Aristoboulos and the Hieros Logos of the Egyptian Jews

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1. Aristoboulos, "didaskalos" of Ptolemy Philometor

The Jewish priest and philosopher Aristoboulos lived and wrote in Ptolemaic Alexandria in the time before the Maccabean revolt (167–164 BC). His works are almost entirely lost. We are left with fragments of an Interpretation (in Greek Exagoge) of the Law of Moses, transmitted by the Christian authors Clement of Alexandria (II cent. AD) and Eusebius of Caesarea (III–IV cent. AD). The only biographical information is found at the beginning of the second Book of Maccabees (hence 2 Macc), where Judas Maccabaeus writes a letter to Aristoboulos and the Jews of Egypt in order to invite them to celebrate Hanukkah, the restoration of the Temple of Jerusalem.

The Jews in Jerusalem and in Judaea and the gerousia and Judas to Aristoboulos, teacher of King Ptolemy, of the stock of the anointed priests, and to the Jews in Egypt greeting and good health.3

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1 I would like to thank Prof. Traianos Gagos, Prof. Anna Passoni Dell'Acqua and the anonymous readers for their useful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.


3 2 Macc 1.7–9 Οἱ ἐν Ἰερουσαλήμ οἱ δὲ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκουμένῃ ἀνέρχοντο καὶ ἔδωκαν τῷ Άριστοβολῷ τῇ Βασιλείᾳ τινὰ δόμημα. For the use of the worddr does not point out that the word is used with reference to priests in the LXX Lev. 4.5.16, 6.22, and is often used to define the kings of Israel, cf. 1 Kings 2.4.7, Ps. 17 (18) 51, Is. 45.1 or the patriarchs, as in Ps. 104 (105) 15. According to M. De Jonge, "The Use of the Word "Anointed" in the Time of Jesus," NT 8 (1966) 132–148 the word "anointed" referring to kings or priests is very rare in Greek-Jewish documents before the first century BC.
This letter has been generally taken as the proof that Aristoboulos was the teacher of king Ptolemy VI Philometor (180–145 BC). Clement⁴ and Eusebius⁵ report that Aristoboulos dedicated his Interpretation to Philometor around 175–170 BC;⁶ and modern scholars tend to accept this date,⁷ although Elias Bickerman, and others after him, have been sceptical on the reliability of the letter of Judas, which may be regarded as a homily on the foundation of the Second Temple, composed some time in the first century BC by an anonymous author, possibly a priest of Jerusalem. Bickerman took the opening greeting of the letter, χαίρειν καὶ ψυγαίνειν, as proof that the letter is a forgery of the first century BC onwards.⁸ Although there is one earlier instance of this greeting, in a fourth century BC public document, namely the lead tablet from Mnesiergos,⁹ the common opinion remains that the letter is a forgery.

The definition of Aristoboulos as didaskalos of Philometor has been disputed, too. For Momigliano, it was a rhetorical title attached to Aristoboulos because he dedicated his work to the king.¹⁰ Eusebius quotes two men, both named Agathoboulos and nicknamed "Masters," as predecessors of Aristoboulos at court. There are some attestations of the name Agathoboulos in the papyri, showing that an important man

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⁴ Strom. 1.22.150.
⁵ PE 8.9.38–10.17.
⁷ Walter, op.cit. (above, n. 1); Fraser, op.cit. (above, n. 2) I, 694 and II, 953–965; Hengel, op.cit. (above, n. 2) II, 106–107; Schürer, op.cit. (above, n. 2) III, 579–580. Further bibliography in Schürer, op.cit., III, 586–587 and Barclay, op.cit. (above, n. 2) 445–446.

