LIBRARY OF THE WRITTEN WORD 3 *The Manuscript World 1*

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ANCIENT LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA?

Edited by Mostafa El-Abbadi
and Omnia Mounir Fathallah
With a Preface by Ismail Serageldin

BRILL

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Library of the Written Word

VOLUME 3

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On the cover: Lecture hall (Auditorium K) of the educational complex at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria (5th–6th century A.D.). © Excavations of the Polish-Egyptian Mission at Kom el-Dikka, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo.

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PREFACE

Ismail Serageldin

Upon assuming my duties as Librarian of Alexandria in 2002, I was determined that the new Library of Alexandria would—like its great namesake, the Ancient Library of Alexandria—be a centre of excellence in the production and dissemination of knowledge, as well as a meeting place for the dialogue of peoples and cultures. The most obvious candidate for the focus of our research efforts would naturally be the Ancient Library and its period. A special project, the Alexandria Project (AP), was born to bring the best scholars to focus on that special early period of Alexandria's history. Much ground has been covered and the fruits of this serious effort will be available to the public in the years to come.

However, of all the topics that concern the public about that period, none is more intriguing than how did the Ancient Library disappear? Regretfully, some publications had created an uncertainty about the topic, which modern scholarship does not share. So it gives me great pleasure to introduce this volume to the reading public, as the first of the volumes to come out of the Alexandria Project, and appropriately dedicated to the topic *What Happened to the Ancient Library of Alexandria?*

Although there has recently been an ever-growing agreement among specialized scholars to accept that the Alexandria Library had long disappeared before the Arab conquest in the seventh century, yet the old controversy has cast its shadow on the minds of many non-specialists who continued to be unclear and remained undecided, to say the least. So we organized a major international Seminar in September 2004. The result was reassuring, as independently a high degree of similarity in opinion was observed among the participant scholars, concerning the fate of the Ancient Library.

The readers of the present volume can easily judge for themselves. For the purpose of this preface, a few examples may suffice to illustrate this fact. Dr. Cherf (USA), after a thorough analysis of Caesar's Alexandrian War in 48 B.C., concludes by endorsing Peter M. Fraser's statement that "we are justified in supposing that the contents of the

Royal Library, if not wholly destroyed, were at least seriously diminished in the fire of 48 B.C."

Professor El-Abbadi (Egypt) deals with the Daughter Library incorporated within the Serapeum. Employing an Alexandrian method of linguistic analysis of the relevant texts, he concludes that "there can hardly be any doubt that the attack on the Serapeum in 391 A.D. put an end to the temple and the Daughter Library."

Professor Dzielska (Poland) considers it as a fact of history that *Hypatia witnessed the destruction of the Serapeum and the Daughter Library*.

In the final section, both professors Qassem (Egypt) and Bernard Lewis (USA) deal with the Arab account of how the Great Library of Alexandria was destroyed by the Arabs after their conquest in 641 A.D. Both refute those accounts as fictitious. Fittingly, Professor Lewis subtitled his paper, *Anatomy of a Myth*. After analyzing modern criticism since the eighteenth century, by Father Renaudot, the distinguished French orientalist, and by the great historian Edward Gibbon, and other subsequent critics, Professor Lewis positively states, "It is surely time that the Caliph ʿUmar and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs, were finally acquitted of this charge."

But if the fate of the Ancient Library is thus authoritatively explained in this volume, another important aspect of Alexandria's early history is also underlined by the scholars. That is the continuation of scholarship beyond the death of Hypatia in 415 A.D. Thus, Professor Dzielska is keen to emphasize that *scholarship in Alexandria did not die with Hypatia.*

Professor Leroux (Canada) traces back to Alexandria a manuscript known as the *Collectio Philosophica*, which has survived from the ninth century in Constantinople. He asserts that *Alexandria was a city of books and readers. Even after the destruction of the Serapeum Library in 391 A.D., each school—for teaching purposes—had its own collection completed and copied from originals from the Library before its final destruction*. He further adds that, "…, the preservation of the collection is a direct result of interaction between institutional and school libraries."

This last statement is corroborated by a conclusion reached by Professor Pearson (USA) about the newly discovered Nag Hammadi collection of Gnostic and non-Gnostic manuscripts, that they were *part of the Library of a Christian monastery of the network of Pachomius in the early fourth century*.

It is thanks to the continuation of many school and monastic libraries that "Alexandrian academic life did not end with the destruction of the

Library," as stated by Dr. Majcherek (Poland) in his study of the newly discovered lecture halls at Kom el-Dikka, dated in Late Antiquity.

Thus, Alexandria was never short of books, and continued to be a renowned seat of learning in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages as established by the contents of our volume. We hope that this and other volumes to come will help link back to that great Alexandrian tradition of scholarship and publication.

