PART I

INTERPRETING RITUAL TEXTS
In the *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* §§128–171, the Jewish high priest, Eleazar, who speaks to the delegation sent from Ptolemy II to Jerusalem in order to fetch the scholars who would translate the Law into Greek, presents an *apologia* for Judaism, primarily organized around a criticism of Gentile idol worship and an allegorical interpretation of the Jewish food laws.  

Included in this rather long section, Ps.-Aristeas describes in §§158–160 three Jewish ritual practices: the wearing of fringes on clothes, the placing of mezuzot on doors and gates, and the binding of phylacteries (tefilin) on the hands. Through the consistent deployment of similar vocabulary, Ps.-Aristeas specifically connects these practices to one of the major themes of the larger *apologia*, that the statutes and commands in the Jewish law, particularly the food laws, have been “set out allegorically” (τροπολογῶν ἐκτέθησαν), and thus they function as “signs” (παράσημον), “symbols” (σημεῖον), and “reminders” (μνεία) for the Jews that the Law contains deeper spiritual truths about the will of God.

While almost all commentators note that *Aristeas* §§158–160 refers to these Jewish ritual practices, we know little about them in the centuries before the rabbis regulated their form and contents, even in light of the discoveries in the Judean desert, among which a number of textile fragments with fringes, thirty fragments of phylacteries and fragments of seven mezuzot were found.  

In fact, outside of the biblical commands, *Aristeas* is the first Jewish text to mention that Jews actually performed these biblical rituals. The passage is worth citing in full at the outset:

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* I am grateful to the editors for the opportunity to contribute to a volume honoring Betsy Halpern-Amaru, who has been a friend and colleague for lo these many years.

1 Although *Aristeas to Philocrates* is not really a letter by the canons of ancient letter writing, the title has become conventional in modern scholarly parlance, and I use it here. I also distinguish between the title of the book and the author by referring to the author as Pseudo-Aristeas, especially since almost unanimously, scholars recognize that a Ptolemaic courtier named Aristeas was not the author of this work. The usual date given to *Aristeas* is somewhere in the middle of the second century B.C.E.

2 For the textiles, see G. M. Crowfoot, “The Linen Textiles,” (*DJD* 1; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 18–38. The phylacteries come from Qumran (Phylactery A–U), Wadi 

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