

**Septuagint, Synagogue, and Symbiosis:
The Jews of Hellenistic Egypt**

Gary A. Rendsburg
Rutgers University

Lanier Theological Library
Houston, Texas

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Empire of Alexander the Great
(356-323 B.C.E.) / (r. 336-323 B.C.E.)



Bust of the
young Alexander
the Great
(c. 100 B.C.E.)

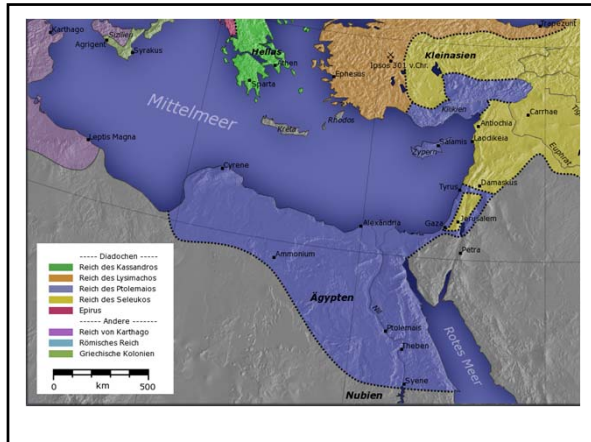
(British Museum)



Cartouche of Alexander the Great
c. 330 B.C.E.
(Louvre, Paris)



The Four Successor Kingdoms to Alexander the Great
Ptolemies – Alexandria, Egypt (blue)
Seleucids – Seleukia / Antioch (golden)



Ptolemy Dynasty 305 B.C.E. – 30 B.C.E.

Founded by Ptolemy I,
general under Alexander

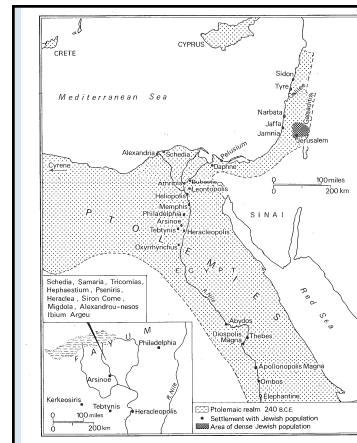
Royal names:
16 kings named Ptolemy
7 queens named Cleopatra
4 queens named Berenike

Jews under Alexander and Ptolemy I

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 12, Chapter 1

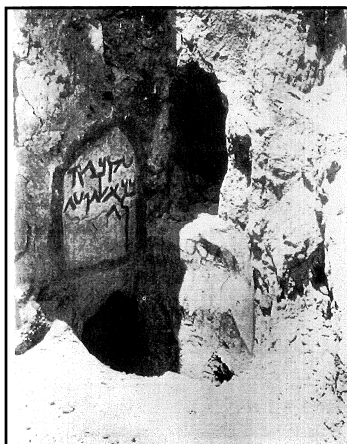
- Ptolemy brought captives from Judea and Jerusalem
- He had heard that the Jews had been loyal to Alexander
- He placed many of them into garrisons

At Alexandria he gave them equal privileges of citizens with the Macedonians themselves; and required of them to take their oaths, that they would keep their fidelity to the posterity of those who committed these places to their care. Nay, there were not a few other Jews, who, of their own accord, went into Egypt, as invited by the goodness of the soil, and by the liberality of Ptolemy.



Map of Ptolemaic Empire

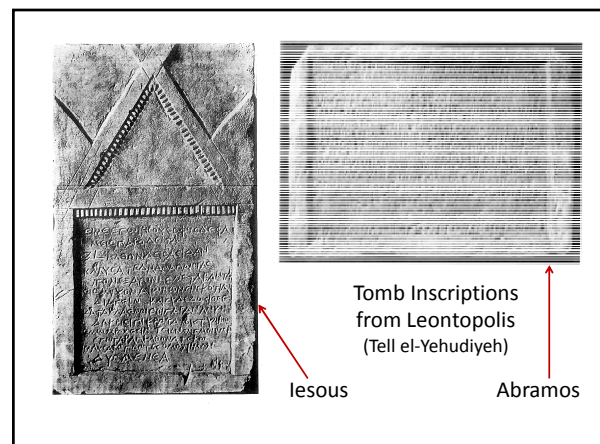
indicating
cities with
Jewish
population



Jewish tomb
Alexandria
c. 275 B.C.E.

עקביה
בן אליועי
ני

Aqavyah ben
Elio'enai



Tomb Inscriptions
from Leontopolis
(Tell el-Yehudiyeh)

Iesous

Abramos

Septuagint The Bible in Greek

Torah translated by Jewish scholars
in Alexandria during the reign of
Ptolemy II Philadelphus
(r. 283-246 B.C.E.)

