

The Letter of Aristeas

The Letter of Aristeas
Facing Greek – English Text



Timothy A. Lee Publishing

The Letter of Aristeas: Facing Greek – English Text

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Introduction

This is a facing parallel edition for The Letter of Aristeas. The purpose of this book and its series is to encourage students, scholars, and interested lay persons to read and study numerous Early Jewish Writings that have been marginalised for too long in scholarship. The book displays the Early Jewish Writings in an ancient language alongside a facing English translation for comparison.

The Letter of Aristeas purports to recount the origin of the Greek Septuagint translation of the Pentateuch in the third century BCE. It suggests this translation of Jewish Law into Greek was instigated after the founding of the library of Alexandria by order of Ptolemy II (reigned 284-246 BCE) and miraculously accomplished by 72 translators. The name Septuagint derives from these 72 translators, which when rounded to 70 is *Septuaginta* (LXX) in Latin, hence Septuagint. The veracity of this account was accepted by Philo (Life of Moses 2 25-44), Josephus (Antiquities 12 2.11-118), church fathers (e.g. Justin Martyr, Apology 1.31), and the Babylonian Talmud (Megillah 9a). However, scholars have recognised for hundreds of years that the letter was actually composed over a century later which leads some to doubt the historical value of the entire work.

Whatever the kernel of historicity behind it, the letter suggests a high level of integration between Jewish culture and the Hellenistic world. It is an important source for a number of issues

on Hellenistic Judaism and the Septuagint. With the translation Jewish Law becomes comparable to Hellenistic philosophy. It's conservative stance on the 'perfect' original translation of the Septuagint (Letter 310) hints at unease with revisions of the Septuagint in circulation from very early days. Aristeas rejects such revision since in his view the Pentateuch had been 'perfectly' translated.¹

What are Early Jewish Writings?

This series of early Jewish writings is unique for it presents Greek, Latin, Ethiopic, or Syriac texts alongside an English translation. This allows students, scholars, and interested lay persons to get into these marginalised texts quickly and without the need for unaffordable editions. The works included in this series are those not found in the Rabbinic Bible, Christian deuterocanonical works (or apocrypha), and Hellenistic Jewish works such as Josephus and Philo. They reflect different theologies and a pluriformity of beliefs unknown in Judaism until being rediscovered in the last few centuries. These writings contain numerous genres popular from the period. These include: Apocalyptic writings (e.g., 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, Sibylline Oracles); Rewritten Scripture (e.g., Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Temple Scroll, Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, Josephus' Jewish Antiquities); Psalms, and Prayers (e.g., The Psalms of Solomon, additional Psalms); Legends (e.g., the Letter of Aristeas); Testaments (e.g., Testament of Twelve Patriarchs, Testament of Abraham); and more explicitly Hellenistic works (e.g., Exagoge).

These books have historically been referred to as pseudepigrapha (singular pseudepigraphon); however, growing awareness of the

¹ For further reading see Dries De Crom. "The Letter of Aristeas." In: *The Oxford Handbook of the Septuagint*. Ed. by Alison G. Salvesen and Timothy Michael Law. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 121–134.

problems with this term have led me to disregard it in place of the more neutral ‘early Jewish writings’. There are two main problems with the term *pseudepigrapha*.

Firstly, it involves anachronistic value judgements of different corpus when the boundaries were not so clear.² For instance, 4 Ezra is normally included among the *Pseudepigrapha* since it is not found in the Septuagint, but from the eighth century it began to be included among the Latin Vulgate with Christian additions in a work known as 2 Esdras, so is found in many Catholic and Anglican Bibles today. Likewise, Jubilees and 1 Enoch are found in the Ethiopic Bible and so canonical for the Ethiopian Orthodox church and Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews).³

Secondly, the term *pseudepigrapha* contains the idea of forgery and falsehood which degrades the works.⁴ It is probable that many of these works were not written to deceive, but followed the accepted literary conventions of the day in a culture for whom our modern concepts of authority would be alien. The place use of *pseudepigrapha* was contested in the early church.⁵ We should not assume these writings are frauds, or literary devices that the audience were expected to recognise. Michael Stone argues a kernel of actual visionary activity or religious experience lies behind many of these visions.⁶ Philip Alexander also finds it possible the scribes were inspired interpreters like the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran (1QpHab 7.4-5), though thinks it

² See Hindy Najman. “The Vitality of Scripture Within and Beyond the “Canon”.” In: *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012), pp. 497–518.

³ Likewise, the Psalms of Solomon and Book of Odes are sometimes also included among the Deuterocanonical works since they are preserved in several Septuagint manuscripts.

⁴ James C. VanderKam. *An Introduction to Early Judaism. Second Edition*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2022, p. 56. The Oxford English Dictionary simply defines the *pseudepigrapha* as spurious (i.e. fake) writings.

