

CAUSES OF THE JEWISH DIASPORA REVOLT IN ALEXANDRIA: REGIONAL
UPRISINGS FROM THE MARGINS OF GRECO-ROMAN SOCIETY,

115-117 CE

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This thesis examines the progression from relatively peaceful relations between Alexandrians and Jews under the Ptolemies to the Diaspora Revolt under the Romans. Alexandrian involvement introduced a new element to the ongoing conflict among Egypt's Jews and native Egyptians. The Alexandrian citizens consciously cut back privileges the Jews previously enjoyed under the Ptolemies and sought to block the Jews from advancing within the Roman system. Soon the Jews were confronted with rhetoric slandering their civility and culture. Faced with a choice, many Jews forsook Judaism and their traditions for more upwardly mobile life. After the outbreak of the First Jewish War Jewish life took a turn for the worse. Many Jews found themselves in a system that classified them according to their heritage and ancestry, limiting advancement even for apostates. With the resulting Jewish tax (*fiscus Judaicus*) Jews were becoming more economically and socially marginalized. This thesis analyzes Jewish writings and pagan writings about the Jews, which evidences their changing socio-political position in Greco-Roman society. In less than 100 years, from 30 CE to 117 CE, the Alexandrians attacked the Jewish community on at least three occasions. Despite the advice of the most Hellenized elites, the Jews did not sit idly by anti-Jewish theater productions, and appealed to Rome. In the year 115 CE, tensions reached a high. Facing three years of violent attacks against their community, Alexandrian Jews responded to Jewish uprisings in Cyrene and Egypt with an uprising of their own. Really a series of revolts, historians have termed these events simply "the Diaspora Revolt."

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapters	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. JEWISH LIFE UNDER THE PTOLEMIES.....	9
3. THE ROMAN ERA.....	28
4. THE DIASPORA REVOLT.....	50
5. CONCLUSION.....	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	66

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the years between 67 through 135 CE a series of three Jewish revolts broke out as a result of tension between Jews and their gentile subjugators. The second of these revolts, the so-called Diaspora Revolt or Second Jewish War of 115–117 CE, has received little attention from historians due to the lack of sound primary source material. This absence of sources is most directly a result of the effectiveness of the Roman forces in putting down this uprising. Among where the Jews revolted—Mesopotamia, Cyrene, Egypt, and Cyprus—the Jewish population was eradicated. If any remained, they were unproductive in terms of literature. The literary sources that do exist are mostly from much later Christian writers, whose accounts and rhetoric are sometimes unclear. What is known is that unlike the prior and subsequent revolts, which were centered in Judea, the Diaspora Revolt broke out in the many regions the Jews had migrated to over hundreds of years. This fact is one which the archaeological evidence and the literary sources agree upon. Other than that, the evidence is scarce and vague. Thus, scholars are left with many unanswered questions in regards to the revolutionaries' initial compulsion to revolt, their goals, and the actual timeline and events of the uprising. As a result, the entire uprising had often been blanketed under one umbrella, ignoring the complexities of what was most likely a series of corresponding regional revolts.

Some scholars conclude the cause of the revolt was an amazing act of unity among the Jews whose ultimate goal was to overthrow the Roman Empire. This theory points to increased tension and anti-Jewish measures resulting from the Flavian dynasty's political propaganda

putting an emphasis on victory over the Jews during the First Jewish Revolt.¹ However, this view wrongfully portrays most Diaspora Jews as unwilling subjects of the Romans. The literary and archaeological record, as we will discuss, evidences Jewish communities that were willing to participate in the Greco-Roman world. The prior argument is further perpetuated by scholars who believe that the Parthian Empire helped coordinate the uprising as another strategy in their ongoing wars with the Romans.²

Unfortunately, this act of unity between Jews of different regions was extremely unlikely. It would have required massive resources in order to coordinate the revolt, and even more cohesion and strategy to keep it a secret from the Romans. Even with the help of the Parthians, a coordinated revolt of that scale would have required improbable strategy. Rather, the Jews living in different regions of the Diaspora were each living within unique social structures which they rebelled against. The structure and history of each individual region the revolt occurred in was drastically different. The revolt—or more accurately, revolts—should instead be seen as responses to existing local tensions between the Jews and their gentile neighbors. Under the Roman Empire, these groups were in an ongoing struggle for Roman imperial patronage. For reasons we will discuss, the gentiles were competing to regain the prestige they had under the Ptolemies, while the Jews were competing to increase theirs.

This argument is not a complete deviation from the theory of unity, in that the overall goal of each revolt was similar, but it rejects the idea that the revolt was anti-Roman in origin. The evidence indicates that Jewish regional leadership had pressed to increase their rights in the

¹ William Horbury, *Jewish War under Hadrian and Trajan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2014), 110; Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 451-454.

² Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism in Turmoil, 116/117 CE: Ancient Sources and Modern Insights* (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), 263.

Roman imperial government for years right up until the uprisings. Prior to this they had lived a lowly status, subject to the policies of their Greek-descended neighbors. Besides their primary goal, the uprisings were only connected through inspiration-the first outbreak inspired the next and so forth until there were disruptions throughout Mesopotamia, Cyrene, Egypt, and Cyprus.

Due to the lack of evidence, attempting to detail what exactly took place in each province is impossible. However, because of the sources from one of the most source-abundant regions, Alexandria, we can create a model for what type of tension might have led to the revolts. The sources indicate that the revolt in Alexandria happened as a result of local tensions that had developed over time. The cause of this outbreak in Alexandria has roots in hostilities between the Greco-Alexandrian citizens (henceforth referred to as the Alexandrians) and the Jews starting at a much earlier date, 38 CE. The Alexandrians saw themselves as proper Greeks, the continuators of Alexander the Great's empire and in fact Greeks frequently migrated to the region from Greece.³ In reality, the Alexandrians, the *Diadochi* (Alexander's successor generals), and even Alexander himself were part of a culture that had developed from not only Greek, but also Egyptian and Near Eastern cultures as well, a mix referred to as Hellenistic culture.

According to the Jewish philosopher Philo, in 38 CE the Alexandrians violently attacked the Jewish population without provocation.⁴ The next reported disruption took place in 66 CE. Josephus reported this confrontation similarly as an initially Alexandrian action against the Jews. This time the Jews responded with an even stronger reaction which resulted in military intervention on behalf of the Alexandrians against the Jews.⁵ In contrast to these two prior disruptions, historians have most often explained the 115 CE Diaspora Revolts as unprovoked (in

³ P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 1:52

⁴ Philo, *Embassy to Gaius*, 18.120-38.

⁵ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 2.487-99.

terms of physical violence) Jewish action against their Greco-Roman peers—largely based on the accounts of Dio Cassius and Eusebius.⁶ Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks’s reading of three papyri fragments referred to as *CPJ* 158 A, 158 B, and 435, in their monumental work *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum (CPJ)* has bolstered the traditional view of initial Jewish violence.⁷

158 A and B, the first fragments published of the so-called Acts of the Alexandrians Martyrs, detail a dispute between Alexandrian and Jewish embassies before a Roman emperor.⁸ According to Tcherikover and Fuks, the Roman emperor mentioned in these fragments was Hadrian and the violence mentioned was Jewish violence late in Trajan’s (r. 98-117 CE) reign, part of the Diaspora Revolt.⁹ The dispute itself was over the resettlement of Jews following the crisis, and the punishment of those who carried out the violence.¹⁰ Papyrus *CPJ* 435, on the other hand, mentions elite Alexandrian owned slaves carrying out the violence that precipitated the papyrus *CPJ* 158’s embassies, for which they were on trial before the Roman governor of Egypt, Rutilius Lupus.¹¹ Tcherikover and Fuks conclude that this violence took place earlier in the year of 115 CE and progressed to a battle, which the Romans swiftly put down.¹²

Modern scholars who address the revolt draw directly from Dio and Eusebius’s remarks at face value, seemingly confirmed by Tcherikover and Fuks’s reading of 158 A and B, and attest to initial Jewish aggression as the cause of the revolt.¹³ Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev has offered a

⁶ Cassius Dio, 68.32.2-3; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2-3.

⁷ Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 2:87-99, 2:228-33.

⁸ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 88.

⁹ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 89.

¹⁰ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 88-89.

¹¹ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 229.

¹² Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 230.

¹³ Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 456; Martin Hengel, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians: Aspects of the Hellenization of Judaism in the pre-Christian Period*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 87.

fresh reading of the before-mentioned papyri. Her hypothesis is that all of the papyri refer to Alexandrian violence against the Jews in the years between 113 and 115 CE, prior to the start of the Jewish uprising.¹⁴ As a result, she concludes the emperor referred to in *CPJ* 158 A and B was Trajan rather than Hadrian. This analysis partially leads her to date the Jewish portion of the revolt in the Egypt as year 116 CE instead of 115, as it is commonly understood.¹⁵ She argues that 115 was a year of continued Alexandrian violence against the Jews. Acts such as the one mentioned in *CPJ* 435 are what led to a Jewish counter-attack starting in 116.¹⁶

Whether or not the revolt broke out mid to late 115 or 116 CE, Pucci Ben Zeev's reading of the papyri is reasonable. Contrary to the revolts in Judea, the Jews were not rising up against the Romans but against their Alexandrian neighbors. This outbreak was not so different from what happened in the 66 CE event. Once more in the Diaspora Revolt, Alexandrian violence led to Jewish violence. Even the violence during 38 CE attest to Alexandrian aggression. Furthermore, when attempting to piece together the series of events leading to the Diaspora Revolt, scholars should not ignore the infamous hostility of the Alexandrians.¹⁷ The hostility previously attributed to the Jews in the Diaspora Revolt is in stark contrast to their role as victims in the 38 CE conflict, and the reactionary role they assumed in the 66 violence.¹⁸ Rather, the Diaspora Revolt should be revisited within the context of the noted escalating tensions and patterns that existed between the Alexandrians and Jews.

¹⁴ Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, "Greek Attacks against Alexandrian Jews during Emperor Trajan's Reign," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 20.1 (1989): 34-35.

¹⁵ Pucci Ben Zeev, "Greek Attacks," 36.

¹⁶ Pucci Ben Zeev, "Greek Attacks," 46.

¹⁷ Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.496-498; Philo, *Against Flaccus*, 33, 35; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*, 32.11; Strabo 17.1.53; Andrew Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt: The Case of the Acta Alexandrinorum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6-7.

¹⁸ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 19.276-281; Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 12. Josephus is the sole source that attests to Jewish violence in 41 CE but he specifically states that it was in reaction to Alexandrian abuses to them, probably alluding to the 38 CE conflict.

I do not want to minimize the role of the Romans in all three of the conflicts mentioned, however. As the rest of the Diaspora Revolt is typically explained, the Romans indeed had a critical role in the 38, 66, and 115-117 CE outbreaks but it was likely indirect. The fact that the Alexandrian and Jewish clashes took place after the Romans conquered Egypt should serve as an indication that the Romans changed the socio-political dynamic. Prior to their conquest of Egypt, the Alexandrian Jews were reported to have had social mobility and peaceful relations with the Alexandrians. Roman intervention created an increasingly tense situation between these groups that escalated over time. As a result, the Jews and the Alexandrians clashed a number of times, culminating in the years leading up to the Diaspora Revolt and the revolt itself. This understanding is in stark contrast to the view that the outbreak in Alexandria was part of the Diaspora wide movement directly against the Romans. Instead it was a response to localized rifts within Alexandria and hostility between Greeks and Jews in the other areas.

Some scholars, notably James Carleton Paget and Pucci Ben Zeev, support the argument that the Romans had a functional role in creating the hostile Alexandrian environment.¹⁹ Likewise, the literary evidence further strengthens their arguments and helps clarify the situation in Alexandria leading up to the revolt. Studying the change in Jewish literature and the literature about the Jews over time will demonstrate that the concerns of the Alexandrian communities changed. It becomes evident that it was Roman incompetence in understanding the complexities of the situation in Alexandria and their mismanagement of the continuous disputes that enabled the Alexandrians to create a point of leverage over the Jewish community, which took shape in the institution of citizenship. The *fiscus Judaicus* added yet another obstacle the Jews had to overcome.

¹⁹ James Carleton Paget, "Jews and Christians in Ancient Alexandria," in *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*, ed. Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk, (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 147-48.

As a consequence of the various factors working against them, the Jewish community never initiated an attack against the Alexandrians because they likely understood their position as politically marginalized. The Alexandrians reinforced inferior Jewish status through their own citizenship policy. The majority of Jews likely saw their avenue to changing their political situation as passive resistance and direct Roman intervention. In this light, the violence between the two groups, as well as the embassies sent time and time again to the emperors were in reality part of this struggle for imperial patronage. The Alexandrians sought to maintain theirs at the expense of the Jews. Meanwhile, the Jews sought a status equal to the Alexandrians as well as the benefits it offered in the Roman world.

In order to do illustrate the series of events in the uprising, I will look at texts written at various points before and during the Diaspora Revolt. To start I will briefly detail the political situation of the Jews in Alexandria prior to the period of Roman rule, under the Ptolemies. This will allow for a closer identification of where the roots of later anti-Jewish fervor originated. Despite the hostile sentiment of at least a portion of the Alexandrians, early literature evidences mostly positive relations under Ptolemaic rule. The evolution of Alexandrian and Jewish relations and their perceptions of one another shows a major shift in the socio-political climate. Still, later Jews maintained a desire to obtain citizenship. This desire was backed by a strategic Jewish rhetoric making their case. The subtlety which the desire was expressed is reflective of the author's sense of urgency regarding the issue, which was influenced by the political landscape of Alexandria.

