

THE SEPTUAGINT AND ALEXANDRIAN SCHOLARSHIP

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Abstract

The origins of the Septuagint of the Pentateuch is a disputed issue. Opinions about the Letter of Aristeas, representing the most ancient account of the matter, differ widely as for the historical value of this document. In a recent study, Sylvie Honigman has advanced a new theory about the original setting of the Greek version of the Pentateuch, the Law of the Jews, (a theory) which is based on an innovative analysis of the Letter of Aristeas.¹⁾ This review article offers a description and critical assessment of her ideas, particularly so regarding her focus on Homeric scholarship. It is argued that, instead of the 'Homeric paradigm' as proposed by Honigman, the idea of a 'philosophical' paradigm does more justice to the data in the Letter. The question is then dealt with in which way this alternative paradigm could serve as a window on the origins of the Greek Pentateuch.

I. The Letter of Aristeas

According to the available sources, the 'Septuagint', i.e. the five books making up the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), was translated into Greek in Alexandria in Egypt, the famous city founded by Alexander the Great. Scholars agree that it is likely indeed that the Pentateuch in Greek was produced in Alexandria, in the first half of the third century BC, but the question of why this (first) translation of the five books of Moses was made is strongly disputed. Several answers have been given to this question. A well-known and popular one is that the Greek version was made, by Jews in Alexandria, for reading purposes in their synagogues.²⁾ Alternatively, it has been suggested that the translation arose out of the educational needs of the Jewish community in Alexandria.³⁾ On the other hand, it has also been argued that the translation was carried out because the Ptolemaic king wanted to have access to the laws of the Jews according to which the latter were granted to live.⁴⁾

¹⁾ S. Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria. A study in the narrative of the Letter of Aristeas* (London and New York, Routledge, 2003), (24 cm, XII, 210 pp.). ISBN 0-415-28072-9. £ 50,-.

²⁾ Cf. H. S. J. Thackeray, *The Septuagint and Jewish Worship: A Study in Origins* (London 1923), 9.

³⁾ S. P. Brock, "The Phenomenon of the Septuagint," in *The Witness of Tradition* (OTS 17; Leiden 1972), 16.

⁴⁾ L. Rost, "Vermutungen über den Anlass zur griechischen Übersetzung der Tora," in H. J. Stoebe (ed.), *Wort, Gebot, Glaube. Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments. Walther Eichrodt zum 80. Geburtstag* (ATANT 59; Zürich 1970), 39-44; E. Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History: Part 1* (AGJU 9; Leiden 1976), 171-175; D. Barthélemy, "Pourquoi la Torah a-t-elle été traduite en Grec?" in idem, *Études d'histoire du texte de l'Ancien Testament* (OBO 21; Fribourg/Göttingen 1978), 322-340; M. Harl, G. Dorival, and O. Munnich, *La Bible grecque des Septante: Du Judaïsme hellénistique au Christianisme ancien* (Paris 1987) 78 ("Il faut l'initiative officielle" [Dorival]). See also N. Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible* (trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson; Leiden 2000), 63; G. Dorival, "Introduction," in C. Dogniez and M. Harl (eds.), *La Bible des Septante: Le Pentateuque d'Alexandrie: texte grec et traduction* (Paris 2001), 40; N. L. Collins, *The Library in Alexandria and the Bible in Greek* (VTSup 82; Leiden 2000); W. Orth, "Ptolemaios II. und die Septuaginta-Übersetzung," in H.-J. Fabry und U. Offerhaus (eds.), *Im Brennpunkt: Die Septuaginta:*

Most recently, yet other proposals have been brought to the fore.⁵⁾

The most ancient answer to the whole issue is to be found in the *Letter of Aristeas*, dating to the second half of the second century BC.⁶⁾ According to this source, the translation of the books of the Pentateuch was part of the policy of the king Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282-246 BC) to collect, if possible, all the books of the world. The royal librarian, Demetrius of Phalerum, was commissioned to do so. Demetrius proposed to include “the books of the Law of the Jews” (par. 30), for which a translation would be necessary. The king then sent a letter to the high priest of the Jews, announcing his plan and requesting assistance. Eleazar, the high priest, agreed to help, and sent a total of seventy-two translators, six men of each tribe—men of good behaviour, experts in Hebrew and in Greek, and learned in the Law—to Alexandria to prepare the translation. The work was done on the isle of Pharos, under the direction of Demetrius of Phalerum. The new version was read to the leaders of the Jewish community in Alexandria, as well as to the Ptolemaic king. It was received most favorably by both parties.

Because the *Letter of Aristeas* (hereafter: LA) clearly bears the marks of an apologetic document, the question of its historical reliability has been disputed. For a long time modern scholarship has been sceptical about any historical clue that LA might contain, except for the idea that the translation was produced in Alexandria. However, recent contributions tend to be more cautious and more nuanced as far as the issue of the true core in LA is concerned.⁷⁾ In this review article I would like to comment on a study which is in line with this trend: Sylvie Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria. A study in the narrative of the Letter of Aristeas*.

Studien zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bibel (BWANT 153; Stuttgart 2001), 97-114. — It has even been suggested that the Septuagint of the Pentateuch, the Law of the Jews, received an official sanction through inclusion in the judicial system of the Ptolemaic court; cf. J. Méléze Modrzejewski, *The Jews in Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (trans. R. Corman; Princeton 1997), 104-111.

⁵⁾ See e.g. A. Pietersma, “A New Paradigm for Addressing Old Questions: the Relevance of the Interlinear Model for the Study of the Septuagint” in J. Cook (ed.), *Bible and Computer* (Leiden 2002), 337-364; J. Joosten, “Le milieu producteur du Pentateuque grec”, *Revue des Études Juives* 165 (2006), 349-361; A. Schenker, “Wurde die Tora wegen ihrer einzigartigen Weisheit auf Griechisch übersetzt? Die Bedeutung der Tora für die Nationen in Dt 4:6-8 als Ursache der Septuaginta”, *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 54 (2007), 327-347; A. van der Kooij, “The Septuagint of the Pentateuch and Ptolemaic Rule”, in G. N. Knoppers and B. M. Levinson (eds.), *The Pentateuch as Torah. New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* (Winona Lake 2007), 289-300; N. Fernández Marcos, “The Greek Pentateuch and the Scholarly Milieu of Alexandria”, *Semitica et Classica* 2 (2009), 81-89; G. Dorival, “New light about the origin of the Septuagint?”, in W. Kraus und M. Karrer (eds.), *Die Septuaginta – Texte, Theologien, Einflüsse. 2. Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 23.-27.7.2008* (WUNT 252; Tübingen 2010), 36-47.

⁶⁾ For editions of the *Letter of Aristeas*, see H. S. J. Thackeray, “Appendix: The Letter of Aristeas,” in H.B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge 1914), 531-606; M. Hadas, ed. and trans., *Aristeas to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas)* (New York 1951); A. Pelletier, ed., *Lettre d'Aristée à Philocrate: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes, index complet des mots grecs* (SC 89; Paris 1962).

