s* readers in the position of receiving these moral teachings.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, the use of the second person, especially the occasional sprinkling of imperatives,<sup>176</sup> also engages the reader in a direct kind of way, even if these commands are not literally addressed to Ps.-Aristeas’ readers. For the imperatives reach out to the reader and urge them to behave in a particular way, especially regarding moral conduct. In this way, Ps.-Aristeas ultimately constructs a more lively and engaging delivery of moral teaching than what one might find in a dry philosophical treatise. So, we might conclude that not only do Eleazar’s oration and the Jewish translators communicate the ethical wisdom of the Law, but also they accomplish this in a way that engages the reader, heightening their persuasiveness.

Moreover, Ps.-Aristeas’ belief that the Law is crucial to moral living explains why he frames the *Letter’s* narrative around the Septuagint’s translation and why he glorifies it throughout his text. For, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, Ps.-Aristeas depicts the Septuagint translation highly positively and, as previous scholars have noted, the *Letter’s* narrative contents are

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<sup>174</sup> L. Michael White and G. Anthony Keddie, “The Epistle of Aristeas,” in *Jewish Fictional Letters from Hellenistic Egypt: The Epistle of Aristeas and Related Literature* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 41-42.

<sup>175</sup> Some examples of the use of second person verbs include 130, 161, 189, 207, 224, 225, 239, 266.

<sup>176</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 144, 154 (this is a future tense verb, but it functions as a command nonetheless), 211, 218, 223.



centred around the story of this translation of the Torah.<sup>177</sup> Ps.-Aristeas' belief in the importance of the Law would explain these textual choices, because we must remember that, in Judaism, the Torah (or ὁ Νόμος in Greek)<sup>178</sup> is the Law. So, if the Law is fundamental to living ethically as a Jew, then Ps.-Aristeas would naturally consider the translated Law (i.e. the translated Torah or the Septuagint) to be central to a proper Jewish lifestyle and identity. It is natural then that Ps.-Aristeas would want to emphasise the Septuagint as he does through these textual choices. Indeed, I would argue that Ps.-Aristeas wants his readers to take note of this text and study it. This, certainly, is the logical inference, considering that Ps.-Aristeas does not just emphasise the Torah translation but also glorifies it as holy and perfect, something worthy of study.<sup>179</sup> Notably, urging his readers to study the Septuagint would be an effective way for Ps.-Aristeas to ensure that his readers have a proper Jewish practice and ultimately attain a stable Jewish identity, for the moral learning they would receive from the Septuagint would lead to a legitimate Judaism, since the translation is sacred and perfect. Of course, all these pronouncements about the perfection of the Septuagint are merely Ps.-Aristeas' opinion, not necessarily historical truth, but, as Johnson has argued for all works of Jewish historical fiction, the historical truthfulness of the *Letter's* narrative is subordinate to the moral truth which our author wishes to convey.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 13-14.

<sup>178</sup> LSJ, sv. νόμος, A.I.b. Indeed, Matt. 7:12 specifically uses the word νόμος to refer to the Torah, when he summarises the Law and the Prophets (i.e. the Hebrew Bible) as "do to others what you would have them do to you" (New International Version).

<sup>179</sup> See Chapter 1 for this.

<sup>180</sup> Sara Raup Johnson, "Conclusion," in *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity: Third Maccabees in Its Cultural Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 217-218.

Lastly, it might seem strange that I have previously analysed the *Letter's* contents on the assumption that Ps.-Aristeas' readers are not Jews of any or much religion conviction but, in this chapter, I am analysing the *Letter* assuming that his readers are religious and need tools to maintain their religiosity. However, we need to consider that the *Letter's* purpose is twofold: Ultimately, Ps.-Aristeas wants Jews to have a firm identity. Firstly, and chiefly, this means persuading his readers to re-identify with Judaism and Jewishness more generally, but secondly, once his readers do decide to firmly re-identify as Jews, Ps.-Aristeas needs to teach them how to be Jewish properly, so they do not adhere to some 'incorrect' Jewish practice or 'relapse' back into Gentile habits. Accordingly, I believe the *Letter* has been written to be read multiple times to accomplish these multiple aims. The first read of the *Letter* is aimed at persuading (ex-)Jews to return to their faith, making a defence of Jewish beliefs and practices, and so, in Chapters 1 and 2, I have analysed the *Letter* as defence of Jewishness for an audience that is less drawn to Judaism. But the second reading, once Ps.-Aristeas has persuaded his audience to return, is aimed at providing these readers with moral instruction so they develop an acceptable Jewish practice and remain Jewish into the future. After all, Eleazar's defence of Jewish practices simultaneously constitutes a repository of these same practices, which Ps.-Aristeas' audience can learn from, until they eventually take up Torah study and move beyond the *Letter*. Thus, this chapter has approached the *Letter* with this second reading in mind, when the text's readers would have been more well-disposed to Judaism and interested in regaining their heritage. Obviously, this is probably all wishful thinking on Ps.-Aristeas' part, but I believe this to be a reasonable hypothesis for how Ps.-Aristeas likely wanted his text to be used.

In summary, then, Ps.-Aristeas, having ideally restored his readers' attachment to Jewishness, had the secondary task of ensuring that his readers developed a healthy Jewish practice and identity and ultimately maintained it throughout their lives. Ps.-Aristeas sought to accomplish this secondary objective of his *Letter* by providing moral learning for his readers, centred around the Jewish Law, for, as Ps.-Aristeas demonstrates through Eleazar, the Law creates and safeguards Jewish purity, a by-word for monotheism. During his explanation of the Law, Ps.-Aristeas has Eleazar emphasise the importance of separation, moral discernment and remembrance of God, since these concepts would ensure that his readers developed an acceptable Jewish practice from Ps.-Aristeas' point of view and never apostatised again. The rhetorical quality of Eleazar's sermon and also the responses of the Jewish translators then heightened the persuasiveness of these moral lessons. But, beyond the specific moral instruction offered in the *Letter*, Ps.-Aristeas also hoped that his readers would pursue Torah study using the Septuagint to truly guarantee the longevity of their Jewish identity, which Ps.-Aristeas had worked so hard to restore.