Ismail Serageldin
Librarian of Alexandria
Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina
Alexandria, April 2007

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Editors
Mostafa El-Abbadi
Omnia M. Fathallah

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AP	Alexandria Project. Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria
APDCA	Association pour la promotion et la diffusion des connaissances archéologiques
ASAE	*Annales du service des antiquités de l'Égypte*
BA	Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BASP	*Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*
BCH	*Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*
BG	Berlin Gnostic Codex
BiEtud	Bibliothèque d'études. Cairo: IFAO
BIFAO	*Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*
BiGen	Bibliothèque générale. Cairo: IFAO
BIU LSH Lyon	Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Lyon
BSAA	*Bulletin de la société archéologique d'Alexandrie*
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CEDOPAL	Centre de Documentation de Papyrologie Littéraire, Département des sciences de l'antiquité, Université de Liège
CNWS	Centre of Non-Western Studies, Leiden University
CNRS	Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris
DPA	*Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*. Publié sous la direction de Richard Goulet. Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1989–
EtudAlex	Études alexandrines. Cairo: IFAO
GM	*Göttinger Miszellen*. Göttingen, 1972–
IACS	International Association for Coptic Studies
IFAO	Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*, 1873–
Syll^3	Dittenberger, Wilhelm. *Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum*. 3rd ed. 4 vols. in 5. Lipsiae: apud S. Hirzelium, 1915–24
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JDAI	*Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*

JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
MIFAO	Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale. Cairo: IFAO
NAWG	Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codices
OCD^3	*The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Edited by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
P. Oxy.	Oxyrhynchus Papyri
PAM	*Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*. Warsaw: Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University
Pap.	Papyrus
PH	Damascius: *The Philosophical History*. Translated by Polymnia Athanassiadi. Athens: Apamea, 1999.
PLRE	Jones, A. H. M., J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971–1992.
Pyr.	Pyramid Texts
RAPH	Recherches d'archéologie, de philologie et d'histoire. Cairo: IFAO
RE	*Real-Encyclopädie der classischen altertumswissenschaft*. Edited by A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, and W. Kroll. Stuttgart, 1893–
REG	*Revue des études grecques*
SUNY	State University of New York
Wb.	Erman, Adolf and Hermann Grapow. *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*. 6 vols. Berlin, 1926–31
Wb. Belegstellen	Erman, Adolf and Hermann Grapow. *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache: Die Belegstellen*. 5 vols. Leipzig, 1935–53
WWR	World Weather Reports. Washington, D.C.
ZÄS	*Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*. Leipzig & Berlin

CONTRIBUTORS

Authors

William J. Cherf, Project Manager and senior consultant for BORN—a leading business information services consultancy. He is a graduate of Indiana University, Bloomington (B.A., 1974) and Loyola University Chicago (M.A., 1978 and Ph.D., 1984). His specialization is in physical anthropology, ancient Egyptian archaeology and ancient history, respectively. Therefore, his publications range from the forked snake-sticks of Tutankhamen to the carbon-14 dating of Late Roman frontier architecture. He taught at several universities in the USA and performed archaeological excavations in Israel, Greece and Egypt.

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Maria Dzielska, Professor of Roman History at the Institute of History at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. In her research, she focuses on late antique political and intellectual history (especially aspects of Greek intellectual life). She is also interested in political doctrines of the Roman Empire and early Byzantium. She is the author of several books, including *Apollonius of Tyana in Legend and History* (Rome, 1986; Greek edition Athens, 2000), articles and translations of Greek authors into Polish. Her book *Hypatia of Alexandria* (Cambridge, MA and London 1995) has already been published in several languages (English, Greek, Korean, Polish, Spanish and Turkish).

Mostafa A. El-Abbadi, Professor Emeritus of Classical Studies at the University of Alexandria, Egypt, Special Advisor to the Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. He is President of the Archaeological Society of Alexandria (founded 1893). In 1997, he was granted the

Kavafy Award in Ancient Greek Studies, in 1998, the Egyptian National Award of Merit in Social Sciences, and, in 2005, the Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada granted him Doctorat Honoris Causa. He is the author of several books and articles, including *Life and Fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria* (Paris, 1990), which was translated into several languages.

Jean-Yves Empereur, Director of Research at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), founder and Director of the Centre d'Études Alexandrines (CEAlex). He obtained Ph.D. in Archaeology from the University of Paris-IV Sorbonne, France. Under his direction the CEAlex conducts excavation research both underwater and on land. He is the author of several books and articles most of which focus on Alexandrian archaeology and history.

