

## 1. The Present Commentary

The *Letter of Aristeas* is in some ways an understudied work. This might seem like a strange statement to those who know the bibliography on this product of Alexandrian Judaism, since it figures prominently in a wide range of introductions to Second Temple Jewish Literature and in various scholarly studies, from those concerned with *Aristeas* itself to those in which *Aristeas* serves as evidence for the nature of Alexandrian and/or Hellenistic Judaism in the second century BCE (or as a precursor to Philo). Of course, it occupies a central place in any discussion about the origins of the Septuagint. Indeed, the work is one of the few complete Jewish texts from Alexandria in its period, and thus, it is an indispensable source of potential information about both the Jewish community in Alexandria and elite, educated Jews in the Hellenistic world during the Ptolemaic period.

At the same time, however, the kinds of studies that one might expect of such an important text have not really been done. Very few monographs have been devoted to it, and there has not really been a complete and full commentary written on the work. The closest thing to a real commentary one encounters is Raffaele Tramontano's 1931 volume, *La Lettera di Aristeas a Filocrate*, which is subtitled *Introduzione, Testo, Versione e Commento*.<sup>1</sup> The commentary, however, is given as extended annotations in footnotes to the text and accompanying Italian translation, and Tramontano concentrates mostly on textual and linguistic matters, particularly the relationship between the Greek of *Aristeas* and the papyri. Prior to Tramontano most of the scholarly work on *Aristeas* took the form of editions of the text and translations, sometimes with longer or shorter notes. (See the bibliography at the end of this introduction.) A short time after Tramontano, Henry Meecham produced two volumes on *Aristeas*, which are not commentaries proper but rather a series of studies on various aspects of the work. The first, *The Oldest Version of the Bible: 'Aristeas' on Its Traditional Origin. A Study in Early Apologetic with Translation and Appendices*, is an expansion of Meecham's Hartley Lecture in which he discusses

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<sup>1</sup> (Naples: Ufficio Succursale della Civiltà Cattolica, 1931).