⁵ The term *pseudepigrapha* was used by the Church Fathers. Eusebius quotes Serapion of Antioch (c. 200 CE) who speaks of rejecting works false ascribed to Peter, such as the ‘Gospel of Peter’ (Eccl. Hist. 6.12.3)

τὰ δὲ ὀνόματι αὐτῶν **ψευδεπιγραφα** ἔμπειροι παραιτούμεθα

‘the writings which **falsely ascribe** their names we reject intelligently.’

⁶ Michael E. Stone. *Ancient Judaism. New Visions and Views*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011, p. 90.

more likely the authors received traditions they believed originated with figures such as Moses.⁷ Origen adopted an eclectic position where he considered some works neither genuine, nor spurious, but mixed and thus for for (cautious) use (Commentary on John 13.104).⁸

Initially, these writings were accepted as authoritative in many Jewish and Christians communities. However, they came to be rejected by the Jews and most of the church, especially in the Western Catholic tradition (which includes Protestants). Take, for example, 1 Enoch which was cited as authoritative in the Epistle of Jude, and the Epistle of Barnabas (Barn. 4.3). A century later (c. 200 CE) Tertullian still considered this book to be authoritative scripture given its use in the New Testament Epistle of Jude, while recognising it was not received by some and rejected by the Jews.⁹ Tertullian goes on to explain that 1 Enoch had been rejected in part given the impossibility of it surviving the flood. A few years later, Origen labelled the works apocrypha, but not in a disparaging way.¹⁰ Due to hesitancy over their origins, they never circulated widely in the church or synagogue and so were not included among the fourth century canon lists. Some works such as Jubilees and 1 Enoch were

⁷ Philip S. Alexander. "Retelling the Old Testament." In: *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars, SSF.* ed. by D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 99–121, p. 101.

⁸ Πέτρου κηρύγματος ... ἐξετάζοντας καὶ περὶ τοῦ βιβλίου, πότερόν ποτε γνήσιόν ἐστιν ἢ νόθον ἢ μικτόν.

"The Preaching of Peter ... we would have to examine whether it is genuine at all, or spurious, or a mixture." (Origen, Commentary on John 13.104, cited William Adler. "The Pseudepigrapha in the Early Church." In: *The Canon Debate.* Ed. by Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002, pp. 211–228, p. 215)

⁹ Scio scripturam Enoch, quae hunc ordinem angelis dedit, non recipi a quibusdam quia nec in armarium Iudaicum admittitur... Eo accedit quod Enoch apud Iudam apostolum testimonium possidet.

'I know that the scripture of Enoch, which has given this order to angels, is not received by some people, because it is not admitted into the Jewish chest ... To these considerations is added the fact that Enoch possesses a testimony in the Apostle Jude.' (*de cultu Feminarum* 1.3)

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 214–215.

translated around the fifth century from Greek into Ethiopian where they remained part of a church untouched by Catholic influence after the Christological debates and split of the 4th and 5th centuries.

Why Read these Writings?

There are several reasons why these writings should be read. Firstly, these texts were very important for many people in early Judaism and the early church so they should be for us, whether a Jew or Christian. In several communities, many of these works were authoritative and even considered scripture on par with the books that we now consider Scripture. The Dead Sea Scroll community (almost certainly Essenes) had more copies (and often luxurious ones) of 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and the Temple Scroll than most books of scripture. In fact, as mentioned previously, books like 4 Ezra, Jubilees, and 1 Enoch are still considered scripture by various churches and Jewish groups today.

Secondly, the Pseudepigrapha is saturated with examples of early Jewish biblical interpretation. If one wants to know how Jews and early Christians understood scripture they should study the exegetical practices employed in these writings. They contain some of the earliest examples of biblical hermeneutics, commentary, and theological reasoning. These texts record developing and competing theologies of determinism, free-will, messianism, resurrection, and the origins of evil.

Thirdly, related to this, reading these texts are important for correcting false ideas about early Judaism. In Protestant scholarship since the days of Martin Luther, later ideas of legalism, often inspired by narrow readings of Rabbinical Judaism were assumed to reflect the scene in Second Temple Judaism. However, reading these writings, and the Dead Sea Scrolls shows this not to be exactly the case.

Fourthly, for Christians the New Testament itself quotes and depends upon these writings. Here are three examples. Jude 14 cites 1 Enoch 1.9 with the same formula the synoptic gospels use to cite Isaiah.¹¹ Likewise, Paul makes a typological reference of Jesus being a rock that followed the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10.4). Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum (sometimes labelled Pseudo-Philo) describes a well of water following the Israelites to miraculously water them in the Exodus (LAB 10.7). This – by extension – implies the rock Moses struck to supply water (Exodus 17.6) is supposed to have miraculously followed them – a theme developed further in Rabbinic literature. Finally, the magicians who assist Pharaoh during the plagues of Egypt are never named in Exodus. However, 2 Timothy 3.8 supplies the names Jamnes and Mambres. Origen notes these names are found in a secret (pseudepigraphical) work titled ‘the book of Jamnes and Mambres’ (Commentariorum Series 117)¹²

Fifthly, these writings were not only read throughout early Judaism and the early church, but even more recently. It was used in debates over the origins of native Americans in the New World.¹³ One might think Protestants have flatly rejected them with an insistence on *sola scriptura*. However, history is more complex. Bruce Metzger draws attention to one unexpected allusion to 4 Ezra by none other than Hugh Latimer, one of the

¹¹ Προεφήτευσεν δὲ καὶ τούτοις ἑβδομος ἀπὸ Ἀδάμ Ἐνώχ λέγων.

