

Space, Borders and Boundaries in the Letter of Aristeas

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Representation of space in literary writings is not just decorative, but plays an important narrative function. Therefore, space is not only the place where something happens, but also includes the whole spatial construction of a literary writing. Narrative analysis has often focused on representations of time in literary texts and has paid less attention to the representations of space. But over the past decades, a lot of work in narratological, cultural, gender and postcolonial studies, etc. has been done to bring questions of space and the representation of space to the fore.¹ The analysis of space constructions in literary writings leads to recognizing the question of boundaries as a crucial point in the spatial construction of a text.

Representations of space in literature analyze the geographical and topographical settings and clarify where the plot happens, where objects and aspects of reality are located, and how the setting of a scene is narratively construed. Quite often, these settings have opposing elements: inside the house or outside the house, on the top of the mountain or in the valley, etc. These settings do not have a decorative function, but have a specific meaning within the narra-

¹ M. G. Henderson ed., *Borders, Boundaries, and Frames. Essay in Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995). R. Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1996). K. Wenz, *Raum, Raumsprache und Sprachräume. Zur Textsemiotik der Raumbeschreibung* (Tübingen: Narr, 1997). L. McDowell and J. P. Sharp, *Space, Gender, Knowledge. Feminist Readings* (London: Arnold, 1997). E. W. B. Hess-Lüttich et.al. eds., *Signs and Space/Raum und Zeichen* (Tübingen: Narr, 1998). M. Reif-Hülser ed., *Borderlands. Negotiating Boundaries in Post-Colonial Writing* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999). C. Bentien and I. M. Krüger-Fürhoff eds., *Über Grenzen. Limitation und Transgression in Literatur und Ästhetik* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 1999). R. Görner and S. Kirkbright eds., *Nachdenken über Grenzen* (Munich: Iudicium, 1999). B. Haupt, "Zur Analyse des Raumes," in: *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse. Kategorien, Modelle, Probleme* (P. Wenzel ed.; Trier: WVT, Wiss. Verl., 2004), 69–87. B. Janowski, "Unterscheiden – Überschreiten – Entgrenzen. Zum Umgang mit Grenzen im Alten Testament," in: *Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie* 33 (H. Schweitzer ed.; Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2009), 32–54. K. James-Chakraborty and S. Strümper-Krobb eds., *Crossing Borders. Space beyond Disciplines* (Oxford: Lang, 2011). M. Huber, C. Lubkoll, St. Martus and Y. Wübben eds., *Literarische Räume. Architekturen – Ordnungen – Medien* (Berlin: Akademie-Verl., 2012). A. Nünning, "Raum/Raumdarstellung, literarische(r)," in: *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie. Ansätze – Personen – Grundbegriffe* (A. Nünning ed.; Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2013), 634–638.

tive: “Spatial opposites are construed as models for narrative opposites”² and therefore fulfill a crucial function in the interpretation of a text through their metaphorical, psychological, and other meanings.

When they differentiate one location from another, boundaries play a very important role in the construction of space in literary writings. They constitute different areas and result in an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’. For example, let us assume that there is one character in a text who is able to cross a boundary, but another is not able or allowed to do so. Separation and exclusion are not the only functions of boundaries in texts; they can also put people together in order to constitute a group. Boundaries very often have social functions in setting limits for constructing an identity and constituting a group.³ Therefore, boundaries do have an important impact on the constitution of a society – in reality as well as in fiction. Thus, special attention must be paid to boundaries in literature, as well as to how they are constructed, how they include or exclude, how they stabilize identities, and who is able or allowed to cross the border and who is not.

In his study “The Structure of the Artistic Text,”⁴ the Estonian scholar Jurij M. Lotman (1922–1993) places the question of space and boundaries in the center of his text analyses: “The simplest and most fundamental case is when the space of a text is divided by some boundary into two parts and each character belongs to one of them. But more complex situations are possible too in which different characters not only belong to different spatial areas, but are associated with different, occasionally incompatible, types of spatial division. [...] There arises a sort of spatial polyphony, the play of different sorts of spatial division for each.”⁵ According to Lotman’s concept, the ‘hero-agent’ of a story is the one (human or non-human character) who is able to cross the border in question and who also belongs to the other subspace: “[T]he border between these subsets, which under normal circumstances is impenetrable, though in a given instance [...] it proves to be penetrable for the hero-agent.”⁶

Therefore, boundaries quite often have a paradoxical function: In arranging structures, they seem to ‘tidy up’ the world. By doing so, boundaries frequently present a clear and often very simple view of the real or fictional world. They place subjects in this or that space, allow or forbid, enable or reject. But a closer look quite often shows that these boundaries are much more fluid than they appear to be at first: “selectivity, fluidity, dynamism, permeability are all intrinsic to the construction of boundaries; yet so too are layers of rhetoric and power.