Most importantly, the literature and archaeology evidence a community that was struggling with their identity. The movement to obtain citizenship is reflective of this larger issue. To an extent, the Hellenistic Jews living in the Diasporic regions had a desire to fit into a

larger Greco-Roman world that sought to erase their unique religious identity. This Hellenistic world consisted of many influential aspects that Jews had to find or create ways to synthesize within their own traditional world view. However, despite this, they were in a struggle with both the Alexandrians and the Egyptians for increased status. Whereas punishment against the Alexandrians did occasionally take place, Jewish status was never improved. This brings to attention the systemic obstacles within the new Roman imperial government that the Alexandrian Jews could not overcome. Still, they continuously appealed to the Romans rather than resort to violence. They acted out of desperation in their 66 CE and Diaspora Revolt reactions. They were aware of their marginalized status, and did not view Roman punishments against the Alexandrians for their previous violent actions as sufficient consequences or answers to their concerns. The violence against the Alexandrian Jewish community continued. Because the Jews viewed the Romans as their patrons, the Roman government's failure to sufficiently protect them caused them to seek a desperate solution.²⁰ In fact, it is apparent that governors' and emperors' actions contributed to the marginalization of the Jewish community. Calling attention to these issues allows for greater context around the Diaspora Revolt, which is important because in the aftermath of the revolt the once vibrant Jewish communities of these regions were practically destroyed.²¹

²⁰ Pucci Ben Zeev, *Judaism in Turmoil*, 480.

²¹ Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 2:97; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 190.

CHAPTER 2

JEWISH LIFE UNDER THE PTOLEMIES

The *Letter of Aristeas* offers an early glimpse of Jewish life in Alexandria. Scholars most often refer to the letter because of the details it provides concerning the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (r. 283-246 BCE). The resulting text is called the Septuagint, after the supposed 72 scholars who worked on the translation. In reality, however, the *Letter of Aristeas* provides very little information on the work it took to translate the text but it is beneficial as one of the earliest sources for Jewish life under the Ptolemies. It details that a relatively minor Jewish migration into Egypt began at the start of the Ptolemaic kingship under Ptolemy I Soter (r. 323-283 BCE).¹ Jews were brought in as slaves from Soter's various Judean campaigns and were settled across the Fayyum and Alexandria.² Despite their status as slaves, many of these early settlers were allowed social mobility and fair treatment. Josephus, the *Letter of Aristeas*, and *CPJ* 18-32 all report eventual Jewish employment as favored soldiers.³ Soter reportedly had so much trust in his Jewish soldiers that he entrusted a fortress to them on the Egyptian border to Cyrene in order to strengthen his hold on the region and quell that city's rebellious tendencies.⁴ Those who were made slaves, or their descendants, were then freed under the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus as an act of good will.⁵ Inscriptions from the third and second centuries BCE record dedications of synagogues on behalf of the Ptolemies further attesting to the positive Jewish perception of the

¹ *Letter of Aristeas*, 12-17.

² Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:57.

³ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 1, p. 148-178; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 2.12.40-42; *Letter of Aristeas*, 36.

⁴ Shimon Applebaum, *Jews and Greeks in ancient Cyrene* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 131; Hengel, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians*, 86.

⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12.46.

early Ptolemaic monarchs.⁶ Dositheos, who 3 Maccabees claims was an apostate Jew, is attested to by the Zeno papyri as a record keeper and secretary to the king.⁷ He also rose to prominence as a priest of the cult of Alexander and the Ptolemies, a position notably not open to native Egyptians.⁸

Positive acts towards Egypt's Jews continued through the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (r. 180-145 BCE). As a result of his welcoming policies and friendly sentiment towards Jews, Jewish settlement in Egypt increased during his reign. Onias IV, the Zadokite claimant to the High Priesthood in Jerusalem, fled to Egypt during the Maccabean outbreak in the region. He then built a temple with the patronage of Ptolemy VI at Leontopolis, a city in the southern Nile Delta. Onias and his followers embraced Hellenistic and Egyptian ideas. To be clear, their community was atypical even for Hellenized Jews, as they developed a unique Judaism that adopted elements from Hellenistic and Egyptian traditions.⁹ The papyri *CPJ* 1510, 1513, and 1530 provide evidence of this community's thoughts on the afterlife—that the body can die but the soul can live on and undergo judgment. *CPJ* 1530 is especially telling, as it mentioned the “house of Hades,” as the “sad place of the dead.” Despite their singularity, the Leontopolis community evidences the extent to which Jews were accepted and allowed to flourish during Philometor's period.

Seen in the context of the king's other actions and noted attitude toward the Jews, his relegation of separate districts for the Jews reflects positive rather than negative intent.¹⁰ The

⁶ John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 200), 67; William Horbury and David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt: With an Index of the Jewish Inscriptions of Egypt and Cyrenaica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), 19-21.

⁷ Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 67; Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 1, p. 115-46; *CPJ* 1.127. The Zenon Papyri are a collection of Greek letters from a real estate official of Apollonios, Ptolemy II Philadelphos's royal minister, named Zenon.

⁸ Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 67.

⁹ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:83.

¹⁰ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:54-57; Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.488.

Letter of Aristeas refers to the Jewish community as a *politeuma* (πολιτεύμα), which was also found on two inscriptions from Berenice in Cyrenaica.¹¹ Generally, it refers to a community of foreigners, whether born in the region or not (for example, non-Alexandrians in Alexandria), within a city or kingdom.¹² In the context of the *Letter of Aristeas*, *politeuma* refers to districts throughout Egypt that had some type of notable status with special privileges regarding their civic rights.¹³ What is important in the formal use of the term is that no formal *politeuma* could exist without special permission from the king.¹⁴ Josephus's Hecataeus confirmed this type of structure. Josephus reports that Hecataeus's High Priest Hezekiah went with a number of Jews to settle Egypt with a "political constitution in writing," for their *politeuma*.¹⁵ Within their district, an ethnarch presided over the community and his function was similar to a magistrate of an independent state.¹⁶ This allowed the Jews within the *politeuma* a limited measure of autonomy. In fact, these *politeuma* ran very much like a recognized Hellenistic state. In this case, the authority of the local political elites and ethnarch did not derive from Alexandrian citizenship, but membership in the Jewish *politeuma*.¹⁷ This appears to have been a status all its own that applied to only a regulated number of Jews, who were called *politai* (πολίται).¹⁸ Thus, only certain Jews were allowed to live in the *politeuma*. What is also important about this specific designation is that it granted the Jews the right to appear before the Court of Ten, a court designated for citizens of a specific city. In the case of Ptolemaic Egypt, papyrus *CPJ* 19

¹¹ Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1959), 297; Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 213.

¹² Shutt, "Letter of Aristeas," in Charlesworth, 299.

¹³ *Letter of Aristeas*, 310; R. J. H. Shutt, "Letter of Aristeas," in Charlesworth, 33.

¹⁴ Shutt, "Letter of Aristeas," in Charlesworth, 300.

¹⁵ Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 300.

¹⁶ Günther Höbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, trans. Tina Saavedra (London: Routledge, 2001), 190.

¹⁷ Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights* (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985), 50; Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 214.

¹⁸ Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 214.

indicates that these city courts were specifically for citizens and *politai*, not for native-Egyptians, foreigners, or other Jews who were not part of the *politeuma*.¹⁹ Additionally they, like the Alexandrians, were allowed exemption from the Ptolemaic poll tax.²⁰ The king likely felt that permitting the formation of these Jewish districts would allow for urban Jews to practice their unique separatist traditions. This type of institution was also known to have parallels in Ptolemaic Cyrene.²¹

The *politeuma* appears to have been what Josephus and Strabo (referenced by Josephus) were insinuating in regards to Jewish privileges, with varying degrees of ambiguity. In his *Jewish War*, Josephus claimed that Alexander granted them equality with the Greeks for their support against the Egyptians.²² Whereas Alexander probably found willing assistance from the Jews against the Egyptians for reasons we will discuss, “equality with the Greeks” might be misleading. The *politeuma* evidences that some Jews did indeed share privileges with their citizen counterparts but in terms of status they were specifically *politai*, not Alexandrian citizens. This distinction will be critical in the Roman period.

Josephus goes on in the same passage to state that Alexandrian Jews were permitted to take the title of Macedonian. This too is deceptive. In another passage he clarifies that this title could insinuate some loose form of military prestige. In reference to a bodyguard to a prince of Commagene, he states that his force was made up of so-called “Macedonians,” receiving their title because of their training and equipment, even though most of them were “lacking any claim

¹⁹ CPJ 1.19; Kasher, *Struggle for Equal Rights*, 49.

²⁰ Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 217.

²¹ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 56.

²² Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.487-88.

to that race.”²³ If Josephus is to be trusted, apparently this was a reference to the first military settlers in Alexandria who belonged to a unit of “Macedonians.”²⁴

In stark contrast to Philometor’s acts of patronage was the contemporary situation in Judea. In Judea, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175–164 BCE) was trying to repress Judaism and its pious followers. Before the Seleucid rule of Judea, the Jews had a relatively positive view of the Ptolemies as rulers while they controlled the region in the third century BCE. Ptolemaic rule over Judea was embraced, as it freed the Jews from the later Persian monarchs who were not as accepting of Jewish ideas as their historical predecessors. While in control of Judea, the Ptolemies allowed the Jews to practice a large degree of semi-autonomous governance, especially in regards to their religious customs, which the Judeans were particularly sensitive to. As a result, the religious leaders seem to have been willing to participate in the wider Hellenistic world. There are a number of papyri fragments attesting to an active trade network between Judea and Ptolemaic Egypt as early as the third century BCE.²⁵ Consequently, when Antiochus was enacting his anti-Judaism reforms, migration to Egypt increased and continued during the initial revolts and outbreaks associated with the Maccabean Revolt, around the 160’s BCE.²⁶ Accounts of Antiochus’s interactions with the Jews in Judea, and the subsequent revolt, are told in 1 and 2 Maccabees. Among Antiochus’s decrees was one outlawing the cult of Yahweh and the consecration of the Jerusalem temple to Zeus.²⁷ Antiochus’s actions would have made Jews throughout the Diaspora acutely aware of their status as non-sovereign subjects whose protection

²³ Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5.460-62.

²⁴ Kasher, *Struggle for Equal Rights*, 49.

²⁵ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 115-129.

²⁶ Alan K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs 332 BCE – AD 642* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 127; Höbl, *Ptolemaic Empire*, 189.

²⁷ Höbl, *Ptolemaic Empire*, 190.

relied on the patronage of Hellenistic monarchs.²⁸ The fact that Egypt was a primary destination of migrants fleeing Judea is indicative of lenient and tolerant Ptolemaic social policies, especially concerning religion.

The *Letter of Aristeas* provides glimpses of the activity and political situation of the Jewish community at the time of its authorship. The date of the text is an important question because the rhetoric of the letter reflects a Jewish community that was far from revolting against the Alexandrians; and, it is indicative of an environment very different than the one that would later include drastic Jewish marginalization. The text is designed to appear as a letter written contemporary to the events it describes. Nevertheless, there is a scholarly consensus that the text was not written by the so-called Aristeas but an Alexandrian Jew, referred to as pseudo-Aristeas, after the events it narrates. That this was written at a later date is assumed based on the author's apparent historical inaccuracies, such as his use of the librarian mentioned in the letter, Demetrius of Phalerum, who was not actually a librarian at Alexandria during the reign of Philadelphus as Demetrius fell out of favor and died in the earlier part of Philadelphus's reign.²⁹ The exact date of the text is unknown but the source provides clues towards a relatively short period. The author mentioned "Coeloesyria and Phoenicia," which was the Seleucid name for the region after they conquered it.³⁰ Elias J. Bickerman argued for an earlier date between 140 and 125 BCE, based on data tracking when certain greetings came in and out of favor.³¹ However,

²⁸ J. H. Shutt, "Letter of Aristeas: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judea-Hellenistic Works*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 2:9.

²⁹ John R. Bartlett, *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Josephus, Aristeas, the Sibylline Oracles, Eupolemus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985), 16.

³⁰ *Letter of Aristeas*, 12; Elias J. Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, 2nd ed (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 115.

³¹ Bickerman, *Jewish and Christian History*, 124-26, 133; H. St. J. Thackeray, "Translation of the Letter of Aristeas," *Jewish Quarterly Review* (1903).

Aristobulus, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, seems to have referred to the *Letter of Aristeas* when reporting the translation of the Septuagint. He conveys a similar story under the reign of Philadelphus, managed by Demetrius of Phalerus.³² This would date the text to no later than 145 BCE, leaving us with a date of authorship sometime between ca. 200 to 145 BCE, perhaps closer to the latter considering Bickerman's analysis.³³

The traditional view of the *Letter of Aristeas* is that it was written as a tribute to the Jewish law and wisdom of the Torah.³⁴ However, as mentioned, the translation process is little detailed. Likewise, the letter focused on the quality of the translation for a relatively short period but consists of very strong rhetoric over the matter.³⁵ The bulk of the text describes the king's reverence for the Jews in his kingdom and the Jewish scribes from Judea. There is an ongoing debate over the author's reasons for portraying such a relationship between the Jewish community and the monarch. Many scholars during the first half of the twentieth century and before believed that the author, in part, intended the text as an apologetic work to a non-Jewish audience.³⁶ The theory is that the author wanted to teach his contemporary gentiles that the monarchy and royal court praised Judaism. In 1958 Victor Tcherikover emphasized the other aspect of the letter, the appeal to a Jewish audience in order to accept the Septuagint as authoritative³⁷ His argument was that the primary propaganda aspect of the letter was to the Jewish audience, rather than to the gentile audience. Tcherikover proposed that the author

³² Eusebius, *Preparations for the Gospel*, 13.12.2.

³³ A. Yarbro Collins, "Aristobulus," in Charlesworth, 833; *Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008), 143.

³⁴ Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 97; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:696, 700; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ: 175 B.C.-A.D. 135*, vol. 3 bk. 1, ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, Matthew Black, and Martin Goodman (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973-1986), 677.

³⁵ *Letter of Aristeas*, 308-322.

³⁶ Schürer, *Jewish People*, vol. 3, bk.1, 679.