‘about these things Enoch the seventh from Adam prophesied’ (Jude 14)

Καλῶς ἐπροφήτευσεν Ἡσαΐας περὶ ὑμῶν

‘Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you’ (Mark 7.6)

καλῶς ἐπροφήτευσεν περὶ ὑμῶν Ἡσαΐας

‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you’ (Matt 15.7)

¹² item quod ait »sicut Iannes et Mambres restiterunt Moysi« non invenitur publicis libris, sed in libro secreto qui superscribitur liber Iannes et Mambres.

Likewise, what he says, “as Jamnes and Mambres resisted Moses,” is not found in public books, but in a secret book which is titled the book of Jamnes and Mambres.

(This section of his commentary is only extant in its Latin translation.)

¹³ Michael E. Stone. *Fourth Ezra*. Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990, p. 47.

architects of the English Reformation.¹⁴ The spot where he was burned alive is marked with a cross on Broad Street in Oxford. On the stake with his fellow reformer Nicholas Ridley, Latimer echoed 4 Ezra,

Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.

I will light a lamp of understanding in your heart which will not be put out until the things have ended about which you will write. (4 Ezra 14.25)

I suggest these writings are not only relevant to Jews, and Catholics, but also to Protestant heirs of Latimer.

Further Study

If you want more commentary on the English texts, then you can consult the two-volume collection of English translations by James Charlesworth.¹⁵ This collection spurred on modern study into the Pseudepigrapha.¹⁶ Since the 1980s more collections of texts have been added.¹⁷ And recently a more student-friendly anthology with helpful introductions has appeared.¹⁸ There are

¹⁴ B. M. Metzger. "The Fourth Book of Ezra." In: *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume One*. Ed. by James H. Charlesworth. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983, pp. 517–560, p. 523.

¹⁵ James H Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Two Volumes*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983-85.

¹⁶ This supplants R. H. Charles, ed. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English. Two Volumes*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1913.

¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alex Panayotov, eds. *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. More Noncanonical Scriptures*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2013.

¹⁸ E.g., Brad Embry, Ronald Herms, and Archie T. Wright, eds. *Early Jewish Literature. An Anthology. Two Volumes*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018.

also several good introductions to these early Jewish writings, but pride of place goes to George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*.¹⁹

Sources

The Greek text is that of H. B. Swete, *The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint* Vol 3 (Cambridge: CUP, Second Edition 1899). This text is in the public domain.

The English text is based on Henry St. John Thackeray, *The Letter of Aristeas* (London: SPCK, 1918). This text is in the public domain. I have modernised the language.

Contact

If a reader finds an issue with this book, or wishes to suggest an improvement, please email: corrections@timothyalee.com.

Acknowledgments

My interest in these writings stems from the encouragement Hindy Najman gave to me to read broadly and to read ancient biblical interpretation. Through her Oxford Biblical Interpretation Seminars during my MPhil, I had my mind blown open

¹⁹ George W. E. Nickelsburg. *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah. Second Edition*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005. For an introduction to the setting and academic questions of the period, see Matthias Henze and Rodney A. Werline. *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters*. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2020. For a simple introduction just to the Pseudeipgrapha see Daniel M. Gurtner. *Introducing the Pseudeipgrapha of Second Temple Judaism. Message, Content, and Significance*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020.

by the whole new world of fascinating text to explore. So, I thank Hindy for all the encouragement she has given me and all her students in Oxford. Through my ongoing studies, now in Cambridge, I have continued to engage with many of these texts, especially rewritten scriptures(/Bible), or as Molly Zahn would say simply 'reuse'. Discussions with the late Jim Aitken, and now Nathan MacDonald have also been fruitful. When I did not find any useful resources that laid out English translations alongside ancient languages, I decided to create this series myself. I hope these books will be as useful to many people, just as they were useful to me.

Emmanuel College, Cambridge

24th April, 2024.