Fayza M. Haikal, Professor of Egyptology at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, the former President of the International Association of Egyptologists. Haikal was the first Egyptian woman to work on the salvage of the monuments of Nubia in 1961. She is the author of several studies in Egyptology, especially editions and publications of ancient Egyptian texts.

Georges Leroux, Professor of Greek Philosophy at the Université du Québec à Montréal. He is the author of numerous books and articles on various topics of ancient philosophy, mainly on the Neoplatonic tradition. Among his valuable publications, a translation of Plato's Republic with introduction and notes (Paris, 2004).

Bernard Lewis, Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at the Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University. He received his Ph.D. in the History of Islam at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His research, teaching and publications cover the period from the advent of Islam until the present day.

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Birger A. Pearson, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at University of California, Santa Barbra. He participated in work sessions on the Nag Hammadi papyri in the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo and contributed in the preparation of the facsimile edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices published under the auspices of UNESCO (1972–1977). He became Director of a Research project at Claremont devoted to the study of the history of Christianity in Egypt from its beginnings up to the Arab conquest. He is the author of several books and articles concerning the subject of his interest.

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Omnia M. Fathallah, Director of Public Services at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA). She is a graduate of the University of Alexandria, Egypt (B.A., 1992), specialized in Classical Studies. In 1993, she began her librarianship career at the BA as a cataloguer of none Arabic monographs. She participated in the organization of many conferences and issued manuals of operations especially for cataloguers. In 2002, she was appointed coordinator of the Alexandria Project (AP). She organized, under the guidance of Prof. Dr. M. A. El-Abbadi, the International Seminar: "*What Happened to the Ancient Library of Alexandria?*" (26–28 September 2004) of which this publication is the scholarly output.

THE ALEXANDRIA PROJECT

The 'Alexandria Project' (AP) is one of the major research projects undertaken by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina since its inception. The Project is designed primarily to serve researchers whose main area of study focuses on the Ancient Library of Alexandria and Alexandrian scholarship as well as other relevant topics. The Project seeks to achieve its goals through stimulating scholarship, promoting research, organizing scholarly workshops, seminars, and conferences as well as developing extensive collections on related topics. It also aims at publishing series of comprehensive studies of which the present volume is the first.

INTRODUCTION

Mostafa El-Abbadi

What Happened to the Ancient Library of Alexandria? is the outcome of an International Seminar organized by the Alexandria Project at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (26–28 September 2004).

The subject was originally suggested by Dr. Ismail Serageldin, the Director of the Library, with the intention of inviting international scholars of different cultural backgrounds to reconsider afresh, at the start of the twenty first century, the long disputed question concerning the fate of the Ancient Library. The final plan developed into a study of the cultural context of the Alexandria Library with special emphasis on the still less explored Late Antiquity. The whole work finally crystallized into four main sections:

1. The evolution of the library institution in Ancient Egypt, covered by two contributors, Mounir Megally and Fayza Haikal.
2. The Alexandria Library under threat in late Ptolemaic and Roman times, treated by W. J. Cherf, J.-Y. Empereur, M. El-Abbadi and L. Polastron.
3. The intellectual milieu in Alexandria in Late Antiquity, dealt with by B. A. Pearson, Maria Dzielska, D. Y. Dimitrov, G. Leroux and Gr. Majcherek.
4. The Arabs and the Alexandria Library, treated by Qassem A. Qassem and Bernard Lewis.

In the first section, Professor Mounir Megally expounds the natural and socio-economic foundation of the cultural and scientific development in Ancient Egypt. He traces the interaction between man and nature, the prevailing geophysical conditions—especially the peculiar phenomenon of the annual Nile flood every summer—and the growth of Learning; in other words, the systematization of Knowledge and the passage from the concrete to the abstract. He surveys the beginnings of several branches of science and technology: the invention of papyrus, the evolution of systems of numbers, of writing, of measuring time, the study of astronomy, the awareness of history,…etc.

Next in the same section, Professor Fayza Haikal discusses the phenomenon of private collections and temple libraries in Ancient Egypt. She distinguishes between archives and libraries in the light of the different technical words used in hieratic: *archives of documents, the house of papyrus rolls and house of life.*

Haikal discusses several points connected with the institution of libraries: divinities, personnel, organization and role in society. She further describes the differences between private, temple and royal libraries, by giving examples of each type; and she finally concludes with an assessment of the Alexandria Library in an Egyptian context.

In the second section, Dr. Cherf presents an original approach to the consequence of Julius Caesar's setting afire the Egyptian fleet in the Eastern Harbour during the Bellum Alexandrinum in 48 B.C. Cherf's main purpose is to prove whether, if given available conditions, the fire of 48 B.C. could have reached fire-storm proportions? He therefore calculated that the date of Caesar's Alexandrian War must have taken place towards the end of August of that year, when meteorological conditions were warm and windy due to the Etesian northern winds. Given the proximity of the granary warehouses to the shore within the harbour area—if ignited by so much as a spark—they would have exploded and escalated the massive harbour blaze to fire-storm proportions. Following the famous passage of Lucan's description of Caesar's fire, Cherf concludes that the Alexandria fire did take place and did spread inland.