[Klauck, op.cit. (above, n. 8) 19–21 and 267–268 on the address and health wish in the Mnesiergos tablet and in private letters.

called Agathoboulos – possibly one of the "Masters" – lived at the court of Philopator. I think that this information lends support to the hypothesis that Aristoboulos was the successor of Agathoboulos as the king's official teacher of philosophy. The job of royal teacher must have been an official court office, with precise rules and duties. In the Ptolemaic period royal tutor was often also the director of the Alexandrian library or played a role in the Museum. Our list of Alexandrian librarians on papyrus has a gap in the reign of Philometor, between Apollonios Eidographos (ca. 196 to 175 BC) and Aristarchos of Samothrace (from 165 BC), so there might be room for Aristoboulos, although there is no precedent for a Jewish chief-librarian (although he may have been erased from the official list for being a Jew). A tradition preserved in Eusebius associated Aristoboulos to the library of Alexandria by putting him (anachronistically) among the 72 translators of the Septuagint under Philadelphos. Also, the fact that Judas Maccabaeus in 2 Maccabees talks about his reconstruction of a library in Jerusalem and offers to send books to Aristoboulos in Egypt may indicate that Aristoboulos was respected as an important intellectual with an official role in the Alexandrian library.

From the extant fragments it emerges that Aristoboulos was an eclectic Aristotelian philosopher, who interpreted the Bible allegorically, by explaining it through categories derived from Greek philosophy. He argues that authoritative Greek philosophers praised the Jewish law for its principles of piety, justice, and temperance, and that Solomon was the first to elaborate on the connection between wisdom and light, long before the peripatetic philosophers described sophia as a lantern on the path of life. Another fragment examines the concept of hieros logos or "sacred legend," a phrase that came from the world of the Orphic mysteries. In the Hellenistic world, under the name of Orpheus circulated a vast literature of hieroi logoi, based on the monotheistic cult of a solar deity source of light and life. The hieros logos of the Egyptian Jews gravitated around the figure of Moses, a teacher and divine man,
associated both to Mousaios, the son of Orpheus, and to the Egyptian god Thoth-Hermes. Aristoboulos played an important role in shaping the *hieros logos* of the Egyptian Jews. In a fragment he quotes a part of the *Testament of Orpheus* by Aratus of Soli (ca. 315–240 BC), and adapts it to a Jewish audience by systematically substituting the name Zeus with *Theos*. By offering an *interpretatio iudaica* of the Greek mysteries, he was probably trying to find a common philosophical ground that could be shared between Greeks and Jews. Probably, he aimed to convince the Ptolemaic king that Jewish religion was no less valuable than Greek philosophy, and that actually Moses was the ultimate source of many pagan philosophers.

2. Aristoboulos in the documents

The papyri mention a prominent man at Alexandria called Aristoboulos as early as the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphos, clearly too early to be our Aristoboulos. In *P.Cair.Zen.* I 59037 of 258/7 BC, the writer informs Zenon that the bearer of some official letters, instead of delivering them was "hanging about the house of Aristoboulos in Alexandria, being corrupted" and a papyrus letter about court intrigues further supports the idea that Aristoboulos was a prominent Alexandrian in the middle of the third century BC. He may be identified with the Aristobulos, son of Diodotos, who is documented as the eponymous priest of the Ptolemies under Ptolemy III Euergetes I. Besides the clash in the dates, the

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20 *PE* 13.12.7.


figure of an eponymous priest is hardly compatible with the Jewish philosopher Aristoboulos. Surely, the Alexandrian Jew Dositheos son of Drymilos had been eponymous priest, although later, 3 Maccabees defined him as an apostate Jew who had abandoned his national religion for the sake of his career. 24 At the end of the third century BC, an Aristoboulos was supervising garrisons in the Thebaid and at Coptos, guided by a (Jewish) archiphylakit called Dositheos. P. Tebt. III 1 821.5, of 17 June 209 BC, 25 is the cancelled petition or withdrawal of claims for hybris, including the penalty of 3,000 drachmas, that the Macedonian Histiaea daughter of Histieios sent to Taaouthes (a Semitic name) daughter of Marres; the case was settled out of court, and the document mentions the épseiov of Aristoboulos, a record-office or a tribunal, possibly at Alexandria. 26 Finally, a group of documents show an Alexandrian official called Aristoboulos signed payments to soldiers and scribes and was involved in tax collection. 27 None of these documents seem really compatible with the Jewish Aristoboulos.