## Chapter 4: Being a proud Jew and an ardent philhellene

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Despite what has been discussed in previous chapters about Jewish superiority, attacks on Gentile ideologies and the importance of separation, Ps.-Aristeas hardly despises all Greek culture or sees it as needing to be wholly discarded. For, as Chapter 4 shall demonstrate, Ps.-Aristeas reassures his readers, communicating to them that, in the process of returning to Judaism, they would not need to discard their philhellenism; on the contrary, they would be able to be Jewish and continue partaking in Greek culture. Ps.-Aristeas chiefly communicates this message through his framing of Jewishness in distinctly Greek terms. Yet, as I shall argue, this blending of Jewish and Greek concepts does not constitute an assertion of equality between Jewishness and Hellenism, as certain scholars have argued, for Ps.-Aristeas' incorporation of Greek cultural elements in the *Letter* only ever reinforces Jewishness, as though subjugated beneath Judaism. This, I will lastly argue, introduces a caveat into Ps.-Aristeas' message that one can be Jewish and practice Hellenism, namely that those aspects of Hellenism which one embraces must uphold Jewish identity and never undermine it. This idea that one's Jewishness must be prioritised when navigating Hellenism then constitutes Ps.-Aristeas' final piece of moral instruction.

Firstly, Ps.-Aristeas demonstrates that one can be Jewish and remain a participant in Greek culture. He primarily conveys this message through his tendency to frame Jewishness in Greek terms, for, as Chapter 1 has already explored, Ps.-Aristeas presents Jewishness in all its manifestations using Greek terminology and literary forms. For example, Eleazar's sermon is filled with philosophical terminology to explain the Jewish Law, which, in turn, is said to derive

from a Solonic lawgiver, Moses.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, Demetrius describes the Law as being not only holy but deeply philosophical too.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, Ps.-Aristeas even depicts Judaea as a bountiful, foreign land, all in accordance with the conventions of Utopian travel literature.<sup>183</sup> In Chapter 1, I argued that this framing of Jewish concepts in a ‘Greek mould’ worked to make Jewishness attractive for Ps.-Aristeas’ philhellenic audience, but it also achieves another important goal. Specifically, it conveys the compatibility of Jewish ideas, and indeed Jewish identity, with certain aspects of Greek culture, especially philosophy and literature. This compatibility then suggests to the reader that being Jewish need not mean complete abandonment of everything that one loves about Greek culture. In essence, one can identify as Jewish and still enjoy Greek culture in many respects.

To further communicate this message, Ps.-Aristeas also frames Jewishness in Greek terms via another means, besides employing Greek terminology and literary forms. Specifically, Ps.-Aristeas often makes mention of Jewish concepts that could also be interpreted as Greek, i.e. common to both cultural traditions. To demonstrate, Demetrius describes the Jewish translators who are to vote on the best translation as deriving from twelve *φυλαί* (tribes).<sup>184</sup> While this is clearly a Biblical reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, it is nevertheless reminiscent of how a Greek polis could be divided, namely Athens with its ten tribes and, remarkably, Plato’s ideal polis, whose citizens were to be divided into twelve parts.<sup>185</sup> The *Letter* features other correspondences between Judaism and Greek philosophy. In the

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<sup>181</sup> See Chapter 1 for the full argument.

<sup>182</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 31: “διὰ τὸ καὶ φιλοσοφωτέραν εἶναι...τὴν νομοθεσίαν ταύτην”.

<sup>183</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>184</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 32.

<sup>185</sup> Wright, “Translation and Commentary,” 152. Plato describes his ideal division of citizens at *Pl., Leg.*, 745d.

Symposia section, the Jewish translators often emphasise justice and, while these references are likely intended to be read as Jewish, justice also features in Greek philosophy.<sup>186</sup> Similarly, Aristeas the narrator references piety (“εὐσέβειαν”), which, despite arguably being Jewish in the grand scheme of the *Letter*, nevertheless also featured in Greek philosophy.<sup>187</sup> Now, in these various examples, by choosing aspects of Judaism that resemble Greek cultural aspects or that are Greek concepts too, Ps.-Aristeas presents Jewishness in a way that accords with Greek culture, indeed in a way that comes off as remarkably Greek. This accordance between Jewishness and Greekness inevitably projects the compatibility of Jewish identity with Hellenism, already discussed above. And, as also stated earlier, this idea of compatibility then communicates to Ps.-Aristeas’ readers that they can be Jewish and remain proud philhellenes. When viewed in light of my broader argument that Ps.-Aristeas was writing to return Jews to their ancestral identity, it becomes obvious why he communicates this message of compatibility to his readers. For it is deeply rhetorically useful for Ps.-Aristeas to tell his readers that it is possible to live Jewishly and engage with Hellenism, that their passion for Greekness need not be discarded. This is rhetorically useful because his philhellenic readers will be considerably more willing to return to Judaism if they know they will not have to abandon Greek culture in the process. Certainly, Ps.-Aristeas would have had no hope of persuading his readers, if he had taken a ‘hard-line’ approach of urging them to discard their Greek cultural citizenship completely. In essence, then, Ps.-Aristeas’ message about the

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<sup>186</sup> The presence of justice in Greek philosophy is discussed by both Tcherikover and More, although I believe are wrong to read the concept as being primarily Greek here, as they seem to do (Tcherikover, “The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas,” 65; More, “Kingship Ideology,” 306-307).

