

جمعية الآثار بالإسكندرية
SOCIÉTÉ ARCHÉOLOGIQUE
D'ALEXANDRIE

BULLETIN

N° 49



Part II

Alexandria

2015

BULLETIN

N° 49

Proceedings of the International Conference
Alexandria: Current Archaeological
Activities and Future Perspectives

Organized on the occasion of the 120th
Anniversary of the Archaeological Society
of Alexandria

Bibliotheca Alexandrina
7-9 April 2013

Edited by
Mona Haggag

This volume is dedicated to the memory of

Azza Karara

Significant and exceptional member of the society

**Many People, Many Possibilities:
Proposals for Future Subjects in Alexandrian Heritage
Management Written from a German Perspective**

An Outline¹

GABRIELE ZIETHEN

Alexandria belongs just as much to the most vivid mega-cities and trading-centres of Antiquity as to the most controversial places from recent point of social living together. Although the foundation by Alexander the Great became one of the latest planned and developed places in the thousands of years old history of Egypt, the city can be seen as a special symbol of the Egyptian perspective and the circle of settled Mediterranean coastal sites. Alexandria in fact was a creation by Alexander the Great's all-embracing perspective of a changing world bound under the idea of Graeco-Mediterranean traditions with its social melting pot of several ethnics, restless social living forms, different traditions of law, religion and identity². However, ancient Romans felt that this irritating and important city was not typical for Egypt in general; as an independent administrative community defined by Greek law, the city belonged in a special way politically to Egypt, but from point of commerce and culture also to the many neighbours at the Mediterranean coasts which also persisted in the tradition of their special legal status: so Romans named the city "*Alexandrea ad Aegyptum*" – Alexandria, the City next to/close to Egypt.

The city's name embraces contrasts in culture and living style, religion and belief, rich and poor. The antique lighthouse sent its shining rays in order to guide sailors, captains and pilots; *Museion* with the library enlightened science and minds, the world of mighty and glamorous Cleopatra³ and the world of learned Hypatia⁴ fascinated contemporaries and descendants of all generations. And finally the Corniche along the Mediterranean coastal site

1 This article is dedicated to Lidija Fatima, the Russian-Alexandrian lady who opened my eyes for the hidden sites of Alexandria.

2 Schmidt, S., 2005: 267-278.

3 Schiff, S., 2013.

4 Dzielska, M., 1995; Lacombrade, Chr., 1994.

makes European visitors the impression to walk along a Mediterranean site opposite of French Nice, only the coloured veils of young ladies seem to make the difference.

During her walks through the city in October 2012 the author of these lines tried to explore the character of the outlined historic and cultural key points also comparing with her impressions from the years before.

Starting an afternoon walk from beautiful Bibliotheca Alexandrina with its growing collections of books and art, there were found the mosaic-stones of the city's character and face. The bookshop of *Al-Qaeid Ibrahīm* mosque opened access to important up-to-day publications of inter-religious dialogues in many European languages, French, English, German and Russian – including an open talk whilst sitting between piles of books. From there I follow the track of tramway – traces of technical heritage – to find access to the daily life centre of the city – under my feet the layers of ancient dwelling, in my mind the Graeco-Roman sources written by famous Alexandrian diplomats, officials and religious staff and around me the colourful enlightened shop-lines facing me to have a glance to the offerings inside. Here I find an old-fashioned wooden interior in a pharmacy, close to the age to be scientifically defined as a movable heritage object (as we know and define by e.g. by German heritage law).

Sunset quickly covers the street silhouette in mild golden-rosé light: showdown before the rising of a mixture of starlight and electric light during evening rush-hour and late night-shopping time. My path leads me more and more towards pulsating heart of the city-centre. Elegant villas and poor homes, expensive cars in their traffic struggle with micro-busses, horse coaches, porters with their luggage and the slowly running tram. Hasty pedestrians, nerved policemen and finally the noise and shouting of revolution and young generation visualize the daily struggle for income, employment and hope for future – accompanied by the prayer-calls. After sundown was completed the city unveils her special character, overcrowded at the public places but too dark and empty in the small streets with their flitting shadows – night time on the other side of social life. Finally the glance of moonlight creating a special shape to the facades of the dying 19th century buildings and forgotten parks whose calm character are the opposite

of the glaring electricity lightening of the gold and silver bazaar in Shari'a Faransa. The evening's dark admonishes promenader to return to residence – how to find out the right way? Asking for the seaside street, Corniche, the Sea was reached – *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum*.

Such recent impressions basically cause the question about future management of historical sites, buildings, parks and excavations places. Are they allowed to be used supporting a national feeling like it was defined in the past – mostly from and in order to dealing with the European perspectives? Or will they be used to find a preference of resurrecting Islamic cultural identity influenced by the yet open-end results of revolution? Should objects from Antiquity and polytheistic culture be fenced as solitaires of a passed world and will Islamic monuments set into a light as a single way to future and in opposite to Jewish and Christian sites?

What will happen with the 19th century buildings of European architects, who in the opinion of many were seen as representatives of a colonial or post-colonial order?