3. An edict on Dionysiac hieroi logoi

There is a curious coincidence between Aristoboulos' decision to adapt the Orphic hieros logos to the theology of the Mosaic narrative and the mention of an Aristoboulos checking hieoi logos of Dionysiac priests on a royal edict of an unidentified Ptolemaic king. 28 The edict ordered that all the clergy of Dionysos should present themselves to Aristoboulos in the katalogeion of Alexandria, (a public archive connected with the keeping of census records) 29 and declare their membership in this or that doctrine. It then requested that they put in writing their name next to a sealed copy of their own hieros logos.

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25 + BL Konk. 262 = J. Hengstl, Griechische Papyri, no. 46.


27 P. Stras. VIII 622 (+ BL IX, 329); P. Stras. II 107 25–26 (+ BL IX, 324 and XI, 255); P. Stras. II 105 10. P. Stras. 103–106 (= WG 299, 293, 300, 302, 292, 289) are the correspondence of the stratigos Hermias with Protarchos, in Year 12 of Philometor.

28 Cerfauix, op. cit. (above, n. 19) was the first to suggest this.

29 For W. Clarysse and D. J. Thompson, Counting the People in Hellenistic Egypt 2. Historical Studies (Cambridge 2006) II, 33f. it is not known since when the katalogeion came to be the archive where census records were deposited. On the katalogeion see further R. Taubenschlag, The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri: 332 B.C. – 640 A.D. (Warsaw 1955) 469, n. 63.
By decree of the king. Persons who perform the rite of Dionysos in the country shall sail down within 10 days from the day on which the decree is published and those beyond Naukratis within 20 days, and shall register themselves before Aristoboulos at the registration-office within three days from the day on which they arrive, and shall declare forthwith from what persons they have received the transmission of the sacred rites for three generations back and shall hand in the sacred book sealed up, each inscribing thereon his own name.30

The date of the edict is controversial. The document was written across the fibres on the back of a papyrus roll, preserving on the front a loan of 215/14 BC,31 and thus has been assigned to the years after 215. Turner, however, thought that the back of the papyrus was written before the front, as public documents were generally written before private ones, and the edict should thus be dated before 215 BC.32 However, there is no guarantee that a public document (especially in local archives) could not be written on the back of an earlier document, and, in fact, the standard papyrological habit was to write on the front first: in Ptolemaic and Roman public documents the most common interval between the writing on the front and the writing on the back (that is, between recto and verso) is between 50 and 100 years—obviously, this is a rule of thumb (albeit taken from a range of documents), and there are exceptions.33 At present, however, the most commonly held opinion has gone back to the view that BGU 1211 is to be


31 BGU VI 1277.


dated after 215/14 BC. If we follow the "rule" of the 50–100 years, moreover, we could hypothesize that the edict was issued approximately between 165 and 115 BC.

The purpose of the edict is also at the centre of the scholarly debate. According to most scholars, the king who speaks in the edict is Ptolemy Philopator. For some, the king wanted to unify the innumerable mystery cults present in Egypt by establishing a unique official cult of Dionysos. For others, he aimed to register those who participated in secret mystery sects in the chōra, in order to limit them, maintain control over them, or do away with them. Some hypothesize that the king, being in financial need, introduced a new tax on priests and wanted to assess the people liable to it, in order to promote the cult of Dionysos, of whom he was a most devout worshipper, or to exercise control over the activities of a group of Dionysiac performers.

The identification of the king in BGU 1211 – unidentified in the document – with Ptolemy Philopator may have been also suggested by the fact that an edict of Philopator concerning a census and fiscal privileges for worshippers of Dionysos is mentioned in 3 Maccabees, an anonymous book written probably by an Egyptian Jew in the late second or first century BC, to celebrate the courage and firmness