Finally, Cherf endorses Peter Fraser's statement that "we are justified in supposing that the contents of the Royal Library, if not wholly destroyed, were at least seriously diminished in the fire of 48 B.C."

Professor J.-Y. Empereur next considers the evidence of archaeology. He chiefly presents the evidence of two Roman villas recently uncovered in Alexandria. One of them with the head of Medusa mosaic was discovered by Empereur himself in the city centre and the other, known as the Villa of the Birds, excavated by the Polish-Egyptian mission at Kom el-Dikka. Their dates extend between A.D. 150 and the second half of the third century A.D.

Empereur gives an account of the devastations suffered by the city in the second half of the third century at the hands of Zenobia, Aurelian, Domitius Domitianus and Diocletian, as well as the earthquake that destroyed the top of the Lighthouse and other monuments. In the words of Ammianus Marcellinus (mid-fourth century), "the town lost the greatest part of the quarter called *Bruccheion*." It was in that district

that the Mouseion and the Library were situated, and they may very easily have suffered the same fate as other monuments. Yet Empereur rightly asserts that the destruction of the Library did not signify the disappearance of books.

The Daughter Library within the Serapeum complex survived into Roman times and became, as the present writer (M. El-Abbadi) asserts, the hub of scholars after the destruction of the Royal Library in 48 B.C. The same fate that befell the Serapeum in A.D. 391, following the decree of Emperor Theodosius to abolish all pagan cults in the empire, also put an end to the Daughter Library.

Accounts of contemporary eye-witnesses (e.g. Theodoret, Eunapius, Aphthonius, Rufinus) testify to the fact that the destruction of the Serapeum was almost complete and that it had been transformed into a church. A crucial argument is the testimony of Aphthonius who had visited the temple before 391 and wrote a *Description* of it afterwards. In his words, he claims to have seen "rooms, some…served as bookstores…, some others were set up for the worship of the old gods." The use of the past tense indicates that those "rooms…" no longer existed at the time of writing. It would also be unthinkable to mention "the worship of the old gods" in the new church.

Mr. Lucien Polastron, who is interested in the History of vanished libraries, compares the circumstances detrimental to books and to libraries in both Alexandria and China. After briefly surveying the events that threatened the Alexandria Library, he presents the case of China that witnessed an early period of intellectual enlightenment between the fifth and third centuries B.C., *when a hundred philosophers or rather a hundred schools* flourished. This was the peak of Chinese *Classics*. This development terminated in 213 B.C., when it was decreed that the possession of books was an exclusive Royal prerogative. Gradually, kings disposed of archives and instructed their subordinates *to burn all writings in order to rule free of risk or constraints*.

However, the decree was subsequently abolished in 191 B.C. and the following decades witnessed reconstruction campaigns of the collection of books under the Han dynasty. Still, the cycles of destruction and reconstruction recurred repeatedly with the change of dynasties.

The third section dealing with the intellectual milieu in Late Antiquity Alexandria is of special interest. It was in Alexandria that we can distinctly feel the pulse of events in the whole then known world. Against a background of intense activity, high feelings and dramatic transformations, international trade thrived and sciences flourished. We have

in this section five contributions of unusual interest. They compliment one another, and each one sheds fresh light from a different angle.

Professor Birger Pearson discusses the accidental mid-twentieth century discovery of the great Coptic papyrus Library of Nag Hammadi. He meticulously analyses the religious content of the Codices and their significance which contain evidence of a variety of Christian Gnosticism, of Hermetic texts as well as miscellaneous non-Gnostic texts. He convincingly argues that the discovered manuscripts were part of the library of a Christian monastery of the network of Pachomius (290–346) in the early fourth century.

As they were of a Gnostic nature, they were meant to be destroyed when *apocryphal* and *heretical* books were proscribed in the monasteries. It is thanks to a few monks who hid their favourite books in the monastic burial site that they still survive.

In the following paper entitled *Learned Women in Alexandrian Scholarship*, Professor Maria Dzielska takes us to another exciting aspect of intellectual life in Alexandria between the fourth and fifth centuries. A major part of the paper is devoted to Hypatia who witnessed and survived 'the destruction of the Serapeum and the Daughter Library.' Following the example of her father and mentor Theon, the well known mathematician, Hypatia believed that it was of prime importance to uphold the scientific heritage of Hellenism. She was very versatile and her contributions to science included, astronomy, mathematics and philosophy. Though herself a pagan, her circle of disciples included both pagan and Christians alike.