³⁷ Victor A. Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," *Harvard Theological Review* 51, no. 2 (1958).

intended to speak to his fellow Jews in order to turn them towards a more enlightened Judaism that understands the allegories of the Torah.³⁸

Whereas Tcherikover's theory is partially correct, the notion that pseudo-Aristeas was writing to suggest that the Alexandrians should hold the Jews in higher esteem is also true. This theory fits into the wider context of a city in which the Jewish and native Egyptian communities were both trying to appeal to the Ptolemies to increase their imperial patronage. This does not imply that pseudo-Aristeas's contemporary Alexandrians or monarchs were hostile towards the Jews, but only that the Jews sought greater prestige. Furthermore, this argument does not disregard Tcherikover's proposition that the author also had a message for the Jewish community, or that it was his primary one. The audience of the *Letter Aristeas*, just like Philo's audience many years later, was likely both Jewish and Alexandrian. This is especially true because of the less hostile relations between the two groups during this early period.³⁹ It is indeed probable that the leaders of the Jewish community wanted their fellow Jews to move towards a Judaism that was more open to cosmopolitan ideas and Greek philosophy. We will see this trend continue throughout Jewish history in Egypt. Just as Philo and his family, leaders of their respective Jewish population, were also the more politically and socially mobile elites in Jewish society, the leaders of pseudo-Aristeas's Jewish community also shared those opportunities. It is evident in the many cases where Jewish leaders participated in the wider Hellenistic world (such as the Hasmoneans; the Herodians; and, Aristobulus the Alexandrian philosopher) that Jewish elites embraced Hellenistic culture. Pseudo-Aristeas's community is likely no different. The *Letter of Aristeas* makes an appeal, on behalf of the Jewish elites, to their fellow Jews to embrace an "enlightened" Judaism.

³⁸ Tcherikover, "Letter of Aristeas," 83.

³⁹ Shutt, "Letter of Aristeas," in Charlesworth, 2:10.

There are examples of arguments to the Alexandrian Jews and to the Alexandrians scattered throughout the text. To the Alexandrians, he emphasized that the chosen Elders were masters of Jewish and Greek literature in an attempt to portray the scribes as appealing and acceptable to the Alexandrians and Hellenized Jews. These scribes were free from any “uncouth and uncultured attitude of mind.”⁴⁰ “Uncouth” and “uncultured” were likely references to Jews that participated in the Maccabean revolt and skirmishes in the Judean countryside. This is indication that events in Judea likely caused the Jews in Alexandria, and throughout the Diaspora, to emphasize their positive attitude towards Hellenistic culture, in order to maintain and improve their prestige. The Ptolemaic monarchs would have undoubtedly welcomed signals that the Jews residing in Alexandria were cultured and compliant subjects. Almost reluctantly, the author admits that a large number of Jews came to Egypt as prisoners, but goes on to state that they were paid generously and received assistance to establish themselves in Egypt.⁴¹ Josephus described Ptolemy I’s battle of Jerusalem on the Sabbath during his Judean campaign in the spring of 311 BCE, after which he brought back many Jews as slaves, so pseudo-Aristeas is alluding to a presumably historically accurate occurrence.⁴² Papyri from the Fayyum attests to the military (cavalry and infantry) as a regular profession for Jews under the Ptolemies.⁴³ As mentioned before, it is clear that Jews in the military could elevate to administrative officers, such as paymasters, and possibly higher.⁴⁴ Regarding ideology, the author claimed that the Greeks worship the same God as the Jews, but they call him Zeus.⁴⁵ I do not think this particular

⁴⁰ *Letter of Aristeas*, 121-122.

⁴¹ *Letter of Aristeas*, 35-36.

⁴² Höbl, *Ptolemaic Empire*, 189.

⁴³ Höbl, *Ptolemaic Empire*, 189.

⁴⁴ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 1, p. 165.

⁴⁵ *Letter of Aristeas*, 16.

line is an argument intended to appeal to the Jews.⁴⁶ Jewish leaders had more of a reason to express this idea to the Alexandrians than to Jews. Jews undoubtedly knew that the majority of foreign peoples they encountered were pagan, and that Yahweh did not fit into a pagan polytheistic pantheon. Pagans on the other hand had a harder time comprehending the concept of monotheism. Jewish elites probably seized whatever opportunities they had to explain their Jewish God to the pagans. What better way to rationalize Yahweh to a pagan audience than to liken Yahweh to Zeus, as a supreme god? This was language the Alexandrians and Ptolemies would understand and accept.

To the Jews, the author sought to express the quality and validity of the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Septuagint lends itself to a more metaphoric, less literal interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Even though a formal translation was required since the Jewish community in Egypt was increasingly becoming unable to read Hebrew, there was likely some backlash to this “enlightened” presentation of the law and scriptures. In order to alleviate the hesitation in adopting the Septuagint, the Jewish elites had to argue the text derived authority directly from the Temple and High Priests. The Elders themselves, supposedly six from each tribe, who came to accomplish the task of translating, represent the Judean community and the High Priest.⁴⁷ Pseudo-Aristeas reported that the High Priest selected each Elder in front of the whole assembly.⁴⁸ The completion of the translation was by divine design, and read to and approved by a massive audience.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Pseudo-Aristeas went to great lengths to express how willingly the Jews embraced Hellenistic culture and the Judaism he presented had keen

⁴⁶ Tcherikover, “Ideology of Aristeas,” 70. Tcherikover rationalizes line 16 as intended for a Jewish audience.

⁴⁷ Tcherikover, *Ideology of Aristeas*, 74.

⁴⁸ *Letter of Aristeas*, 42-46.

⁴⁹ *Letter of Aristeas*, 302-308.

resemblances to popular ancient Greek ideas, particularly Stoicism.⁵⁰ For example, when the King asked what the highest form of sovereignty was, the Elders replied self-control. Additionally, when the author referenced traditional Hebrew scripture, he did so heavily employing language that was familiar to the Alexandrians and Jews educated according to what was seen as a proper Greek education rather than Jews versed solely in the Torah.⁵¹ Although, he presented a hybrid of Hellenistic and Jewish concerns, the author did not abandon Judaism's core values. When the King asked the scribes what he should regard as beautiful, they replied "piety."⁵² The author was putting forth a dual argument, and just as important he was even speaking to Jews who may very well have been versed in or influenced by Stoic thought. Through his use of language and his view of "uncultured" Jews the author is reflective of a Jewish community willing to accept Hellenistic thoughts.

Thus, the text supports the conclusion that the *Letter of Aristeas*'s intended audience was both Jewish and Alexandrian. His argument to the Jews was that they accept the authority of the Septuagint only and that they allow themselves to adopt the enlightened form of Judaism. His argument to the Alexandrians was that they see the Jews as separate from those who revolted in Judea, and that they either start or continue to recognize the Jews as worthy of imperial patronage and elevated status. The importance of the letter is that neither of its arguments lead to the conclusion that the period in which it was written was one of turmoil or intensely hostile relations between the Jewish and Alexandrian communities.

The letter also provides limited evidence of the Jewish communities' citizenship status. In his letter to Eleazer, the king writes that he treats all of his subjects "liberally" when compared

⁵⁰ Tcherikover, *Ideology of Aristeas*, 65.

⁵¹ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:698, 703.

⁵² *The Letter of Aristeas*, 229.

to previous rulers, “especially [Eleazer’s] citizens.”⁵³ By indicating the Jewish community was part of Eleazer’s citizenry the author foreshadowed Claudius’s sentiment in 41 CE that the Jews cannot ask for citizenship in a land that is not their own. Even from this early date there was an idea that Alexandria was not a Jewish land and thus the Jews did not have an inherent right to Alexandrian citizenship. Importantly, at this time their situation was not yet hostile but the Jews were certainly aware of their separate social status. They felt a need to maintain an identity distant from those in Judea while maintaining that Judaism was not fundamentally rebellious. However, during the Ptolemaic period the institution of citizenship gave the Jews little legal reason to appeal to their Alexandrian neighbors on behalf of their community with anything more than passive rhetoric. Ptolemaic civic officials in the city closely monitored Alexandrian citizenship through ancestry but the limitations resulting from a lack of citizenship, at this time, were minimal. It appears that the status of *politai* was sufficient in terms of political and social privileges during the Ptolemaic era. In fact, there was a large number of non-Alexandrians who were able to obtain important positions in the military and the Ptolemaic court.⁵⁴

Two other Alexandrian authors from the Ptolemaic era, the Jewish philosopher Aristobulus and the Jewish chronographer Demetrius, reflect a community that felt comfortable working within the Ptolemaic system, both culturally and politically. Aristobulus, primarily preserved in Eusebius, sought to explain that the expressions in the Hebrew Scriptures were allegorical rather than literal.⁵⁵ Aristobulus claimed that the scriptures were derived from a Stoic doctrine of allegory.⁵⁶ Likewise, Demetrius the Chronographer wrote a history of the Jews for his

⁵³ *The Letter of Aristeas*, 37.

⁵⁴ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:52.

⁵⁵ Baron, *Social and Religious History*, 1:196.

⁵⁶ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:696.

Alexandrian contemporaries that focused on chronological problems within the Scriptures.⁵⁷

That both of these authors wrote in Greek and sought to explain Judaism to their gentile neighbors is indicative of a Jewish community very invested in gaining the approval of the Ptolemies and Alexandrians. Apparently this worked, as Aristobulus himself was welcomed to speak before King Ptolemy VI Philometor.⁵⁸

Despite their mostly positive relations, it is probable that Jews were viewed with some misconceptions because of their monotheism, community isolation, and unique practices. This is true for Jews in many parts of the Mediterranean. Outside of the Ptolemaic court, native Egyptian religious elites harbored some ill sentiments against the Jews. The most notable evidence to this is from Manetho, writing during the Ptolemaic era in the third century BCE. Manetho, an Egyptian Priest writing on the history of Egypt, wrote that the Jews under Moses were polluting Egyptian cultural practices, attacking the Egyptian people and destroying their property, and were ultimately forced out of Egypt.⁵⁹ Although Manetho wrote in Greek and adopted some elements of Hellenistic culture, his anti-Jewishness was a remnant of Egyptian rather than Hellenistic thought. Anti-foreign sentiments were common among Egyptian priests, especially towards what they perceived as religious challenges.⁶⁰ Josephus attests to Manetho gathering his sources from Egyptian priestly writings, myths and legends, and oral tradition.⁶¹ Hecataeus also referred to Egyptian priestly sources in his *Aegyptica* in which he referred to the Jews as a plague.⁶²

⁵⁷ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:691.

⁵⁸ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:694-96.

⁵⁹ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:509, 704-5.

⁶⁰ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:509, 689; Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 1:116-17, 190-91.

⁶¹ Verbrugge, *Berosos and Manetho*, 103, 120.

⁶² Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 508-9.

The origins of Egyptian religious resentment towards the Jews results from their perceived favorable positions under the Persians. A papyrus from the Elephantine garrison claims the Persian King Cambyses II (r. 525–522 BCE) destroyed several temples of the Egyptians but spared the Jewish temple.⁶³ Furthermore, the Jews at Elephantine did not participate in the uprisings against the Persians, probably because of their relatively positive relationship with the monarchs.⁶⁴ Suggesting Egyptian resentment, the “Passover Letter” attests to King Darius (522–486 BCE) having to order the Egyptians to stay away from the Jewish temple.⁶⁵ This did not prevent the Egyptians from destroying the Jewish temple nine years later.⁶⁶ So, once again, the hostility towards the Jews was a result of struggles for imperial patronage. Of course this tension persisted under the Ptolemies and later under the Romans, as the Egyptians were certainly marginalized in their own right under the Greco-Roman rulers. Ironically the Egyptians had elements of their rich culture appropriated, but were seen as barbaric and their name was used as slander in both Jewish and pagan writings. Notably, the god Sarapis, which the Alexandrians took a bust of to their appeal to Trajan in Rome, was seen as both a Hellenistic god and an ancient Egyptian divinity.⁶⁷ Their attractive culture, however, did not bring them noted social or economic mobility under the Greco-Roman monarchs. Even among those individuals engaged in Alexandrian-Egyptian intermarriage, their children were not granted hereditary citizenship.⁶⁸ In fact, it does not appear that any native Egyptians entered the citizen-body during the Ptolemaic period.

⁶³ David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013), 16-22.

⁶⁴ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 16.

⁶⁵ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 17; A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 113.

⁶⁶ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 17.

⁶⁷ Höbl, *Ptolemaic Empire*, 101.

⁶⁸ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 72.

Regarding perceived tension among the Alexandrians and Jews, scholars have often interpreted 3 Maccabees as a signal of friction between these groups.⁶⁹ This Jewish text is most often dated during the first century BCE, however, there is question as to whether it was before or after Rome conquered Egypt (30 BCE). Conflict in the dating stems from the author showing familiarity with the terminology of the Ptolemaic court but identifying the term *laographia* (*λαογραφία*), which some scholars recognize as the tax non-Jews were subject to during the Roman era.⁷⁰ However, the term appears in three Ptolemaic sources regarding a type of registration and tax for non-citizens, indicating the identification with the tax during the Roman era is inconclusive.⁷¹ In fact, there is evidence that a *laographia* was conducted during the Ptolemaic era that extended to non-citizen Jews in Alexandria (including *politai*) for taxation purposes. Within the context of his narrative, the author was referencing the Ptolemaic *laographia*, suggesting a date prior to the Roman era when the term would have taken on another understanding.⁷²

As a genre, 3 Maccabees is a historical romance or historical fiction which means it is overall fictional but provides some historical details.⁷³ The historical details in this text are generally considered weak because of the author's "bombastic" style.⁷⁴ Whether or not the persecution of the Jews in the text is historical, we can still draw several important conclusions: these Alexandrian Jews viewed those in Judea as pious; this group was aware of common

⁶⁹ Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1959), 274-75.

⁷⁰ John J. Collins, "3 Maccabees," in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible: NRSV with the Apocrypha*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1659.

⁷¹ Sarah Raup Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identities: Third Maccabees in its Cultural Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 134-37; Kasher, *Struggle for Equal Rights*, 76.

⁷² Johnson, *Jewish Identities*, 134-37.

⁷³ Anderson, "3 Maccabees," in Charlesworth, 2:510, 514; Grabbe, *Jews and Judaism*, 97; Joseph Mélèze Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian*, trans. Robert Cornman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 141; Schürer, *Jewish People*, vol. 3, bk. 1, 537.

⁷⁴ Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 122; Grabbe, *Jews and Judaism*, 97; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:703.

slanders against them and the perception of their unique Jewish customs (dietary laws and separateness); the Alexandrians were not specifically seen with disdain, but gentiles were; and, the Alexandrian Jews in the text did not have citizenship but desired it. The first of these conclusions contrasts the earlier sentiment from pseudo-Aristeas who sought to distinguish the Alexandrian community from the Judeans.

