HISTORY

ARISTEAS THE EXEGETE
(prior to First Century B.C.)

A NEW TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION
BY R. DORAN

Aristeas the Exegete, in a work whose dimensions, contents, and character otherwise escape us, reconstructs a "Life of Job" from the Greek form of the narrative of the canonical Book of Job. Aristeas places Job among the patriarchs as a descendant of Esau, and describes how his possessions and health are taken from him, how his friends comfort him, and how and why God restores his fortune and health.

Texts

The work of Aristeas is known to us only thirdhand. Eusebius of Caesarea, in his Praeparatio Evangelica 9.25.1-4, cited Alexander Polyhistor's quotation of Aristeas' work. The critical text used as the basis for this translation is that of K. Mras.¹

Relation to the canonical Book of Job

The synopsis of the story of the Book of Job made by Aristeas is clearly related to the Greek translation of the Book of Job. In both the Septuagint and Aristeas, Job lives in Ausitis (= Heb. text 'μόνος'); the possessions of Job are listed in the same order and language in both (LXX Job 1:3a; PrEv 9.25.2); the disasters that befall Job occur in the same order and often in the same language. The three friends who come to comfort Job are described as kings by Aristeas, as in the Septuagint but not in the Hebrew text of Job 2:11; they come to visit, eis episkepsin, a phrase that reflects the text of the Septuagint in Job 2:11, episkepsasthai auton, but which has no equivalent in the Hebrew text. The names of all four visitors echo the form of the names in the Septuagint. Aristeas, therefore, is drawing on this text of the Book of Job.

That Aristeas has knowledge of the complete Book of Job is indicated by the addition of Elihu to those who come to visit Job; in the canonical book, he does not appear until chapter 32.² Such a conclusion is important, since Aristeas' portrayal of Job differs radically from that of the present canonical Book of Job, which combines two views of Job; Job the Questioner and Job the Patient.³ But Job the Questioner, the one who seeks to understand the problem of the suffering of a righteous man, is absent in Aristeas. He does not mention the dialogues on the problem of suffering but, rather, emphasizes Job's courageous endurance and God's subsequent astonishment. Job's visitors, Elihu among them, encourage Job in Aristeas' version; they do not condemn him for sinning. What Aristeas has taken from the canonical Book of Job is essentially the folk tale of the patient Job.⁴

Why would Aristeas have made such a précis of the Book of Job? The language that

¹ Mras, GCS 43.1.
² Many scholars see the section about Elihu as an interpolation; cf. M. Pope, Job (Anchor Bible 15; New York, 1973) pp. xxvii–xxviii.
Aristeas uses that found in Jewish accounts of persecution and martyrdom. The amazement of onlookers at the constancy of Jews under trial for their religion is found in the descriptions of the deaths of Eleazar (4Mac 6:11) and of some of the seven brothers martyred under Antiochus IV (4Mac 9:26; 2Mac 7:12). Hecataeus of Abdera also states that the Jews deserve admiration because of their willingness to undergo any torture rather than transgress their ancestral laws (Josephus, *Apion* 1.190–93). Aristeas, then, by stating that God was amazed at Job’s steadfastness, has transformed the tragedy and the problem of suffering in the canonical Book of Job into an edifying story of endurance for the sake of religion.

### Relation to Jewish traditions

Aristeas places Job in the patriarchal period as a descendant of Esau. Jewish tradition also places Job in this period: the Biblical Antiquities of Pseudo-Philo has Job marry Dinah, the daughter of Jacob; the Rabbis discuss Job’s role in connection with that of Balaam in Numbers 24; the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum on Gen 36:11 identifies Eliphaz, one of the sons of Esau, as the Eliphas who came to visit Job.

Three texts identify Job and the figure of Jobab in Genesis 36:33: Aristeas the Exegete, the Septuagint addition to the canonical Book of Job, and the Testament of Job. This last text, perhaps to be dated to the latter half of the first century BC and subtitled *The Book of Job, Who Is Called Jobab,* explains that Jobab was his name when he dwelt near an idol. The change in name here seems to signify the change from idol worshiper to true believer (TJob 2:1–2). In this document, Job’s first wife was called Sitis, and his second wife was named Dinah. Here, the Testament of Job is similar to the tradition found in Pseudo-Philo’s Biblical Antiquities. According to this tradition, Job would belong to the generation after Jacob and Esau.

The closest parallel to the genealogical traditions in Aristeas the Exegete is found in the Septuagint addition to Job. This text, present in every Greek manuscript, was known to Origen. Besides the identification of Job and Jobab, the genealogy in the Septuagint addition and in Aristeas depends on a special reading of the Greek, which turned Bozrah, the city, into Bassara, the mother of Jobab. One major difference between the genealogies is that, in Aristeas, Job is the son of Esau; in the Septuagint addition, he is fifth in line from Abraham through Esau, Reuel, and Zerah. However, as soon as one has Bozrah as the mother of Job, one is dependent on a tradition that has Zerah as the father of Job, as at Genesis 36:33. The best suggestion is that the text of Aristeas has suffered accidental haplography: Esau married [Bassemat and had Reuel. Reuel married and had Zerah. Zerah married] Bassara and had Job. Without some such textual emendation, it is difficult to see how the mother of Job can be derived from Bozrah of Genesis 36:33, and the father be Esau.

Besides the same genealogical tradition in both Aristeas and the Septuagint addition, the same geographical location is given in both; however, linguistic similarity in place descriptions is not enough to posit dependence between texts.