Timothy A. Lee

ΑΡΙΣΤΕΑΣ ΦΙΛΟΚΡΑΤΕΙ

Introductory Address to Philocrates

¹ Ἀξιολόγου διηγήσεως, ὦ Φιλόκρατες, περὶ τῆς γενηθείσης ἡμῖν ἐντυχίας πρὸς Ἐλεάζαρον τὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἀρχιερέα συνεσταμένης, διὰ τὸ σὲ περὶ πολλοῦ πεποιῆσθαι, παρ' ἕκαστα ὑπομιμνήσκων, συνακοῦσαι περὶ ὧν ἀπεστάλημεν καὶ διὰ τί, πεπειράμαι σαφῶς ἐκθέσθαι σοι, κατελιφῶς ἦν ἔχεις φιλομαθῆ διάθεσιν, ² ὅπερ μέγιστόν ἐστιν ἀνθρώπῳ, προσμανθάνειν αἰετι καὶ προσλαμβάνειν, ἥτοι κατὰ τὰς ἱστορίας, ἢ καὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ πρᾶγμα πεπειραμένῳ. οὕτω γὰρ κατασκευάζεται ψυχῆς καθαρὰ διάθεσις, ἀναλαβοῦσα τὰ κάλλιστα· καὶ πρὸς τὸ πάντων κυριώτατον νενευκυῖα τὴν εὐσέβειαν ἀπλανεῖ κεχρημένη κανόνι διοικεῖ.

³ Τὴν προαίρεσιν ἔχοντες ἡμεῖς πρὸς τὸ περιέργως τὰ θεῖα κατανοεῖν, ἑαυτοὺς ἐπεδώκαμεν εἰς τὸν προειρημένον ἄνδρα πρεσβειάν, καλοκαγαθία καὶ δόξῃ προτετιμημένον ὑπὸ τῶν πολιτῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ κατακεκτημένον μεγίστην ὠφέλειαν τοῖς σὺν ἑαυτῷ καὶ τοῖς κατὰ τοὺς ἄλλους τόπους πολίταις, πρὸς τὴν ἐρμηνείαν τοῦ θείου νόμου, διὰ τὸ γεγράφθαι παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐν διφθέραις ἑβραϊκοῖς γράμμασιν. ⁴ ἦν δὴ καὶ ἐποιησάμεθα ἡμεῖς σπουδῆ, λαβόντες καιρὸν πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα περὶ τῶν μετοικισθέντων εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἐκ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ὑπὸ πατρὸς τοῦ βασιλέως, πρῶτως κεκτημένου τὴν τε πόλιν καὶ κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον παρειληφότος. Ἄξιόν ἐστι καὶ ταυτὰ σοι δηλώσαι. ⁵ πέπεισμαι γὰρ σε μᾶλλον ἔχοντα πρόσκλισιν πρὸς τὴν σεμνότητα καὶ τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων διάθεσιν τῶν κατὰ τὴν σεμνὴν νομοθεσίαν διεξαγόντων, περὶ ὧν προαιρούμεθα (δηλοῦν, ἀσμένως σε) ἀκούσεσθαι, προσφάτως παραγεγενημένον ἐκ τῆς νήσου πρὸς ἡμεῖς, καὶ βουλόμενον συνακοῦειν ὅσα πρὸς ἐπισκευὴν ψυχῆς ὑπάρχει. ⁶ καὶ πρότερον

The Letter of Aristeas

(I) *Introductory Address to Philocrates*

¹ As the story of our deputation to Eleazar, the high priest of the Jews, is worth telling, and because you, O Philocrates, have set your heart, as you are constantly reminding me, on learning the motives and purpose of our mission, I have endeavoured to give you a clear account of the matter. I know that love of learning of yours; ² and it is indeed man's highest task "ever to make addition to his store of learning and acquirements,"¹ either by the study of history or by actual experience of affairs. The soul is thus built up in purity, by taking up into itself what is best, and with piety, supreme above all, as its aim, is assisted in its pursuit by an unerring guide.

³ It was my² devotion to the careful study of religion which led me³ to offer my⁴ services for the embassy to the man I have mentioned, who, owing to his virtuous character and exalted position, is held in high honour both by his countrymen and by the rest of the world, and is in possession of documents of the greatest service to his nation, whether at home or abroad, for the translation of the divine law, because it exists in their country written on parchment in Hebrew characters. ⁴ This embassy then I⁵ undertook with enthusiasm, after finding an opportunity of approaching the king on the subject of the men who were removed to Egypt from Judea by the king's father, when first he took over the city⁶ and the government of Egypt. This story also

¹These words form an iambic line in the Greek, and are probably a quotation from a lost tragedy.

²Lit. "our"

³Lit. "us"

⁴Lit. "our"

⁵Lit. "we."

⁶Alexandria.