<sup>187</sup> Specifically, at *Let. Ar.*, 2. Wright discusses piety as a Hellenistic concept in Greek philosophy (Wright, “Translation and Commentary,” 104), though I think he goes too far in distancing the concept from Judaism, simply on the basis that εὐσέβεια does not appear in the Septuagint translation of the Torah.

compatibility of Jewishness and Greek culture serves to reassure his readers so that he might more effectively persuade them to re-embrace the religion and identity of their forefathers.

Others, to be sure, have also argued that Ps.-Aristeas incorporates Greek forms and concepts and that he asserts the notion that one can be Jewish and embrace Greek society and culture. For example, Honigman has noted and analysed Ps.-Aristeas' blending of Greek forms with Jewish ideas along with his incorporation of Greek concepts too, leading her to declare the *Letter* a "manifesto of 'Jewish Greekness'."<sup>188</sup> Similarly, in 1949 Tcherikover had already demonstrated that Ps.-Aristeas incorporates Greek philosophical ideas, specifically to create a kind of cultural synthesis which would enable Jews, hesitant about Greek culture, to embrace Greek society while remaining Jewish.<sup>189</sup> And Wright, more recently, has expressed much the same sentiment.<sup>190</sup> However, these scholars, specifically Tcherikover and Wright, see Ps.-Aristeas as concerned with anxious Jews, as an author who is reassuring this audience that they will not have to abandon Judaism when embracing Hellenism. But I would argue that Ps.-Aristeas is actually writing to reassure his readers, who have already gleefully embraced Hellenism, that they need not discard their philhellenism, when returning to a Jewish lifestyle and identity. It is not that Ps.-Aristeas' readers need encouragement to participate in Greek culture with the reassurance that their Jewishness will not be compromised. Rather, they need encouragement to identify with Judaism and the reassurance that re-identifying as Torah-observant Jews will not compromise their participation in Hellenism.

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<sup>188</sup> Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 19.

<sup>189</sup> Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," 65-66, 81.

<sup>190</sup> Wright, "Introduction," 68-69.

Now, despite this blending of Greek concepts and terms with Judaism, Ps.-Aristeas is not asserting equality between Jewishness and Hellenism or some universalist theology, as certain scholars have asserted. For example, Tcherikover argued that Ps.-Aristeas presents the Torah as a “universal doctrine” that could be accepted by all, especially ‘enlightened Greeks.’<sup>191</sup> Hadas, writing around the same time, came to similarly universalist conclusions, arguing that Ps.-Aristeas sought to teach that “the same end [that Judaism offers] may be attained by others by a different path,” that is, without following traditional Jewish practices.<sup>192</sup> This notion that non-Jews, who do not observe Jewish ritual practices, can still access the same kinds of ethical benefits that Judaism offers has been somewhat echoed by Wright. He states that, for Ps.-Aristeas, enlightened gentiles know that there is only one god and they worship it, and that they possess the same ethical values that the Law represents,<sup>193</sup> as though Greek lifestyles are legitimate alongside Judaism. Yet, these arguments cannot be valid, because, as I shall shortly demonstrate, Greek culture only ever seems to reinforce Judaism in the *Letter*, as though Hellenism is subjugated to Jewishness. There is, in short, a hierarchy with Judaism at the top, not some kind of equality between Greeks and Jews, where elite Greek lifestyles and philosophies are equally as legitimate as Judaism. Even when Jews and Greeks seemingly interact on an equal playing-field with mutual benefit, the portrayal is,

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<sup>191</sup> Tcherikover, “The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas,” 73.

<sup>192</sup> Hadas, “Introduction,” 62.

<sup>193</sup> Wright, “Introduction,” 68-9, 268. Moore seems to make a similar argument, specifically that Ps.-Aristeas is concerned with enlightened Gentile monotheists, such as Chrysippus (Moore, “For the Sake of Mice and Weasels,” 223-226). Likewise, Collins and Holladay also believe that Ps.-Aristeas’ statements about Gentiles leaves at least some room for certain Greeks, and even certain Egyptians in Holladay’s opinion (John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish identity in the Hellenistic diaspora*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 192-193; Carl R. Holladay, “Jewish Responses to Hellenistic Culture in Early Ptolemaic Egypt,” in *Ethnicity in Hellenistic Egypt*, ed. Per Bilde (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992), 147-148).



in fact, quite unequal, often with Jews educating Greeks, like a teacher instructing a student. This, then, only underscores the hierarchy.

As just stated above, the *Letter* cannot be proclaiming equality because, in the text, Greek culture only ever reinforces or ‘buttresses’ Judaism, suggesting an ideological hierarchy with the Jewish religion above Hellenism. To provide examples of this, the philosophical language and allegorical reasoning of Eleazar’s sermon, while being distinctly Greek argumentation, nevertheless serves to justify the Jewish Law,<sup>194</sup> buttressing the legitimacy of Jewish morality. Likewise, Ps.-Aristeas adheres to conventions of the Utopian genre to positively portray Jewish subject matter, specifically Judaea. Similarly, his construction of an idealised Jerusalem according to the prescriptions of Greek philosophy is aimed at boosting the appeal of Judaism, not Hellenism.<sup>195</sup> It seems then that Ps.-Aristeas’ incorporation of Greek culture, whether in the form of philosophical argumentation or Greek literary forms, is merely a tool for asserting the primacy of Judaism. As Gruen states, Ps.-Aristeas “exploits his profound familiarity with Hellenic literary genres and the Alexandrian scholarly scene, to advertise the advantages of Jewish tradition.”<sup>196</sup> Now, this constant use of Greek culture to uphold Jewishness arguably relegates Hellenism to a subordinate position, whose existence revolves solely around supporting Judaism, like a humble set of pillars reinforcing the walls of a mighty building. Accordingly, it is difficult to see how there could be any equality here or acceptance of non-Jewish ideologies as legitimate in their own right. On the contrary, there is a hierarchy at work here. Of course, by using Hellenism to buttress Jewishness, Ps.-Aristeas risks making his

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<sup>194</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 143: “profound logic”; *Let. Ar.*, 161: “right reason”. However, see Chapter 1 for the full discussion of the Greekness of Eleazar’s sermon on the Law.