From perspective of a balanced heritage management and taking into consideration the loss of so many cultural monuments in a lot of African and Near Eastern countries during the last thirty years up to now it is to pin-point that the future of heritage monuments will unveil to international community the true character of those who have the official duty to take care for them and to develop the historic sites. A serious taking care for the cultural biography of settled places – as such we can understand old cities – should be motivated by a broad acceptance of the equal cultural value of all objects from all époques – without preference for this or that period of their life. Old cities are like human beings. They have their cradle deep in the underground layers of the streets; they grow up with each new building and they find their rest at burial places and cemeteries. If we would accept a preference, we would take the memories from a biography or we would cut-out the illustrations of a book of life – and finally in worse case the broken characters of each responsible generation would come to daylight.

Because of the crucial problems caused by the recent situation in Egypt in general, archaeologists, historians, heritage management staff and

architects⁵ will have to resist the temptations to sacrifice their humanity and neutrality if they would decide for worshipping a questionable future and questionable mono-thematic style. It should be understood that not only the sites of tourism have to be protected and developed by an adequate management but also the silent places, like single architectural monuments or historic grave areas, equally of their belonging to a special social or ethnic group or religious community.⁶ Tourist sites are important, they “earn” the money to preserve their own existence and to finance the protection of the very special sites and subjects – but how many tourists have forgotten the true meaning and all-embracing importance of what they have seen when they buy the cheap plastic-made “art”-copies at the airport after check-in their over-luggage?

The recent fragility of social public life in Alexandria should be taken into consideration for the next decades. Architects, archaeologists, historians and heritage managers should offer an integrated creative program to schools and university classes in collaboration with teachers of all levels of education in order to fascinate next generation (e.g. school pupils cultural excursions in the city, visiting daily life at historic places): students of classics and humanities can offer programs to schools (workshops, internet-platforms made from the young for the young a.s.): to train themselves for their future profession, to encourage a young auditory to ask questions, to find out the meaning of cultural sites, to make sites and buildings talking to all of those who like to listen the story – and to make them understanding the importance of cultural sites as a part of their own cultural roots and identity. Especially some conservative style of teaching should be improved: instead of the well-known and often tiring monotone guided walks through museum exhibitions there could be thematic or dia-chronological units for young and adult visitors and also creative units of language course in the museum and outside of the classroom or study hall. Cultural education will

5 On recent city-planning projects in Alexandria see: Speer, A., Winterhager, R., 2013. Masterplan of architectural projects in Alexandria:

<http://www.as-p.de/projekte/stadtplanung/208709-masterplan-alexandria.html> (accessed: 15.10.2013).

6 The problem of an increasing vandalism at places of mosques and cemeteries and esp. vandalism against epigraphic objects was discussed in his introducing speech by M. E. Awad on occasion of Fifth International Forum of the Calligraphy, *Writing and Inscriptions in the World throughout the Ages, “Writings and Inscriptions in the Cities and Deserts of North Africa”*, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, October 16-18, 2012.

be the young generations guide to identity, tolerance and understanding. This is much more as any tourist-offering. For individual visitors or tourist groups only such subjects will be visible and comprehensible which are kept alive by the authentic knowledge and cultural identity of the displaying staff, because contemporary Alexandria, too, belongs to both: to Egypt and to the all-connecting Mediterranean culture⁷: *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum*.

7 Concerning antiquity see Schmidt, S., 2005, 276: *“Man kann die Verhältnisse in gewisser Weise mit dem modernen Alexandria des 19. Und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts vergleichen: in dem großen Mittelmeerhafen des arabischen Ägyptens, der von vielen Menschen unterschiedlicher Herkunft bewohnt war, blieben die arabischen Elemente vielfach nur Ornamente des weitgehend europäisch geprägten Lebens. Auch die Bewohner des hellenistischen Alexandrias orientierten sich wohl in der Mehrzahl zur Mittelmeerwelt hin. Von dorthier kam ihr Reichtum durch den Handel, und von dorthier kamen auch die meisten kulturellen Anregungen. Wenn sie ihren Blick auf Ägypten richteten, taten sie es meist mit einer griechisch geprägten Wahrnehmung ...“*

References:

- Dzielska, M., 1995: *Hypathia of Alexandria*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge/Massachusetts.
- Lacombrade, Chr., 1994: Hypathia, in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum 16*, Stuttgart, col. 965-967.
- Schiff, S., 2013: *Kleopatra: Ein Leben*, Aus dem Englischen von H. Ettinger und K. Schuler, Bertelsmann Verlag, München.
- Schmidt, S., 2005: Das hellenistische Alexandria als Drehscheibe des kulturellen Austausches?, in: Beck, H., Bol, P. C., Bückling, M. (eds.), *Ägypten, Griechenland, Rom*, Verlag Wasmuth, Liebieghaus Museum Alter Plastik, Tübingen, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, 267-278.
- Speer, A., Winterhager, R., 2013: Wie plant man mitten im Umbruch?, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, No. 174, 30, Juli 2013, 31 (print-version), electronic version:
<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/stadtbau-in-aegypten-wie-plant-man-mitten-im-umbruch-12310572.html>