² M. Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1988), 257.

³ F. Barth ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Organization of Cultural Difference* (Oslo/London: Universitetsforlaget, 1969).

⁴ J. M. Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (Michigan: Univ. of Michigan, 1977) [*Struktura khudozhestvennogo teksta*, 1971].

⁵ Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, 231.

⁶ Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, 240.

Stability and continuity are claimed by appeal to the past, but this is a conceit made necessary by the novelties of the present. Where rhetoric constructs the boundary as immutable and impenetrable, we may suspect actual invasion and penetration.”⁷

1. Spatial representation and boundaries in the Book of Aristeas

The Book of Aristeas⁸ is characterized by a wide variety of boundaries. The first to be discussed is a basic, but rarely heeded boundary crossing: Who is “Aristeas” in the Book of Aristeas? To what extent can the character “Aristeas” be understood as a boundary crossing?

Then the geography in the Book of Aristeas will be examined, which is characterized by two centers in the narrated time: Alexandria and Jerusalem. The geographical boundary between these two cities is transgressed by various characters; the question will be whether these characters thereby become relevant actors (“hero-agents”) or who takes on this role in the Book of Aristeas (topological boundary). Another demarcation in the text relates to the question of the Jewish conception of life, about which the Egyptian delegation asks and to which the high priest responds by explaining that Moses, as a lawgiver, surrounded the people with “impregnable ramparts and walls of iron” (*ἀδιακόποις χάραξι καὶ σιδηροῖς τείχεσιν* Arist 139). This practical boundary is to be discussed in consideration of a fourth demarcation in the Book of Aristeas, the theological boundary: does the Book of Aristeas really extend the declaration of belief in the one and only God, central to the identity of Israel, to include an equation with the gods of the peoples, as is often assumed?

2. Who narrates the Book of Aristeas? A first boundary crossing

In the Book of Aristeas, a Greek writer “Aristeas” (*Ἀριστέας*) presents himself as a text-internal author. Thus Aristeas is the first-person narrator who relates from his perspective in retrospect the events regarding how the desire to acquire the writings of the Jews for the library of Alexandria was realized. This Aristeas introduces himself as a Greek and non-Jew (Arist 16; 121–171), who was reportedly working as a high court official at the court of King Ptolemy II (Arist 1–8). As first-person narrator, he reports (*διήγησις* “report”; Arist 1; 18; 322) to Philocrates on the past events (Arist 1).

⁷ J. M. Lieu, “‘Impregnable Ramparts and Walls of Iron’: Boundary and Identity in Early ‘Judaism’ und ‘Christianity,’” *NTS* 48 (2002): 297–313, 309.

⁸ The translation follows M. Hadas, *Aristeas to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas)* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951).

At the same time Aristeas is also part of the world that he narrates and in which he appears: Aristeas describes, for example, how he traveled to Jerusalem and spoke to the high priest there. Aristeas therefore has a dual role: he is both the narrator and a character. As a narrator, he describes the events from his perspective in retrospect in the form of an ongoing story, in which he, as an acting character, plays a crucial role, and appears therefore as a contemporary narrator and in the past events as an actor. Following Gérard Genette, one can therefore describe Aristeas as an intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator.⁹ In his dual role, this Aristeas is a fictional character (“fictional identity of *B.Ar.*’s narrator”¹⁰).