<sup>195</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>196</sup> Gruen, “Jewish Literature,” 421.

identity dangerously reliant on Greek culture. However, Ps.-Aristeas knows this, since he takes care to ensure that Judaism is never too reliant on Hellenism in the *Letter*, frequently emphasising God as the true foundation of Judaism, not Greekness in any form.<sup>197</sup> Nevertheless, Ps.-Aristeas does portray various aspects of Greek culture as reinforcing Jewishness, as though subordinated beneath Jewish identity, preventing the possibility that Ps.-Aristeas is asserting equality.

Though it might initially seem strange, this idea of using the dominant culture to subversively ‘buttress’ or fortify a minority culture, even at this dominant culture’s expense, is certainly not unusual or impossible. Barclay has noted that, in various colonial contexts, the colonisers’ culture has often been exploited “to equip [the colonised] to resist the colonizers’ cultural imperialism.”<sup>198</sup> In light of this observation, Ps.-Aristeas’ appropriation of Greek culture is hardly strange, if not to be expected. Alexandria was, after all, a colonial context, albeit more for Egyptians than Jews. Even in non-colonial contexts, throughout broader Jewish history, this appropriation of the dominant culture has also occurred, as Biale demonstrates in the case of a fifteenth-century Jewish coffin from Italy. Biale observes here that the Italian Jewish community “adopt[ed] and adapt[ed] motifs from the surrounding culture for its own purposes.”<sup>199</sup> Accordingly, Ps.-Aristeas’ adoption of elements from Greek culture, i.e. the

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<sup>197</sup> God is often referred to as ‘the starting-point’ (*καταρχή*), as at *Let. Ar.*, 132-134, 189, 200, 201, 235.

<sup>198</sup> Barclay, “Jews in a Diaspora Environment: Some Analytical Tools,” 96-97.

<sup>199</sup> Biale sees Jews as full participants in Italian culture, “albeit with their own concerns,” rather than outsiders apart from this culture (David Biale, “Toward a Cultural History of Jews,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), xix). This was almost certainly the case for Alexandrian Jews historically regarding Greek culture and society, however I would argue that Ps.-Aristeas would like to view Jewish life in Alexandria as ideally involving engagement with Greek culture sometimes but also some separation from that culture at other times, even if Jews were most probably permanently embedded in a culturally Greek environment and could not really escape from it.

surrounding culture, to reinforce the legitimacy of Jewish culture and ideology seems entirely in-line with what we would expect. Moreover, it might seem strange that Ps.-Aristeas could be using elements of Greek culture to subordinate this very same Greek culture (which is the result of his appropriation of Hellenism), yet Bhabha theorises that “the meaning of symbols of culture has no primordial unity or fixity, can be appropriated...and read anew.”<sup>200</sup> If this observation is correct, then there is nothing inherent about the symbols of Greek culture to prevent them from being put in service of Judaism, even to the point of subordinating Hellenism.

Still, one might object that Ps.-Aristeas often portrays Jews and Greeks amicably interacting with one another, as though equals and with both parties benefiting. Certainly, scholarship has long noted the cultural convergence of Judaism and Hellenism throughout the *Letter*, and yet, perhaps the most relevant passages for cultural and intellectual interaction, namely Eleazar’s sermon and the Symposia, arguably do not project or assert equality. I have already spoken of Eleazar’s attacks on non-Jewish practices and of the subversiveness of the translators’ responses in Chapter 2. However, even the very circumstances of these passages project the superiority of Jewishness. For in both these passages, Greeks are consistently portrayed as students in need of education and the Jews of the *Letter* as teachers who provide this education. For example, Aristeas, for all his knowledge, still requires an exposition of the Law from Eleazar, who provides an impassioned lecture for him. And in the Symposia section, Ptolemy and his own philosophers receive what is fundamentally a seven-day lecture in Jewish ethics. Now, this framing of Jews and Greeks as teachers and students respectively is clearly an unequal portrayal, with the Gentiles appearing rather unenlightened from their lack

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<sup>200</sup> Cited in Charles, “Hybridity and the Letter of Aristeas,” 246.

of knowledge, while the Jews present themselves as wise sages. This apparent inequality or disparity only then underscores the ideological hierarchy mentioned earlier where all things Jewish have the upper hand over Greeks and their culture. For this reason then, and what has already been said about Hellenism being employed to ‘buttress’ Jewishness, it seems entirely sensible to assert that Ps.-Aristeas is not projecting a sense of equality in the narrative of the *Letter*.