Dzielska suggests that Hypatia probably gave her lectures in the recently discovered *lecture halls*. As she enjoyed great popularity with her pupils and high esteem among the city governors, she became involved in the power conflict (412–415) between Bishop Cyril and the imperial prefect Orestes, with whom she was on friendly terms. It was this involvement that provoked Cyril's followers to attack and kill her.

A point Dzielska is keen to emphasize, is that scholarship in Alexandria did not die with Hypatia, as is sometimes tendentiously alleged; on the contrary it remained strong.

Dr. Dimitar Dimitrov, in the following paper, examines the dilemma of another contemporary intellectual, Synesius of Cyrene who was a pupil of Hypatia and later on was appointed Bishop of Ptolemais in Cyrene by Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria. If Hypatia was wholeheartedly committed to philosophy, Synesius appears to have felt the internal embarrassment between a philosophic mind and a Christian

heart. On his appointment as bishop, Synesius felt the urge to give expression of his inner conflict in writing *Letter 105*, which is the subject of Dimitrov's paper.

Through painstaking analysis of *Letter 105* and its comparison with other writings of Synesius, especially the *Hymns* and *On Dreams*, Dimitrov attempts to reconcile the seemingly conflicting philosophic objections and Synesius' own concept of the Christian faith as he understood it in the early fifth century.

Professor Georges Leroux, in his contribution Damascius *and the Collectio Philosophica*, which has survived in a manuscript of the ninth century in Constantinople, he chose the Neoplatonist philosopher, Damascius as his guide because: (a) Damascius' career took him from Damascus (where he was born c. A.D. 460) to Alexandria, Athens, Persia and back to Alexandria. (b) The fact that two of his major works were transmitted as part of the *Collectio Philosophica*.

Leroux accepts Westerink's argument with regard to the Alexandrian origin of the collection:

> Alexandria was a city of books and reading, it was also a city of debate and learning and the later period cannot be understood without a constant reference to the role of the Library before 391 A.D. It is altogether wholly improbable that the work being done inside the philosophical circles would have been totally disconnected from the activities of the main Library, whatever that institution had become during the fourth century.

Leroux concludes that Damascius himself assembled the *Collectio Philosophica* in Alexandria in preparation for his long stay as a *scholarch* in Athens. Later on, a copy of it was taken to Constantinople. Thus the preservation of the collection is an outcome of interaction between institutional and school libraries.

To complete the literary image of Alexandria in Late Antiquity as represented in the last four papers, Professor Grzegorz Majcherek presents his recent discovery of *lecture halls* (auditoria) at Kom el-Dikka in a paper entitled *Academic Life of Late Antique Alexandria: A View from the Field*. The discovery of the *lecture halls* has definitely thrown an entirely new light on the nature of academic life in late Antique Alexandria. They date from the fifth century and seem to have continued to function until the early eighth century. The combined evidence of archaeological and literary sources leaves little doubt that Alexandria in Late Antiquity, continued to be one of the great centers of education in the fields of philosophy, law and medicine, attracting students and professors from all over the ancient world.

It is remarkable that the sixth century author, Elias describes lecture-rooms to be "in similarity to theatres, are often rounded in plan so that the students can see one another as well as the teacher." Majcherek comments that Elias appears to have been "describing one of the lecture-halls on our site where, in theory, he could even have been teaching." He concludes by asserting that "quite obviously, Alexandrian science did not end with the destruction of the Library."

The final section of our volume—which deals with the Arab period—presents two papers by the medievalist, Professor Qassem Abdou Qassem and the well-known orientalist, Professor Bernard Lewis. Both follow similar, but not identical, ways of thinking. Qassem analyses the basic two *Arab accounts of the destruction of the Library of Alexandria*; one is that of al-Baghdādī who visited Egypt c. 595 A.H./A.D. 1200, the other one by Ibn al-Qiftī (d. 646 H./A.D. 1248) Both authors reported that it was ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs who had destroyed the Library at the order of Caliph ʿUmar.

Qassem refutes both reports for several reasons: (a) Their late, sudden appearance after some six centuries of total silence by earlier historians, Arabs and non-Arabs alike. (b) Discrepancies and errors in al-Baghdādī. (c) The fictitious nature of al-Qiftī's account.

Qassem concludes that the Arab story of the destruction of the Alexandria Library is a fabrication and an example of the abuse of history for political purposes.