Aristeas as the intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator must be clearly distinguished from the pseudonymous writer/author of the Book of Aristeas that could possibly have been a Jew (and could be described as “Pseudo-Aristeas”). “The fictional identity of *B.Ar.*’s narrator introduces an important shift as compared to the real author. The real author was most probably a learned Alexandrian Jew, but the fictional identity he takes on is that of a Greek courtier of Ptolemy II.”¹¹

Thus there is a first boundary crossing at the level of the book’s conception. The unknown, probably Jewish writer allows “Aristeas” to appear as a Greek, non-Jew and court official and makes him the spokesman of his text. In the text, the (probably) Jewish author of the Book of Aristeas offers a Greek perspective with the narrative voice and character; he allows the Jewish perspective to be told through other characters, such as the high priest or the 72 scholars. In so doing, the author of the Book of Aristeas plays with the “boundary” between different groups (“Jews” – “Gentiles, Greeks”) and transgresses this boundary in the genre of literature to narrate his (Jewish) writing from the perspective of a (non-Jewish) Ptolemaic court official.

3. Geographical spaces and boundaries in the Book of Aristeas

The Book of Aristeas tells of two encounters, in each of which boundary crossings are necessary. The delegation of the Ptolemaic king, to which Aristeas also belongs, travels to Jerusalem in order to meet the high priest there and talk with him (Arist 121–171). From there, the delegation with the 72 scholars chosen by the high priest travels back to Alexandria (Arist 172), where they meet the Ptolemaic king (Arist 184–300). Both encounters require the crossing of geo-

⁹ See G. Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); B.G. Wright, *The letter of Aristeas. “Aristeas to Philocrates” or “On the Translation of the Law of the Jews”* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), 20.

¹⁰ S. Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria. A Study in the Narrative of the Letter of Aristeas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 69.

¹¹ Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria*, 69.

graphical boundaries. It is interesting that neither the journey from Alexandria to Jerusalem nor the return journey from Jerusalem to Alexandria are described; these are dealt with only briefly (Arist 83; 172; see also 319: brief note of the return journey of the 72 scholars). In the account, the destinations appear to be more important than the distances. The speaker Aristeas describes Jerusalem lying on a high mountain and situates the city in his text-map (contrary to the real geography) in the middle of Judea (Arist 83), which one can interpret as a signal of harmony.¹² Contrary to expectation, this is not followed by a description of Jerusalem, which would maintain the perspective of the approaching delegation, but rather a description of the Temple (Arist 84–99), which lies in the center of the city. In the spatial representation, the narrative thus jumps from seeing the high mountain (Arist 83) to a description of the Temple which lies on the top of this mountain (Arist 84). The representation of space is therefore taken up anew in the center of town and describes the Temple as a building with its size, its rooms and its furnishings (Arist 84–91), as well as those priests working inside it (Arist 92–95) and the high priest (Arist 96–99). Then, interestingly, in decreasing length, the castle (*ἄκρα*) in Jerusalem (Arist 100–104) and the city itself (Arist 105–106) are described. For the Temple, castle, and town the size and proportions are mentioned. It is also noticeable that each of the three topographical areas is surrounded by circular walls (Temple: Arist 84; castle: Arist 100–101; city: Arist 105); This is significant in that the word “circular wall” (*περιβολος*) is used in Book of Aristeas only for these three places. The description of the city of Jerusalem is followed by the description of the land and its boundaries (Arist 107) with its economic sectors (agriculture, trade and port), rivers, and mountains (Arist 107–119). Aristeas even compares Jerusalem here with Alexandria (Arist 109), which in the spatial description suggests an equivalence of Jerusalem and Alexandria that is a very interesting and even bold interpretation with respect to the real cities and distribution of power. Aristeas names adjacent areas as well and stresses that, as with the Temple, castle and city, Judea is surrounded by boundaries, by natural ramparts, making an invasion of the country difficult (Arist 118).

In the geographical description of the country by Aristeas, which – according to the text-internal presentation – tours the country and the city with foreign eyes, two things stand out. The description does not follow the travel route, but instead starts at the Temple, then goes to the castle and the city of Jerusalem, and ends with the country. This account places the Temple at the beginning and goes out in the description of the topography from this center to the periphery. If – as Lotman emphasizes – space representations testify to the value system and culture model in which they are anchored, then this organizational principle shows a world view that describes not only Jerusalem, but places the temple in

¹² J.-M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford et.al.: Oxford University Press, 2004), 218–223.

the center of the representation (Temple → castle → city → country) and, originating from it, the world. It is equally revealing that all four subspaces described are closed spaces that were created (circular walls) or are naturally present.