Furthermore, Ps.-Aristeas’ tendency to employ certain aspects of Greek culture, such as philosophy, specifically to reinforce Judaism seems to be his way of expressing an important caveat to his message that one can be Jewish and engage with Greek culture. This caveat is essentially that one’s participation in Greek society and culture, while permitted, must be of the sort that reinforces one’s Jewish identity and never undermines it. In practice, this caveat likely means that the specific aspects of Greek culture which one embraces must strengthen, or at least not threaten, one’s Judaism. Certainly, that such a caveat exists in the *Letter* is the logical implication of Ps.-Aristeas’ tendency to embrace Greek concepts that fortuitously accord with or strengthen Judaism, while seemingly avoiding embracing any aspects of Hellenism which blatantly undermine Judaism or one’s Jewish identity. Moreover, the idea that engagement with Greeks and their culture is only permitted if one’s Jewishness remains unharmed or even benefits explains why the Jewish translators interact with Ptolemy and his court so happily, despite Eleazar’s emphasis on separation. It is because their interaction and cooperation with Greeks leads to the Septuagint, a highly positive outcome for Jews in which Egyptian Judaism benefits greatly. Also, as Barclay notes, the translators take care to observe all their dietary prescriptions at Ptolemy’s court,<sup>201</sup> that is, they work to protect their Jewish

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<sup>201</sup> Barclay, “Cultural Convergence,” 147. Barclay is referring to *Let. Ar.*, 181.

identities while interacting with Greeks. Ultimately, it seems that the translators' engagement with the Greek world is permitted because they carefully guard their Jewish identities and also because this cultural cooperation yields a highly beneficial outcome, the Greek Septuagint. In sum, then, it would seem that Ps.-Aristeas' message that one can engage with Hellenism does have a caveat, namely that one's Jewish identity must be prioritised when exploring Greek society.

Now, this notion that, when engaging with Greek culture, one must prioritise one's Jewishness then provides an important litmus test to help Ps.-Aristeas' readers navigate Alexandrian culture and society safely. This litmus test essentially runs as follows: if an aspect of Greek culture reinforces, or at least does not threaten, the newly restored Jewish identity of Ps.-Aristeas' readers, then it can be embraced. But if it undermines their Jewishness, then it must be rejected, since Jewishness must be prioritised. Likewise, if a Gentile possibly threatens the Jewish identity of Ps.-Aristeas' readers, then interacting with them is off-limits, but if they encounter certain Gentiles who do not harm their identity, then his readers may associate with them.<sup>202</sup> In this way, Ps.-Aristeas offers his readers a straightforward way to determine what is acceptable Jewish conduct, beyond what he has already provided via Eleazar's sermon regarding the Jewish Law and the evils of polytheism and immoral sexual behaviour. This additional tool for determining acceptable conduct is important because, while the Law is a failsafe way to live ethically for Ps.-Aristeas, he cannot expect his readers

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<sup>202</sup> Eleazar, in fact, makes this point more or less at *Let. Ar.*, 130: "You see what kind of effect different behaviours and interactions produce, for human beings come to be perverted if they associate with wicked people, and they are wretched throughout their life. But, if they live with the wise and intelligent, then, out of previous ignorance, they obtain correction for their lives."

to be fully conversant in it yet, and even the explanation of the Law that he provides<sup>203</sup> might not necessarily be sufficient for every situation that his readers find themselves in. So, this litmus test of sorts constitutes a particularly useful and thus important tool for establishing which aspects of Greek society and culture are acceptable and which are unacceptable. And, by discerning between what is appropriate and inappropriate when navigating Alexandrian society, Ps.-Aristeas' readers will be able to keep their Jewishness safe and strong at all times, which is Ps.-Aristeas' overarching desire.

In light of this guiding principle, the Jewish translators show themselves to be the ideal Jews of the *Letter* in that they follow Ps.-Aristeas' litmus test, strategically engaging with Greek society and culture to reap the benefits but without damaging their Jewishness.<sup>204</sup> For their participation in Hellenism often seems specifically calculated to benefit Judaism while avoiding any kind of harm. For example, the translators are highly familiar with Greek language and literature,<sup>205</sup> which enables them to produce the Septuagint, benefiting Jews. Moreover, the translators are clearly very conversant in Greek philosophy, yet they have embraced it in a way that evidently does not damage their commitment to Judaism in any way, for they frequently invoke God throughout the Symposia. Likewise, as stated earlier, the translators engage with Ptolemy, a Gentile, but are careful to maintain the Jewish Law in the process, specifically their dietary customs. In sum, the Jewish translators carefully navigate Hellenic culture and society in a way that lets them enjoy the benefits of that civilisation

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<sup>203</sup> See Chapter 3 for Ps.-Aristeas' explanation of the Jewish Law.

<sup>204</sup> Honigman has also discussed the translators as representing a kind of Jewish ideal, particularly regarding their familiarity with Greek and Jewish learning, though certainly not in the context of this litmus test idea, which I have not yet seen any other scholar discuss (Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 19).

<sup>205</sup> *Let. Ar.*, 121.

without ever diluting their devotion to their ancestral religion. In a sense then, even if Ptolemy technically maintains political control over them, the translators always have the upper hand spiritually, remaining in control of their identities as Jews. Importantly for Ps.-Aristeas' purpose, by portraying such ideal Jews who had succeeded in being Jewish in a Greek world, Ps.-Aristeas provided his readers with a brilliant glimpse of what was possible for Alexandria's Jews – a glimpse of a life thoroughly enriched by Greek literature and philosophy, but firmly rooted in the Torah.

To conclude, Ps.-Aristeas hardly hated Greek culture in its entirety; indeed, throughout his *Letter*, he reassured his readers by clarifying that, when returning to Judaism, they would not need to abandon their participation in Greek culture, for it would be possible to be religiously Jewish and continue partaking in Greek society. However, Ps.-Aristeas' use of Greek cultural elements, most often to reinforce the legitimacy of Judaism, communicated an important caveat here: although engagement with Greek society would be permitted, one's Jewishness would have to remain dominant and be prioritised. There was no room for equality here between Jewishness and Greekness. Moreover, in the process of communicating this notion that one's Jewish identity should be prioritised, Ps.-Aristeas also offered his readers one last piece of moral instruction in the form of a litmus test. If an aspect of Greek culture upheld Jewishness, then it could be embraced, but, otherwise, it would need to be rejected. The Jewish translators embodied this principle most clearly, demonstrating to Ps.-Aristeas' readers that one could happily engage with Hellenism while never once ceding one's Jewish identity to the Greek status quo.