A fitting conclusion to the entire volume is Professor Bernard Lewis' paper entitled *The Arab Destruction of the Library of Alexandria: Anatomy of a Myth*. Lewis starts his presentation with the definite statement: "Despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, some writers are still disposed to believe and even repeat the story of how the Great Library of Alexandria was destroyed by the Arabs after their conquest of the city in A.D. 641, by order of the Caliph ʿUmar."

He shows that as early as 1713, Father Renaudot, Eusèbe, the distinguished French orientalist cast doubt on the story of Barhebraeus. He was followed by the great English historian, Edward Gibbon who outrightly denies "both the facts and the consequences." Lewis continues to enumerate a succession of other Western scholars who carefully analyzed and demolished the story. The very fact that it still survives and is repeated, is a clear testimony to the enduring power of a myth.

After analyzing the nature and circumstances of this and other historical myths (Christian and Jewish), Lewis declares, "It is surely time that the Caliph ʿUmar and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs, were finally acquitted of

this charge which their admirers and later their detractors conspired to bring against them."

After the above survey of the contents of our volume, it is I feel, justifiable to conclude that the various contributors have offered two responses to the query raised by the title: *What Happened to the Ancient Library of Alexandria?*

The first is the prevailing agreement among the participant scholars, that the two principal components of the Alexandria Library, i.e. the Royal Library within the Royal Palaces' area (*Bruccheion*) and the Daughter Library within the Serapeum, had practically met their end more than two centuries before the Arabs came to Egypt.

The second response is of particular significance and great consequence, as it asserts that in spite of the disappearance of the institutional Library, Alexandria continued as one of the great centres of learning in Late Antiquity, thanks to collections—in the individual schools—of books that had been made of copies from originals that were in the Great Library.

À LA RECHERCHE DE LA SYSTÉMATISATION DES CONNAISSANCES ET DU PASSAGE DU CONCRET À L'ABSTRAIT DANS L'EGYPTE ANCIENNE

Mounir H. Megally

Ce n'est point un hasard si, à un moment important de l'histoire de l'Antiquité, la cristallisation des connaissances par la création de la première Grande Bibliothèque du monde s'est faite à Alexandrie, en Egypte. À moins que, par leurs réalisations novatrices, les civilisations actives, et celle de l'Egypte ancienne en était une, n'engendrent elles-mêmes ce genre de hasard heureux; la création de cette Bibliothèque apparaît alors comme l'aboutissement d'un long enchaînement irréversible d'étapes positives dans cette voie. Ce long cheminement fait d'essais, d'échecs, d'améliorations, d'acquis peut sembler modeste ou hors de propos au regard de l'éclat de cette prestigieuse Bibliothèque, mais fort heureusement l'histoire millénaire de l'Egypte ancienne nous révèle les jalons qui marquent son parcours sur la voie menant à l'instauration et à l'élaboration de ce qu'on appelle archives et bibliothèques.

L'enchaînement de l'histoire millénaire de l'Egypte et sa richesse en faits historiques offrent à l'historien un large contexte qui lui permet en général d'avoir une connaissance approfondie des faits et une vue d'ensemble de leur genèse, de leur déroulement et de leur constance à travers l'histoire ou, au contraire, et leur sort final quand ils disparaissent à un moment donné ou se manifestent sous une autre forme. Il peut les insérer, forme aussi bien que contenu, dans des courants cohérents de pérennité ou de métamorphoses historiques, contexte où les probabilités de l'émergence d'un fait, de sa continuité ou de son éclipse apparaissent comme des événements rationnels répondant à des facteurs intelligibles. Il en est de même pour leurs modalités. Ceci permet également d'adopter éventuellement une approche épistémologique qui situe ces faits dans un processus d'acquisition de connaissances, une 'expérience du savoir' qui clarifie certaines conditions de son émergence, de sa signification réelle, de son impact sur la vie de l'homme et de sa transmission, un des domaines des 'sciences sociales' qui explorent les 'faits humains collectifs.' Le parcours vers la systématisation des

connaissances, dont nous essayerons d'évoquer ici les grandes lignes, en est un bon exemple.[1]

Ce parcours a commencé véritablement par la recherche d'un ensemble d'idéogrammes capables de signifier d'une façon constante un contenu intelligible et précis, le même pour celui qui les trace que pour ceux qui les liront, avant d'arriver à établir un système d'écriture complet et cohérent qui peut à la fois exprimer des choses concrètes et des concepts abstraits. Ce système graphique, qui mène une société au seuil de l'époque historique, marque, en fait, une des phases importantes d'un changement social profond. Il est certain que la mise au point d'un système graphique cohérent, et le système égyptien employant idéogrammes et phonogrammes en est bel et bien un exemple performant, ne se remarque que dans des sociétés qui ont atteint une certaine complexité créative, sociétés urbaines dotées d'un gouvernement centralisé, c'est-à-dire un Etat. L'écriture joue, en effet, un rôle essentiel et surtout accélérateur dans l'intensification du travail humain et l'adoption sur une grande échelle d'un ensemble de plans organisationnels d'ordre socio-économique, permettant à une société de devenir cumulative, facteur qui nous intéresse ici vu son action stimulatrice sur l'acquisition de la connaissance.