34 Bagnall and Derow, op.cit. (above, n. 30) no. 160.

36 According to J. Tondriau, op.cit. (above, n. 35) royal thiasoi were created at the court of Philopator as associations of drinkers under the patronage of Dionysos. Eratosthenes and Polybius, echoed by Plutarch, talk about the debaucheries of Philopator and his court (Eratosthenes in Athenaeus VII 276 a–c = FGH 241 F 16; Polybius 5, 34, 10 and 5, 37, 10; Plutarch, Cleomenes 33, 2; 34, 2 and 36, 7). Justinus 30, 1 also reports that the king spent his time in drinking parties and played the harp. Tondriau, "Le décret ...," (above, n. 35) 84–95, argues that the edict does not refer to any synod (Schubart), but to a census (Wilcken); in "La dynastie Ptolémaïque ...," (above, n. 35) Tondriau explains that technitai of Dionysos were personnel of thiasoi, e.g. musicians and actors, and investigates the iconography of Philopator as Neos Dionysos. Finally, in "Tatouage ...," (above, n. 35) he suggests that in Ptolemaic Egypt the cult of Dionysos was subject to many syncretistic associations, e.g. Dionysos-Attis-Ammon and, thus, could be confused with the worship of other gods.

37 Bagnall and Derow, op.cit. (above, n. 30) n. 133.
of the Jews of Egypt before the persecutions of the Ptolemies. The contents of 3 Maccabees may be summarised as follows. After defeating Antiochus III in the fourth war of Coele-Syria, Philopator and his army visited the conquered cities and paid homage to their temples, including the temple of Jerusalem, but when he attempted to violate the Holy of Holies, God struck him with a paralysis. Once he came back to Egypt, he took revenge on the Jews: by a royal decree, he ordered a census where the Jews would become slaves unless they embraced the cult of Dionysos, and were to be marked with the ivy-leaf, a symbol of the god. The king promised freedom and isopoliteia, citizenship "equal" to the Alexandrians, to all those who swapped Judaism for Dionysos. Then he ordered that the Jews should gather in the hippodrome, in order to be counted in a census, that actually aimed to confiscate their property, but the census could not be taken because of the high number of the Jews, so the enraged king sent his army and drunken elephants against them. But the prayers of the Jewish priest Eleazar and three different divine interventions made the elephants take fright and run over the Egyptian army, while another miracle (or perhaps, a Jewish concubine) made the king cease the persecution, free the Jews and even grant them permission to dedicate a stele, a prayer-house, and introduce an annual memorial of the events. The census-edict reads:

[Philopator] set up a stele on the tower at the court and inscribed the following: "those who do not make public offerings [sc. to Dionysos] are not to enter their sacred places, but all Judeans are reduced to a menial status and subject to enrolment [laographia kai oiketíkê diathêsis]; those who protest will be carried off forcibly for execution; those who are registered are also to be branded with the ivy-leaf emblem of Dionysus and assigned to their former status." But lest he appear hateful to everyone, he wrote beneath, "If any of them should prefer to adopt the practices of those who have been initiated according to the rites, they will enjoy equal civic rights with the Alexandrians."46

Indeed, the phrasing and content of this "literary edict" seem to have little in common with the "documentary edict" in BGU 1211, which does not mention any measures concerning the Jews. According to Josephus, moreover, the persecution of Jews that 3 Maccabees attributes to Philopator took place:

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39 3 Macc 1.8–29.
40 Ibid. 2.23–28.
41 Ibid. 2.31–3.11. On the Jewish aspiration to isopoliteia see Barclay, op.cit. (above, n. 2) 60–71.
42 3 Macc 3.12–19.
43 Ibid. 4.
46 Ibid. 2.27–33. Translation from A New English Translation of the Septuagint (Oxford 2007).
place later, under Ptolemy Euergetes II Physcon (145–116 BC). Since under Philopator most of the people in Judaea were pro-Egyptian, many being mercenary soldiers in the Ptolemaic army, it is unlikely that the king chose to have such bad relations with the Jews.

Nonetheless, that Philopator ordered a census involving property and slaves is confirmed by the documentary papyri. Several declarations of house-property and documents recording payments on properties attest a census of property under Philopator, and precisely from November 209 to January 208 BC. Clarysse and Thompson report that Ptolemy III Euergetes I first instituted a systematic census of property in 229 BC in connection with a 2% fiscal levy, to which we should link the edict of Philopator, mentioned in a document of 12 December 209 BC. Another piece of official correspondence written between 13 December 209 and 11 January 208 BC preserves a letter of the dioikêtês Theogenes to the epimeleítês Apollonios, with the injunction not to accept declarations from people with privileged land, and in another document, the dioikêtês Theogenes grants an extension of 30 days to taxpayers for submitting apographai of property in January 208 BC. These were probably the officials in charge of the census of 209/208. Moreover, a petition to Philopator of 210 BC contains the earliest known allusion to the katalogeion, which may have been created in this period. The edict in BGU 1211, thus, could have been a standard Ptolemaic edict ordering a census or a property census, a registration of slaves and of privileged classes, and might have included the Jews as slaves or prisoners of war, even if it was not a specific anti-Jewish provision that aimed to exterminate them.