# Conclusion

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At the beginning of this thesis, I set out to determine the much-debated purpose or intended function of The Letter of Aristeas, essentially answering the question why did Ps.-Aristeas write the Letter. Through my analysis of the text, I concluded and demonstrated that the Letter was addressed to those Jews whose identification with Judaism had waned or vanished in the face of the considerable attractions of Hellenism and was written specifically for the purpose of restoring and solidifying their Jewish identities. In this final chapter, I will first summarise these conclusions. Then, I will demonstrate that these conclusions, due to their originality, constitute noteworthy contributions to scholarly understanding of the Letter. Moreover, these conclusions, as I will also show, have meaningful implications both for our understanding of the text as a whole and the Alexandrian context in which it was written. Lastly, I will provide some recommendations for future research.

Overall, I argued that Ps.-Aristeas' overarching desire was for Alexandria's Jewish community to have a strong attachment to Judaism and their identity more broadly. Accordingly, Ps.-Aristeas needed to respond to the concerning phenomenon of Alexandrian Jews either completely abandoning their religion and identity or diluting it in some way, a phenomenon evidenced in the ancient sources, as Chapter 1 demonstrated. And this is exactly what Ps.-Aristeas did, setting out to halt this phenomenon by writing a work, *The Letter of Aristeas*, that would restore their Jewish identities. For this was Ps.-Aristeas' primary goal, and the *Letter's* chief purpose, namely to persuade his readers, specifically those whose attachment to Judaism was waning or non-existent, to firmly re-identify with Judaism. Certainly, as Chapter 1 also demonstrated, it is quite unlikely that Ps.-Aristeas sought to



address non-Jews or those Jews who were already committed to Judaism. Rather, it was those Jews that Ps.-Aristeas felt had strayed too far from their ancestral religion who were his primary concern.

To accomplish his aim of restoring his readers' Jewish identity, Ps.-Aristeas firstly sought to advertise a Jewish identity by attractively portraying Jewishness, hoping that this would draw his readers back into the fold. This attractive portrayal involved presenting Jewishness in its many forms as being supreme, or at least highly positive, and framing these various elements of Jewishness in distinctively Greek terms. Such a portrayal, I argued, would instil Jewish pride in his readers and, due to the 'Greekness' of this portrayal, Jewish identity would ideally come across as the kind of identity that Ps.-Aristeas' Hellenophile readers would want to take on. Overall, this attractive portrayal worked to promote or advertise Jewishness so as to draw the readers back to identifying with Judaism.

However, to have the greatest chance of returning his readers to a Jewish identity, Ps.-Aristeas also undermined Alexandria's dominant politico-cultural 'authorities', such as rival Gentile ideologies, intellectual figures or even the state, for Jews might have been attracted to these 'authorities' in place of Judaism. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, Ps.-Aristeas subtly critiques Ptolemy I and II, his philosophers, certain prominent writers, namely the Utopian travel authors, while also denouncing certain aspects of Greek culture, such as idolatry. Significantly, by refuting these various peoples, their ideologies and practices, Ps.-Aristeas removes the ideological competition. The implication of this is that, if no individual or ideology can surpass Judaism, then there exists no ideological alternative to Judaism, and so Ps.-Aristeas' readers cannot reasonably ignore the Jewish religion. In this way, they would further be drawn back to their ancestral religion and identity.

Once his audience had decided to re-commit to Judaism, however, Ps.-Aristeas needed to ensure the quality and longevity of their newly restored Jewish identities, the *Letter's* secondary purpose. He needed to guarantee that his readers would develop a proper Jewish practice and would stick to it, rather than apostatise again. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, Ps.-Aristeas accomplished this goal by providing moral instruction, specifically the importance of observing the Law. He primarily communicated this instruction through Eleazar's sermon and the Symposia section. However, Ps.-Aristeas also stressed the importance of the Law through those other passages where the Septuagint translation is praised or legitimised, seemingly as a way to urge his readers to study this sacred text. For by learning and adhering to the Law, particularly as presented in the Septuagint, his readers would remain morally pure, preventing them from 'relapsing' into impure, Gentile lifestyles.

Yet, as Chapter 4 pointed out, Ps.-Aristeas hardly despised all Greek culture or saw it as needing to be wholly discarded. Rather, he reassured his readers, through his framing of Jewishness in Greek terms, that being Jewish was compatible with participating in Greek culture, that they would not have to abandon their Greek cultural citizenship entirely. However, this framing of Jewishness in a Greek fashion was not an assertion of equality between Jewishness and Hellenism. For Ps.-Aristeas, there existed a cultural hierarchy with one's Jewish identity on top above Greekness, and, likewise, there was a caveat to his notion that his readers could continue participating in Greek culture, namely that they needed to prioritise their Jewish identity while doing so, never engaging with Greek people, ideologies and practices that threatened their restored identity.

These conclusions that I have reached, while certainly informed by previous scholarship, constitute original arguments and are thus noteworthy contributions to current scholarship.

This is especially so, because, as I will shortly demonstrate, my conclusions have potentially significant implications for both scholars of the *Letter* and also historians of the Alexandrian milieu in which this text was written.