This text presented a more traditional Judaism, one that the author of the *Letter of Aristeas* attempted not to emphasize because of his different audience. Rather than try to connect himself to an “enlightened” form of Judaism, the author of 3 Maccabees was much less inclined to make appeals to an Alexandrian audience and connected himself to the Jews in Judea. He did not feel a need to emphasize the Greek knowledge of the elders and presented the crux of the of the problem between Ptolemy IV Philopator and the Jews as Jewish unwillingness to reject their traditions and allow the king to enter the Temple.⁷⁵ The Judeans were presented as admirably pious and rushed to aid the priests in praying to receive God’s help in preventing Philopator from entering the Temple.⁷⁶ Unlike the Ptolemies in the *Letter of Aristeas*, Philopator was not awed by the law and reason of the Jews but refused to believe it applied to him. Although he was unable to enter the temple, the king continued to disrespect Jewish tradition when he returned to Egypt. Upon his return, he demanded that they offer sacrifice at a stone or stele, either in commemoration of himself or Dionysus, and that they register as slaves, pay a poll tax, and brand their bodies with the ivy-leaf symbol of Dionysus.⁷⁷

Emphasizing his mood of disdain against the Jews the king slandered them as hostile and enemies of the government. Many of the statements are fairly generalized, however, and show no

⁷⁵ 3 Maccabees 1:11-15.

⁷⁶ 3 Maccabees 1:16.

⁷⁷ 3 Maccabees 2:28.

clear signs of having been drawn from actual sentiments of the gentiles during the time the author was writing but rather reflect the mood of the story. Other statements show that the author was aware of the root of many of these negative opinions, suggesting that at least some of what he relayed were actual attitudes held against the community. For example, the author details gentile slanders against Jewish dietary practices and separatist traditions.⁷⁸ Gentiles in antiquity, especially in Roman areas, were known to have common misunderstandings of Jewish law.⁷⁹ Even though 3 Maccabees was composed prior to Rome's formal conquest of Egypt, Rome's increasing influence may have increased the Alexandrians' negative perceptions of the Jews.⁸⁰

The King's actions, however, do not imply that this was a text written to slander the Ptolemies, the Alexandrians, or Hellenism.⁸¹ 3 Maccabees' author confirmed the opposite through many statements. Regarding the king, the author maintained that the Jews have long had unshakable loyalty toward the dynasty and wished goodwill upon them.⁸² Likewise the author showed no harshness towards Egypt.⁸³ It is clear that the author was not writing in longing for Israel or dissatisfaction of the Ptolemies. His statement at 3:8 shows that although the stories identify the king and his followers as impious gentiles, the Jews and Alexandrians had no harsh feelings for one another.⁸⁴ At 3:8 and 3:10, the author suggested that the Alexandrians showed sympathy grieving for the Jews during their misery and could not help only because they were not strong enough. The text does indeed make generalized statements showing animosity between Jews and gentiles but these statements probably refer to the king, his followers, and the

⁷⁸ 3 Maccabees 3:3-7.

⁷⁹ Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 126-27.

⁸⁰ Anssi Lampela, *Rome and the Ptolemies of Egypt: The Development of their political Relations* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1998).

⁸¹ Bartlett, *Hellenistic World*, 5; Bowley, 453; Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 125.

⁸² 3 Maccabees 3:3, 6:26, 7:7; Johnson, *Jewish Identity*, 152-154.

⁸³ Gruen, *Diaspora*, 241-42; Johnson, *Jewish Identity*, 155.

⁸⁴ Johnson, *Jewish Identity*, 160.

Egyptians.⁸⁵ Considering the care of the author in portraying Jewish sentiments towards the Ptolemies and Alexandrians, and lack of ill words chosen to describe Hellenistic practices, or life in Egypt, this text was not attempting to portray a Jewish disdain for the author's current physical or cultural environment.

With many references and similarities to Jewish scriptures, notably to 2 Maccabees, Daniel, and Esther, and lack of cues or nods to Greeks, the author of 3 Maccabees wrote for a primarily Jewish audience.⁸⁶ The author was trying to communicate to his fellow Jews a message against abandoning their Jewish practices.⁸⁷ Underlying 3 Maccabees is a theme of martyrdom for upholding Judaism. The king demands in 2:28 that those who do not offer sacrifice or register will face death. The function of the Judean Temple story was to show that the Jews in Egypt were undergoing torture as a result of Judean loyalty to Jewish traditions. According to the author, Egyptian Jews should uphold their traditions and not abandon their values to enhance their reputation with the king.⁸⁸ Anyone who did abandon Judaism was considered enemies of the Jewish nation.⁸⁹ Herein lies the primary purpose of 3 Maccabees, to emphasize the importance of a commitment to Judaism.⁹⁰ For further emphasis, after Philopator ends his persecution of the Jews, the pious Jews were granted their request to persecute the Jews who abandoned their religion.⁹¹ This reflects a very strong opinion against defectors. Pious Jews would have seen this as an important message for others in the Diaspora who were confronted with alternative religions, philosophies, and cultures.

⁸⁵ 3 Maccabees 4:1.

⁸⁶ Anderson, "3 Maccabees," in Charlesworth, 2:512, 2:515; Bartlett, *Hellenistic World*, 17; Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 122; Johnson, *Jewish Identity*, 148-51, 172.

⁸⁷ Johnson, *Jewish Identity*, 154.

⁸⁸ 3 Maccabees 2:31.

⁸⁹ 3 Maccabees 2:33.

⁹⁰ Johnson, *Jewish Identity*, 174.

⁹¹ 3 Maccabees 7:10-16; Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 145-46.

Whereas the author does show some awareness of animosity between Jews and gentiles in the Greco-Roman world, the text does not lend itself to conclude that before the Roman conquest of Egypt the situation was already as severe as it would be afterwards. Mobs were likely not forming against each other as one would in 38 CE against the Jews. Still, the desire for citizenship existed even among the pious Jews, assuming the author fell into this category. The author made it clear that although he desired the reward of “equal citizenship with the Alexandrians,” it was not attainable for most of the Jewish community unless they abandon Judaism and join the “mysteries.”⁹² This is evidence of Jewish disenfranchisement. It is important to note that this mention of the citizenship requirements does not imply a birth requirement, showing the avenue towards equal citizenship was, for the Jewish community, to participate in the pagan religious traditions. Significantly, evidence (that will be discussed below) from the period of transition to Roman rule indicates that individually some religious Jews could obtain equal citizenship. Still, the shift in tone regarding the Ptolemies is significant and likely a result of the increasing Roman interaction in the region having an influence on Alexandrian-Jewish relations. It seems, in contrast to the *Letter of Aristeas*, Jews were now becoming aware of their marginal status. Correlating to the authorship of this text, after the start of the first century BCE the Ptolemies and Romans developed an almost immediately fruitful trade network that also perpetuated Rome’s and Egypt’s cultural connections.⁹³ 3 Maccabees demonstrates the significance of this interaction through apparent increasing tension that is evident in the text. Roman domination of Egypt would have far more drastic consequences in regards to the citizenship requirement, creating a more urgent need for imperial acknowledgment and protection.

⁹² 3 Maccabees 2:30, 3:20; Gruen, *Diaspora*, 73.

⁹³ Lampela, *Rome and the Ptolemies*, 215.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROMAN ERA

The first significant contact between the Romans and Ptolemies began after Rome's victory over Pyrrhus in the 270's BCE, which inspired the Ptolemaic monarchs to initiate contact with the Romans.¹ At this point the Romans and the Ptolemies began a formal friendship, renewed from time to time to show allegiance in Rome's various wars with the Macedonians and Hellenistic monarchs in Syria.² For the most part Rome and Egypt's friendship was a formality, but it also indicated the beginning of a successful trade network.³ Furthermore, because of their good relations, the Romans also had a vested interest in keeping the Ptolemaic kingdom functioning successfully at the expense of the Seleucid and Macedonian's territorial ambitions. After Octavian's war for succession against Antony and Cleopatra, Rome formally annexed Egypt, making it a province in 30 BCE. Upon Egypt's annexation, the Romans initially kept the Ptolemaic legal system in place without drastic alterations aside from some changes in personnel.⁴ This would change over time.

Roman era Jews had to appeal to patrons who already had their own preconceived and developing notions of the community, largely based on experiences and interactions with Jews from outside of Egypt, be it in Rome, Syria, or Judea. In addition to their inherent religious differences, the Romans were also experiencing a number of their citizenry converting to and observing Judaism. It appears that as Roman interaction with Diaspora Jews increased, so too did conversion and observation of Judaism amongst gentiles.⁵

¹ Lampela, *Rome and the Ptolemies*, 33.

² Lampela, *Rome and the Ptolemies*, 36.

³ Lampela, *Rome and the Ptolemies*, 215.

⁴ Kasher, *Struggle for Equal Rights*, 74.

⁵ Marius Heemstra, *The Fiscus Judaicus and the Parting of the Ways* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 39; Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 1 (January 1989): 15.

In spite of the increase in acceptance of Jewish practices among some, these groups were not the norm. Many Roman authors left writings that expressed a fear and suspicion of Jewish traditions polluting Roman customs. The Roman historian Tacitus remarked that Jews despised all gods, practiced abominable customs, and showed hate and enmity towards all gentiles.⁶ Whether or not conversions happened in Egypt, it seems the Romans were particularly uncomfortable with the idea of fellow Romans, notably the youth, observing Jewish traditions.⁷ Tacitus negatively reported that Jews required proselytes to disown their countries as well as depart from their families.⁸ For some Romans, being Roman and practicing Judaism were mutually exclusive concepts, and fear of conversion would continue to fester in the minds of later Romans. Juvenal claimed that Jews revered the Torah at the expense of the Roman law.⁹ Both Tacitus and Juvenal were calling their audience to note the dangers of Judaism's exclusiveness and attempted to persuade them to not to abandon their Roman values.¹⁰ Thus, even prior to the regular collection of the *fiscus Judaicus*, some Romans had a notion that adopting Judaism meant abandoning their Roman identity.¹¹ Simply, for many Romans, a practicing Jew could not be Roman, and vice versa. As this prejudice became widespread following the First Jewish revolt, what likely started only as a sentiment from the most traditional Romans would increasingly become reinforced through law with the concept of citizenship.

⁶ Tacitus, *Histories*, 5.5.1. Tacitus's comments may reflect the sentiment of what was also a disenfranchised (relative to their prior prestige) group, the senatorial class under the Flavian and Antonine dynasties.

⁷ Juvenal, *Satire*, 14.106.

⁸ Tacitus, *Histories*, 5.5.1.

⁹ Juvenal, *Satire*, 14.95-105.

¹⁰ Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 41.

¹¹ Goodman, "Nerva," 43.

The Roman concept of citizenship emphasized class differences and put more of an institutional dependence on the definition of “Jew”.¹² Roman citizenship came with several privileges which made it especially attractive to Jews, native Egyptians, and even Alexandrians. Among other benefits, Roman citizens were protected from a large degree of magisterial violence regarding corporeal and capital punishment, exempted from a number of Roman administered taxes, and considered for a number of administrative positions.¹³ Perhaps just as important, during the imperial era Roman citizenship was sought because of its implied status as much as for its benefits.¹⁴ We receive several details on obtaining citizenship from Pliny the Younger’s *Letters*. Pliny was a senator under Trajan writing just before the time of the Diaspora Revolt. Pliny’s *Letters*, as they are collectively published, concern several issues but most important for this study are those dealing with the issue of Roman and Alexandrian citizenship. Naively Pliny asks the Emperor Trajan to grant his therapist and a freedwoman citizenship.¹⁵ However, upon applying for citizenship with Trajan’s approval, Pliny learned that his therapist *should* receive Alexandrian citizenship prior to Roman.¹⁶ This was not a requirement but a strong recommendation because as the *politeuma* (the privileged Jewish district) shows, privileges within the Alexandrian system were granted only to specific groups within the city.

The extent to which the Alexandrians guarded citizenship at this time, the fact that Alexandrian citizenship was so strongly recommended to Pliny, and the increase of and urgency in Jewish appeals for the status leads to the presumption that Alexandrian privileges no longer extended to members of the *politeuma* nor, as Pliny found out, to Roman citizens. Roman

¹² Goodman, “Nerva,” 44; Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 15.

¹³ Richard Alston, *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2002), 223, 392; A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 236, 244-45.

¹⁴ White, *Roman Citizenship*, 221-22.

¹⁵ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.5.2.

¹⁶ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.6.2.

citizenship on the other hand granted one privileges specifically within the Roman system, pertaining to Roman laws and Roman taxes. Thus, Pliny had to appeal to Trajan once more. Once again Trajan granted his request but stated, “Following the rule of my predecessors, I do not intend to grant Alexandrian citizenship except in special cases...”¹⁷ It appears that for the most part the Roman emperors conceded to the Alexandrians who then appealed to the Roman prefects to formalize their requests.¹⁸ The idea that individuals *ought* to obtain Alexandrian citizenship before applying for Roman led to contention because non-Alexandrians had to rely on exceptional Roman patronage to oversee their local political hierarchy, to which the Romans were reluctant. Furthermore, whereas Alexandrian citizenship was not a requirement, the Romans did view it as a qualifier of a certain level of civilization.¹⁹ Now that Alexandrians had practical reasons to aspire to Roman citizenship themselves (taxes and other privileges), they perpetuated more than ever the idea that Jews were uncivilized second-class citizens.²⁰ The struggle for imperial patronage was no longer just between Egyptians and Jews but now included the Alexandrians, a people the Romans respected.

Roman administrators regarded Alexandria above the rest of Egypt. There the Ptolemies had fostered a great Hellenistic intellectual environment that garnered the city prestige. Examples of the special status granted to Alexandrian citizens include their continuation of Ptolemaic poll tax that exempted Alexandrians, as well as consideration for important

¹⁷ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.7.

¹⁸ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.7.

¹⁹ Diana Delia, *Alexandrian Citizenship During the Roman Principate* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 46; Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 5, 218. Harker concludes a different argument—that Pliny’s *Letters* indicate that Alexandrian citizenship was required for Roman citizenship—but he acknowledges it was for purposes of cultural identity.

²⁰ Bowman, *Egypt*, 127.

administrative positions.²¹ In addition, Alexandrian citizens received reduced land taxes on all Egyptian holdings, and Roman taxes on real estate and slave sales.²² Now that social advancement was in practice limited to Alexandrians, they guarded their citizenship with even greater rigor. They thought citizenship was their avenue to control their social standing within the Roman system.