L'émergence de ce système graphique est ainsi à chercher dans son contexte originel, celui d'une recherche d'amélioration de la performance des activités économiques dans des conditions déterminées. Très tôt il y eut une recherche de ce genre en Egypte, recherche poussée par des exigences bien réelles, qui étaient associées dans ce pays, comme d'ailleurs dans toute société ancienne ou moderne, aux fonctions normales de production et d'échange essentielles pour son développement. À la lumière de ces contingences contraignantes, le processus de ce système devient intelligible.

Ces circonstances sociales de la connaissance, pratiques ou abstraites, ont favorisé un processus irréversible d'accomplissement que l'Egypte

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[1] Nous sommes convaincus de l'intérêt, pour les études historiques, de la recherche de schémas des processus d'actions élémentaires et directes qui sous-tendent les décisions pragmatiques prises pour gérer l'activité économique et l'action politique d'un peuple. Ces schémas rendent plus intelligibles bien de faits historiques et plus aisée la possibilité de saisir les relations existantes entre eux; dans ce cas, ces faits se distinguent plus facilement comme des éléments qui concourent à un même effet d'ensemble. De ce point de vue, l'histoire de l'Égypte ancienne est un bon exemple du rôle de l'interaction de facteurs socio-économiques dans son remarquable développement et *surtout en ce qui concerne le sujet qui nous préoccupe aujourd'hui, la systématisation du savoir et le passage du concret vers l'abstrait.*

a connu tôt dans sa longue histoire, et qui s'est réalisé à travers de multiples enchaînements de procédures et d'essais. Comme tout système, il a dû nécessiter un long apprentissage par un groupe social qui le pratique régulièrement et par la création, par la suite, d'une des institutions les plus importantes de la société, l'école, étape décisive sur la voie de la systématisation des connaissances. À l'origine, ce développement était principalement limité aux milieux des fonctionnaires de l'Administration, les scribes, et la connaissance qu'ils disséminaient était essentiellement en rapport avec leur activité, leur rôle social.

On peut facilement comprendre que ce même processus aboutisse, pour de multiples raisons et grâce au système politico-économique favorable, à une rationalisation des connaissances remarquable par rapport aux normes de l'époque, que l'écriture a permis de matérialiser dans des textes. Il a également fait ressentir la nécessité de conserver dans des archives et, plus tard dans des bibliothèques, des documents importants jugés nécessaires pour maintenir et intensifier cette évolution générale, documents tenus disponibles pour des consultations ultérieures. De multiples indices historiques concrets indiquent l'existence de telles archives ou bibliothèques en Egypte, même si leurs bâtiments construits en briques crues ont disparu, à l'opposé de salles semblables qui faisaient partie de temples érigés en pierre.

Mais, plus que les bâtiments, l'existence d'archives et de bibliothèques nous intéresse ici comme l'aboutissement d'une longue recherche de systématisation des connaissances dans plusieurs domaines, processus dont on peut retracer certaines étapes et motivations. Il est important de noter que mis à part le domaine théologique, ce processus mène, in fine, à un pas fondamental: le passage d'une connaissance de ce qui est matériel, sensible, réel, bref d'une connaissance technique, à une connaissance plus systématisée qui en est la conséquence logique. Par exemple, l'analyse du système de l'écriture, on va le voir, montre comment on abstrait des choses leur propriété essentielle, on constate les relations entre leurs caractéristiques structurelles et on isole par abstraction ce qui les unit, les rassemble ou les oppose: il s'agit bien là d'exercices d'abstraction. Ce passage du concret à l'abstrait caractérise la recherche positive du savoir ainsi que la dissémination organisée des connaissances.