δὲ διεπεψάμην σοι περὶ ὧν ἐνόμιζον ἀξιομνημονεύτων εἶναι τὴν ἀναγραφὴν, ἣν μετελάβομεν παρὰ τῶν κατὰ τὴν λογιωτάτην Αἴγυπτον λογιωτάτην ἀρχιερέων περὶ τοῦ γένους τῶν Ἰουδαίων. ⁷ φιλομαθῶς γὰρ ἔχοντί σοι περὶ τῶν δυναμένων ὠφελῆσαι διάνοιαν δέον ἐστὶ μεταδιδόναι, μάλιστα μὲν πᾶσι τοῖς ὁμοίοις, πολλῶ δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ γνησίαν ἔχοντι τὴν αἴρεσιν, οὐ μόνον κατὰ τὸ συγγενὲς ἀδελφῶ καθεστῶτι τὸν τρόπον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν ὀρμῇ τὸν αὐτὸν ὄντα ἡμῖν. ⁸ χρυσοῦ γὰρ χάρις ἢ κατασκευή τις ἄλλη τῶν τετιμημένων παρὰ τοῖς κενοδόξοις ὠφέλεισαν οὐκ ἔχει τὴν αὐτὴν, ὅσον ἢ παιδείας ἀγωγή καὶ ἢ περὶ τούτων φροντίς. ἵνα δὲ μὴ περὶ τῶν προλεγομένων μηκύνοντες ἀδόλεσχόν τι ποιῶμεν, ἐπὶ τὸ συνεχὲς τῆς διηγήσεως ἐπανήξομεν.

Origin of the Scheme and Preliminary Proceedings

(a) The Proposal of the King's Librarian

⁹ Κατασταθεὶς ἐπὶ τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως βιβλιοθήκης Δημήτριος ὁ Φαληρεὺς ἐχρηματίσθη πολλὰ διάφορα πρὸς τὸ συναγαγεῖν, εἰ δυνατόν, ἅπαντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην βιβλία· καὶ ποιούμενος ἀγορασμοὺς καὶ μεταγραφὰς ἐπὶ τέλος ἤγαγεν, ὅσον ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως πρόθεσιν. ¹⁰ παρόντων οὖν ἡμῶν ἐρωτηθεὶς Πόσαι τινὲς μυριάδες τυγχάνουσι βιβλίων; εἶπεν Ὑπὲρ τὰς εἴκοσι, βασιλεῦ· σπουδάσω δ' ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ πρὸς τὸ πληρωθῆναι πεντήκοντα μυριάδας τὰ λοιπά. προσήγγεται δέ μοι καὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων νόμιμα μεταγραφῆς ἄξια καὶ τῆς παρὰ σοὶ βιβλιοθήκης εἶναι. ¹¹ Τί τὸ κωλύον οὖν, εἶπεν, ἐστὶ σε τοῦτο ποιῆσαι; πάντα γὰρ ὑποτέτακταί σοι τὰ πρὸς τὴν χρείαν. ὁ δὲ Δημήτριος εἶπεν Ἑρμηνείας προσδεῖται· χαρακτηῖσι γὰρ ἰδίους κατὰ Ἰουδαίων χρῶνται, καθάπερ Αἰγύπτιοι τῇ τῶν γραμμάτων

is worthwhile my telling you. ⁵ For I am persuaded that you above all men, with your leanings towards the holiness and the sentiments of the men who live in accordance with the holy law, will gladly listen to the story about them which I¹ purpose to narrate, having but recently come over from the island² to us and being anxious to hear whatever makes for the soul's edification. ⁶ On a former occasion, too, I sent you a description of matters in my opinion worthy of record concerning the Jewish nation, which I³ obtained from the high priests, the most learned body in that most learned land of Egypt.⁴ ⁷ It is right to communicate such things to you with your eagerness to learn what may benefit the mind; very willingly would I impart them to all who are like-minded with you, but chiefly to you; so sincere are your principles, and not only does your character show you to be my brother by birth, but in your striving after goodness you are at one with me.⁵ ⁸ For neither the attraction of gold nor any other of the objects that the vain-glorious hold in honour confers the same benefit as a cultured training and the pains expended thereon. But, not to weary you with too long an introduction, I⁶ will resume the thread of the narrative.⁷

(II) Origin of the Scheme and Preliminary Proceedings

(a) The Proposal of the King's Librarian

⁹ Demetrius of Phalerum,⁸ as keeper of the king's li-

¹Lit. "we."

²Probably Cyprus is meant.

³Lit. "we."

⁴Possibly the writer wishes to identify himself with the historian Aristeas, who wrote a work about the Jews, a fragment of which is preserved by Eusebius.

⁵Lit. "with us." Perhaps with a slight transposition of words we should read, "and not only are you my brother by birth, but also in your character, which in its striving after goodness is akin to ours."

⁶Lit. "we."

⁷Cf. 2 Macc. 2.32.