⁷⁾ Cf. those scholars who believe that in line with LA the initiative of the translation was taken by the Ptolemaic court; see the literature mentioned in note 3. See also the contributions by Van der Kooij and Fernández Marcos referred to in note 4, as well as T. Rajak, *Translation and Survival. The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford 2009).

II. Homeric Scholarship

The work of Honigman is a rich and stimulating study as it not only represents an important contribution to the study of LA⁸⁾ but also offers a new proposal regarding the original setting of the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek version of the Pentateuch. It is marked by a detailed investigation of LA by “examining the work in its Greek context” (9), without ignoring though the Jewish components of the text. It has two parts: the first (chs 2-4 [pp. 13-91]) contains an analysis of LA, whereas the second (chs 5 and 6 [pp. 93-143]) offers a discussion of current theories about the origins of the Septuagint, i.e. the Greek version of the Pentateuch, as well as her own thesis.

The contents of this study may be summarized as follows. After having explained the purpose of her work in ch. 1, Honigman starts her analysis of LA by dealing with its genre and composition (ch. 2; pp. 13-35). The structure of LA is described as being marked by a ring composition, on the one hand, and by a number of ‘digressions’, on the other. The ‘ring’, beginning and the ending of LA, is said to contain the main topic — the translation of the Jewish Law into Greek. The sections which are regarded digressions, are four in number: (1) the description of the gifts by the king to the temple in Jerusalem (par. 51b-83a), (2) the journey to Jerusalem (par. 83b-120), (3) the apology of the Law by Eleazar, the high priest (par. 128-171), and (4) the symposium (par. 187-300). It is pointed out that these sections correspond to specific genres of the Greek literature of the time. For example, the journey to Jerusalem belongs to the genre of the travelogue, including the aspect of an utopian geography, whereas the banquet scene section reflects the genre of the philosophic symposium. The diversity of the genres concerned is best understood, Honigman argues, in the light of the literary *poikilia*, a rhetorical device which is meant to enhance the pleasure of reading. As far as the contents are concerned, the digressions are blending both Greek and Jewish elements. Interestingly, it is claimed that the description of Jerusalem “is directly inspired by Aristotle’s depiction of the ideal *polis* in Book vii of his *Politics*” (23). However, in view of the differences it is also stated that LA presents an excellent illustration of a way of creative re-writing since, in comparison to the source used, “prescriptions which, in Aristotle’s text, apply to the *polis* as a whole, are shifted in *B.Ar.* on to the Temple” (23). Furthermore, in comparison to other cities, such as Alexandria, Jerusalem is depicted in LA as a city of moderate size, and this aspect too is in line with Aristotle (24).

In the rest of ch. 2 Honigman deals with the homogeneity of the document (LA can be seen as a homogeneous composition), with the intended readership (a highly educated Jewish readership in Alexandria), and with the ‘central narrative’. It is stated that the ‘real purpose’ of LA should be assessed on the basis of the ring composition which is considered to contain the central narrative, and not on that of the digressions (29). In line with the conventions of Greek historiography the introduction to LA (par. 1- 8) needs to be taken seriously since it contains the subject matter of the document. The topic of this section concerns the meeting with Eleazar, High Priest of the Jews (par. 1), which, according to Honigman, is further defined in par. 3: “[I] offered

⁸⁾ Honigman prefers to speak of the *Book of Aristeas* (*B.Ar.*).

[myself] as a deputation (to Eleazar ...) with a view to the translation of the divine Law, because it was written by them on parchments in Hebrew characters". Hence, the central theme, she maintains, "is mainly concerned with the nature of the scroll on which the translation of the LXX was based" (37).

The next chapter (3) is entitled, "The Central Narrative. The transfiguration of history into charter myth" (pp. 37-63). It is argued that LA is best understood as a historical or charter myth, as a document that is "concerned with past events, giving them a special meaning and significance for the present" (40). Most of the chapter, however, is devoted to the 'central narrative' which is said not only to contain the 'main' theme, but also a 'secondary' one.

The **main theme** "is, in fact, the story of the scroll" (41). The story of the scrolls of the Law as coming from Jerusalem is in line with the Alexandrian policy to acquire as much as possible official editions of important texts, such as the so-called civic editions. Hence, the message of LA is clear: the copy from Jerusalem represents an original copy thus being a perfect one. However, as she argues on the basis of LA par. 30-31, there is more to it: "It is implicitly stated in ch. 31 that the copy imported from Jerusalem had undergone thorough textual emendation" (44f.).⁹ Moreover, since the embassy to the high priest does not only concern the scroll from Jerusalem but also the translators, "the topic of authenticity and quality is split", as Honigman puts it, "between the scrolls and the translators" (45). "Not only must the scroll be perfect, but the translators must be too: they are imported together with the scroll" (45). She then makes the following two statements which are crucial to her main thesis: "The warranty for good quality is given not to the scroll, but to the translators. This shift deliberately blurs the distinction between official edition and translation" (45). And: "This blurring between the notions of textual emendation and translation is further achieved by the choice of the terminology used" (45) in LA. In support of this thesis the following (five) arguments are put forward. First of all, the verb used in par. 31 (διακριβῶ) implies the notion of textual emendation. The 'official edition' coming from Jerusalem was emended, in line with the practice of the grammarians, to retrieve the original text. Second, the verb μεταγράφω (par. 15) can express both the ideas of translating and of transcribing (45f.). Thirdly, the working method of the translators as described in LA — i.e. working collectively and reaching agreement among themselves on each by comparing versions (par. 302) — fits the culture of the grammarians in Alexandria and has also to do with the production of textual editions. Fourthly, the terminology attested in par. 305 (ἀνάγνωσις and διασάφησις, 'reading' and 'interpretation') reflects the work of Greek grammarians, and points to a connection between 'translation' and 'editing' (47). Fifthly and finally, the statement in par. 30 about Hebrew manuscripts that had been copied carelessly,¹⁰ was first of all meant to make clear that "the translation of the LXX was the best possible one, primarily because it was based on the most authentic original" (48). However, for the Alexandrian reader, Honigman asserts, it was evident that this statement

alluded to "the ideology related to the recovering of original texts by textual emendation as practised by the grammarians subsidized by the Ptolemaic dynasty" (48). Thus, "the reference to careless manuscripts makes no sense unless we remember the situation current in the field of Homeric studies in Alexandria by the time our author wrote *B.Ar.*" (49).

The **secondary theme** consists of several episodes, aiming at equating the account in LA with Exodus 24, that is to say, equating the status of the LXX with that of the Hebrew Law. The episodes are: (1) The liberation of Jewish slaves by Ptolemy II (par. 12-27, 33-37): according to Honigman the author of LA is interested "in drawing a parallel between the contemporary history of the Jews in Egypt and their history in ancient times" (55f.). In the Bible the Jews escaped from Egypt, and the Law was given on mount Sinai. The picture of LA is similar — liberation and the promulgation of the Law —, the difference being that due to Ptolemy's benevolence there was no need to flee. Thus the Law could be received in Alexandria (56). (2) The selection of the Elders in Jerusalem: this procedure is related to the view of Jerusalem as a *polis*, with a civic body (compare Plato's ideal city with 12 tribes), but the 'real' meaning of this motif is the biblical one (cf. the number of 70 in Exod 24). (3) The proclamation of the translation in Alexandria: this element too is a blend of two models, a Greek one and a biblical one. As to the latter, Honigman refers to Exod 24:3-7 — the reading and promulgation of the Book of Covenant to the people —, a parallel often drawn by scholars.