The spatial description of the events that take place in Alexandria is different. From the point of view of the text construction, the first-person narrator Aristeas is ‘at home’ here and identifies the rooms of the event without describing them intensively. The action here is mainly focused on two spaces: The first is the court or the palace of the king, from which the delegation is sent and received (Arist 9–20; 173–183) and at which the seven-day symposium takes place (Arist 184–294). A second location is the island of Pharos, on which, as a protected space, the 72 scholars from Jerusalem are to withdraw to complete the translation in peace and quiet (Arist 301–307). The island as well as the house which is built on it are two enclosed spaces.

This geographical description of the space divides the narrated world into two subspaces: Jerusalem and Alexandria. While Alexandria is scarcely described, but rather assumed to be known, the city of Jerusalem is described as lying in the center of Judea and is divided into Temple, castle, city.

4. Boundary crossings in the Book of Aristeas by characters: The scrolls of the law

The boundary between Alexandria and Jerusalem is crossed two times each by the Egyptian delegation from the Ptolemaic king of Alexandria and by the 72 scholars from Jerusalem. It is striking that the boundary is indeed described as surmountable for two large groups, but these groups do not thereby become “heroes” (“hero-agents”): Although mobile, they only fulfill certain orders and then each return after the accomplishment of their mission back to the space from which they came; the return of the Jewish scholars to Jerusalem is even explicitly mentioned (Arist 319). Thus the boundary crossing of the individuals to the opposing field is not permanent but only temporary, and is also authorized by the powers in the respective subspaces.

A permanent boundary crossing takes place quite surprisingly in the Book of Aristeas through a very different ‘character’: the scrolls of the law. At first glance this is an unusual boundary-crossing ‘character’ – but only at first glance. The occasion and purpose of the efforts described in the Book of Aristeas are to have a copy of the Jewish laws (*τῶν Ἰουδαίων νόμιμα μεταγραφῆς*) in the library of Alexandria (Arist 10). But because it was written in a different script and language, it must first be translated (Arist 11). Thus right at the beginning of the Book of Aristeas, the commitment to a double border crossing is apparent: Jewish law as text crosses over the space of Jerusalem and the Temple to be permanently preserved in the library of Alexandria. The text thus permanently topologically

crosses a boundary – or in other words, the boundary turns out to be permeable for the Torah. With the translation of the text, it crosses a second boundary, but this boundary crossing is ambivalent and is therefore described in differentiated manner: the text is to be translated. But any translation changes and opens different possibilities, which the Book of Aristeas itself concedes, because the translations of the scholars need to be coordinated (Arist 302). This goal of conformity (*συμφωνία*) is emphasized once more at the end when the Jewish community of Alexandria accepts the new text as “well and piously made and in every respect accurate” (*καλῶς καὶ ὁσίως διηρμήνευται καὶ κατὰ πᾶν ἡκριβωμένως*; Arist 310). Jewish law therefore crosses a boundary by permanently remaining in another space, while the second boundary as a translation, interestingly enough, is played down as far as possible. As a result, while the original text remains in Hebrew and has its place in Jerusalem, the new Greek text will have its place in Alexandria.

From the spatial construction here, it is instructive that the transfer of the scrolls from Jerusalem is not described, but that the emphasis here is on the selection of scholars (see Arist 46–47; 121–127). Conversely, in Alexandria the arrival of the scrolls is first honored and only then are the scholars received. Breaking with custom – delegations which have just arrived normally have to wait 30 days before the king receives them – the king interrupts his official duties and calls for the scholars (Arist 174–175). Contrary to the usual etiquette, the king is waiting impatiently for the new arrivals, walking back and forth (Arist 175), and does not at first welcome the guests, but first asks about the books: “They entered, then, with the gifts which had been sent and the precious parchments in which the Law was inscribed in Jewish letters with writing of gold, the material being wonderfully worked and the joinings of the leaves being made imperceptible; and when the king saw the men he began to put questions concerning the books. When they had uncovered the rolls and had unrolled the parchment the king paused for a considerable space, and after bowing deeply some seven times said, ‘I thank you, good sirs, and him that sent you even more, but most of all I thank God whose holy words these are.’” (Arist 176–177). Only after the king has had the scrolls removed, he greets the men (Arist 179). The not explicitly described ‘departure’ of the scrolls from Jerusalem and the much more broadly orchestrated arrival of the scrolls in Alexandria as such make the specific Alexandrian perspective clear with respect to the arrival of the scrolls in Alexandria as the crucial boundary crossing: the Torah, with its translation into Greek, permanently crosses a boundary and thus fundamentally changes. Now it no longer belongs only to the subspace of Jerusalem, but permanently and in a modified form also to the Alexandrian living environment. In the terminology of Lotman, that would be the “revolutionary element”¹³ in relation to the previously constructed world view in the text.