⁸Demetrius lived from about 345 BCE to about 283 BCE. The last part of his life was spent at the court of Ptolemy Soter, but he was out of favour with Ptolemy Philadelphus and banished by him. He was never

Description of the Royal Presents

51 Ὡς δὲ ἐπηγγειλάμην καὶ τὰ τῶν κατασκευασμάτων διασαφῆσαι, ποιήσω. πολυτεχνία γὰρ διαφέροντα συνετελέσθη, τοῦ βασιλέως πολλὴν ἐπίδοσιν ποιουμένου καὶ παρ' ἕκαστον ἐπιθεωροῦντος τοὺς τεχνίτας. διὸ παριδεῖν οὐδὲν ἠδύναντο οὐδὲ εἰκῆ συντελέσαι. πρῶτον δέ σοι τὰ περὶ τῆς τραπέζης ἐξηγήσομαι. **52** προεθυμείτο μὲν οὖν ὁ βασιλεὺς ὑπέροπλόν τι ποιῆσαι τοῖς μέτροις τὸ κατασκεύασμα. προσέταξε δὲ πυθέσθαι τῶν ἀνὰ τὸν τόπον, πηλίκη τίς ἐστίν ἢ προὔσα καὶ κειμένη κατὰ τὸ ἱερὸν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις. **53** ὡς δὲ ἀπεφῆναντο τὰ μέτρα, προσεπηρώτησεν, εἰ κατασκευάσει μείζονα. τινὲς μὲν οὖν καὶ τῶν ἱερέων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἔλεγον μηδὲν ἐπικωλύειν. ὁ δὲ εἶπε βούλεσθαι καὶ πενταπλῆν τοῖς μεγέθεσι ποιῆσαι, διατάζειν δὲ μήποτε ἄχρηστος γένηται πρὸς τὰς λειτουργίας. **54** οὐ γὰρ αἰρεῖσθαι τὸ κείσθαι μόνον ἐν τῷ τόπῳ (τὰ) παρ' αὐτοῦ, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον χάριν ἔξειν, ἐὰν τὰς καθηκούσας λειτουργίας ἐπὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ κατεσκευασμένων οἷς καθῆκε ποιῶνται δεόντως. **55** οὐ γὰρ ἔνεκεν σπάνεως χρυσοῦ τὰ προσυντετελεσμένα βραχύμετρα καθέστηκεν, ἀλλὰ φαίνεται πρὸς τινὰ λόγον, εἶπεν, οὕτως συνεστηκέναι τοῖς μέτροις. ἔτι γὰρ ἐπιταγῆς οὔσης οὐθὲν ἂν ἐσάνιζε· διόπερ οὐ παραβατέον οὐδὲ ὑπερθετέον τὰ καλῶς ἔχοντα. **56** τῇ μὲν οὖν ποικιλίᾳ τῶν τεχνῶν ἐκέλευσεν ὅτι μάλιστα χρῆσασθαι, σεμνῶς ἅπαντα διανούμενος καὶ φύσιν ἔχων ἀγαθὴν εἰς τὸ συνιδεῖν πραγμάτων ἔμφασιν. ὅσα δ' ἂν ἦ ἄγραφα, πρὸς καλλονὴν ἐκέλευσε ποεῖν· ὅσα δὲ διὰ γραπτῶν, μέτρα αὐτοῖς κατακολουθῆσαι.

57 Δύο γὰρ πῆχεων τὸ μήκος, τὸ δὲ ὕψος πῆχεος καὶ ἡμίσιους συνετέλουν, χρυσοῦ δοκίμου στερεὰν πάντοθεν τὴν ποιήσιν

Aristeas. In the MSS of Aristeas Xafipias stands in place of Zacharias and the sixth name in this tribe has disappeared.

Jesus, Sabbataius, Simon, Levi: of the sixth, Judas, Joseph, Simon, Zacharias, Samuel,¹ Selemias: of the seventh, Sabbataius, Zedekias, Jacob, **49** Isaac, Iesias,² Natthaius: of the eighth, Theodosius, Jason, Jesus, Theodotus, John, Jonathas: of the ninth, Theophilus, Abraham, Arsamus, Jason, Endemias, Daniel: **50** of the tenth, Jeremy, Eleaxar, Zacharias, Baneas, Elisha, Dathaius³: of the eleventh, Samuel, Joseph, Judas. Jonathes, Caleb,⁴ Dositheus: of the twelfth, Isaelus, John, Theodosius, Arsamus, Abietes, Ezekiel: in all seventy-two persons.”

51 Such, then, was the reply which Eleazar⁵ gave to the king’s letter.

(III) Description of the Royal Presents

I will now fulfil the promise which I made to describe the works of art. They were worked with extraordinary skill, as the king, in addition to his large grants, also exercised a constant supervision over the craftsmen, so that they could not neglect or scamp any part of the work. **52** I will first give you an account of the table. Now, the king’s intention was to make this piece of work of gigantic dimensions. However, he caused inquiries to be made of persons in the locality as to the size of the previous table⁶ which stood in the temple at Jerusalem; **53** and when they reported the dimensions, he inquired further whether he should make one on a larger scale. Some of the priests and of the people said that there was nothing to prevent him. But the king replied that, though his wish was to make his gift five times as large, yet he doubted whether such a table might not be

¹Text “Somoelus”

²Probably = Jesse (Epiphan. **ΨΝ**).