Despite their privileged position, one demand the Alexandrians continuously made was the granting of a council of citizens, or *boulê* (*βουλή*), which was an institution they believed all great Hellenistic cities should have.²³ For the Alexandrians the absence of a *boulê* served as a marker of their insulting diminished status under the Romans. To be clear, the Alexandrians may not have had a *boulê* under the Ptolemies, but the ramifications of its absence were undoubtedly emphasized within the Roman legal system. A letter written to an unspecified Roman emperor (other than the use of “Caesar”) details the Alexandrians’ thoughts on the *boulê* matter.²⁴ They argued that a council would enable them to ensure that the “pure” citizen body would remain free of men they saw as “uncultured and uneducated.”²⁵ Scholars agree that the phrase “uncultured and uneducated” was intended to refer to the Jews.²⁶ Contrasted with the use of “uncouth” and “uncultured” in the *Letter of Aristeas*, it seems that this was a common Alexandrian slander against the Jews. Pseudo-Aristeas tried to distance the Jewish community in Alexandria from this categorization in his appeal for Ptolemaic patronage, but now the Alexandrians were using it against the Jews in their appeal for Roman patronage. This “Boule-Papyrus,” as Tcherikover and

²¹ Alston, *Roman and Byzantine Egypt*, 186-87; Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World: The Greek and Roman Documents Quoted by Josephus Flavius* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 453; Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 5.

²² Delia, *Alexandrian Citizenship*, 31-33; Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 5.

²³ Bowman and Rathbone, “Cities and Administration,” 119.

²⁴ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 27-28. Tcherikover and Fuks argue that, in Egypt, only Augustus was identified solely by the title “Caesar.”

²⁵ *CPJ* 2.150.5-8

²⁶ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 27; Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 117.

Fuks refer to it, is evidence that the Alexandrians were participating in the struggle for status in full-force, even if it forced them to denigrate the Jews. The Alexandrians believed their city had gone from a royal capital to a subordinate position without a council to show for their previous prestige. Meanwhile, they perceived the fact that Caesar and Augustus confirmed *Jewish* rights as they were under the Ptolemies as a distinguishing gesture.²⁷ This disparity was not lost on the Alexandrians who grew increasingly hostile in their relations with the Jews.

Regardless of the obstacles working against them, there existed openness for the most culturally assimilated and politically powerful Jews to obtain Roman citizenship. Again, it was the degree of perceived civilization that mattered. One such example was Tiberius Julius Alexander, Philo Alexander's nephew. Caesar himself granted the would be governor's father, or possibly grandfather, citizenship, despite his Jewish religion which indicates that at least under Julius Caesar observant Jews could reach the status of Roman citizen. Josephus attests to the piety of Tiberius's father, Alexander the Alabarch, throughout his *Jewish War*. According to Josephus, Alexander was far superior to his son in religious devotion.²⁸ He states that Alexander even paid to have nine gates of the Jerusalem Temple plated in gold.²⁹ As his title suggests, Alexander advanced to the status of Alabarch of Alexandria. On the other hand, Alexander's son, Tiberius Julius Alexander, did not maintain his religious traditions. Tiberius rose to ranks even higher than his father through his military success, becoming the procurator of Judea then prefect of Egypt. Tiberius Julius Alexander's career shows that Jews after the time of Julius Caesar were still allowed to give up Judaism in order to release themselves from the limitations forced upon

²⁷ H. Idris Bell, eds., *Jews and Christians in Egypt: The Jewish Troubles in Alexandria and the Athanasian Controversy* (London: Oxford University, 1924), 11; Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.40.

²⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.100-1.

²⁹ Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5.205-206.

religious Jews.³⁰ For all of Tacitus's negative sentiment towards Jews, he does not slander Tiberius's prior religious affiliation or even mention it.³¹ Tacitus's lack of ill words for Tiberius may demonstrate a tendency to absolve apostate Jews of their Jewish affiliation after giving up the religion.

Tiberius Julius Alexander is the most famous example of an Alexandrian Jew granted citizenship because of his heavy hand in putting down the 66 CE clash and the First Jewish War in Judea, but a more telling example is the case involving the Alexandrian Jews Tryphon and his son Helenos. A late Ptolemaic monarch, possibly Cleopatra VII (r. 51-30 BCE), granted Tryphon Alexandrian citizenship under unknown circumstances.³² The Romans, however, refused to recognize Tryphon's son Helenos's claim to citizenship even after a petition arguing his right to the status.³³ Helenos insinuated that he had prior benefits of the status under the Ptolemaic system but under the Roman his status had changed.³⁴ The continuation of the Ptolemaic poll-tax (in conjunction with the new Roman taxes) made the status all the more desirable to Helenos.³⁵ Why Helenos was not able to maintain his citizenship is not clear, but Tcherikover ascribes it to the possibility that his mother was not a citizen which may have been important to the Alexandrians.³⁶ However, contradicting this theory, Helenos makes it clear that he only had to defend his status beginning in the Roman period. Considering the lengths Josephus goes to to state that Tiberius Julius Alexander had forsaken Judaism but his father had not, it is probable that as early as Augustus's reign apostatizing not only allowed one to move up the political

³⁰ Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 185; Matthew B. Schwartz, "Greek and Jew: Philo and the Alexandrian Riots of 38-41," *Judaism* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2009), 212.

³¹ Goodman, "Nerva," 41.

³² Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 164.

³³ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 29; Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 164, 185.

³⁴ *CPJ* 2.151.1-5. Helenos even writes that he was an "Alexandrian," but corrects it to say "Jew of Alexandria."

³⁵ *CPJ* 2.151.20-25.

³⁶ Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 30.

ladder in Alexandria, but also increased one's chances of inheriting and keeping citizenship.³⁷ Helenos made his case on the basis that he has always lived in Alexandria and received the proper education.³⁸ As Aristeas also emphasized the learnedness of the Elders in his story, it is probable that during the Ptolemaic period education, ability, and culture were the keys to moving up the social ladder and, for the most prominent Jews, to obtain Alexandrian citizenship. The assumption that pious Jews were "uncivilized" (or culturally unworthy), and therefore not deserving of citizenship steadily increased at the beginning of the Roman era, notably after Caesar, as Alexandrians became engaged in the race for status.

These new Roman policies and increasing Roman negative perception of practicing Jews led to social tension between the Hellenized Alexandrian elites and Jews in Alexandria. Philo, reporting on the violence against the Jews in 38 CE, the so-called Alexandrian pogrom, wrote that the Alexandrians acted because of their knowledge that the Roman Emperor Gaius Caligula hated the Jews, and they had extravagant hopes of praise and greater benefits as a result of their actions.³⁹ Philo concedes that the Jews were ideologically opposed to Gaius's claim of divinity on grounds of their monotheism.⁴⁰ Because of the Emperor's disapproval of the Jewish community, the Alexandrians saw their opportunity to act on their long pent up aggression towards the Jews. The Alexandrians "overran [their] houses, expelling the owners with their wives and children...stole the furniture and cherished valuables..." and burnt many to death, others died from the smoke, and some had their limbs torn.⁴¹ Whereas Philo may have exaggerated the extent of the riot's torture and violence, he certainly captured the mood of

³⁷Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 20.100.

³⁸Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ* vol. 2, p. 31.

³⁹Philo, *Embassy*, 134, 137.

⁴⁰Philo, *Embassy*, 115.

⁴¹Philo, *Embassy*, 127-131.

discomfort and fear held by his contemporary Jewish community. The Roman governor Flaccus's reluctance to act on behalf of the Jews strengthened the Jewish sense of insecurity, as they increasingly felt the Romans would not protect them, a theme Philo reinforced throughout his work, and a sentiment confirmed by Roman gubernatorial action and inaction.⁴² As a result, Philo participated in an embassy to the Roman Emperor Caligula, but whereas later emperors were more responsive to the embassies and sought solutions, Caligula was reluctant to act on behalf of the Jews.

In his *Flaccus*, Philo depicts the Alexandrians as constantly inciting attacks and pushing for anti-Jewish legislation, resulting from their "innate hostility to the Jews."⁴³ These remarks were associated with jealousy, social mobility, and the Prefect Flaccus's own anti-Jewish ideas.⁴⁴ Particularly important to later events and an example of the Romans adjusting the law according to the desires of the Alexandrians, Flaccus issued a proclamation that specifically took away Alexandrian citizenship from all Jews who had it, and designated the entire community as foreigners rather than *politeuma*, further distancing them from their Ptolemaic-era status.⁴⁵ As I noted, prior to this date, under the Ptolemies the Jews were given the special classification of *politai*, which previously permitted them to participate in the Alexandrians' Hellenistic institutions. This, in addition to a letter sent by the Emperor Claudius, consequently took away their ability to participate in all Alexandrian political institutions.⁴⁶ Flaccus's proclamation also had harsher ramifications. Prior to the proclamation, the Jews were punished for their crimes with a flattened blade by their own people, as was the custom for the Alexandrians. Meanwhile,

⁴² Philo, *Embassy*, 132.

⁴³ Philo, *Flaccus*, 22-24, 29-30.

⁴⁴ Philo, *Flaccus*, 44-46, 53-54; Schwartz, "Greek and Jew," 213.

⁴⁵ Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 13.

⁴⁶ Philo, *Flaccus*, 53-54; Bowman and Rathbone, "Cities and Administration," 115-16.

the Egyptians were scourged with a lash by the Alexandrians. After the proclamation, the Jews faced the same punishment as the Egyptians.⁴⁷ This punishment symbolizes the shift in the Greco-Roman perception of the Jews in terms of civility.

The next emperor Claudius's reaction to the reports of violence in Alexandria confirmed the Jews' second-class status and presumed loyalties. Claudius specifically denied to the Jewish community certain Alexandrian rights, and ordered that they cease asking for those privileges because Alexandria was not their homeland.⁴⁸ Reinforcing his point Claudius ordered that they stop attempting to intrude on games presided over by the gymnasiarchs and *kosmetes*, once more because Alexandria was not their homeland.⁴⁹ Two important points can be drawn from Claudius statements. First, Jews were steadily becoming formally denigrated as foreigners in Alexandria; and second, prior to Claudius's proclamation the Jews were forcing themselves into Hellenistic games despite Alexandrian attempts to stop them. The second point reinforces the first, because traditionally only citizens were allowed to participate in the games arranged by the *kosmetes* and gymnasiarchs.⁵⁰ Simply, the Jews were not Alexandrian citizens, should not press for it, and could not participate in activities reserved for citizens.

The importance of Claudius's letter is that he was taking a step closer towards formalizing the relationship between the Alexandrians and Jews, and their respective statuses according to how the Alexandrians wished. No longer were the Jews a privileged group in Alexandria. Despite his efforts to appease the Alexandrians, he still condemned their violent behavior and refused to grant the community a *boulê*. He went as far as vaguely threatening the

⁴⁷ Philo, *Flaccus*, 78-80; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights*, 455-56, 481.

⁴⁸ Claudius, *Letter to the Alexandrians*, 4.95-105; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 126.

⁴⁹ Claudius, *Letter to the Alexandrians*, 4.95-105; Alston, *Roman and Byzantine Egypt*, 189. The *kosmetes* were tasked with the duty of organizing events within the gymnasium.

⁵⁰ Kasher, *Struggle for Equal Rights*, 316.

community if they continue their destructive behavior. This likely further insulted the Alexandrians, who wanted increased privileges of their own (primarily a *boulê*) and wanted the Emperor on their side against the Jews. It is probable that Claudius thought he was enacting reasonable concessions to both sides in order to ensure peace between the communities.⁵¹ The Alexandrians, after all, were waging a “war” against the Jews.⁵² However, to this end he mismanaged the situation. The Jews would not discontinue antagonizing the Alexandrians or pushing for more rights within the Roman system, nor would the Alexandrians begin perceiving the community with greater favor.

Further regarding the activity of the Jews, Claudius demanded that they cease their invitations to Jews from Syria or Egypt to Alexandria.⁵³ This is an indication that the Jews were developing a stronger identification with Hellenistic Jews from Egypt and Syria, regions that included Jews that the Alexandrians viewed as “uncivilized” and “uncultured”. Rather than link these migrating Jews with “zealots,” it is probable that they were indeed Hellenistic Jews fleeing what they may have viewed as rural or anti-Hellenistic movements in their respective regions. This would explain why they sought to establish themselves in Alexandria, a major Hellenistic Jewish center.

The 66 CE clash should be seen in the context of the aftermath of Claudius and Flaccus’s reforms. Josephus, the only source on this event, states that the Alexandrian citizens were holding a public meeting at the amphitheater, to which the Jews sought participation and attempted to sneak into.⁵⁴ Hence, this event is a long-term consequence of Flaccus’s measure, as his proclamation formally stripped them of the right to partake in public meetings. Once the Jews

⁵¹ Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 21.

⁵² Claudius, *Letter to the Alexandrians*, 4.70-80.

⁵³ Claudius, *Letter to the Alexandrians*, 5.95-100.

⁵⁴ Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.488-507.

were noticed the Alexandrians regarded them as spies and attempted to burn three captives, leading to further violence from both the Jews and the Greeks.⁵⁵ This moment clarifies the position the Alexandrians took in regards to their Jewish neighbors. They considered the Jews full-fledged enemies. With this in mind, one way to see their attempt at disrupting the meeting is as a form of resistance. This event was ongoing at the very moment Tiberius Julius Alexander was prefect of Egypt, indicating that the feud was primarily between Alexandrians and pious Jews. Serving as a representative of the Romans, Tiberius sided with the Alexandrians (as did the Roman prefect in 38 CE) and allowed two Roman legions to kill the Jewish rioters and plunder their property.⁵⁶ This inequality was not lost on the Jews, who, as our historical account suggest, resented Tiberius's involvement in subjugating the Jews.

There is a distinct pattern that confrontations between Jews and Alexandrians began with events that took place in either the theater or mock theaters at the gymnasium. Leading to the 38 CE riot against the Jews, Philo mentioned that the Alexandrian factions had taken offense to Jewish excitement for Herod Agrippa's recent visit through Alexandria.⁵⁷ The Alexandrians took to the gymnasium to make jeers at the visiting tetrarch, and after his visit brought a noted "lunatic" into the gymnasium and paraded him as a Jewish king in a mock theater.⁵⁸ Philo made his opinion of theaters known in his *On Husbandry (On Agriculture)*, where he ridicules theaters as lending themselves to unruly crowds and factions that were unapologetic for offensive conduct (such as that in the 38 riot).⁵⁹ In another offense credited to Flaccus, the governor lashed and tortured several Jews, after which the theater continued with dance and music.⁶⁰ Again, Philo

⁵⁵ Pucci Ben Zeev, "Greek Attacks," 38.