In their recent study, Willy Clarysse and Dorothy Thompson have shown that the aim of the Ptolemaic census was both to raise the salt tax or halikê, and conversely, to exempt special groups from taxation. Under Philadelphos and throughout the Hellenistic period, both in Egypt and outside, the guilds of priests and Dionysiac performers called "technitai of Dionysos" enjoyed tax exemptions, as they

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48 The king’s three-month trip to Coele-Syria and Jerusalem is documented also by Polybius V 86–87, but the information that the Jews rebelled against Philopator is false, according to Momigliano, op.cit. (above, n. 44) 585 ff.

49 See Clarysse and Thompson, op.cit. (above, n. 29) II, 17, n. 38; 25f. nn. 75–78, with reference to P.Cair.Cat. 10274 = W.Chr. 224, P.Petrie III 72 (a) = W.Chr. 222 (declaration of property), W.Chr. 221 = UPZ I 116 = C.Pap.Hengstl. 20 (prostagma relating to a census of landed property), P.Lond. III 1200, pp. 2–3 = C.Ord.Ptol. All. 28 (receipt for enkyklion), P.B.Meg. 10750 = SB 9599 = C.Ord.Ptol. All. 30 (receipt for enkyklion), P.Edfou 5 = C.Ord.Ptol. All. 31, P.Lond. VII 2189, P.Cair. inv. 10295, all connected with the census of property held by Philopator in 209 BC. On the census of property of 209 BC, cf. documents and bibliography in C.Ord.Ptol. All. 28–32, P.Heb. I, p. 63 ff, P.Heid. VII 390, house declaration from Krokodilopolis, and the house declaration 392 (13–22/12 209). Cf. also the evaluations of immovable properties in P.Petr. III 70 (a), and the declarations of property SB XXIV 16063, all from 209/208, as well as some sales of houses immediately preceding the census.

50 Cf. C.Ord.Ptol. 28.
51 W.Chr. 224.1–11.
52 P.Tebr. III.1 705.
53 P.Edfou 5.
54 P.Tebr. III.1 770.
55 Cf. Clarysse and Thompson, op.cit. (above, n. 29) Chapter 3.
played a key role in the dynastic cult of the Ptolemies. The grant of tax privileges to Greek performers, along with teachers of Greek and victors in Greek-style games, "symbolised the privileged treatment of Hellenised classes." All this data suggest that both the census of Jewish slaves mentioned in 3 Maccabees and the Dionysiac census mentioned in BGU 1211 may have been reminiscent of the census of 209/208 BC or of analogous operations of census of property and slaves.

This interpretation would help to explain why, in 3 Maccabees, the Jews lament that they have to declare properties and risk becoming slaves: actually, the census served to register the booty of the Syrian campaigns of Philopator after the battle of Raphia (217 BC), and specifically, to count the Jewish prisoners of war. In the edifying perspective of the book, Philopator's decision to free the Jewish slaves is seen as a miracle, but an analogous operation of "Amnesty" and manumission of prisoners of war was done by Ptolemy II Philadelphos as indicated by the Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates (§ 22) and also by other Ptolemies, such as Ptolemy Euergetes II Physcon in 145 BC. Some Jews might have considered converting to the religion of Dionysos in order to avoid slavery and join the upper class, although 3 Maccabees proudly points out that "only a few were tempted to worship the king, but the majority abhorred those who parted from them." 3 Maccabees specifies that the census lasted for 40 days, from 25 Pachon (20 May) to 4 Epeiph (28 June), and that the Jews were supposed to be registered in three days from 5 to 7 Epeiph, while their safe return home is dated to 14 Epeiph (8 July). These dates, however, do not agree with the dates in the property declarations from the Arsinoite, all coming from November-December 209 BC.

