



Alexander Legacy with the Jews

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Shimon the Just was the High Priest in the Temple of Solomon at the time of **Alexander the Great**. They met. On his way from Egypt, after he himself laid out the plans for the future cultural center of the Hellenized World, the city of **Alexandria**, on his march to Mesopotamia to battle **Darius** at Gaugamela, Alexander was passing through Palestine. Some local archons urged him to destroy the Jewish Temple. He marched to Jerusalem. Shimon donned the white priestly garments that he wore on the **Yom Kippur** (day of atonement) holiday when he would enter the inner sanctum of the Temple and went out to meet Alexander. He offered him the symbolic welcome of bread with a blessing. To the surprise of his entourage, upon seeing Shimon, Alexander dismounted and prostrated himself before the **High Priest**.

Encouraged, Shimon took Alexander on a tour of the Temple. Alexander was very impressed and offered a marble bust of him to be placed in the Temple courtyard. Shimon explained that it was forbidden by the **Law of Moses** for the Jews to have images or statues, and certainly not in the Temple. He suggested an alternative way to give homage to the Emperor: that all **male babies** born that year would receive the name "Alexander". The Macedonian king accepted, and that is how "**Alexander**" became a **Jewish name**.

Following Alexander's death and the wide spread of Greek civilization throughout the known world, the Jews adopted **Hellenism** wholeheartedly, Apostle Paul being a prime example. I too was born in **Veroia** [*Berea*], the city that Apostle Paul visited [*see article on page 5 by Taiganides*] and I survived the anti-Semitic Holocaust of the **Nazis** thanks to the support of the local followers of **Apostle Paul**. I am Greek and now a Greek-American of the Jewish faith.

The Synagogue you see in the picture is the one I attended, and according to tradition the same one where Apostle Paul preached. As required by our Gymnasium, I attended also church services on special occasions with my fellow classmate **Elissaios Paul Taiganides**.



Jews studied Greek philosophy, which they harmonized with Judaism. A prime example is the Jewish philosopher Philo [*Φίλων ο Αλεξανδρεύς*]. It was said of him "*ή ο Φίλων Πλατωνίζει , ή ο Πλάτων Φιλωνίζει*". Philo Ioudaios lived from 30 BC to 40 AD within the large Jewish and Greek communities of Alexandria, Egypt. Influenced by Greek philosophers, like **Plato**, Philo wrote some of his many books in Greek reflecting a Hellenized version of Judaism that was different from that of orthodox Judaism of Jerusalem.

The first translation of the **Old Testament** Jewish Scriptures to another language was in **Greek**, known as the Septuagint translation by 70 scholars. It had been commissioned by King **Ptolemy** [*one of the leading generals of Alexander*] for the sake of the thousands of Jews who lived in **Alexandria** and understood Greek better than Hebrew. It was in use in Judea at the time of Jesus. Centuries later, it was translated into Arabic.