⁵⁶ Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 128.

⁵⁷ Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 11.

⁵⁸ Philo, *Flaccus*, 36; Kasher, *Struggle for Equal Rights*, 317.

⁵⁹ Philo, *On Husbandry*, 35-38.

⁶⁰ Philo, *Flaccus*, 86.

may have exaggerated his account but the theme of violence and anti-Jewish performances in the theater certainly had precedent. The heightened friction surrounding this Hellenistic institution continued and, as mentioned, in the 66 CE clash the Alexandrians were meeting in the theater discussing plans for an embassy to Nero when the group of Jews sneaked inside. After three Jews were captured and threatened with the punishment of being burnt alive, the Jewish community stormed the theater and violently attacked the Alexandrians. These accounts, all prior to the Diaspora Revolt, show that the theater had already evolved to a center of anti-Jewish sentiment as it had in other Greco-Roman cities. Around the time of the First Jewish War, a production at the Antioch theater consisted of a scene in which several Jews were burned.⁶¹ Both Josephus and Talmudic literature attests to anti-Jewish productions and congregations taking place at theaters across the Roman Empire.⁶² However, in all of these of these events it was the “Greek” communities that perpetuated anti-Jewish thought through their depictions of the Jews, and met to take a stance on what they interpreted as problems with practicing Jews. In the 115 CE clash, the theater will again have a role at the start of the revolt.

The *fiscus Judaicus*, a tax exclusively collected from Jews, would further solidify “Jew” as a politically second-class citizen in terms of Roman administration. The recent revolt in Judea and the imposition of the Jewish tax after 70 CE marks a drastic turn in Jewish and Alexandrian relations, and Jewish status throughout the Roman Empire. Socially, the Jews had more reason than ever to seek the rights associated with Alexandrian citizenship. Prior to the imposition of the tax, only males between the ages twenty-five and fifty had to pay the annual tax to the Temple in Jerusalem.⁶³ This tax was in the amount of two *denarii* with an additional *denarii* paid as a gift to

⁶¹ Kasher, *Struggle for Equal Rights*, 318.

⁶² Kasher, *Struggle for Equal Rights*, 318; Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.47.

⁶³ Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 15.

the priests.⁶⁴ With the destruction of the Temple, the Romans replaced the Temple tax with the *fiscus Judaicus* and collected two *denarii* from the Jews, paid to the Temple of Jupiter. The new tax was extended to include children and women from the ages 3 to at least 61 after the destruction of the Temple.⁶⁵ This tax was of course in addition to the *laographia* that Augustus extended from the Ptolemaic era, and the other taxes administered by the Romans.⁶⁶ In addition to the already existing taxes, the new tax, demanded from virtually every person in the household, further relegated the Jews to the margins of society in terms of economic stability. Even more important, the new tax directed to a pagan temple was an insult to the Jews. They were now more aware than ever of their unique identity.⁶⁷ Increasingly they were running out of options to decrease the rate at which they were becoming socially marginalized and financially impoverished.

It is notable that after 70 CE no Alexandrian Jew ever became nearly as prominent as Tiberius Julius Alexander. This is likely a result of the tax and the First Jewish War not only limiting the Jews financially, but also socially. The First Jewish War marked a shift in Roman perceptions of Jews. After this date, Vespasian ordered the removal of the Jewish temple at Leontopolis.⁶⁸ Leontopolis had become an important center for the Jewish community living in the southern Nile Delta, especially those attracted to Onias's interpretation of Judaism.⁶⁹ Its closure, a year after the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed, sent a message to Egypt's Jews that they were no longer seen as separate from the Jewish communities in Judea. It also indicated to the Greco-Egyptians that the Roman emperors no longer protected Jewish communal practices

⁶⁴ Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 44.

⁶⁵ Goodman, "Nerva," 41; Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 15.

⁶⁶ Delia, *Alexandrian Citizenship*, 31-33.

⁶⁷ Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 125.

⁶⁸ Horbury, *Jewish War*, 119-20, 123.

⁶⁹ Höbl, *Ptolemaic Empire*, 190.

and were opposed to the potential anti-Roman assembly that gentiles thought Jewish temples offered.⁷⁰

The tax, as did many Roman laws, provided enough room for variances in operation to allow the provinces to adapt it according to regional customs.⁷¹ One aspect in particular that was left undefined was who fell into the category of Jew. To see if this burden fell specifically to religious Jews the key figures to observe are apostate Jews. Local custom seemed to have temporarily dictated whether or not apostates were subject to the tax. In some instances, known apostates were required to sacrifice to an idol or image of the emperor to evade the tax, while others were never given this opportunity and had to pay the tax.⁷² Under Vespasian there is evidence that Roman citizens paid the tax. Considering apostatizing eased the path towards citizenship (serving as an indication that one was willing to adopt Greco-Roman ideals), some of the Roman citizens who paid the tax under Vespasian may have been apostates. Under Domitian all apostate Jews were required to pay the tax, thus putting a formal emphasis on Jewish heritage or ancestry.⁷³ Additionally, Domitian (r. 81-96 CE) abused the tax and collected it from many who were simply accused, but not proven, of “living a Jewish life.”⁷⁴ After Domitian, the Emperor Nerva (r. 96-98 CE) may have canceled or lighted the *fiscus Judaicus*, partially to contrast himself with his unpopular predecessor.⁷⁵ Nerva’s policies seem to have given many Jews hope of improved social status within the Roman Empire and that the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple might soon begin. Unfortunately, Nerva’s short-lived policies did not survive

⁷⁰ Horbury, *Jewish War*, 123.

⁷¹ Goodman, “Nerva,” 44.

⁷² Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 58, 65.

⁷³ Goodman, “Nerva,” 40.

⁷⁴ Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 75.

⁷⁵ Goodman, “Nerva,” 44; Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 448, 452; Heemstra, 69-84. Goodman concludes that Nerva abolished the *fiscus Judaicus*, but Heemstra suggests that Nerva only ended the *calumnia* in relation to the *fiscus Judaicus* and not the tax altogether. Heemstra argues that the *calumnia* was the term for the practice under Domitian of punishing certain gentiles who were wrongfully accused of “living a Jewish life.”

his death. Thus with the exception of Nerva's short reign, for the most part after 70 CE the Alexandrians now had another legal loophole that gave them more power over the Jews in the Roman system and allowed them to designate who was a Jew and who was not.

Another Diaspora text, 4 Maccabees, attests to the increasing intolerance for Jewish monotheism in the Hellenistic centers of the Jewish Diaspora, as well as to the Jewish reaction to their changing environment. Written in a rhetorical style, the author likely had a formal Greek education indicating Jewish participation in Hellenistic institutions (therefore, the author was likely not educated in Alexandria post-Flaccus's proclamation), but who the author was is unknown. As a background to the text, the author presented several debates between the "arrogant and terrible" Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175-164 BCE) and several of his Jewish subjects. Contrary to popular belief, the author was not writing against adoption of Hellenism, rather the debates focused on whether or not it was rational for pious Jews to abandon their dietary traditions when faced with the threat of death for upholding them. More generally this was a speech given by a Hellenized Jew speaking against abandoning Jewish law. Through the debates the author demonstrated that it was more reasonable to uphold Jewish tradition, and practice restraint from gentile practices due to the Law of the Torah being dominant over the will of the king. In effect, the author was presenting a Jewish interpretation of reason being sovereign over emotion, a popular topic in the ancient Stoic tradition.⁷⁶

Both the location and date of 4 Maccabees's authorship is debated among scholars. Regarding the date, the text most likely reflects the geographical and linguistic knowledge of a period between 20-54 CE. The authors use of the word *θρησκεία* (religious observance) was not

⁷⁶ 4 Maccabees 1:1; John, W. Martens, *One God, One Law: Philo of Alexandria o the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 17-30. Stoic thought, particularly involving reason, is also prevalent in the works of Philo of Alexandria.

common until the Roman period, post Common Era.⁷⁷ Elias Bickerman confirmed this observation, and noted that Apollonius was said to govern “Syria, Phoenicia, and Cilicia,” which is a designation only applied to the region under Roman rule from 20-54 CE, when they were linked under one administrator.⁷⁸ It is widely accepted that the text was written in one of the centers of the Hellenized Diaspora communities. Noticing the resemblances to the issues present in the *Letter of Aristeas* and 3 Maccabees could provide evidence of authorship in Alexandria. However, Jan Willem Van Henten has called to attention the similarities between 4 Maccabees 17:9-10, and inscriptions on Jewish funerary inscriptions found throughout Asia Minor, leading to a Syrian or Cilician origin.⁷⁹ Without further evidence, certainty is impossible, however, 4 Maccabees is still useful Jewish source showing that Jews throughout the Diaspora had similar concerns and were facing similar situations, including issues over citizenship.

4 Maccabees is a unique text because of its perceived anti-Hellenism in content but display of Greek rhetorical and philosophical principles. Eusebius and Jerome refer to 4 Maccabees as *On the Supremacy of Reason* because its content is focused on the virtue of devout reason (*ὁ εὐσεβῆς λογισμός*).⁸⁰ Because of its structure and style, it is probable that 4 Maccabees was consciously written for oral delivery at a synagogue or celebration in a Jewish community according to the formal elements of Greek rhetoric. Furthermore, like Philo, scholars generally believe Stoic rhetoric and philosophy heavily influenced the author.⁸¹ The Similarities between Stoicism and 4 Maccabees is evident, such as the emphasis that absolute knowledge of truth was

⁷⁷ Bickerman, *Jewish and Christian History*, 268.

⁷⁸ 4 Maccabees 4:2; Bickerman, *Jewish and Christian History*, 268.

⁷⁹ Jan Willem Van Henten, “A Jewish Epitaph in a Literary Text: 4 Macc 17:8-10,” in *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, Ed. Jan Willem Van Henten and Pieter Willem Van Der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 48-58.

⁸⁰ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.10.6; John R. Bartlett, “The Books of the Maccabees,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, (New York: Oxford University, 1993): 482.

⁸¹ Charlesworth, *Pseudipigrapha*, vol. 1, bk. 2, 537.

achievable through virtuously overcoming emotion.⁸² As is seen in 3 Maccabees, pious Jews believed absolute truths could be known through familiarity with the Torah, and true virtue meant maintaining Judaism in the face of adversity. An analysis of Judaism's sects and traditions show that Judaism also stressed overcoming desires and emotions, a sentiment that was reflected in the *Letter of Aristeas*.

Whether or not the speech was ever given, the author presented his work as a speech broken up according to the divisions formally required of this type of rhetorical argument. The author detailed his subject first, then provided proofs, and repeated the formula for each change of argument.⁸³ He stated from the outset that his purpose is to praise rational judgment, the highest virtue.⁸⁴ However, he quickly made it apparent that his proposed "rational judgment" was to uphold the Torah in the face of adversity, a theme also evident in 3 Maccabees. The author then told the story of a Jew named Eleazer and another Jewish family who all died because of their refusal to follow the king Antiochus IV Epiphanes's orders to eat pork and abandon Judaism.⁸⁵ These individuals, according to the author, died for noble bravery and the virtue.⁸⁶

Clearly written for a Jewish audience, each of the author's examples were taken solely from Jewish texts that his audience would have familiarity with.⁸⁷ His primary example was an adaption of 2 Maccabees 6-8, which is a text that portrays Hellenism extremely negatively. Had the author of 4 Maccabees wished to portray Hellenism negatively, he had the relevant source material. Instead the author chose to write specifically in support of upholding Judaism when

⁸² Schürer, *Jewish People*, vol. 3, bk. 1, 589-90.

⁸³ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 3.13.2; *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002), 218.

⁸⁴ 4 Maccabees 1:1.

⁸⁵ 4 Maccabees 4:15.

⁸⁶ 4 Maccabees 1:7-9.

⁸⁷ Schürer, *Jewish People*, vol. 3, bk. 1, 589.

confronted with Hellenism.⁸⁸ Once again, even more evident than in the *Letter of Aristeas* and 3 Maccabees, the issue of dietary practice was at the forefront of the author's conscience. Roman period authors routinely portrayed Jewish dietary practices negatively, particularly their practice of abstaining from consuming pork.⁸⁹ Josephus also addressed this point of resentment in his *Against Apion*.⁹⁰ Thus like Josephus, this text certainly had apologetic features, indicating a more hostile environment to the Jews throughout the Empire.

The importance of the author choosing to emphasize dietary practice cannot be understated. As mentioned, this was written at a time when there were noted apostate Jews, and it appears that many Hellenized Jews were tempted to forsake dietary practices because of the reoccurrence of this theme in the literature. Furthermore, reflecting an audience in the midst of political and cultural struggle, the author argued a need for to stay calm and composed when confronted with hostility. He stated that "reason rules over the more violent emotions...[and] the temperate mind repels all these malicious emotions, just as it repels anger."⁹¹ The text goes on attempting to appeal to its Hellenized Jewish audience, arguing that it is both reasonable and virtuous to maintain Jewish customs.⁹² The author was thus likely attempting to appeal to those Jews who already had an education according to the Greek model, and suggest to them that though they should maintain their customs they should work within the confines of their current political situation as opposed to revolt or rebellion.⁹³

Several themes prevalent in the discussed literature evidence the gradual development of a hostile anti-Jewish environment. This development would culminate in the violent years prior

⁸⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.10.6.

⁸⁹ Tacitus, *Histories*, 5.4-5.

⁹⁰ Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.137-142.

⁹¹ 4 Maccabees 2:15-23.

⁹² Anderson, "4 Maccabees," in Charlesworth, vol. 2, 532-33.