Firstly, my contention that the *Letter's* primary intended readership was those Jews of waning religious devotion or even apostates is a broadly new contribution to scholarly debate. Previously, scholars tended to view the *Letter's* primary readership as being either Greeks or Jews, especially those hesitant to embrace Greek society and firmly attached to Judaism.<sup>206</sup> I proposed, however, that Ps.-Aristeas' intended audience, while being Jewish, was considerably less attached to Judaism and already deeply integrated in Greek society and culture. Among Anglophone scholars, this is a suggestion that has seemingly been overlooked or not given much consideration. Even Hadas, and more recently Gruen and Honigman, who agree that the intended audience were Jews already integrated in Greek culture, nevertheless view these Jews as being comfortably Jewish at the same time.<sup>207</sup> In reality, I argued, Ps.-Aristeas' primary intended audience had limited or no attachment to Judaism. Tcherikover is perhaps an exception to the scholarship here, in that he was open to considering Jews of limited religiosity as possibly being a secondary audience. Nevertheless, scholars have mostly sidelined such Jews, seeing them as unlikely candidates for the *Letter's* primary readership, if they even consider them at all. Overall, then, my argument about Ps.-Aristeas' primary intended audience is an original contribution to scholarly research, offering a revised, if not totally new, understanding of the intended readership.

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<sup>206</sup> Tcherikover, Wright, Hacham and More are notable adherents of this argument, but see Chapter 1 for a brief summary of previous scholarly opinion on the question of intended readership with the relevant citations.

<sup>207</sup> Hadas, "Introduction," 60; Gruen, "The Letter of Aristeas and the Cultural Context of the Septuagint," 418-419; Honigman, "Genre and composition in the Book of Aristeas," 28-29.

Likewise, my conclusion that the *Letter's* primary purpose was to return Jews of limited religiosity to a strong Jewish identity also constitutes an original contribution to scholarship. For, while a range of scholars have suggested that Ps.-Aristeas was concerned with Jewish identity and Judaism's survival on some level,<sup>208</sup> none have argued that his primary purpose was to reinvigorate the Jewish identities of his readers, who had grown less attached to Judaism, by returning them to their ancestral faith. For example, Wright also believes that Ps.-Aristeas wanted his readers to have a strong Jewish identity and that his purpose was partly to re-affirm Jewish identity,<sup>209</sup> but, for Wright, there is no sense that Ps.-Aristeas wrote to bring his audience back to Judaism, because Wright does not consider that they had lost their Judaism in the first place. Moore has interestingly argued that Ps.-Aristeas wanted to revive his readers' attachment to Judaea and Jerusalem,<sup>210</sup> which certainly approaches my main argument, yet, for me, Ps.-Aristeas does not simply want to revive their attachment to the Holy Land, though this is certainly important; rather he wants to reinvigorate his readers' attachment to Jewishness in all its manifestations, whether they be Jewish beliefs, practices or symbols. Accordingly, it seems that my contention that the *Letter's* purpose was to restore the Jewish identities of people in whom there was little or no Jewish conviction is a new contribution to Anglophone scholarship.

This revised understanding of the *Letter's* purpose has a major implication for our understanding of the *Letter* as a whole. Namely, it offers a new way of looking at the *Letter*, specifically as a work that is seeking not to encourage more interaction among Jews and

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<sup>208</sup> Moore surveys a number of scholars who adopt this line of thinking that the *Letter* primarily concerned with Jewish identity (Moore, "For the Sake of Mice and Weasels," 206-207).

<sup>209</sup> Wright, "Introduction," 66-67, 69-70.

<sup>210</sup> Moore, "For the Sake of Mice and Weasels," 253-254.

Greeks, but rather less interaction, with a greater focus on embracing Judaism. For, if we accept Ps.-Aristeas' purpose was to bring his readers back to a Jewish lifestyle, after being lured away by Hellenism, then his text necessarily becomes one which centres around the importance of (re-)embracing Judaism. The focus is not on greater Jewish interaction with Greek culture. It is quite the opposite, for restoring his readers' attachment to Judaism requires that Ps.-Aristeas urge his readers to limit their interaction with Greek culture, which had coaxed them from Judaism in the first place. And, certainly, his readers are expected to completely detach themselves from certain Gentile customs, such as idolatry and forbidden sexual practices. So, Ps.-Aristeas seems to want his readers to lessen their interaction with Hellenism, rather than increase their interaction. This alternative way of viewing the *Letter*, which derives from my new argument about the text's purpose is rather significant, for it constitutes a break from the tendency initiated by Tcherikover that sees Ps.-Aristeas as fundamentally concerned with encouraging more interaction between Jews and Greeks. Thus, we are offered a fresh way of viewing the *Letter* as a whole.

In the same vein, while some have tended to see the *Letter* as encouraging a sort of egalitarian cooperation between Jews and Greeks,<sup>211</sup> my conclusions suggest the work actually contains noticeable hostility toward Gentiles, further shifting how we ought to view the *Letter*. For example, I concluded that Ps.-Aristeas constructs an attractive portrayal of Jewishness, where the superiority of Judaism is emphasised, while he also criticises certain rival Gentile ideologies and individuals. These conclusions compel us to reconsider the idea

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<sup>211</sup> See Chapter 4 (esp. notes 11-13) for a brief look at some major proponents of this viewpoint. Beyond those listed there, More and Hacham have both argued that Ps.-Aristeas, and thus the *Letter* itself, are positively disposed to the Ptolemaic dynasty. For them, there does not appear to be antagonism (Hacham, "A New Exodus Story?" 18-19; More, "Kingship Ideology," 318-319).

of the *Letter* as a text of peaceful cultural interaction on an equal playing-field, devoid of tension. For, as Chapter 2 demonstrated, the text happily criticises certain Gentiles, while asserting the supremacy of Jewishness throughout the narrative. Ultimately, I believe this forces us to consider the possibility that the *Letter* is a more antagonistic text than has been previously been acknowledged. At any rate, though, it is important to note that Birnbaum and Gruen are two scholars who do see the *Letter* as asserting superiority,<sup>212</sup> though they are seemingly in the minority among Anglophone scholars. And so, at the very least, my conclusions can be said to lend some support to their way of viewing the *Letter*, namely as one which asserts Jewish superiority over Gentiles, a scholarly interpretation which I hope will grow in popularity over time.