However, there is no guarantee that the king in BGU 1211 is Philopator. In my view BGU 1211 is to be attributed to either Ptolemy VI Philometor (181–145 BC) or Ptolemy Euergetes II "Physcon" (145–116 BC). As a matter of fact, BGU 1211 was written on the back of a document of 215/214 BC, and the common practice was to let 50–100 years pass before writing on the back of an already used roll (it is difficult to believe that a document was kept in the archives for five or ten years only, as do those who think that BGU 1211 was issued by Philopator before his death in 210 BC). Therefore, the fact that BGU 1211

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56 Cf. ibid. II, 52 with reference to the letter P.Hal. I 260–265 of 256 BC: "Apollonios to Zoilos, greetings. We have exempted the [teachers] of letters, the athletic coaches, those practising the affairs of Dionysus, and victors at the games in Alexandria … from the tax on salt, both these individuals and [their household members] etc." Ταπέινηδεύοντας τα περι των Διόνυσου is found in Diodorus Siculus IV 5.4 and Artemidorus Oneir. I 18. An alternative restoration could be, like in BGU VI 1211, τελούντας κτλ. For evidence of technitai in the Greek world, cf. Clarysse and Thompson, op.cit. (above, n. 29) II, 135 ff. and n. 50. By the mid-third century BC, 228 technitai, 107 males, are documented in the Herakleides meris of the Arsinoite nome.

57 Clarysse and Thompson, op.cit. (above, n. 29) II, 129.

58 Ps.-Arist. 12–27 claims that Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282–246 BC) issued a decree freeing all Jewish slaves of war. For Pseudo-Aristeas, Ptolemy issued 20 drachmas to everyone who owned a Jewish slave, while Josephus, AJ XII 11–33 exaggerated it to 120 drachmas. On the Amnesty Decrees of Physcon in 145 BC, and their possible link to 3 Maccabees, see Capponi, op.cit. (above, n. 35).

59 3 Macc 2, 30–23. Probably, the majority of the Jews despised the Dionysiac cult and its worshippers (including the king!), because of their promiscuous and debauched lifestyle. On the bad reputation of Dionysiac artists, cf. Clarysse and Thompson, op.cit. (above, n. 29) II, 136, n. 54 with reference to Aristotle, Problems 956b10 "why are the technitai of Dionysus mostly scoundrels?" and Artemidorus, Oneir. I 18.
is on the back of a document of 215/214 BC should point to a date between 165 and 115 BC, that is, in the reigns of either Philometor or Physcon.

Also the census described in 3 Macc probably refers to a later king, not Philopator. Let us go back to the information in Josephus (C.Ap. II 55) that the whole story of the census in 3 Macc referred to an historical event to be dated in the time of Physcon, around 145 BC. Josephus "corrects" 3 Macc in a way that lets us believe that he had better sources on the origins of this narrative. What if the edict in BGU 1211, that is so similar to the core idea of 3 Macc, was also created at the time of Philometor or Physcon? The mention of Aristoboulos in the document is compatible with this context and date, as the Jewish Aristoboulos is known to have been the teacher of Philometor. Surely Aristoboulos would be the perfect censor of the hieroi logoi of the Dionysiac worshippers, as he was a fine connoisseur of the intricate relationships between Dionysiac religion and Judaism. It is even possible that either Philometor or Physcon allowed Aristoboulos and the most rigorous Jews of Egypt to use the census information to check whether any "apostate" Jews were worshipping Dionysos.60