Chapter 4 is entitled: "Enforcing the Narrative Veracity. The rhetoric of historiography in *B.Ar.*" (pp. 65-91). The argument here is that from the point of view of Antiquity LA is to be considered a piece of historiography. According to the standards of the time, a historian employed several tools in order to enhance the reliability of a given story. The same is true of LA. In this regard, Honigman points to elements such as the ego-narrative (the 'I' is an court official being the ideal person for presenting the whole story), the insertion of official documents (e.g. a royal decree, report of Demetrius, exchange of letters between Ptolemy and the high priest, a list of names). She also discusses the relationship between literary elaboration and historical reliability according to the Classical standards (74-85). In the last part of the chapter, Honigman goes into the issue of 'inaccuracies' in LA seen from a modern point of view. For instance, although the technical vocabulary related to Egypt in LA is rooted in reality (of the time of the author), it can not be considered correct as historical reliable as far as the setting of the translation is concerned (first half, third century BC). Examples of an anachronistic usage are the terms *politeuma* (this does not yet apply to the Jews in Alexandria, in the early days), and the title *ton archisomatophylakon* (partitive genitive; not earlier than 163 BC). The association between Ptolemy II and Demetrius of Phalerum, however, is presented as a special case because, as she points out, there is reason to believe that Demetrius was part of an existing tradition. Unlike the names of the other Greek officials in LA, that of Demetrius stands out "as the only theophoric name referring to a pagan deity, the goddess Demeter" (89). Given the prominent role played by Demetrius "in gathering texts from all over the Greek world for the setting up of a new library in Alexandria" (90), one is entitled to assume that his name "was firmly tied up in Alexandrian memory with the ideology of possessing the canonical texts of Classical authors" (90). Moreover, since

⁹) The relevant passage reads, "These [books] also must be in your library in an accurate version".

¹⁰) The relevant passage reads (in the translation given by Honigman), "But they have been transcribed somewhat carelessly".

at an earlier date Aristobulus (first half, second century BC) was familiar with the association between Ptolemy II and Demetrius as far as the origins of the Septuagint are concerned, one may assume that this association as presented in LA was part of an oral tradition (90). This does not imply, however, that both were really involved in the translation of the LXX, in the first half of the third century. Honigman: “Chapters 5 and 6 will show that there are grounds to associate the translation with the reign of Ptolemy II, not his father. This would confirm that the involvement of Demetrius of Phalerum in the story of the origins of the LXX derives from ideological grounds” (90).

In chapters 5 (pp. 93-118) and 6 (pp. 119-143) Honigman deals with the issue of the origins of the Pentateuch in Greek. Her own proposal is based on the similarities between Homeric scholarship and the translation of the Pentateuch as presented in LA: these “may echo some diffuse historical reality” (94). Before formulating her thesis (in ch. 6), she notes the following points regarding the setting of the translation in the early third century BC: (a) lexical and other textual data point to the third century BC; the language is the Koine in use in Egypt, hence the translators did not come from Judea (97); (b) the Jewish community was at that time “rather small” (not yet a *politeuma*) (101); (c) in view of the huge expenses involved, in the early third century BCE only a state-sponsored enterprise could come into question (101f.); (d) since the project was expensive and complex, and since at that time the Jewish community was not yet strong, it is conceivable that the Jews asked the king for support of the project (royal patronage).

In the rest of chapter 5, Honigman discusses current hypotheses about the original purpose of the LXX, the Law of the Jews in Greek (105-118) — the liturgical one (the translation made for synagogal needs), the educational one (including the ‘interlinear’ model), the legal one (the translation intended as a legal document), the cultural one (the translation intended for the royal library; it is argued that the involvement of the library is likely to be reality at a later stage of the Septuagint’s history). She reaches the conclusion that none of them is plausible enough.

Chapter 6 contains her own hypothesis on the genesis of the LXX, the Pentateuch in Greek, as well as a summary of her ideas concerning the genesis of LA. Based on her argumentation in chapter 3, the conclusion is drawn that the description of the origins of the translation in LA is strongly influenced by the practice and ideology of Homeric scholarship (“the translation is consistently depicted as textual editing” [119]). The passage of par. 310 — where the statement is found that the translation “has been made well and is in every respect accurate”, and that it should “remain in its present form and no revision should take place” —, is best understood, according to Honigman, in the light of developments in the field of Homeric scholarship of the time, namely, the move towards a standardization of the text of Homer. LA seems to reflect a concern about a situation which she describes as “a state of relative anarchy in the manuscripts of the LXX circulating in the days of *B.Ar.*” (127). All this does not only tell us something about the time of the author of LA, but is also considered by Honigman important for the genesis of the Greek version of the Pentateuch. Her hypothesis proposes “that the early history of the LXX should be read against the background of the history of the editing of the

Homeric epics in Alexandria, across a time span ranging from the early third to the middle or later part of the second century BCE” (120). This means that the Law of the Jews “was primarily translated not for pragmatic needs, but for the sake of prestige” (120). The move of the Jews in Alexandria, who presumably themselves took the initiative, “was prompted by the royal propaganda that promoted the ideology linked to the editorial activity that was being carried out in the library” (138).

III. A Homeric Paradigm?

The study of Honigman is a rich and stimulating piece of scholarship. Her thesis about the origins of LXX Pentateuch is based on a detailed and innovative analysis of the most important source we have — LA, the *Letter of Aristaeus*. Instead of making sweeping and global statements about its reliability, she takes this document seriously by examining first of all the work in its Greek, and more in particular, in its Alexandrian context. It is not my aim to comment, in this review article, on all the aspects of her analysis of LA. Rather, I would like to concentrate on her thesis of the ‘Homeric paradigm’.

Honigman is right by pointing out that LA represents a piece of (ancient) historiography — to be dated in the second half of the second century BC — which also bears the marks of a charter myth.¹¹⁾ As outlined above, she is of the opinion that the ‘Homeric paradigm’ can be regarded a window on the origins of the translation. The main thesis of her study, as developed in chapter 3, is that the description of the origins of the translation in LA was strongly influenced by the practice and ideology of Homeric scholarship. It is this feature of LA which, in her view, ‘echoes’ the original setting of the translation project: the translation was made under Ptolemaic patronage (the king provided for the huge expenses) for the sake of prestige, and not for reasons of any religious need. The Jews of Alexandria wanted to present themselves as an educated community with a literary work in Greek to be proud of — the Greek version of the Law of Moses —, a work that was as significant to them as were the Homeric epics to the Greeks. Or to put it with the words of T. Rajak: “The possession of writings in Greek denoted membership of the Greek ‘club’”.¹²⁾

One of the passages in LA, which is very crucial to her thesis of the Homeric paradigm, is to be found in par. 30-31. Both paragraphs are part of the memorandum of Demetrius of Phalerum (par. 29-32), in which he proposes to the king to include “the books of the Law of the Jews” in the library, for which a translation would be necessary. The passage is about scrolls of the Law, written in Hebrew; it reads in the translation given by Honigman thus: “(these scrolls) have been transcribed (σεσήμανται) somewhat carelessly ... These [books] also must be in your Library in an emended form (διηκριβωμένα)” (44). She then asserts that it is “implicitly stated in ch. 31 that the copy imported from Jerusalem had undergone thorough textual emendation”

¹¹⁾ Cf. Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, 47-50 (‘historical myth’).