Prophets and Writings sections
followed within the next century

Great Library
of Alexandria

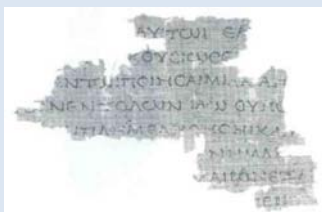
O. Von
Corven
(19th century)



4Q120

Septuagint
fragment of the
book of Leviticus
found at Qumran

c. 50 B.C.E.
(Israel Museum)



Septuagint fragment of the book of Habakkuk
Nahal Hever (near Ein Gedi, Israel)
c. 50 C.E. (Israel Museum)

P. Rylands 548 (Egypt) – John Rylands Library (Manchester)
Fragments of the book of Deuteronomy



2nd century C.E.



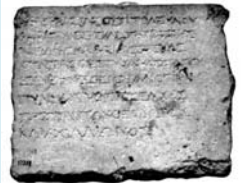
Codex Sinaiticus – 4th century C.E., parchment
Oldest Complete Manuscript of the Septuagint
St Catherine's Monastery > British Library
www.codexsinaiticus.org

Proseuche – forerunner of the Synagogue



Schedia, c. 240 B.C.E.

On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Berenice his sister and wife and their children, the Jews (dedicate) the *proseuche*



Xenephyris, c. 120 B.C.E.

On behalf of King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra the sister and queen Cleopatra the wife, the Jews of Xenephyris (dedicated) the gateway of the *proseuche* when Theodore and Achillion were presiding

More Proseuche Inscriptions



Alexandria, c. 120 B.C.E.

... to God, the Highest... the sacred precinct and the *proseuche* and its appurtenances



Nitriai, c. 120 B.C.E.

On behalf of King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra the sister and queen Cleopatra the wife, Benefactors, the Jews in Nitriai (dedicated) the *proseuche* and its appurtenances



Alexandria, c. 40 B.C.E.

On behalf of the queen and king, for the great God who listens to prayer, Alypus made the *proseuche* in the 15th year, Mecheir...



Alexandria (?), c. 40 B.C.E.

Papous built the *proseuche* on behalf of himself and his wife and children. In the 4th year, Pharmouthi 7.



Alexandria (?), c. 40 B.C.E.

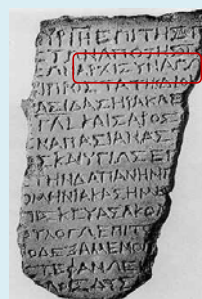
On the orders of the queen and the king, in place of the previous plaque about the dedication of the *proseuche*, let what is written below be written up. King Ptolemy Euergetes (proclaimed) the *proseuche* inviolate.

The queen and the king gave the order.



Alexandria, 3 C.E.

... Hathyr 18, in the ... of those from the ... *archisynagogos* (or -oi) ... *archiprostates* ... Since Brasidas son of Herakleides ... 33rd year of Caesar ... in all ... and soundly, ... the expense ... days ... repair ... by word in ... crown ... with two ...



Alexandria, 3 C.E.

... Hathyr 18, in the ... of those from the ... *archisynagogos* (or -oi) ... *archiprostates* ... Since Brasidas son of Herakleides ... 33rd year of Caesar ... in all ... and soundly, ... the expense ... days ... repair ... by word in ... crown ... with two ...

Theodotus Synagogue Inscription
Jerusalem, 1st century C.E.



Theodotus Synagogue Inscription
Jerusalem, 1st century C.E.

Theodotus, son of Vettenus, priest and archisynagogue, son of an archisynagogue, grandson of an archisynagogue, built the synagogue for the reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments, and the guest house and the rooms and the water supplies as an inn for those who came from abroad, which [synagogue] his fathers had founded and the elders and the Simonides.



Symbiosis

Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagoge*
2nd century B.C.E.

Greek-style drama in 5 acts
269 lines extant
Iambic trimeter, à la Euripides
Replete with monologue by Moses
Messenger arrives to report on the battle

Symbiosis

Philo the Poet, *Jerusalem*
2nd century B.C.E.