¹³ Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, 238.

5. Boundaries and boundary markers

Probably the strongest talk of a boundary in the Book of Aristeas is attributed to the high priest in his answer to the question by Aristeas and the Ptolemaic delegation regarding the Jewish purity laws with the “impregnable ramparts and walls of iron.” The Ptolemaic delegation had, in fact, inquired about the provisions in the legislation on food and drinks as well as unclean animals (Arist 128) and asked, “why it was that, creation being one, some things are regarded as unclean for food and some even to touch” (Arist 129). First, the high priest explains the theological foundation that there is only one God (Arist 132, more in the next section) and then goes on to speak of the laws in detail. Against the background of worship of gods and images classified as foolish, the high priest highlights the achievements of Moses, who is always referred to in the Book of Aristeas as lawgiver (*νομοθέτης*), to whom thanks are due that he has given the people the food and purity laws which protect the people with “impregnable ramparts and walls of iron” (*ἀδιακόπους χάραξι καὶ στόφροις τείχεσιν* Arist 139): “When therefore our lawgiver, equipped by God for insight into all things, had surveyed each particular, he fenced us about with impregnable ramparts and walls of iron, to the end that we should mingle in no way with any of other nations, remaining pure (*ἀκάθαρτος*)¹⁴ in body and in spirit, emancipated from vain opinions, revering the one and mighty God above the whole creation” (Arist 139). The food and purity laws thus have no function as such, they do not serve to ensure health, etc., but rather are only there to establish a boundary with which the membership in the nation is defined and a stable identity is established. In his explanatory statement the high priest argues that the observance of the laws, especially in terms of the unclean animals and the food laws, enables a way of life in righteousness (Arist 147–149).

The Jewish perspective described in the Book of Aristeas therefore lays great emphasis on the boundary effected by the laws given by Moses. It is interesting, however, that the observance of the food laws at the seven-day symposium of the Ptolemaic king (Arist 182) does not take place because anyone wants to observe the Jewish laws, but because taking on the customs and traditions of others for reasons of hospitality and courtesy was common for the Ptolemaic court. One can certainly conclude from this that the self-described boundary in the Book of Aristeas was “subverted.”¹⁵

It is also remarkable that in the Book of Aristeas only the food and purity laws are named as typical boundary markers; other typical boundary markers, however, are not mentioned here.¹⁶ Consistently missing are aspects such as

¹⁴ *ἀκάθαρτ-* in Arist 128.129.147.166.169.

¹⁵ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 110.

¹⁶ Lieu, “Impregnable Ramparts and Walls of Iron,” 297–313.

circumcision, calendar questions or the Sabbath. The 72 scholars spend a seven-day symposium with the King and work 72 days on their translation without mention of keeping the Sabbath.

According to the Book of Aristeas, however, the boundary-setting food and purity laws have another function. Then the high priest explains further that they serve to define the boundaries of belonging: “Whence the priests who are the guides of the Egyptians, have looked closely into many things and are conversant with affairs, have named us “men of God” (*ἀνθρώπους θεοῦ*), a title applicable to no others but only to him who reveres the true God (*εἰ μή τις σέβεται τὸν κατὰ ἀλήθειαν θεόν*)” (Arist 140). Those who belong to the “men of God” are therefore those “who revere the true God” (Arist 140). With this a new boundary is created: the “men of God” are those that are committed to the one and only God. Thus a clear boundary has been created, one which is not ethnically identical to Israel (at least the Book of Aristeas does not emphasize this), but one that defines the boundary of belonging, where the one and only God is known and experienced. This is a different definition of belonging, which is basically universally oriented.

