

Alexandria

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from an article in the Thompson Chain Reference Bible.

Alexandria, the birthplace of Apollos, was founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Its palaces of the Ptolemies, its wonderful museum, its famed library, and its keenly intellectual populace of Greeks, Jews, and Egyptians made it one of the greatest intellectual and cultural centers of the Roman Empire.

The Septuagint version of the Old Testament (280 to 170 BC) was written at Alexandria, and here, during the first century, lived Philo Judaeus, a brilliant and devout Jew, whose writings on the Logos were in certain respects similar to those of John the Beloved.

Alexandria – *Encyclopedia Britannica*

Arabic AL-ISKANDARIYAH city and urban muhafazah (governorate), Lower Egypt. Once the greatest city of the ancient world and a centre of Hellenic scholarship and science, Alexandria was the capital of Egypt from its founding by Alexander the Great in 332 BC to AD 642, when it was subdued by the Arabs. It is now the second largest city, the centre of a major industrial region, and the chief seaport of Egypt. It lies on the Mediterranean Sea at the western edge of the Nile River delta, about 114 miles (183 km) northwest of Cairo.

Alexandria has always occupied a special place in the popular imagination by virtue of its association with Alexander and with Mark Antony and Cleopatra. Alexandria also played a key role in passing on Hellenic culture to Rome and was a centre of scholarship in the theological disputes over the nature of Christ's divinity that divided the early church. The legendary reputation of ancient Alexandria grew through a thousand years of serious decline following the Arab conquests, during which time virtually all traces of the Greco-Roman city disappeared. By the time Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, Alexandria had been reduced to a fishing village. The modern city and port that flourished on the back of the cotton boom in the 19th century has, therefore, little in common with the Alexandria of the past.

The free port status granted Alexandria by the Ottoman Turks accentuated the cultural ambivalence inherent in the city's location—extended along a spit of land with its back to Egypt and its face to the Mediterranean. This idea of a free city, open to all manner of men and ideas, was something the new Alexandria had in common with the old. It was a theme the Greek writer Constantine Cavafy, drawing heavily on its legendary past, developed in his poems of the city. This idea of Alexandria, and Cavafy's take on it in particular, was highlighted by the English writer Lawrence Durrell in his four-part novel, *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957-60).

The city site

The modern city extends 25 miles (40 km) east to west along a limestone ridge, 1-2 miles (1.6-3.2 km) wide, that separates the salt lake of Maryut, or Mareotis—now partly drained and cultivated—from the Egyptian mainland. An hourglass-shaped promontory formed by the silting up of a mole (the Heptastadium), which was built soon after Alexandria's founding, links the island of Pharos with the city centre on the mainland. Its two steeply curving bays now form the basins for the Eastern Harbor and the Western Harbor.

The prevailing north wind, blowing across the Mediterranean, gives Alexandria a markedly different climate from that of the desert hinterland. The summers are relatively temperate, although humidity can build up in July and in August, the hottest month, when the average temperature reaches 87 °F (31 °C). Winters are cool and invariably marked by a series of violent storms that can bring torrential rain and even hail. The mean daily temperature in January, which is the coldest month, is 64 °F (18 °C).

The city plan

Designed by Alexander's personal architect, Dinocrates, the city incorporated the best in Hellenic planning and architecture. Within a century of its founding, its splendors rivaled anything known in the ancient world. The pride of ancient Alexandria and one of the Seven Wonders of the World was the great lighthouse, the Pharos of Alexandria, which stood on the eastern tip of the island of Pharos. Reputed to be more than 350 feet (110 meters) high, it was still standing in the 12th century. In 1477, however, the sultan Qa'it Bay used stones from the dilapidated structure to build a fort (named for him), which stands near or on the original site of the Pharos. In 1994 archaeologist Jean-Yves Empereur of the Centre for Alexandrian Studies (Centre d'Etudes Alexandrines) found many of the stones and some statuary that had belonged to the lighthouse in the waters off Pharos Island. The Egyptian government planned to turn the area into an underwater park to allow divers to see the archaeological remains of the lighthouse.

The Canopic Way (now Al-Hurriyah Avenue) was the principal thoroughfare of the Greek city, running east and west through its centre. Most of

the Ptolemaic and, later, Roman monuments stood nearby. The Canopic Way was intersected at its western end by the Street of the Soma (now An-Nabi Danyal Street), along which is the legendary site of Alexander's tomb, thought to lie under the mosque An-Nabi Danyal. Close to this intersection was the Mouseion (museum), the city's academy of arts and sciences, which included the great Library of Alexandria. At the seaward end of the Street of the Soma were the two obelisks known as Cleopatra's Needles. These obelisks were given in the 19th century to the cities of London and New York. One obelisk can be viewed on the banks of the River Thames in London and the other in Central Park in New York City.