Epic poem
Only 29 lines survive
Hexameter (à la *Iliad* and *Odyssey*)
Includes episode about Abraham
Praises the springs and water system
in Jerusalem

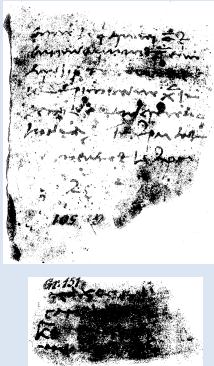
Symbiosis

Philo the Philosopher
c. 25 B.C.E. – c. 50 C.E. / *voluminous writings*

The Bible is the source of both religious revelation
and philosophic truth
Allegorical approach to Scripture
Elements of Plato, Pythagoras, and the Stoics
combined with Judaism
Questions and Answers to Genesis and Exodus
Describes reading of Torah in the Synagogue on
Sabbath

The Occupations of the Jews

253 B.C.E. – Pasis the wool merchant
241 B.C.E. – Samoelis the vine-dresser
218 B.C.E. – Seos the wool merchant
2nd cent B.C.E. – Ioudas son of Dositheos the farmer
2nd cent B.C.E. – Sabbataios son of Horos and his son
Dosas, potters
2nd cent B.C.E. – Iapheas son of Dositheos the weaver
2nd cent B.C.E. – Iakoubis son of Iakoubis the flute-player
78 C.E. – Tryphas son of Nikon, the farmer (Edfu)
89 C.E. – Philoppos son of Thedetos, the donkey-driver



Ostracon recording wine-tax paid by Aristomenes the Jew (Thebes, 161 B.C.E.)

Ostracon, recording distribution of wheat or some such agricultural product, includes mention of someone named Sambaton (Upper Egypt, 2nd century B.C.E.)



Jews as soldiers in the Ptolemaic Army

210 B.C.E. (Fayum)

- Theophilos son of Dositheos
- Philistion [son of . . .]
- Timaos son of Telouphis

All three Jews of the Epigone (reserves)

(P. Gurob 8 – Trinity College, Dublin)

Jews as soldiers in the Ptolemaic Army


174 B.C.E. (Fayum)

P. Tebtinus 818 (recto) (Berkeley)

Jews as soldiers in the Ptolemaic Army (174 B.C.E. – Fayum)


Ioudas son of Iosephos, Jew of the Epigone
 Agathokles son of Ptolemy, Jew of the infantry
 Ananias son of Ionathas, Jew of the Epigone

Deinias son of Aineas
 Thrases son of Sosibios
 Thebon son of Phanokles
 Samaelos son of Ioanes
 Four Jews of the Epigone



Jews as soldiers in the Ptolemaic Army (174 B.C.E. – Fayum)

- Theodoros son of Theodoros, who is also called Samaelos
- Nikanor son of Iason, both Jews of the First Hipparchy



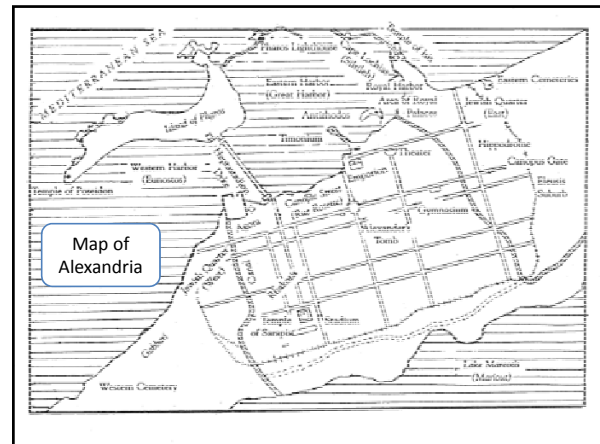

Jews as soldiers in the Ptolemaic Army

107 BCE

- Civil War between Cleopatra III and her son Ptolemy IX
- The former appointed as her generals Chelkias and Ananias, sons of Onias (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, Book 13)

1st century BCE inscription:

Eleazaros son of Nikolaos, the officer, (has dedicated) the sundial and the well on behalf of himself and his wife, Eirene.

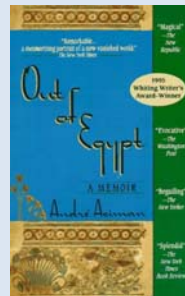


Coda

Jews continued to live in Egypt in large numbers throughout late antiquity (Roman and Byzantine periods) and into the Middle Ages (Muslim period).

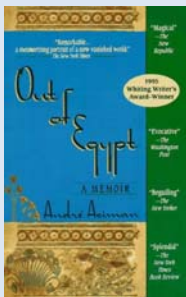
Largest community shifted from Alexandria to Cairo in the 10th century, where Maimonides would serve as leading rabbinical authority in the 12th century.

Coda



At least until 1956, when Jews began to leave Egypt *en masse* during the anti-Israel fervor stirred up by Gamal Abdal-Nasser

Coda



André Aciman,
Out of Egypt: A Memoir
(1995)

"[they] would never, ever know, nor even guess, that this was our last night in Alexandria."