⁹³ Anderson, "4 Maccabees," in Charlesworth, vol. 2, 532-33; Schürer, *Jewish People*, vol. 3, bk. 1, 589; Cohen, *Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 37.

to the Diaspora Revolt. Rather than writing against Hellenism, as 3 and 4 Maccabees have been perceived as doing, these authors were writing specifically against abandoning Jewish practices. Anti-Hellenism was a feature of Judean Jewish texts, seen strongest in 2 Maccabees. In the *Letter of Aristeas* the message of the author to continue to practice Judaism was presented in a very subtle way, told through the narrative of the Torah translation. This narrative allowed him to suggest that the Septuagint and Alexandrian Judaism was a proper extension of traditional Judaism, one that could exist within a Hellenistic framework. Aristobulus, Demetrius, and Philo after them practiced forms of Hellenized Judaism, but, in Philo's case, with strong rhetoric to maintain Jewish monotheism. 3 and 4 Maccabees spoke to their Jewish audiences with urgency and force to make their message clear, even in the face of death Jews should not abandon their religion. The author of 3 Maccabees made his position known with the contrast between the apostate named Dositheus mentioned at the beginning of his narrative, and the punishment of death for apostatizing at the end.⁹⁴ Apostatizing was a real fear for the Jews, as conversion was for the Romans. Despite that, these authors and presumably other Hellenized Jewish elites thought the avenue to greater prestige was careful syncretism with Hellenistic ideals.

By the time of 3 Maccabees's authorship, and continuing with 4 Maccabees, Jews were becoming increasingly aware of the slanders against them. Chief among these were insults against dietary practices. Later Roman authors definitely saw the Jewish diet as abnormal and indicative of their separateness. The author of 3 Maccabees suspects that the negative gentile sentiments of Jews stems from their dietary traditions, and the entirety of 4 Maccabees is centered on the king's demand to have Jews eat pork. 4 Maccabees puts forth direct arguments opposing slanders against Jewish customs.

⁹⁴ 3 Maccabees 1:3

These texts also contribute to the understanding of citizenship issue. Already at the time of the *Letter of Aristeas*'s authorship it was apparent that gentiles believed the rightful place of citizenship for Jews was Judea, rather than Alexandria. Thus, this sentiment was not purely, or primarily, a Roman one, rather Claudius was making a judgment based on an Alexandrian tradition. 3 Maccabees evidences increasing citizenship concerns, hinting at the existence of arguments within the Jewish community to abandon Judaism in order to obtain citizenship. It can be concluded that Jews were gradually having to defend against the threat of Jews apostatizing through Jewish rhetoric, and this trend grew steadily over the years as anti-Jewish rhetoric also increased. Both of these trends evidence communities that were in direct conflict with one another, struggling to garner more political favor at the expense of the other.

Before continuing to the last Jewish uprising in Alexandria, it is important to clarify the historical events that led to the outbreak. First, because of the Rome's entry into the region whatever negative sentiments the Alexandrians had of the Jews, mostly slander from religious leaders, gradually increased over time as a result of Alexandrians now competing in the struggle for political rights in the new Roman system. By 66 CE, what was friction between religious leaders developed into friction between most Alexandrians citizens and Alexandrian Jews. Still, at this point one was only considered politically a Jew if they practiced Judaism.⁹⁵ After 70 CE, however, there existed a trend to extend the Jewish classification even if they apostatized. Second, legal institutions perpetuated this trend towards gradual discrimination against the Jews. In the early period of Roman rule, the Alexandrians resented their diminished status and the status of their beloved city.⁹⁶ They saw what they perceived as the stability of Jewish rights, in regards to social status and legal privilege, as unequal treatment. Therefore, they sought to limit

⁹⁵ Goodman, "Nerva," 41.

⁹⁶ Bowman and Rathbone, "Cities and Administration," 119.

the social mobility of the Jews through the legal institution of Alexandrian citizenship. After the outbreak in 38 CE, Flaccus issued a proclamation that all Jews were foreigners and devoid of formal Alexandrian political rights, which regulated the Jews even further to the margins of society.⁹⁷ Claudius continued the trend of diminishing Jewish status by demanding that they not push for more privileges, noting that Alexandria was not their city despite the generations of Jews who lived in the region..⁹⁸ Finally, the *fiscus Judaicus* provided the Alexandrians with a method to ensure all Jews, even apostates, were economically restrained and classified as the Alexandrians saw fit.

⁹⁷ Philo, *Flaccus*, 53-54; Bowman and Rathbone, "Cities and Administration," 115-116.

⁹⁸ *CPJ* 2.153.

CHAPTER 4

THE DIASPORA REVOLT

Although Cassius Dio and Eusebius only briefly mention the revolt, they have drastically influenced the historical narrative of the event as later ancient and modern historians have relied heavily on their accounts. Eusebius mentioned the revolt in both his *Ecclesiastical History* and his *Chronicle*. Unfortunately, Eusebius was not without a critical bias. When speaking of the Jews, it is important to recognize that he ascribed their suffering and punishment to their refusal to recognize Jesus as the messiah. Eusebius viewed Jewish tragedies as righteous punishments from God. According to his rationale, God never punished one Jew; he punished all Jews. It is with this backdrop that Eusebius's statements should be seen. He reminds his readers as much when he introduces the Diaspora Revolt, stating, "While the teaching of our Savior and the church were flourishing daily and moving on to further progress the tragedy of the Jews was reaching the climax of successive woes."¹ Eusebius then goes on to describe the revolt as breaking out in Alexandria, the rest of Egypt, and "especially in Cyrene," against the "Greek" citizens.² Next, he states that the following year the scope of the revolt was increased to a war.³ At some point during this war, the Greeks from other areas in Egypt and Cyrene gathered in Alexandria and killed the Jews that were rioting in the city. This left the Jews that were rioting outside of the city, primarily those from Cyrene, to plunder Egypt.⁴ The violence in Egypt continued until Marcus Turbo put down the forces from Cyrene, and the Egyptians who had rallied under the leader of the revolt in Cyrene, Lucuas.⁵ Out of fear of revolt, the emperor then

¹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2.2.

² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2.2.

³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2.2.

⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2.3.

⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2.3-4.

ordered the general Lusius Quietus to murder the Jews of Mesopotamia.⁶ Shortly after, Quietus was made governor of Judea for his actions.⁷

Upon a close reading of Eusebius's description, several important deductions can be made. First and foremost, most of the Jews that participated in the revolt appeared to have revolted in their respective regions first, before it was considered a unified war. Eusebius seemed to only consider it a war when the Cyrenian Jews were able to move into Egypt. It was only when the Romans moved in that Eusebius suggested the Egyptian Jews, not including the defeated Alexandrian community, gathered under Lucuas, the leader of the revolt in Cyrene. Despite his resentment toward all Jews, Eusebius acknowledged these events started as separate happenings, unified under Lucuas only when the Romans moved into Egypt. The argument can be made that Eusebius's audience did not read his work this way, however, even authors who used Eusebius as their source reported the source similarly or vaguely, not indicating whether or not the revolt was unified but specifying the separate regions which the revolt started sequentially.⁸

Likewise, Cassius Dio mentioned the revolt in his *Roman History*. He asserted that the Jews in Cyrene conducted a revolt under a man named Andreas.⁹ Andreas may have been another name for the before mentioned Lucuas, or another leader. Separately, he reported that the Egyptian Jews conducted similar "outrages," and last, Cyprus's Jews revolted under a different leader, Artemion.¹⁰ It is also notable that Cassius Dio reported the brutality of the Jewish

⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2.5.

⁷ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2.5.

⁸ Jerome, *Chronicles*, 278-280; Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, 7.12.6

⁹ Cassius Dio 68.32.1.

¹⁰ Cassius Dio 68.32.2.

uprisings, stating they ate their victims' flesh, sawed them in half, and made clothing from their skin.¹¹

The claims of Jewish brutality are shocking indeed, but are most likely false and reflect only a theme prevalent in Greco-Roman literature. Dio, as well as Polybius and Juvenal, associated these types of atrocities to groups they would view as “barbarians,” or uncultured.¹² In Dio's case, he used similar descriptions when reporting revolts by the Britons and the *Bucoli*.¹³ Also meaningful is the fact that Eusebius omitted comparable details of Jewish brutality, as it would have contributed to his overarching argument in regards to the community.¹⁴ This serves as indication that neither he, nor his sources, were aware of those atrocities. It is probable that Dio fabricated his accounts of Jewish atrocities to follow the particular literary theme mentioned before. To uncover what actually happened in this revolt we have to approach the papyri with the knowledge gained from the literary analysis in the previous chapters.

As discussed, at the time of the last outbreak, Alexandrian and Jewish tension was at a high point, and the Alexandrians had citizenship to reinforce the Jews' second-class status. Furthermore, the tendency of the Roman-selected prefects to side with the Alexandrians in their military response to uprisings caused many Jews to lose hope of gubernatorial intervention working in their favor. *CPJ* 157, 158 A and B, and 435 show that the Jewish community could not count on the Roman prefects to quell violence against them. Instead, Jewish leaders consistently had to seek an audience with the Roman emperors. Papyrus *CPJ* 157 narrates events that explicitly took place during the reign of Trajan, earlier than the events mentioned in 158 A and B, and 435. *CPJ* 157 reports the Jewish and Alexandrian embassies were sent to Rome to

¹¹ Cassius Dio 68.32.1.

¹² Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 455; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 160.

¹³ Cassius Dio 62.7.1-3, 71.4.1; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 160.

¹⁴ Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 159.

speak before the Emperor following some type of violence. Although it is fanciful in presentation, it does retain historical value. The list of names, titles, and accomplishments of the Jews and Alexandrians that participated in each delegation is typical of official documents, indicating that the author referenced actual documents.¹⁵ As such, the basis is assumed to be historical. Furthermore, since the embassies appeared before Trajan in the city of Rome (as stated in the papyrus), the date of their appeal was prior to the Spring of 113 CE when Trajan left Rome. The situation the papyrus references is vague, but it does appear to have been an Alexandrian attack against the Jews, as Trajan condemns the manner which the Alexandrians address him after what they “dared to do to the Jews.”¹⁶ The exchange between the Alexandrian embassy and Trajan is exaggerated, and the extent to which Trajan condemned the embassy is questionable but there is no reason to doubt that an actual historical event of Alexandrian aggression against the Jews brought the embassies to Trajan. Previously, on multiple occasions, Jews sought audience with the emperor as their primary means to address violence against them.

Papyrus *CPJ* 435 refers to a separate incident dated to October 115 CE but also provides telling details. The critical and debated line reads: “Then some will say that the people who dared this were few...to hold the theatre...to show...and are preparing fire and weapons against us. I know that they are few, but they are supported by many more and provided for by the powerful, who pay not to be abused and maltreated.”¹⁷ A few questions stick out: who were “us;” who were the “few;” and who “provided” for the few? Upon first glance, the “few” appears to refer to a small number of Jews but these few were sponsored by presumably elite figures in Alexandria. Furthermore, Claudius’s and Flaccus’s legislative measures effectively barred Jews

¹⁵ Pucci Ben Zeev, “Greek Attacks,” 41; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 134.

¹⁶ *CPJ* 2.157.2.35-37.

¹⁷ *CPJ* 2.435.2.1-20.

from participation in notable Hellenistic institutions, which would have been especially true in practice. That being said, the “few” must refer to a small group of slaves (as they were the ones punished) or lower-class Alexandrians committing elite-sponsored violence against the Jews, and were holding the theater to either launch their attacks or put on anti-Jewish mockeries. These few were then preparing fire and weapons against the Jews and carried out violence against at least some of them, who then had the opportunity to report their wounds.¹⁸ Once more, the Jews did not view the governor’s punishments for the violence as sufficient and they waited to report to the judge sent by Trajan in hopes that he would carry out the proper punishment of execution.¹⁹

CPJ 158 A and B portray similar disputes before Trajan, but with more detail and greater historicity. Pucci Ben Zeev and William Horbury argue that these papyri referenced the same dispute mentioned in *CPJ* 435 due to the similarities of sponsored slave disruptions, and the scene of anti-Jewish theater.²⁰ The events of 158 A and B, then, are a consequence of the Alexandrians disputing their punishment issued by the judge before the Emperor Trajan himself. The Alexandrian embassy, in effect, prompted a Jewish one to dispute the Alexandrians’ appeal for mercy and defend the judge’s decision. The 158 papyri detail that the judge sentenced 60 Alexandrians and their slaves to execution. Specifically, in regards to the theater production that preceded the violence, once more we see the trend of Alexandrian anti-Jewish propaganda continue. However, it appears that the Alexandrians attempted to credit portions of the production to the prefect Lupus, or an actor playing him.²¹ If this is a correct reading, it would suggest that the Alexandrians credited some of the anti-Jewish sentiment to Lupus, which agrees

¹⁸ *CPJ* 2.435.3.10-20.

¹⁹ *CPJ* 2.435.3.20-25.

²⁰ *CPJ* 2.435. 3.17-20; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Judaism in Turmoil*, 140; Horbury, *Jewish War*, 221.

²¹ *CPJ* 1.158A.1.1-8.

with the theme of governors perpetuating these ideas. Furthermore, it appears that the production provoked the crowd into seizing certain Jewish prisoners and wounding them to some unknown extent.²²

Two more questions arise, however, regarding these papyri (*CPJ* 435, 158 A and B). First, if these are references to the period just before the revolt, then what is the explanation of the mention of the battle between the Jews and Romans at the end of *CPJ* 435? Second, what was the issue with the edict mentioned in *CPJ* 158 dealing with the resettlement of Jews? The battle between the Romans and Jews is mentioned in the context of the erroneous judgements, likely in reference to wrongful punishments issued by the governor. It is probable, given the pattern of governors reacting on behalf of the Alexandrians first and foremost, that the battle refers to the initial reaction of the Roman forces to the mentioned violent aftermath of the anti-Jewish theatrics. These forces would have been tasked with suppressing whatever Jewish response there was. This theory is further strengthened if the assumption that Lupus had some role in the initial theatrics. The governor's involvement in the entire affair would render him too invested in its outcome to give an unbiased judgment, resulting in the Jewish dissatisfaction with whatever his, presumably lax, punishment was for those who started the disruption. Or rather, as the last line would lead us to believe, the governor declared erroneous judgments against the Jews instead of punishing the Alexandrians. Jewish leaders then sought an audience with the aforementioned judge.