Between Al-Hurriyah Avenue and the railway station is the Roman Theatre, which was uncovered in 1959 at the Kawm al-Dikkah archaeological site. At the southwestern extremity of the ancient city are the Kawm ash-Shuqafah burial grounds, with their remarkable Hadrianic catacombs dating from the 2nd century AD. Nearby, on the site of the ancient fort of Rakotis, is one of the few classical monuments still standing: the 88-foot- (27-metre-) high marble column known as Pompey's Pillar (actually dedicated to Diocletian soon after 297). Parts of the Arab wall, encompassing a much smaller area than the Greco-Roman city, survive on Al-Hurriyah Avenue, but the city contracted still further in Ottoman times to the stem of the promontory, now the Turkish Quarter. It is the oldest surviving section of the city, housing its finest mosques and worst slums.

Rome and the Church

The decline of the Ptolemies in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC was matched by the rise of Rome. Alexandria played a major part in the intrigues that led to the establishment of imperial Rome.

It was at Alexandria that Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemies, courted Julius Caesar and claimed to have borne him a son. Her attempts at restoring the fortunes of the Ptolemaic dynasty, however, were thwarted by Caesar's assassination and her unsuccessful support of Mark Antony against Caesar's great-nephew Octavian. In 30 BC Octavian (later the emperor Augustus) formally brought Alexandria and Egypt under Roman rule. To punish the city for not supporting him, he abolished the Alexandrian Senate and built his own city at what was then the suburb of ar-Raml. Alexandria,

however, could not be ignored, since it held the key to the Egyptian granary on which Rome increasingly came to rely; and the city soon regained its independence.

St. Mark, the traditional author of the second Synoptic Gospel, is said to have been preaching in Alexandria in the mid-1st century AD. Thenceforth, the city's growing Christian and Jewish communities united against Rome's attempts to impose official paganism. Periodic persecutions by various early emperors, especially by Diocletian beginning in 303, failed to subdue these communities; and, after the empire had formally adopted Christianity under Constantine I, the stage was set for schisms within the church.

The first conflict that split the early church was between two Alexandrian prelates, Athanasius and Arius, over the nature of Christ's divinity. It was settled in 325 by the adoption of the Creed of Nicaea, which affirmed Christ's spiritual divinity and branded Arianism—the belief that Christ was lower than God—as heresy. Arianism, however, had many imperial champions, and this sharpened the conflict between the Alexandrian church and the state. In 391 Christians destroyed the Sarapeum, sanctum of the Ptolemaic cult and what Cleopatra had saved of the great Mouseion library. In 415 a Christian faction killed the Neoplatonist philosopher Hypatia, and Greek culture in Alexandria quickly declined.

After the ascendancy of the patriarchate of Constantinople—to which the see of Alexandria answered after the division of the Roman Empire in 364—the local church adopted Monophysitism (belief in the single nature and therefore physical divinity of Christ) as a way of asserting its independence. Although Monophysitism was rejected by the Council of Chalcedon (451), the Alexandrian church resisted Constantinople's attempts to bring it into line. An underground church developed to oppose the established one and became a focus of Egyptian loyalties. Disaffection with Byzantine rule created the conditions in which Alexandria fell first to the Persians, in 616, and then to the Arabs, in 642.

The Islamic period

The Arabs occupied Alexandria without resistance. Thenceforth, apart from an interlude in 645 when the city was briefly taken by the Byzantine fleet, Alexandria's fortunes were tied to the new faith and culture emanating from the Arabian Desert. Alexandria soon was eclipsed politically by the new Arab capital at al-Fustat (which later was absorbed into the modern capital, Cairo), and this city became the strategic prize for those wanting to control Egypt. Nevertheless, Alexandria continued to flourish as a trading centre, principally for textiles and luxury goods, as Arab influence expanded westward through North Africa and then into Europe. The city also was important as a naval base, especially under the Fatimids and the Mamluks, but already it was contracting in size in line with its new, more modest status. The Arab walls (rebuilt in the 13th and 14th centuries and torn down in 1811) encompassed less than half the area of the Greco-Roman city.

Alexandria survived the early Crusades relatively unscathed, and the city came into its own again with the development of the East-West spice trade, which Egypt monopolized. The loss of this trade—which came about after the discovery of the sea route to India in 1498 and the Turkish conquest of Egypt in 1517—was the final blow to the city's fortunes. Under Turkish rule the canal linking Alexandria to the Rosetta branch of the Nile was allowed to silt up, strangling the city's commercial lifeline. Alexandria had been reduced to a small fishing village when Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798.

Alexandria, School of

The first Christian institution of higher learning, founded in the mid-2nd century AD in Alexandria, Egypt. Under its earliest known leaders (Pantaenus, Clement, and Origen), it became a leading centre of the allegorical method of biblical interpretation, espoused a rapprochement between Greek culture and Christian faith, and attempted to assert orthodox Christian teachings against heterodox views in an era of doctrinal flux. Opposing the School of Alexandria was the School of Antioch, which emphasized the literal interpretation of the Bible.