¹²⁾ Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, 87. See also E. S. Gruen, “The *Letter of Aristaeus* and the Cultural Context of the Septuagint”, in M. Karrer und W. Kraus (eds.), *Die Septuaginta – Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten. Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D)*, Wuppertal 20.-23. Juli 2006 (WUNT 219; Tübingen 2008), 155.

(44f.). This statement implies that the passage of par. 31 should be related to the story of the scrolls of the Law as coming from Jerusalem (par. 172-179), a story which is regarded to be in line with the Alexandrian policy to acquire official editions of literary works (such as the so-called 'city editions').¹³⁾

If read in the translation quoted above, the passage under discussion alludes to copies of the Law in Hebrew that were carelessly 'transcribed', and also stipulates that the books of the Law should be in the Library in an 'emended' form. It is however not likely to assume, as Honigman does, that the latter statement also applies to the copy coming from Jerusalem. The reason is that the way the scrolls from Jerusalem are presented in par. 176 does not support this idea. This passage obviously reflects the notion that these scrolls represent a perfect copy, and not an emended one, in a way similar to city editions which were considered in Antiquity to be the most reliable texts (see also below). It therefore is more safe to say that the copies referred to in par. 30 were only exemplars in use in Egypt.¹⁴⁾

However, the assumption that this passage refers to copies in Hebrew is based on an interpretation of the verbal form *σεσήμανται* ('transcribed') which is far from certain. Scholars have argued that the verb *σημαίνω* in this instance should be taken as 'to write' (hence 'to transcribe'),¹⁵⁾ but the problem is that this meaning is not attested elsewhere in Greek literature.¹⁶⁾ The verb actually conveys the notions of 'giving signs', 'signifying', 'indicating', 'interpreting', and 'explaining' (compare e.g. the expression *τὸ σημαίνόμενον*, "the sense or meaning of words" [LSJ]). As has been observed by Meecham, this is also the way it is used at other places in LA: 'to make known, inform' (par. 33, 120), and 'to interpret' (par. 143, 192, 315).¹⁷⁾ Interestingly, in the last instance (par. 315) the verb is employed in relation to a dream, an usage which is also attested elsewhere (see e.g. Herodotus, *Histories*, 1:108, and LXX Daniel 2:30). Consequently, it stands more to reason to render the verbal form in par. 30 as 'interpreted', thus referring to translations that already existed.¹⁸⁾

If understood this way, Demetrius' memorandum makes perfect sense and turns out to convey the following coherent message: the books of the Law of the Jews are lacking in the Library; in order to add these books a translation is needed (see also par. 10-11), but since already existing translations of the Law of the Jews had been made 'carelessly', this translation should be made by experts from Jerusalem in order to get an 'accurate' one (*τὸ κατὰ τὴν ἑρμηνείαν ἀκριβές* [par. 32]). It is to be observed that

neither Demetrius, nor the king propose to acquire a Hebrew copy of the Law for the Library; they are only interested in a Greek version of it to be put in the Library.¹⁹⁾ Thus, the memorandum is marked by a contrast between earlier versions, on the one hand, and a new, 'accurate' translation, on the other.

The latter point, the notion of precision, leads us to another issue at stake — the question of how to understand Greek *διηκριβωμένα* in the same context (par. 31). This term is usually taken in the sense of 'emended' as is also the case in the English translation given by Honigman. In support of this rendering of the Greek term she argues that "[T]he Greek verb used, *diakriboun*, is one of the verbs regularly used to the textual emendations made on the manuscripts of Homer in the grammarians' undertaking to retrieve the original text" (45). However, as far as I know there is no evidence that this verb was used that way by the grammarians. Honigman refers to an article by O. Murray, but the difficulty is that he too does not provide any evidence for this usage. On the contrary, he only states that "*διακριβοῦν* here is equivalent to the technical *διορθοῦν*", without providing any basis for this claim.²⁰⁾ In addition, there is another reason why it is implausible to equate an 'emended' version with an 'accurate' one. This can be illustrated by the following story. The early poet Aratus (third century BC) sought a 'reliable' text of Homer; he was told: "You can, if you get hold of the ancient copies, and not the edited copies (*διωρθωμένοις*) of our day".²¹⁾ The idea here is that 'ancient' copies, such as city editions, were held the best texts available. That is why, according to another story, the official copies of the three Tragedians which had been borrowed from Athens, were kept in Alexandria, whereas copies made of them on papyri of the finest quality were sent back to Athens.²²⁾ Thus, if one thinks of reliable texts, ancient copies held in official archives were considered the best ones, not the emended exemplars. For these two reasons it is not plausible to take the verb *διακριβοῦν* in the sense of textual or corrective editing (i.e., *διόρθωσις*). Rather, the verbal form in par. 31 (*διηκριβωμένα*, 'having been brought to exactness') is better understood in line with the notion of precision in par. 32 quoted above, which implies that its meaning refers to the issue of a translation: 'having been brought to exactness' then conveys the idea of a translation of the books that is marked by the correct or precise meaning of words. The point that the exactness has to do with the meaning of words is supported by the use of the verb *σημαίνω* in par. 30, which, as argued above, conveys the idea of 'signifying' and 'explaining' things.²³⁾

This link between 'precision' and the 'meaning' of words is also hinted at in another section of LA — par. 301-311 — which tells the story of the actual translation and its

¹³⁾ See also Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, 59.

¹⁴⁾ Cf. D. W. Gooding, "Aristeas and Septuagint Origins: A review of recent studies", *VT* 13 (1963), 357-379 (360).

¹⁵⁾ See in particular the contributions by G. Zuntz, "Aristeas Studies 2: Aristeas and the Translation of the Torah", *JSS* 4 (1959), 109-126, and Gooding, "Aristeas and Septuagint Origins".

¹⁶⁾ In support of their view, Zuntz and Gooding point to a passage in one of the preserved fragments of Aristobulus where the verb occurs (Fr. 4, 7). However, the way the verb is used here is better understood in the sense of 'to make clear the meaning'; cf. the translation by N. Walter: "haben wir ... die richtige Bedeutung ausgedrückt" (*Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, Bd. III, Lief. 2 [Gütersloh 1975], 275).

¹⁷⁾ H. G. Meecham, *The Letter of Aristeas. A linguistic study with special reference to the Greek Bible* (Manchester 1935), 201.

¹⁸⁾ Cf. P. E. Kahle, *Die Kairoer Genisa* (Berlin 1962), 226.

¹⁹⁾ Cf. S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford 1968), 51f.

²⁰⁾ O. Murray, "The Letter of Aristeas", in B. Virgilio (ed.), *Studi ellenistici II* (Pisa 1987), 24.