³Or Thaddaeus, as one MS reads.

⁴So Epiphanius. The MSS have **Ξαβεύ**.

⁵Or “El. and his colleagues.”

⁶i.e. the table of shewbread.

ἄγοι τὴν ἑαυτοῦ· καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς πᾶσιν αἴτιος ἀγαθῶν ἐστίν, ὃ κατακολουθεῖν ἀναγκαῖον.

206 Ἐπαινέσας δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦτον ἕτερον ἐπηρώτα Πῶς ἂν τὴν ἀλήθειαν διατηροῖ; ὁ δὲ πρὸς τοῦτο ἀπεκρίθη Γίνωσκων ὅτι μεγάλην αἰσχύνην ἐπιφέρει τὸ ψεῦδος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, πολλῶ δὲ μᾶλλον τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν· ἐξουσίαν γὰρ ἔχοντες ὁ βούλονται πράσσειν, τίνας ἔνεκεν ἂν ψεύσαιντο; προσλαμβάνειν δὲ δεῖ τοῦτό σε, βασιλεῦ, διότι φιλαλήθης ὁ θεὸς ἐστίν.

207 Ἀποδεξάμενος δὲ εὖ μάλα καὶ τοῦτον ἐπιβλέψας εἶπεν Τί ἐστι σοφίας διδαχὴ; ὁ δὲ ἕτερος ἀπεφήνατο Καθὼς οὐ βούλει σεαυτῷ τὰ κακὰ παρεῖναι, μέτοχος δὲ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὑπάρχειν ἀπάντων, εἰ πράσσοις τοῦτο πρὸς τοὺς ὑποτεταγμένους καὶ τοὺς ἀμαρτάνοντας, εἰ τοὺς καλοὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιεικέστερον νουθετοῖς· καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἅπαντας ἐπιεικεία ἄγει.

208 Ἐπαινέσας αὐτὸν τῷ μετ' αὐτὸν εἶπε Πῶς ἂν φιλόανθρωπος εἴη; κάκεινος ἔφη Θεωρῶν ὡς ἐν πολλῶ χρόνῳ καὶ κακοπαθείαις μεγίσταις αὖξει τε καὶ γεννᾶται τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος· ὅθεν οὔτε εὐκόπως δεῖ κολάζειν, οὔτε αἰκίαις περιβάλλειν· γινώσκων ὅτι τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ζῆν ἐν ὀδύναις τε καὶ τιμωρίαις καθέστηκεν· ἐπινοῶν οὖν ἕκαστα πρὸς τὸν ἔλεον τραπήσῃ καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἐλεήμων ἐστίν.

209 Ἀποδεξάμενος δὲ τοῦτον ἐπυνθάνετο τοῦ κατὰ τὸ ἐξῆς Τίς ἀναγκαιότατος τρόπος βασιλείας; Τὸ συντηρεῖν, εἶπεν, αὐτὸν ἀδωροδόκητον, καὶ νήφειν τὸ πλεῖον μέρος τοῦ βίου, καὶ δικαιοσύνην προτιμᾶν καὶ τοὺς τοιούτους φιλοποιεῖσθαι· καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς φιλοδίκαιός ἐστίν.

for a moment and replied, “If he did nothing unworthy of his rulership, never acted licentiously, never expended money on empty and vain things, but by acts of beneficence drew his subjects to wish him well; for God is the author of good things to all men, and man must needs follow his guidance.”

206 The king commended him, and asked of another how he should adhere to the truth. To this he replied, “By recognising that lying brings great disgrace upon all men, but chiefly upon kings. For as they have power to do what they will, what object have they for falsehood? And you must further take to heart, O king, that God is a lover of the truth.”

207 He gave this reply his hearty approval, and looking upon another said, “What is the teaching of wisdom?” And the next one replied, “As you desire that evils should not befall you,¹ but to partake of all that is good, you should act in this spirit to your subjects and to offenders, and should very gently admonish such as are virtuous; for God draws all men to him by gentleness.”

208 He commended him, and asked of his neighbour how he might be humane. And he said, “By observing after how long a time² and through what great sufferings the human race comes to maturity, aye and to the birth. You must not therefore on slight provocation punish or subject men to injuries, recognising that human life consists of pains and penalties. You will then, taking all into consideration, be disposed to mercy; for God also is merciful.”

209 With a word of approval to him he inquired of the next in order, “What is the most essential quality for a ruler?” “To keep oneself incorruptible,” he replied; “to be sober for the greater part of one’s life, to honour righteousness above all things, and to make friends of men of this

¹Cf. the negative form of the golden rule, e.g. in the Didache 1.2.

²Or, with a slight emendation, “with what trouble” (Wendland).