5. Theological boundaries: No crossing!

Boundaries in the Book of Aristeas turn out to be permeable; they are able to be temporarily crossed by the envoys from Alexandria and the 72 scholars, even permanently for the divine *nomos*. What about the concepts of God in this context? Does the Book of Aristeas expand the exclusively monotheistic concept of God in the sense of equating the God of Israel with Zeus, as one often reads?

It is notable that throughout the book, the word as well as the subject (*ὁ θεός* “God” is only relatively rarely found: in the discussion between King Ptolemy and Aristeas (Arist 15–21), in the discussion between the high priest Eleazer and Aristeas (Arist 121–171; esp. 128; 130–141; 155–166; 168) and in the question-and-answer exchange during the symposium at the Ptolemaic court between the king and the Jewish scholars (Arist 184–294).

So far, the question of conceptions of God has been paid only little attention and has always been reduced to the well-known and much-received statement of the analogy between the God of Israel and Zeus in Arist 16.¹⁷ In an audience with the Ptolemaic king, Aristeas explains that “for the same God who has given them their law guides your kingdom also” (Arist 15) and continues: “God, the overseer and creator of all things, whom they worship, is He whom all men wor-

¹⁷ B. Schmitz, “... using different names, as Zeus and Dis’ (Arist 16). Concepts of ‘God’ in the Letter of Aristeas,” in: *Die Septuaginta – Orte und Intentionen* (WUNT; S. Kreuzer, M. Meiser, M. Sigismund eds.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck (forthcoming)).

ship, and we too, Your Majesty, address him differently, as Zeus and Dis” (*τὸν γὰρ πάντων ἐπόπτην καὶ κτίστην θεὸν οὗτοι σέβονται, ὃν καὶ πάντες, ἡμεῖς δέ, βασιλεῦ, προσονομάζοντες ἑτέρως Ζῆνα καὶ Δία*: Arist 16).

Due to the speech situation (see 1. above), the analogy between their own and the Jewish God is *not* made from a Jewish perspective, but by the narrative voice, the Greek non-Jew Aristeas. The (possibly Jewish) author of Book of Aristeas puts this statement into the mouth of the non-Jew Aristeas. The equation of the various deities thus occurs from Greek-pagan (external) perspective: Aristeas argues that this position in the Jewish system is occupied by “God” and in the Greek system by “Zeus”, and is only different with respect to the name given (*προσονομάζοντες ἑτέρως*). This interpretation of another name-giving is supported by the two different ways of forming the accusative of Zeus: *Ζῆνα καὶ Δία* “Zena and Dia”.¹⁸ In a subtle play on words, Aristeas illustrates the interdependence of the two names which at first glance are different: “by these names men of old not unsuitably signified that He through whom all creatures receive life and come into being is the guide and lord of all” (Arist 16). Thus a position is represented by Aristeas that is already found in the pre-Socratics (Xenophanes, similar in Heraclitus) and especially in the Stoics. Zeno of Citium (335–262 BC), who is considered the founder of the Stoics, writes: “God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus (*Δία*); he is also called by many other names (*προσονομάζεσθαι*).” (Diog. Laert. VII 135).¹⁹ The equation and the resulting idea of the multiple naming of Zeus is adopted by Zeno’s students (Cleanthes, Chrysippus, etc.); Cleanthes of Assos (died 230–229 BC) expressed this in his hymn to Zeus (around 280 BC): “Noblest of immortals, many-named (*πολυώνυμε*), always all-powerful² Zeus, first cause and ruler of nature, governing everything worth your law, ³greetings!”²⁰

With the statements of Aristeas, the pagan but not the Jewish position is highlighted in the Book of Aristeas; the Jewish position is represented rather by the high priest Eleazer and by the 72 scholars. The high priest takes questions from the delegation from Alexandria (Arist 128–141) about the Jewish way of life as an opportunity to explain the theological foundations of the Jewish laws and way of life: “But first of all he taught that God is one (*ὅτι μόνος ὁ θεός ἐστι*) and that His power is made manifest in all things (*καὶ διὰ πάντων ἡ δύναμις αὐτοῦ φανερὰ γίνεται*), and that every place is filled with His sovereignty, and that nothing done by men on earth secretly escapes His notice, but that all anyone does and all that is to be manifest to Him” (Arist 132). Thus Eleazer represents a clear, monotheistic confession which he repeats a little later when he speaks of the “one and mighty

¹⁸ N. Meisner, *Aristeasbrief* (JSHRZ II.1, Güterloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1973), 47–48.