²¹⁾ N. L. Collins, *The Library in Alexandria and the Bible in Greek* (VTSup 82, Leiden 2000), 103. See also P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, Vol. I (Oxford 1972), 450.

²²⁾ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I, 325; II, 480, note 147.

²³⁾ Cf. also the term *ἑρμηνεία* in par. 32 which too conveys the notions of translation and interpretation.

promulgation. In par. 305 the translation process is described as being based on the “reading” of the parent text, as well as on the “interpretation” of “each element” (τὴν ἐκάστου διασάφεισιν). The term ἐκάστον used here is to be taken as a reference to (particular) words or expressions.²⁴⁾ After having finished the whole translation, we are told in par. 310 that, when the text had been read in public, the leaders of the translators as well as the representatives of the Jews in Alexandria made the following statement: “Inasmuch as the translation has been well and piously made and *in every respect accurately* (κατὰ πᾶν ἠκριβωμένως), it is right that it should remain in its present form and that no revision take place” (par. 310). Like par. 31-32, this passage too touches upon the ‘accuracy’ of the translation. Taken both paragraphs (305 and 310) together, it can be said that the ‘accuracy’ has to do with the ‘interpretation’ of particular words and expressions.

As argued above, Demetrius’ memorandum is marked by the contrast between an ‘accurate’ translation still to be made and earlier versions considered unreliable. The reference to the latter obviously serves to highlight the notion of precision, but the question arises what may have been the background of the idea of earlier versions of the Law in Greek, the more so since historically speaking the assumption of earlier versions of the Law is very unlikely.²⁵⁾ It is important to note, first of all, that this idea is also found elsewhere in LA. According to par. 314, Theopomp wanted to use something from the Law, “something of the previously translated [books] that [was rendered] in a dubious / misleading way”. The underlying idea of this passage is clear: if a scholar and historian like Theopomp, who lived in the fourth century BC, was able to use the Law of the Jews in a Greek version, then there must have been a version predating the one made in Alexandria. Furthermore, the same idea is also attested in another piece of Jewish literature of the time. In one of the preserved fragments of Aristobulus, a Jewish scholar living in Alexandria in the first half of the second century BC, we read: “It is evident that Plato imitated our legislation and that he had investigated thoroughly each of the elements in it. For it had been translated by others before Demetrius Phalereus”. As is clear from the rest of the fragment Aristobulus thinks of a ‘partial’ translation, whereas the ‘entire’ one was made later, when “Demetrius managed the undertaking”. Just as in the case of Theopomp, Greek scholars like Plato could only have taken over Jewish ideas if the Law of Moses had been translated into Greek before ‘the Septuagint’ was made. Here we touch on the Jewish claim, typical of Alexandrian Judaism, of the supremacy of their culture.²⁶⁾ Aristobulus is the oldest source, we know of, which testifies to this conception. The author of LA apparently was familiar with this whole idea, and made use of it in a particular way by creating a contrast between ‘careless’ earlier versions

²⁴⁾ For the use of ἐκάστον, see also LA par. 143, 302; LXX Dan 7:16, 19; Philo, *Hyp.* 7:13 (the Law is not only read but also expounded, by a priest or an elder, “point by point”).

²⁵⁾ Pace Kahle, *Die Kairoer Genisa*, 227.

²⁶⁾ This motif was most important to Philo of Alexandria; see D.T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden 1968), passim. As for Josephus, see *Ag. Ap.*, 2:257. On this topic, see now G. Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and ‘Canonic’ Texts. The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (JSJSup 109; Leiden 2006), 90-95.

and the ‘accurate’ translation, the latter made under the supervision of Demetrius.²⁷⁾

From the above it follows that the passage of par. 30-31 in LA does not refer to Hebrew manuscripts that had been copied carelessly, but rather to the conception of earlier translations of the Law. As a result, this passage does not support the idea of the ‘Homeric paradigm’, as proposed by Honigman.

But what about the second half of par. 305, which as noted above also plays an important role in Honigman’s argumentation? This passage, which was already part of our discussion above, reads thus: “they (the translators) turned to the reading (aloud) and the interpretation of each element”. Honigman is right by pointing out that the author of LA is “equating here the practice of the translators with that of the grammarians” (47), but her assertion that it provides “a bridge between translation and editing” (47) raises questions. The terminology used in par. 305 (ἀνάγνωσις and διασάφεισις) has to do with the study of literary works, but not necessarily so with editing. The wording refers to the ‘reading (aloud)’ and the ‘interpretation’, both being basic aspects of the skill of a grammarian.²⁸⁾ On the Greek side, one could think of these (and other) abilities as requirements for a grammarian to be able to write commentaries, such as was done by Aristarchus. True, a man of letters like Aristarchus was also familiar with the practice of editing texts, but there is no reason to assume that this notion too is hinted at in par. 305. This is even less likely when the passage is read from a Jewish perspective. The terminology employed is then easily understood as referring to the abilities of scholar-scribes. They were the experts who were able to ‘read’ the Scriptures in Hebrew, such as the books of the Pentateuch, as well as to ‘interpret’ these texts, the result being that, to put it with the Prologue to the Wisdom of Ben Sira, they developed “a thorough familiarity with them” (Prologue, 11).²⁹⁾

Thus, it can be said that par. 305 contains evidence that the Jewish translators were equated in LA with the grammarians of Alexandria, in particular as far as the abilities of reading and interpretation of literary texts — like the works of Homer — are concerned. There is however no reason to assume that this passage also hints at the editing of texts, the more so if one reads the passage from a Jewish perspective. It may be added in this connexion that the equation of Jewish scholars with their Greek colleagues is also attested in another source of the time: LXX Dan 1:4 provides evidence that the term γραμματικός could be used in connection with members of the Jewish elite (see also v. 17 where the expression γραμματικὴ τέχνη occurs!).

All in all, the conclusion is warranted that LA does not provide sufficient evidence for the thesis of the Homeric

²⁷⁾ For the issue of the emphasis on ‘accuracy’ in LA, see A. van der Kooij, “The Promulgation of the Pentateuch in Greek according to the Letter of Aristaeus”, in A. Voitila and J. Jokiranta (eds.), *Scripture in Transition. Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Rajja Sollamo* (JSJSup 126; Leiden 2008), 179-191.

²⁸⁾ See A. van der Kooij, “Perspectives on the Study of the Septuagint. Who are the translators?”, in F. García Martínez and E. Noort (eds.), *Perspectives in the Study of the Old Testament and Early Judaism. A Symposium in Honour of Adam S. van der Woude on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday* (VTSup 73; Leiden 1998), 222f..

²⁹⁾ For the agreements between LA par. 305 and the Prologue of Ben Sira, see Van der Kooij, “Perspectives on the Study of the Septuagint”, 219-224.

paradigm. This is not meant to say, however, that LA would not contain any indication for a view on the Jewish translators from the perspective of Alexandrian scholarship. As I will argue in the next section, LA contains data regarding the translators which point to an alternative proposal.