The similarities between the Septuagint addition and Aristeas are impressive. What is the probable relationship? Freudenthal and Walter have argued that the Septuagint addition is

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3 Similar language is used also in contexts of endurance of suffering as part of one’s *philosophical* creed. Cf. the report of Aelian on the death of Calanus, the Indian gymnosophist (*Varia historia* 5.6). The way Calanus died was even to be marveled at (*agasthénai*); Alexander the Great admired Calanus and his fortitude in undergoing death. For a fuller report of the contempt of the Gymnosophists for pain and suffering, see Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.2f.

4 The Zare of Gen 36:17 is equated with the Zara of Gen 36:33.

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dependent on Aristeas. P. Wendland claimed that Aristeas is dependent on the Septuagint addition. However, neither solution is satisfactory. Perhaps both Aristeas and the Septuagint addition share a common tradition. A source for this common tradition may be the "Syriac book" which the Septuagint addition claims that it is quoting.

Relation to the Letter of Aristeas

Within this volume is the Letter of Aristeas, which describes the circumstances surrounding the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. This tale of the seventy translators was surely written by an Alexandrian Jew, presenting himself as a gentle functionary of the Ptolemaic court. Is there any connection between the author of this work and the Aristeas who wrote the remarks on Job? In the Letter of Aristeas 6, the author remarks that "on a former occasion, I sent you a record of the facts which I thought worth relating about the Jewish race." Is the author of the Letter of Aristeas here referring to the work of the Aristeas who wrote on Job? Is he claiming identity with him?

B. Motzo is the main proponent of the view that the two works were authored by the same person, but Tramontano has rightly shown that Motzo's reasoning is very farfetched. From Freudenthal on, most scholars have denied that the same person authored the two works. Denis, for example, holds that the authors of the two works have nothing in common except the name; Denis emphatically states that the exegetical work of the historian of Job could not have been passed off as the work of a non-Jew, as the Letter of Aristeas was. However, the issue remains open. B. Z. Wacholder is right to object that the two different genres demanded two different styles, even were the author the same.

Cultural significance

Aristeas the Exegete has depicted Job as the silent sufferer. This view of Job is too unspecified to allow one to detect whether Aristeas has influenced later writings. For example, one cannot say that James 5:11, where Job is mentioned as a model of steadfastness, was influenced by Aristeas. Aristeas is certainly in line with the later Rabbis, such as Abaya and R. Johanan, who held Job in high esteem; he is likewise distinguished from such others as Raba, who states that Job was a sinner, and those who linked Job with Balaam. The context of discussion for Aristeas, however, is quite different from that of the Rabbis: They argue from the debates and dialogues in the Book of Job; Aristeas overlooks these debates.

Date and provenance

The work of Aristeas the Exegete is prior to that of Alexander Polyhistor, who flourished around 50 B.C. No more precise dating is possible, unless one accepts that the Letter of Aristeas 6 is referring to Aristeas' "Concerning the Jews." Then Aristeas is prior to the Letter of Aristeas. As to where the work was produced, the use of the Septuagint Job indicates a Greek-speaking area; beyond this, it is impossible to specify.

Original language

It was shown above, in discussing the relation of Aristeas to the canonical Book of Job, that Aristeas uses the Septuagint translation. It was also noted that the name of Job's mother, Bassara, comes from a special reading of the Greek. The original language of Aristeas' work, therefore, was certainly Greek.
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Charlesworth, *PMR*, pp. 80f.

Freudenthal, J. *Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erhaltenen Reste jüdischer und samaritanischer Geschichtswerke*. Hellenistische Studien 1–2; Breslau, 1874–75.
In his "Concerning the Jews," Aristeas narrates that Esau married [Bassemat and had Reuel. Reuel married, and had Zerah. Zerah married] Bassara, and fathered in Edom a son, Job. Job dwelt in Ausitis on the borders of Idumea and Arabia. He was a righteous man and rich in possessions. For he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 she-asses at pasture, and he also had much arable land. This Job was formerly called Jobab. God tested him to endure, and brought great misfortune on him. First, his asses and oxen were lost because of robbers; then, both the sheep and the shepherds were burnt up by fire which fell from heaven. Not long after this, the camels too were driven away by robbers. Then his children died when their house collapsed on them; on the same day, his body too was covered with ulcers. While he was in such dire straits, Eliphaz the king of the Taimanites, Baldad the ruler of the Sauchites, and Sophar the king of the Minneans came to visit him. Elihu, the Buzite, the son of Barachel, also came. While he was being comforted, he said that even without comfort he would be steadfast in piety, even in such trying circumstances. God, amazed at his high courage, freed him from his illness and made him master of many possessions.

a. See the Introduction, "Relation to Jewish traditions."

b. Walter (JSHRZ 3.2 [1975] 295) has overstated the grammatical complexity.

c. The MSS of Eusebius Zóbités, a metathesis for the Bouzitēs of LXX Job 32:2.

d. As the text now stands, en te eusebeia is grammatically linked to tois deinois by a te...kai construction, which is usually connective. However, the usual meaning of tois deinois is "in difficult circumstances," and such a meaning is in contrast to an attitude of reverence. The above translation has maintained the contrast between "piety" and "trying circumstances." Alternatively, one could suggest that the basic meaning of the main verb, emmenein, "to remain," would be nuanced by the phrases that follow: with "in piety," the verb would mean "be steadfast," i.e. in piety; with "in difficult circumstances," it would mean "submit to." The translation would then be: "... he would be steadfast in reverence, and he would submit to such trying circumstances."