4. Summary

This paper has argued that the registration of Dionysiac performers mentioned in the aforementioned edict (BGU 1211) probably took place in the context of a general census of property and slaves. Philopator took a similar census in the aftermath of his Syrian campaigns, in order to count the booty and the slaves captured, but many other Ptolemaic kings, from Philadelphos to Physcon, did the same after their military campaigns, thus there is no guarantee that BGU 1211 is of the time of Philopator, and actually, if we take into account that the edict is written on the back of a document of 215/14 BC, it is likely that it was issued between 165 and 115 BC, that is, under Philometor or Physcon. BGU 1211 might have been issued in the context of the immigration of a Jewish military community along with the exiled high priest Onias at the time of the Maccabean revolt in the 160s BC, when Philometor offered these Jews land and the possibility to have their own temple at Leontopolis (Heliopolite nome), and added the Jewish garrisons to the Ptolemaic army. The arrival of Onias and his Jews and the foundation of the temple of Leontopolis led to a profound reform of Judaism in Egypt. Onias claimed that he was restoring a "purer" form of Judaism; according to Josephus (AJ XIII 76), he criticised the irregular customs of the Jews of Egypt, who were assimilating to their Egyptian context,61 and explicitly said that he should aim to rectify this, by establishing at Leontopolis a "pure" sacrificial rite, respectable in the eyes of Jerusalem, and valid for all the Jews of Egypt. Basically Onias, after the profound changes brought by the Maccabean revolt, and the creation of a more nationalistic and independent Jewish state, wanted to put an end to the excessive "integration" of many Jews of Egypt, by exhorting them to stay within the proper Jewish religion.62 3 Maccabees, too, echoes the debate among the Jewish immigrants, whether they should assimilate to Greek religion, in order to get social


62 L. Capponi, op.cit. (above, n. 61) Chapter 3 on the religious reforms of Onias in Egypt, and in particular, 3.4. on the conversion of "Egyptianised" Jews.
advancement at Alexandria, or remain loyal to their ancestral laws. The book laments that many Egyptian Jews embraced the religion of Dionysos in order to obtain social advancement, such as jobs in the Greek administration, and openly condemns this form of integration.\(^{63}\)

If \textit{BGU} 1211 was written under Philometor or Physcon, it would be intriguing to think that the census of the \textit{hieroi logoi} of the Dionysiac worshippers was part of a census of slaves and prisoners of war where the Jews also played a role. It may have been the world of Philometor and Aristoboulos, in the 160s, or to the census and "miraculous" amnesty that Physcon granted to the Jews, including Onias, the founder of Leontopolis, around 145 BC according to the Josephean interpretation of \textit{3 Maccabees}.\(^{64}\) Aristoboulos' dates are compatible with both hypotheses, although I think that it is more likely that Aristoboulos was the major Jewish intellectual figure \textit{before} the arrival of Onias IV in Egypt and the foundation of the temple of Leontopolis in the 150s BC. The date of the aforementioned Letter (in \textit{2 Macc} 1.7–9) of Judas the Maccabee to the Jews of Egypt and to Aristoboulos, in 164 BC, must be acceptable and realistic, even if the letter is a fake, and also the offer of Judas to send to Aristoboulos the sacred books of the Bible from Jerusalem could be linked to the activity of Aristoboulos as censor of \textit{hieroi logoi} in \textit{BGU} 1211. Interestingly, if we hypothesise that the edict was written on the back of the papyrus roll 50 years after the front was written, we should date it to 165 BC, a date which is very compatible with the aforementioned reference to Aristoboulos in \textit{2 Macc}.

To sum up, it is likely in my view that the census of Dionysiac worshippers to which \textit{BGU} 1211 refers probably belongs to the age of Philometor and Aristoboulos (181–145 BC), and perhaps, to a date around 165 BC. Aristoboulos was taking efforts (like later, Philo) to shore up the faith of the Jews of Alexandria and Egypt, who faced the temptation of apostasy, and often embraced the cult of Dionysos, by arguing that the Orphic-Dionysiac \textit{hieros logos} was an adaptation of the Jewish cosmology, and that the best pagan philosophers and theologians "plagiarized" Moses. Naturally, Aristoboulos was also trying to convince to his royal pupil, king Philometor, that the Jews were neither foreigners nor barbarians, but had a religion based on the highest moral values, and thus deserved a respectable place in Ptolemaic society.

\(^{63}\) An important theme in \textit{3 Maccabees} is the elimination of the apostate Jews of Egypt. According to \textit{3 Maccabees} 7:10–16, after the miracle in the hippodrome, the Jews asked the king to eliminate the "apostates among them."