IV. Scholars and Philosophers

The translators of the Law are presented in LA as learned persons of noble parentage who were selected by the high priest (par. 121). They are said to be “men of the most exemplary lives and mature experience, skilled in matters pertaining to their Law” (par. 32; see also par. 39, 46), being depicted as experts of the Law, scholars who had a great knowledge of and insight into its meaning (par. 122). Regarding their ability to make a translation we are told that they not only had a good knowledge of the Hebrew language and its literature, but also had made serious study of the literature of the Greeks (par. 121).

The way the translators are depicted is marked, for rhetorical reasons, by idealization, but it is also to be noted that this picture has much in common with what we know of Jewish ‘scribes’ in the Hellenistic era. For example, Jesus ben Sira and his grandson were scholars who had a good knowledge of the Scriptures, whereas the latter was also bilingual (or even trilingual, if familiarity with Aramaic may be presupposed) and thus able to produce a Greek version of the work of his grandfather.

According to LA, as was proposed by Demetrius and requested by the Ptolemaic king, the high priest selected the translators, “six in number from each tribe” (par. 32, 39, 46), i.e., 72 ‘elders’ in total. Honigman has rightly observed that the way the selection is described in par. 42 witnesses “a process of appointment of representatives of the civic body” (57), in this case the civic body (πληθός) of Jerusalem. As to the number of 72, she argues, in line with other scholars, that its real meaning has to do with the number of elders in Exodus 24. According to the story found in this chapter, 70 elders were accompanying Moses, together with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, the priests, to Mount Sinai to meet God (Exod 24:1, 9). This number (70) is, she asserts, “the ‘true’ number of Elders behind the civic fiction of 72” (58).

The idea of scholars to try to understand the number of 72 (elders) in the light of Exod 24 makes sense. However, since the motif of 70 elders is also found elsewhere in the Pentateuch, as is clear from Numbers 11 (vv. 16-25), this link is not that striking. Moreover, the number of 72 in LA also reminds one of the number of 71 being, according to Jewish tradition, the number of persons making up the ‘Sanhedrin’ as the body of representatives of the Jewish people was called in Roman times (Mishnah, Sanh. 1,6). Thus, the alleged link between LA and Exod 24 as to the number of elders is not that specific. It has been argued, though, that this link is important because LA shares another motif with Exod 24 — the promulgation of the Law (by reading its text in public). However, this element too is not only found in Exod 24, but is also attested in passages such as Josh 8, 2 Kings 23, and Neh 8.³⁰⁾

³⁰⁾ See A. van der Kooij, “The Public Reading of Scriptures at Feasts”, in C. Tuckett (ed.), *Feasts and Festivals* (CBET 53; Leuven 2010), 27-44, esp. 36f. The assumption of the ‘Exodus motif’ as underlying LA is, in my

view, not that strong, and deserves further discussion. For a detailed treatment which not only focuses on parallels but also calls attention to contrasts between LA and the Exodus tradition, see N. Hacham, “The *Letter of Aristeas*: A New Exodus Story?”, *JSJ* 36 (2005), 1-20.

Be this as it may, the important thing is that the translators, having been selected by the high priest in the presence of the civic body of Jerusalem, represent the whole people of Israel (cf. “six of each tribe”).³¹⁾ In a way similar to the Sanhedrin, the group of the translators is described as an official body. When they meet, they do so as groups of officials do, as is evident from the terminology employed in par. 301-303 (συνέδριον and συνεδρεία). This clearly indicates that the Greek version of the Law produced by them is thought of as an official text.

The official character of the Greek Pentateuch is also underlined by the way the procedure is described, according to which the wording of the Greek text was determined. Sitting together “in a house which had been duly furnished near the shore” (par. 301), they were completing the work by “reaching agreement among themselves on each element by comparing versions” (par. 302). This passage has it that their work was marked by comparing versions or renderings of particular words, ending up with decisions that were taken ‘unanimously’. The idea of LA is that the translation produced was agreed by all the translators, as is also indicated in par. 32 and 39. In these two paragraphs, the phrase ἐκ τῶν πλειόνων occurs, which usually is taken as referring to the majority among the translators. However, it stands more to reason to assume that this phrase refers to the full number of translators because it reflects terminology used elsewhere to designate official bodies.³²⁾ Anyhow, the procedure as hinted at in LA has much in common with the meeting and decision making of a council, highlighting in this way the official character of the translation.³³⁾

All this, however, does not make up the full picture of the translators as presented in LA. Seen from the perspective of Alexandrian scholarship, a major section in LA deserves our attention — the Symposium (par. 187-300). We are told here that the king posed a question to each of the 72 elders during a seven-night banquet; he was pleased with the answers given, hailing each of the Jewish scholars. The Symposium section, which reflects “the genre of the philosophic symposium” (Honigman, 18), is about a banquet organized as an occasion for philosophic exchange. As is expressly stated, the Jewish elders deserved admiration, especially to the ‘philosophers’ (par. 201, 235, 296). This group of scholars is referred to thrice in LA, whereas in par. 201 one philosopher is mentioned by name, Menedem of Eretrea, who also praises the Jewish scholars present. Obviously, the Jewish translators are depicted as most competent philosophers in answering questions posed by the king — questions about several topics, in particular about the issue of good government (‘kingship’).³⁴⁾

Honigman does not consider this major part of LA being relevant for the picture of the translators because, in her

view, not that strong, and deserves further discussion. For a detailed treatment which not only focuses on parallels but also calls attention to contrasts between LA and the Exodus tradition, see N. Hacham, “The *Letter of Aristeas*: A New Exodus Story?”, *JSJ* 36 (2005), 1-20.

³¹⁾ According to a late, Byzantine tradition the work of Homer too was edited by 72 scholars. See Veltri, *Libraries, Translations*, 80f.. See also Collins, *Library*, 102f.

³²⁾ Cf. ‘the Many’ as a reference to an official body in Jewish and Greek sources of the time (see e.g. 1QS 6:1, 7, 8, 12, as well as Polybius, *Histories* 6.11.12; 15.1.5).

³³⁾ Pace Honigman, *The Septuagint*, 46.

³⁴⁾ Cf. Fernández Marcos, “The Greek Pentateuch”, 86.

view, the Symposium section is one of the digressions, and hence of no significance for what she regards the main theme of the whole document. Whatever view one might take on the main theme of LA it is difficult to accept that the long section of the Symposium was only made for the sake of literary variety. Seen from a rhetorical point of view, this section adds considerably to the picture of the translators as being not only experts of the Law but also excellent scholars praised by the philosophers at the king's table in Alexandria.³⁵) They are able to answer philosophical questions being familiar among other things with kingship ideology.³⁶)

The emphasis on 'philosophy' is also apparent at other places in LA. Demetrius' memorandum (par. 29-32) is an interesting section in this regard. He, himself a philosopher (see below), states that the "legislation" to be found in "the books of the Law of the Jews" is "very philosophical and perfect"; "the theory (θεωρία) contained in them is sacred and hallowed, as Hecataeus of Abdera says" (par. 31). He also refers to "the men (i.e., the Jews) who have lived and live (πολιτεύομαι) according to them (i.e., the books)" (ibid.). The Law of the Jews is said to be of a philosophical nature, and is seen as a source of divinely inspired wisdom.