	Present Active			Present Middle		
Ind.	1s	ἀγαπῶ	πληρῶ	ἀγαπῶμαι	φιλοῦμαι	πληροῦμαι
	2s	ἀγαπᾶς	πληροῖς	ἀγαπᾶ	φιλεῖ	πληροῖ
	3s	ἀγαπᾷ	πληροῖ	ἀγαπᾶται	φιλεῖται	πληροῦται
	1pl	ἀγαπῶμεν	πληροῦμεν	ἀγαπώμεθα	φιλούμεθα	πληροῦμεθα
	2pl	ἀγαπᾶτε	πληροῦτε	ἀγαπᾶσθε	φιλεῖσθε	πληροῦσθε
	3pl	ἀγαπῶσι(ν)	πληροῦσι(ν)	ἀγαπῶνται	φιλοῦνται	πληροῦνται
Subj.	1s	ἀγαπῶ	πληρῶ	ἀγαπῶμαι	φιλῶμαι	πληρῶμαι
	2s	ἀγαπᾶς	πληροῖς	ἀγαπᾶ	φιλεῖ	πληροῖ
	3s	ἀγαπᾷ	πληροῖ	ἀγαπᾶται	φιλεῖται	πληρῶται
	1pl	ἀγαπῶμεν	πληρῶμεν	ἀγαπώμεθα	φιλώμεθα	πληρῶμεθα
	2pl	ἀγαπᾶτε	πληρῶτε	ἀγαπᾶσθε	φιλεῖσθε	πληρῶσθε
	3pl	ἀγαπῶσι(ν)	πληρῶσι(ν)	ἀγαπῶνται	φιλοῦνται	πληρῶνται
Impv.	2s	ἀγάπα	πλήρου	ἀγαπῶ	φίλου	πληροῦ
	3s	ἀγαπάτω	πληροῦτω	ἀγαπάσθω	φιλείσθω	πληροῦσθω
	2pl	ἀγαπάτε	πληροῦτε	ἀγαπᾶσθε	φιλεῖσθε	πληροῦσθε
	3pl	ἀγαπάτωσαν	πληροῦτωσαν	ἀγαπάσθωσαν	φιλείσθωσαν	πληροῦσθωσαν
Inf.		ἀγαπᾶν	πληροῦν	ἀγαπᾶσθαι	φιλεῖσθαι	πληροῦσθαι

		Imperfect Active			Imperfect Middle		
Ind.		1s	2s	3s	1pl	2pl	3pl
	ἡγάπων	ἐφίλων	ἐπλήρουν	ἡγαπῶμην	ἐφιλούμην	ἐπληρούμην	
	ἡγάπεις	ἐφίλεις	ἐπλήρους	ἡγαπῶ	ἐφίλοῦ	ἐπληροῦ	
	ἡγάπα	ἐφίλει	ἐπλήρου	ἡγαπᾶτο	ἐφιλεῖτο	ἐπληροῦτο	
	ἡγαπῶμεν	ἐφιλοῦμεν	ἐπληρούμεν	ἡγαπώμεθα	ἐφιλούμεθα	ἐπληρούμεθα	
	ἡγαπάτε	ἐφιλείτε	ἐπληροῦτε	ἡγαπάσθε	ἐφιλείσθε	ἐπληροῦσθε	
	ἡγάπων	ἐφίλων	ἐπλήρουν	ἡγαπῶντο	ἐφιλοῦντο	ἐπληροῦντο	

		Present Active Participles					
		Masc.	Fem.	Neut.	Masc.	Fem.	Neut.
Nom.	ἀγαπῶν	ἀγαπῶσα	ἀγαπῶν	ἀγαπῶν	φιλῶν	φιλοῦσα	φιλοῦν
Acc.	ἀγαπῶντα	ἀγαπῶσαν	ἀγαπῶν	ἀγαπῶντα	φιλοῦντα	φιλοῦσαν	φιλοῦν
Gen.	ἀγαπῶντος	ἀγαπῶσης	ἀγαπῶντος	ἀγαπῶντος	φιλοῦντος	φιλοῦσης	φιλοῦντος
Dat.	ἀγαπῶντι	ἀγαπῶσῃ	ἀγαπῶντι	ἀγαπῶντι	φιλοῦντι	φιλοῦσῃ	φιλοῦντι
Nom.	ἀγαπῶντες	ἀγαπῶσαι	ἀγαπῶντα	ἀγαπῶντες	φιλοῦντα	φιλοῦσαι	φιλοῦντα
Acc.	ἀγαπῶντας	ἀγαπῶσας	ἀγαπῶντα	ἀγαπῶντας	φιλοῦντας	φιλοῦσας	φιλοῦντα
Gen.	ἀγαπῶντων	ἀγαπῶσῶν	ἀγαπῶντων	ἀγαπῶντων	φιλοῦντων	φιλοῦσῶν	φιλοῦντων
Dat.	ἀγαπῶσι(ν)	ἀγαπῶσαις	ἀγαπῶσι(ν)	ἀγαπῶσι(ν)	φιλοῦσι(ν)	φιλοῦσαις	φιλοῦσι(ν)