¹⁹ Cf. Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. With an English translation by R. D. Hicks, II (Cambridge/Massachusetts: 1979), 241.

²⁰ The translation follows J. C. Thom, *Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus. Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 33; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 40.

God” (*τὸν μόνον θεὸν καὶ δυνατὸν σεβόμενοι*) (Arist 139). The high priest expresses his position of exclusive monotheism with the *μόνος* formula in classical terminology, as its contents are known, for example, from the writings of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 43:11; 44:6; 45:1–6, 21–22; 46:9, etc.).²¹ This exclusive-monotheistic position is subsequently unfolded twice in a traditional biblical manner (Arist 134–138): in the criticism of polytheism and of the worship of idols or images of god. This idol and cult-image polemic presents the traditional standpoint (Isa 44:9–20; see also Jer 10:3–16; Ps 115:4–8/135:15–18; Bar 6; Dan 14; Wis 13–14, etc.). Thus this statement of the high priest is firmly rooted in the Jewish tradition, which maintains an exclusive-monotheistic concept of God.

This makes it clear that the theological boundary in the Book of Aristeas is clearly drawn and is not crossed. Rather, the respective character specifies the perspective of the statement: Aristeas represents a philosophical, possibly Stoic-inspired concept of God, in which behind the different manifestations one supreme God is assumed who is capable of carrying the name of Zeus. The high priest, however, represents the Jewish exclusive-monotheistic concept of God. In the Book of Aristeas, this boundary is rather implicitly drawn. There is no direct interaction between the two positions, and this would not even be possible because of the power gap in the narrated situation. The Book of Aristeas, however, still positions itself clearly at this point: the Greek-philosophical idea of ‘God’ developed in the dialogue between Aristeas and the king is contradicted by the statement of the high priest that the Jews, in contrast to the many gods of the peoples (Arist 134–138), worship the one and only God (Arist 132; 139–140 *passim*). In this way, the identification thesis of Aristeas (Arist 16) and thus a theology of inclusion or identification is contradicted. It is not to be ruled out, however, that the Stoic-inspired concept of God discarded in the Book of Aristeas may have been attractive in the Jewish environment of Alexandria; perhaps this is why the Book of Aristeas therefore positions itself so clearly at this point.

6. Conclusion

The Book of Aristeas includes a many-faceted boundary concept. The first sentence “Aristeas to Philocrates” already plays with boundaries and their crossing. Geographic spaces are described that are to be differentiated from each other (Jerusalem – Alexandria) and are separated by a boundary. This boundary is crossed twice each by the delegation from Alexandria to Jerusalem and the journey of the 72 scholars from Jerusalem to Alexandria. Both boundary crossings are arranged and authorized by the respective rulers; the return to the respective

²¹ *Μόνος* in Deut 32:12; 1 Sam 7:4.3; 2 Kgs 19:15.19 // Isa 37:16.20; Ps LXX 50:6; Isa 44:24 and in 3 Esr 8:25; Est C 14 [= Est LXX 4:17]; 2 Macc 7:37 etc.

subspace is a part of this. The situation is different with the Torah: it goes as text from Jerusalem to Alexandria and remains there permanently, translated and thus fundamentally changed, even when the Book of Aristeas repeatedly makes an effort to maintain the high accuracy of the translation. While the geographical boundaries are presented as permeable and the topological boundary crossing of the Torah even as permanent, the Book of Aristeas, however, makes one boundary on a theological level very clear. The interpretation of God as the One who is addressed by different names (Arist 15–17) is shown in Book of Aristeas, due to the speech situation, to be the perspective of Aristeas, the narrator who describes the action and who as a non-Jew represents a philosophical, Stoic-inspired concept. This is contrasted with the position of the high priest of Jerusalem (Arist 132–133 *passim*), who in the tradition of Deutero-Isaiah and others recognizes the God of Israel as the One and Only. In other words, in the Book of Aristeas boundaries are shown to be crossable. The Book of Aristeas even goes so far as to say that the Torah itself can become a prototype of boundary crossing; but not up for discussion is the commitment to God as the One and Only. This boundary is not permeable.