However, my conclusion regarding the *Letter's* purpose does not just have implications for scholars of the *Letter*; it also has meaningful implications for modern scholars of Alexandria, especially its Jewish population. Firstly, my argument that Ps.-Aristeas wrote to restore the Jewish identities of those who had diluted or abandoned their Jewishness would constitute further historical evidence for the existence of certain Alexandrian Jews who had left their religion in the mid-to-late Ptolemaic period. There was already some evidence of apostasy and waning Jewishness among certain Jews in Ptolemaic Alexandria, namely the case of Dositheus son of Drimylus and certain Alexandrian Jewish works that seem quite preoccupied with apostasy.<sup>213</sup> The *Letter* could thus be considered further evidence of the existence of such Jews, if my argument about its purpose is correct. This interpretation of the *Letter* might also force scholars to take more seriously the possibility of apostasy in Ptolemaic times, as

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<sup>212</sup> Erich Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 227–228; Birnbaum, “Allegorical Interpretation and Jewish Identity,” 311.

<sup>213</sup> See Chapter 1, specifically notes 22 and 24, for a full list of citations.

scholarship has tended to consider apostasy an extremely isolated phenomenon, if they accept it at all.<sup>214</sup> Secondly, my conclusions about the *Letter's* purpose would also constitute further evidence for growing anxiety among those Jews, like Ps.-Aristeas, who watched on with distress at this phenomenon of apostasy, essentially evidence that this phenomenon did not go unnoticed. As noted above, there were already Alexandrian Jewish texts that seemed to express concern about this phenomenon through their preoccupation with the theme of apostasy, and we might rightly regard *The Letter of Aristeas* as yet another example of such a text expressing concern. Accordingly then, my findings about the *Letter's* purpose do have implications that extend scholarship's understanding of the Jewish experience in Alexandria also, besides the *Letter* itself.

Lastly, it will be useful to briefly consider possible future research directions. First and foremost, it would be beneficial for future researchers to consider those parts of the *Letter* that I have not examined at length (due to space constraints), and perhaps reconsider them in light of my new argument that the *Letter's* purpose was to draw its readers back to a firm Jewish identity. In this way, one might test my argument that the text's purpose was to revive Jewish identity, examining whether the rest of the *Letter* actually coheres with this argument. And if the text does cohere, as I believe it does, then we stand to learn more about how the rest of the *Letter* operates in relation to this overarching purpose of restoring Jewish identity,

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<sup>214</sup> E.g. Modrzejewski, who rightly argues the Dositheus son of Drimylus was a real person, not a literary fiction, nevertheless considers him an exceptionally unusual case (Modrzejewski, "A New Diaspora," 87-88). Likewise, Gruen, who would agree with me on the idea that Ps.-Aristeas asserts Jewish superiority, still remarkably argues that "Jews did not abandon or compromise their own traditions while functioning successfully in the society of Hellenistic Alexandria," (Gruen, "The Letter of Aristeas and the Cultural Context of the Septuagint," 418). Wright, at least, acknowledges that Jews may have encountered some difficulties in maintaining their traditions and participating in wider Alexandrian life, though seemingly not arguing that Jews actually abandoned or diluted their Jewish identities (Wright, "Translation and Commentary," 276-277).

while also potentially gaining a greater insight into Ps.-Aristeas' ideology. Particular sections worth examining would include Aristeas the narrator's remarks to Philocrates at the *Letter's* beginning, the ekphrasis on Ptolemy's gifts, and perhaps the Symposia section too, for this section especially contains a wealth of moral instruction too copious to be fully analysed in this thesis. Regarding the Alexandrian milieu of *Letter's* composition, a comparative study of other Alexandrian Jewish texts alongside the *Letter*, centred around how they each deal with the theme of apostasy, would prove useful, for the different reactions and portrayals of these authors could be used to tentatively establish the details of the phenomenon of apostasy and waning Jewish pride more broadly. Certainly, any improvement in our understanding of the Alexandrian context would increase our ability to interpret the *Letter*.

To conclude, the issue that I set out to resolve in this thesis was the much-pondered question of authorial intention in *The Letter of Aristeas*, specifically the issue of the text's purpose or intended function. Ultimately, I concluded that Ps.-Aristeas was likely responding to a disturbing phenomenon of Jews abandoning or lessening their commitment to Jewish beliefs and customs in Alexandria, and that his purpose in writing was to revive the waning or non-existent Jewish identities of these individuals. To accomplish this goal, Ps.-Aristeas constructed an attractive portrayal of Jewishness, while criticising any potential rival individuals and ideologies. Moreover, he provided moral instruction to ensure that his readers would not relapse into Gentile lifestyles once they had recommitted to a Jewish life and identity. These conclusions about purpose and readership constitute original contributions to scholarly debate, which yield meaningful implications for our understanding of the *Letter* and the Alexandrian context in which Ps.-Aristeas was writing. Notably, these conclusions offer a new way of viewing the *Letter* as a whole, while also providing further evidence for the



somewhat overlooked phenomenon of diminishing attachment to Judaism under the impact of Hellenism in Alexandria.

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