One may assume that the great interest in 'philosophy' as attested in LA was typical of the Jewish milieu in Alexandria, from which LA originated. It reminds one of Aristobulus, a Jewish scholar — exegete and philosopher — from Alexandria and presumably belonging to the same milieu. According to 2 Macc 1:10, he was a member of a priestly family, and was known as "the teacher of Ptolemy". He is said to have dedicated his work, of which only five fragments have survived, to the king, probably Ptolemy IV Philometor (181-145). The (Greek) Pentateuch ('our books') is designated by him as 'the Law' and 'our legislation', just as in LA. This Law is regarded, in a way similar to LA, the source of wisdom from which great philosophers like Plato drew.³⁷) Accordingly, Moses is presented as "a divinely inspired philosopher".³⁸) As becomes clear from the fragments, Aristobulus was an eclectic philosopher who drew "on Aristotelian, Stoic and Pythagorean motifs".³⁹) He was familiar, among other things, with the Peripatetic school of thought to which he refers explicitly (Fr. 5).

Scholars have observed that LA contains a number of 'Aristotelianisms', which means to say that it shows some familiarity with the terminology typical of the Peripatetic school of thought.⁴⁰) A striking example is the occurrence of

³⁵) For a similar picture of Jewish intellectuals at a royal court, see Dan 1:19-20 ("And the king spoke with them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah [...]. And in every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom")!

³⁶) On this topic in LA, see now J. More, "Kingship Ideology: A Neglected Element in Aristeas' Charter Myth for Alexandrian Judaism", in J. Cook (ed.), *Septuagint and Reception. Essays prepared for the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa* (VTSup 127; Leiden 2009), 299-320.

³⁷) J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora. From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh 1998), 150. This of course implies the idea of an earlier version, or versions, of the Law in Greek (see above).

³⁸) N. Janowitz, "The Rhetoric of Translation: Three Early Perspectives on Translating Torah", *HTR* 84 (1991), 132.

³⁹) Barclay, *Jews*, 153 note.

⁴⁰) Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, 77-78.

the term *metriotes* in par. 122, testifying to the theory of the ethical mean.⁴¹) Furthermore, the section about the high priest as interpreter of the Law (par. 128-169) is also marked by a touch of philosophy. He is depicted as someone who makes use of allegory to interpret the Law, just as is also known of Aristobulus.

All in all, the translators are depicted in LA, first of all, as scholars elected by the high priest, forming an official body representing the people of Israel, and producing the translation of the books of Moses in their meetings. Although they are presented as 'scribes' whose abilities are very similar to those of the grammarians, it is important to note that LA reveals a strong emphasis on their competence as philosophers. The translators are hailed by the Greek philosophers present at the banquet because of their great wisdom which, among other things, includes a remarkable familiarity with the matter of constitution (*politeia*; cf. the kingship topic). Furthermore, the statement that the Law is said to be 'philosophical', that is to say, a source of philosophical insight, as well as the presence of a number of 'Aristotelianisms' are all part of the 'philosophical' picture in LA. As will be clear, the view of the Law as source of philosophy also underlies the passages about the earlier versions of the Law (see above). Interestingly, in these respects LA attests an ideology quite similar to that of Aristobulus. Instead of the 'Homeric' paradigm as proposed by Honigman, therefore would like to put forward the view that LA testifies to a 'philosophical' paradigm as far as the topic of 'Alexandrian scholarship' is concerned.⁴²)

V. The Original Setting

After having analysed LA in great detail, Honigman argues that the Homeric paradigm 'echoes' the original setting of the translation of the Pentateuch. This raises the intriguing question whether, and if so, in which respect, LA might mirror the setting in which the Greek Pentateuch was produced. LA is the most important document from Antiquity that tells us a story about the origins of the Greek Pentateuch. Honigman has shown that it is marked by an antiquarian intent and contains also elements being part of an oral tradition shared by members of the Jewish elite in Alexandria. However, as she has also made clear, even in the case of traditions used by the author, it remains difficult to show whether they testify, in one way or another, to the original setting of the translation. How then to proceed? The best way, it seems to me, is to see whether there are external data which may add to the plausibility of any hypothesis based on LA. Consequently, the alternative proposal made above — the 'philosophical' paradigm — can only serve as a window on the original setting of the translation if there is external evidence that sheds light on the relevant period.

Demetrius of Phalerum is one of the figures who in LA play a crucial role in the story about the translation of the Law of the Jews. He is said to be the one who advised the king on the translation of this Law, and also the one who considered the Law of the Jews to be 'philosophical'. What

⁴¹) Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, 77.

⁴²) Interestingly, LXX Daniel reflects an interest in 'philology', instead of 'philosophy'; cf. the vocabulary used in ch. 1 (γραμματικός [v. 4], γραμματική τέχνη [v. 17], φιλόλογος [v. 20]).

to make of him from a historical point of view? Is there any evidence that may support the idea that he was the one who played an important role in the original setting? Which evidence can be adduced to make this idea plausible?

Demetrius of Phalerum, being a most outstanding pupil of Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor, belonged to the Peripatetic school of philosophy. Scholars have pointed out that this school was very influential under Ptolemy I Soter which was due, partly at least, to Demetrius. With the two scholars just mentioned — Aristotle and Theophrastus —, Demetrius shared a great interest “in the comparative studies of laws and constitutions”.⁴³⁾ Furthermore, he was the one who advised Ptolemy I, among other things, “on the civil code of Alexandria and the foundation of the Library, as well as about the foundation and organization of the Mouseion”.⁴⁴⁾ The intriguing question, however, is whether he was also the one who advised the king on the translation of the Jewish Law, as is claimed in LA.

It is important to note that LA is not the only early source that points to Demetrius. This view is also found in one of the fragments of Aristobulus:

But the entire translation of all [the books of] the Law was made in the time of the king called Philadelphus, your ancestor, who displayed a great munificence, while Demetrius of Phaleron directed the undertaking (Fr. 3)

In the light of this evidence it seems likely that the tradition about Demetrius was not invented by the author of LA, but was apparently part of the collective memory of Jewish intellectuals in Alexandria.⁴⁵⁾ The observation made by Honigman, that the name of Demetrius stands out in LA “as the only theoforic name referring to a pagan deity, the goddess Demeter”,⁴⁶⁾ makes this even more plausible.

So there seems to be reason to believe that this tradition about Demetrius should not be dismissed too easily.⁴⁷⁾ There are, however, also problems with the way Demetrius is presented in LA. First of all, LA is presumably wrong in presenting Demetrius as ‘the royal librarian’.⁴⁸⁾ Second, it is not certain whether Demetrius continued his position under Ptolemy II, as LA and Aristobulus assume. Ancient sources seem to imply that he was in conflict with Ptolemy II and was banished by him. Some have taken these anachronisms as an argument for dismissing the whole story about Demetrius in LA, but others have pointed out that this is not the only conclusion to be drawn. It is quite conceivable, as suggested by Rajak, that the translation enterprise was indeed “set in motion by Demetrius still under Ptolemy I and then accomplished under Ptolemy II”.⁴⁹⁾ This would also explain the role of the Library in LA,

because, although Demetrius was the one who advised Ptolemy I about its foundation, it was Ptolemy II who founded it as an actual institution. So it is at least possible that Demetrius had to do with the translation project of the Law of the Jews, but more evidence is needed to make this idea plausible.