There is not a papyrus specifically detailing the audience before the judge, but *CPJ* 158 provides the judge's sentencing. As mentioned, he sentenced 60 Alexandrians and their slaves to death. It is this ruling that the Alexandrian embassy appealed to Trajan to repeal. In their appeal,

²² *CPJ* 2.158A.2.1-10

they credit the violence solely to the slaves, for which their masters supposedly punished them. However, they also point towards an edict of Lupus as the cause of the tension in the first place. The Alexandrian Antoninus, in *CPJ* 158, indicates that Lupus had transferred a group of Jews to a location in which they could “attack and ravage” Alexandria. In the extant evidence he does not, however, suggest that the Jews attacked from their supposed strategic location. The reference to “the prison” in the text, may perhaps be in reference to this location which would serve as an explanation of why Lupus could transfer the community.²³

In analyzing the literary sources, scholars have found that the revolt consisted of two periods: the *stasis*, which was the period leading to the revolt; and, the revolt, in reference to the period of singularly Jewish violence against their neighbors.²⁴ Eusebius used the term *stasis* to describe the first year of the revolt.²⁵ Pucci Ben Zeev placed the disruption described in *CPJ* 158 and 435 in the period of *stasis* as it shows no indication that the Romans had yet lost control.²⁶ This disruption is reflective of the *stasis* as a whole. In Eusebius’s other uses of the word he describes periods of strife, skirmishes, and riots, rather than a formal war or large scale revolt.²⁷ These references are similar to what is described in *CPJ* 158 and 435. However, the papyri specifically ascribe the cause of the disruption to the Alexandrians. Given what I have detailed above, this completely follows the usual pattern in Alexandria—Alexandrian violence preceding a Jewish reaction. In this case the Jewish reaction was not a violent one, it was to appeal to the judge sent by Trajan.

²³ *CPJ* 2.158A.2.5-10.

²⁴ Horbury, *Jewish War*, 168.

²⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2.

²⁶ Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 138.

²⁷ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.19; 5.2.6.

The limited evidence indicates that the contemporary governor of Egypt, Lupus, was anti-Jewish. As attested by the papyri, Lupus did not hesitate to employ violence against the Jews on behalf of the Alexandrian population. By this time the Jewish community in Alexandria was so disenfranchised they would not have been able to engage the Alexandrians, Lupus's forces as governor, and consequently the Romans. They were undoubtedly aware of this, which would explain the author of *CPJ* 435 indicating that many Jews thought they must wait for the judge for proper judgment. Their avenue to retribution could *only* come through the Emperor, or his representatives. They could not depend on the governor to enforce unbiased punishment. His initial reaction was to perpetuate violence against the Jews.

So, the *stasis* was likely a period of Alexandrian violence against the Jews. The Jews did not believe they could reasonably retaliate, that is, until late 115 or early 116 CE. Sometime over the course of these two years, events began to propel Jews throughout the Mediterranean to a series of revolts. Before they revolted, the Jews in Alexandria wanted to work within the system. They were, historically, a pro-Hellenistic community. If the previous embassies can serve as any indication, Jewish leaders sought peaceful relations with the Alexandrians and the extension of Alexandrian rights to them, even when violence was carried out against them. However, all of the accounts note that the outbreak of the revolt was started by Jews. Rather than this be just a minority that started a revolt the rest of the Jews could not come back from, the situation from prior generations had changed and created an environment that drove the Alexandrian Jews to desperation.

Despite the possible favor Trajan showed the Jews after the 115 disruption that began in the theater, he also perpetuated an official anti-Jewish stance. Alone, neither idea (favor towards the Jews or anti-Jewish propaganda) directly caused the revolt, but rather they both influenced

the period of *stasis*. Trajan's father was the commander of the Tenth Legion in Judea from 67-69, during the First Jewish War, which participated in the destruction of Qumran and the siege of Jerusalem.²⁸ Trajan's family owed their eventual prominence in Rome to his father's success in the revolt, and to the fact that he was a prominent supporter of Vespasian's imperial claim after Nero's (r. 37-68 CE) death. Because of Trajan's familial link to the First Jewish War and lack of formal familial ties to previous emperors he further strengthened the idea that the Jews had been enemies of the Romans. His very dynastic claim, as stressed in propaganda, rested on the Flavian's victory over these Jewish enemies.²⁹ The nature of his anti-Jewish position, as opposed to his actual attitude towards the Jews, was to portray them as natural enemies of Rome.³⁰ Of course, another consequence of his position was not permitting the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, as this would run contrary to the imperial Jewish policy.³¹

The effects of his Trajan's Jewish policies were two-fold. First, Trajan's policies came after Nerva had either ceased or relaxed the collection of the *fiscus Judaicus* indicating a desire to step away from the anti-Jewish ideas of his predecessors. Trajan's reassertion of those negative sentiments then, after Nerva's death in 98 CE, would have had shattered the hopes of many Jews.³² If Nerva had given them any hope of a new Temple, this was now dashed.³³ Evidence from Philo attests that even the most Hellenized Jews felt a strong emotional connection to the Jewish Temple.³⁴

Nevertheless, it was not simply this kind of propaganda that caused the Jews to revolt, but its ramifications played a central role. As was the intention, Flavian anti-Jewish propaganda

²⁸ Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 449.

²⁹ Horbury, *Jewish War*, 134.

³⁰ Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 452.

³¹ Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 453.

³² Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 452.

³³ Horbury, *Jewish War*, 129.

³⁴ Philo, *Embassy*, 186-91, 290-93, 333.

caused gentiles throughout the Greco-Roman world to view them as enemies. We have already seen what happened in 38 CE when Caligula expressed displeasure with the Jewish community. Trajan's reinstatement of an anti-Jewish policy would have had a similar affect. Development of this type of mentality likely took hold within the Alexandrian community, suggesting it was okay to attack the Jews. However, this was not the case. In reality, Trajan was trying to do both—keep peace and maintain his public image. These concepts were unfortunately sometimes counterintuitive. The aftermath of the theater incident would have contradicted what the Alexandrians perceived as the imperial sentiment. This serves as a possible explanation of the slander against Trajan, accused of having Jews in his court, because the official line was that Jews were the enemy.³⁵ Despite the official anti-Jewish rhetoric, scholars agree that Trajan was a reasonable emperor. He would have condemned the Alexandrians for their activities during the period of *stasis* simply for disrupting peace in the Empire. Furthermore, Trajan also tended to distance himself from the cult of Serapis, whom the Alexandrians revered, in order to portray himself as the incarnation of traditional Roman virtues.³⁶ However, his efforts to appease both groups, perpetuate his familial image and imperial claim, and maintain peace were unsuccessful and did little to calm the tense situation.

There were mixed messages coming from the Emperor to the Jews. On one hand, he was reasonable and condemned Alexandrian violence against them; on the other, he reinstated an anti-Jewish policy and the *fiscus Judaicus*. As a result, Jews certainly had no reason to think he would allow them to rebuild the Temple, but they also had no reason to believe he would permit violence against them. Their qualms were not with the Romans, but still against the Alexandrians. The Alexandrians believed the Jews to be their enemies, enemies of the Empire,

³⁵ CPJ 2.157.45-50.

³⁶ Horbury, *Jewish War*, 130.

and resented any indication the Emperor favored them. Likewise, Jews in this Hellenistic center would have viewed their enemy as the Alexandrians, who were directly oppressing them by taking any opportunity to ensure they would not receive increased privileges.

As I have argued, from the perception of the Alexandrian Jews, they had relatively little reason to rebel against the *Romans*. When the violence of the Jewish revolt flared up by 116 CE, at the latest, the Greek Alexandrians were the rebels' main target. Whereas there is scarce evidence proving that the Alexandrian Jews held an anti-Roman sentiment, there is plenty indicating they held animosity for the Alexandrians. This animosity, soon to turn violent, was likely the culmination of the long-standing Alexandrian trend of oppressing the Jews, especially at strategic times. The Alexandrians believed they would increase their favor with Trajan, as they did with Caligula, or, at the very least, they could act on their existing anti-Jewish intuitions free of punishment. But, the remaining question when assessing the revolt is determining what ignited the fervor of rebellion in the Diaspora Jews.

While the situation in Alexandria was boiling, Trajan led a campaign against the Parthians (Trajan's Parthian War), officially because of a dispute over the Armenian throne.³⁷ During his campaign he conquered areas throughout Mesopotamia, but many certainly did not welcome Roman intervention. Jews who lived in the Parthian Empire had lived relatively peacefully under the Parthian monarchs.³⁸ They were able to practice their religion freely and openly, were not subject to excess Jewish-specific taxes, and there is little suggestion in the sources indicating violence between Jews and their immediate neighbors in the Parthian Empire.

³⁷ Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 108; Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 100.

³⁸ Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 454.

Because of their favorable perception of Parthian rule, as Trajan progressed through Parthia the Jews in the regions he had already conquered participated in local revolts against Roman rule.³⁹

It is no coincidence that it was right around this time that the Jews in Cyrene began to rise up. However, it was not because they had sympathy for Jews living in Mesopotamia. There has historically been the argument that the Jews that participated in the Diaspora Revolt did so on behalf of those living in Mesopotamia. Despite this claim, there is no extent evidence of Jews who revolted in their respective region on behalf of Jews of other regions.⁴⁰ Furthermore, there would be very little to gain from a revolt on behalf of others. Rather than rise up to help the Mesopotamians, the Cyrene Jews chose this moment to revolt in response to the anti-Jewish violence from 113 through 115 CE because of the distracted Roman forces who would typically respond on behalf of the Roman governor's forces of Egypt.⁴¹ Governor Rutilius Lupus himself may have acted with some degree of weakened forces. It is unknown whether *Legio XXII Deiotariana*, one of the legions typically stationed in Alexandria, participated in Trajan's Parthian campaign. *Legio III Cyrenaica*, which scholars suspect was primarily stationed in Egypt during this time, certainly participated to some degree.⁴² As noted, Alexandrian Jews had every reason to think Lupus would act against them on behalf of the Alexandrians. The possibility of his weakened forces and certainly the fact that the bulk of Rome's Eastern forces were preoccupied with the Trajan's Parthian war gave the Cyrenian and Egyptian Jews all the reason to choose this moment to revolt.

³⁹ Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 202, 209-212.

⁴⁰ Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism*, 264.

⁴¹ Millar, *Roman Near East*, 103. Due to the partial evidence of Trajan's Parthian campaign, with the exception of a five legions (IV Scythica, III Cyrenaica, XVI Flavia, VI Ferrata, X Fretensis, XI Claudia), scholars do not know how many or which legions participated in this campaign.

⁴² Millar, *Roman Near East*, 103; Maurice Sartre, *The Middle East Under Rome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 137; Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 237.

The *Fifth Sibylline Oracle* attests to the fact that they were determined to revolt against their Alexandrian neighbors.⁴³ It is also probable that the initial success of the Mesopotamian Jews against the Romans strengthened the rebellious fervor of the Alexandrian Jews. With the intent to enact violence against their pagan neighbors and destroy the pagan temples, Cyrenian Jews broke out in revolt. The Egyptians in the rural areas followed. Last, the Alexandrians rose up with relatively little success likely because of the quick response by Lupus, and the “Greeks” from other areas who fled their homes to Alexandria (probably for refuge) and fought against the city’s Jewish population.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Fifth Sibylline Oracle*, 414-15.

⁴⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.2.3.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The situation in Alexandria is just one example of how the Diaspora Revolt was actually a series of localized revolts, resulting from tensions between the local Hellenized Jews and their pagan neighbors that required the Romans to intervene, consistently against the Jews. The literary evidence from this region and the revolt itself supports the argument that Jews faced a history of systemic oppression since the beginning of the Roman era. After Roman conquest of Egypt, the situation in the region had changed. The Alexandrians were quickly thrown into the struggle for imperial patronage, which had been ongoing between Jews and Egyptians since the Ptolemaic era. These tensions fluctuated between managed and violent until the governorship of Lupus, who then perpetuated anti-Jewish ideology both actively and passively. Within this environment Jews endured about three years of violence, appealing to the Emperor with some success. However, tensions were already at a high, and neither the Alexandrians nor the Jews had the status they wished. Hearing of Jewish revolts in the former Parthian kingdom, and seeing the opportunity of weakened and unsupported military forces in the region, Jews across the former Ptolemaic empire revolted against their neighbors. The Alexandrian Jews were perhaps the last to act, but the combined Greek and Roman forces were still strong enough to put down the revolt only in Alexandria, leaving the rest of Egypt's Jews and the Cyrenian Jews to ravage the countryside.

Ultimately this Jewish effort had some success in terrifying and killing their pagan neighbors, and destroying pagan temples, but their success was later undone by the Romans.¹ As could be expected, the Roman reaction to the revolts was far more severe than theirs against the

¹ *CPJ* 2:436-450.

Alexandrians during the *stasis*. The Romans pulled forces from Trajan's Parthian campaign to effectively subdue the revolt. On his own return to Rome, Trajan became ill and died before reaching Italy. Immediately picking up where Trajan left off, his successor, Hadrian, oversaw military action in Cyrene and Egypt. His efforts, including elements of Alexandrian and Egyptian backlash, marked the end of the Hellenistic Jewish community in the region.²

The outcome of these events further demonstrates the pattern mentioned above. To put it simply, from the start of their interactions in Egypt, the Romans mismanaged the unique situation in Alexandria that had developed under the Ptolemies. The Alexandrians saw themselves as the jewel of the Ptolemaic Kingdom, and upon Roman intervention they quickly realized their position had changed. Prior to this, Diaspora Jews had a unique opportunity to move up the social ladder, however, after Roman conquest of Egypt this aspiration threatened the Alexandrians' own social status which resulted in dire consequences for the Jews.

Unfortunately, competitions over perception and status in antiquity were not unique to Alexandrian and Jewish relations. As mentioned, the Jews and Egyptians also competed for status in the Ptolemaic Kingdom, which perhaps contributed to the extreme marginalization of the Egyptian community and certainly to the anti-Jewish rhetoric aforementioned.³ Antisemitism also has roots in early Christians and Jewish disputes over religious doctrines, and later Christians attempts to garner credibility and security in the post-70 CE Roman Empire.⁴ Marginalization seems to have been a pattern in the Greco-Roman period as a result of ambitious communities, their rhetoric, and mismanagement by the authorities. This study shows not only

² Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 204.

³ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 72, 82

⁴ Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 554.

how one such tension transpired over time, but also how this affected the literature and religious beliefs of the marginalized community.

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