The memorandum of Demetrius referred to above displays a most positive and favourable evaluation of the Law of the Jews; the latter is not only called ‘very philosophical’, as well as ‘perfect’ and ‘divine’. The statement about the philosophic nature of the Law is one of the features of LA making up the philosophic paradigm, which is also marked by the view that the Jewish translators were most competent philosophers who were able to answer questions about, among other things, kingship ideology. Again, one can not simply assume that these elements of LA mirror in one way or another the time of the original setting unless such an assumption could be based on external evidence dating to the period around 300 BC.

There are a few pieces of evidence which are of great interest.⁵⁰⁾ First, in a fragment of his work *De Pietate*, Theophrastus (372-288/7), philosopher and teacher of Demetrius, describes the Jews as being “philosophers by race”: “they converse with each other about the deity, and at nighttime they make observations of the stars, gazing at them and calling on God by prayer”.⁵¹⁾ Just as Demetrius in his memorandum, Theophrastus too displays a very positive attitude towards the Jews in Palestine. By calling them ‘philosophers’, he lifted them above the mere barbarians. Josephus tells us that according to Clearches even Aristotle regarded the Jews philosophers who “descended from the Indian philosophers” (Ag. Ap. 1,179). This report about Aristotle is hardly to be considered historical, but is nevertheless most interesting since, as Rajak puts it, “observations on Judaism are by this means legitimated among the master's successors” (76).

Second, Demetrius refers in his memorandum to Hecataeus of Abdera (par. 31). The latter was a Greek scholar who belonged to the reign of Ptolemy I and lived in the same city as did Demetrius — Alexandria. Hecataeus devoted a long passage in his *Aegyptiaca* to the Jews in Judea.⁵²⁾ Its focus is mainly on the laws and customs of the Jewish people. The reader is told that Moses, “outstanding both for his wisdom and for his courage”, took possession of the land and founded cities, such as Jerusalem. He also states: “In addition, he established the temple that they hold in chief veneration, instituted their forms of worship and ritual, drew up their laws, and ordered the things regarding the government”. Although this picture is not fully in line with what is told in the Pentateuch,⁵³⁾ the interesting thing is that Hecataeus offers a description of the Jews, their Law and institutions which, apart from a few critical remarks,⁵⁴⁾ is very positive indeed. As far as the ‘constitution’ (πολιτεία) of the Jews is

⁴³⁾ J. M. Williams, “The Peripatetic School and Demetrius of Phalerum's Reforms in Athens”, *The Ancient World* 15 (1987), 90.

⁴⁴⁾ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I, 314f.

⁴⁵⁾ Cf. Honigman, *The Septuagint*, 89f.

⁴⁶⁾ Honigman, *The Septuagint*, 89.

⁴⁷⁾ Cf. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I, 690; Collins, *Library*; Orth, “Ptolemaios II.”; Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, 42, 76f., and Honigman, *The Septuagint*, 88-90.

⁴⁸⁾ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I, 321, 690.

⁴⁹⁾ Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, 42. She also states that the “evidence for the banishment is not strong, since our single source for it is Hermippus, by no means the most reliable of biographers” (ibid.). For doubts about this tradition, see also Collins, *Library*, 73f. For dating the Greek version in the time of Ptolemy II, see also Honigman, *The Septuagint*, 137.

⁵⁰⁾ See also Fernández Marcos, “The Greek Pentateuch”, 86.

⁵¹⁾ See M. Stern (ed.), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol. 1: *From Herodotus to Plutarch* (Jerusalem 1974), 10.

⁵²⁾ See Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors* I, 26-29.

⁵³⁾ Moses did not take possession of the land, nor founded cities like Jerusalem.

⁵⁴⁾ Note the following passage: “The sacrifices that he established differ from those of other nations, as does their way of living, for as a result of their own expulsion from Egypt he introduced an unsocial and intolerant mode of life”.

concerned, Hecataeus has a rather detailed section of the leadership of the Jewish nation, in which he tells his readers that this nation was, and still is, headed by priests (leading priests under the prime direction of the high priest) who were also appointed to be “judges in all major disputes”. Furthermore, it is also said that “at the end of their laws” there is appended the statement, “These are the words that Moses heard from God and declares unto the Jews”. On whatever passage in the books of Moses this quote might be based,⁵⁵⁾ this passage reflects the claim of the Jews about the divine status of their laws.

A third piece, to which Orth has drawn attention,⁵⁶⁾ is the fact that the Peripatetic school, to which Demetrius belonged (see also above), had “a special interest in constitutions, *politeiai*, and therefore in lawgivers”.⁵⁷⁾ This interest was not limited to Greek cities and their laws. On the contrary, Aristotle and his successors also showed a great interest in constitutions and laws of the ‘barbarians’.

All in all, in the early Ptolemaic era the Jews, more in particular the Jews in Judea / Palestine, were obviously on the mental map of Greek scholars (cf. Theophrastus and Hecataeus of Abdera). In the light of the evidence provided above it is conceivable that Demetrius took a great interest in the Jews of Palestine, particularly in their laws and constitution, as did Hecataeus. Such an attitude would fit in with his ideas as a Peripatetic scholar. The positive view on the Jews held by a famous scholar like Theophrastus may have motivated him even more. One thus can easily imagine that Demetrius was the one who advised Ptolemy I that it would be worthwhile to have a Greek version of the Law of the Jews. (The fact that Judea was part of the Ptolemaic empire of the time may also have played a role.) If so, a scholarly interest on the Greek side would have been part of the original setting of the translation in Alexandria.⁵⁸⁾

In conclusion it can be said that the ‘philosophical’ paradigm, typical of LA, contains elements which mirror, albeit dimly, the original setting of the Greek version of the Law of the Jews. It is to be noted however that the external evidence we have only sheds light on the Greek side of the coin, in particular on the role of Demetrius, and not on the Jewish side. It does not tell us anything of why the Jews might have been interested in a Greek version of their Law. It also does not help us answer related questions such as whether the Jews in Alexandria were involved, or whether, as LA claims, the Jewish authorities of Jerusalem played an important role.⁵⁹⁾ Nevertheless, the above may have shown that the study of Honigman is stimulating indeed in rethinking the significance of the *Letter of Aristeas*.

⁵⁵⁾ Stern thinks of passages such as Lev 26:46 and Num 36:13 (*Greek and Latin Authors*, I, 32), but it is more probable that the statement alludes to the book of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut 1:1 and 5:27-28).

⁵⁶⁾ Orth, “Ptolemaios II.”, 108-110.

⁵⁷⁾ Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, 75.

⁵⁸⁾ Cf. Fernández Marcos who speaks of “a scholarly milieu as the social setting of the translators” (“The Greek Pentateuch”, 88).

⁵⁹⁾ For a discussion of some of these questions, see J. Cook and A. van der Kooij, *Law, Prophets, and Wisdom. On the Provenance of Translators and Their Books in the Septuagint Version* (forthcoming).