On peut ne pas s'accorder à attribuer à ce savoir un caractère 'scientifique' jugé d'après les normes actuelles, propriété qu'on accorde, par exemple, au savoir grec, proche de nous et dont nous partageons bien des caractéristiques et surtout des approches. On peut, également, penser que ce savoir était resté au niveau de l'expérience spontanée

ou commune, c'est-à-dire, sans une conceptualisation systématisée ou poussée, ou uniquement au stade empirique d'une science,[2] opinion qui risque d'injecter une dimension anachronique dans le débat. Bref, c'est une question ouverte. Néanmoins, c'est un savoir qui témoigne d'une véritable unicité d'approches, de formes, et de procédures de connaissance conformes à une certaine exigence de précision, d'objectivité, de méthode et d'abstraction, même si les principes n'en sont pas clairement formulés ou pleinement exprimés. Par exemple, il est vrai que les textes mathématiques que nous avons de l'Egypte ancienne ne présentent pas une formulation clairement énoncée de règles mathématiques, mais cette absence est-elle, en elle-même, un argument certain ou le seul argument? On voit, par contre, dans ces textes l'application d'une règle mathématique non énoncée, celle du rapport constant de la conférence d'un cercle à son diamètre, π, et on peut se demander, dans ce cas, si la modélisation retenue dans les spécimens d'exercices mathématiques modèles, conservés parmi les textes didactiques égyptiens, n'a pas rendu inutile l'énonciation de règles vu, peut-être, que les étudiants en avaient connaissance. D'ailleurs, mis à part quelques compositions littéraires, on constate, en général, dans les textes, un laconisme parfois très poussé, sobriété qui ne caractérise pas uniquement les textes religieux comme les Textes des Pyramides ou les Textes des Sarcophages, par exemple, mais également les sapiences, etc. En effet, l'esprit oriental, nous le pensons, est, en général, peu enclin à être explicite. Il opte plutôt pour le contenu virtuel des propositions. Il est superflu, à ses yeux, de formellement exprimer ce qui est jugé connu, courant, évident, présupposé ou axiomatique.

I. *La recherche des connaissances découle de la gestion socio-économique du pays*

I.1. *Cadre géophysique et son impact*

À l'origine, cette recherche d'acquisition de connaissances s'inscrit en Egypte dans un cadre socio-économique et fait partie d'une gestion poli-

[2] Il n'est pas aisé en général, vue la formulation bien concise, de saisir certaines structures conceptuelles dans les mathématiques égyptiennes, cf., par exemple, Toomer, "Mathematics and Astronomy," 44–45.

tique pertinente du pays face aux exigences inévitables et astreignantes de sa géographie physique. C'est un exemple intéressant de l'étroite relation entre cette recherche, facteur de stimulation et de dynamisme, et l'état socio-économique d'un pays dont on va essayer d'évoquer ici l'essentiel dans son contexte.

La partie fertile de l'Egypte, il ne faut pas l'oublier, n'est pas vaste; c'est une vallée étroite autour du Nil, sa seule source d'eau, réalité qui prend tout son sens face à l'immensité du désert qui l'entoure, visible de partout de la vallée. Ceci explique d'une part l'importance donnée à l'inondation, source de vie dont dépend l'économie du pays, et de l'autre l'action unificatrice de cette inondation, base de l'unité organique du pays. On peut facilement comprendre qu'aucune des nombreuses régions de cette vallée, qui s'enchaînent du Sud au Nord, ne pouvait gérer seule l'inondation ni ses conséquences sur son territoire; cette gestion, tout comme le contrôle équitable des eaux pour satisfaire les besoins de tous ne pouvait être, comme c'est encore le cas aujourd'hui, qu'une affaire d'Etat.

Ceci a été un ou le facteur déterminant de la création d'une administration centrale forte. En effet, le pouvoir politique centralisé, régime que cette situation a favorisé, disposait de ce que les chefs des provinces n'avaient pas: la constance de la légitimité politique nationale dont le commandement et la puissance sont incontestés, la possibilité de disposer de moyens matériels importants, adéquats et disponibles dans tout le pays et, surtout, 'l'énergie animatrice,' outil politique nécessaire pour pouvoir imposer son arbitrage dans les litiges entre régions, provinces et villes concernant l'étendue des territoires et, plus important encore, dans les conflits relatifs au droit à des quantités déterminées des eaux de l'inondation pour irriguer les champs. Par ailleurs, le fait que la superficie de terre arable varie sensiblement d'une région à l'autre complique les modalités de l'application d'une politique équitable compte tenu de la densité ou de la faiblesse de la concentration urbaine, et oblige à se référer systématiquement à des arbitrages anciens et à des barèmes acceptés par tous et qui sont consignés dans des documents de base conservés aux archives.

L'exemple de l'action politique du roi Amenemhat I, fondateur de la XIIe dynastie, est intéressant à ce propos par sa clarté d'application de ce principe de référence aux archives étatisées. Pour marquer la naissance d'une période nouvelle de gestion équitable du pays, il s'est déplacé lui-même pour veiller à la réparation des irrégularités qui s'étaient glissées pendant la trouble Première Période Intermédiaire

dans la démarcation de territoires de villes et également pour rétablir leurs pleins droits dans le partage équitable des eaux, selon les données consignées dans les registres anciens.[3] C'est un exemple intéressant du recours du pouvoir à des barèmes fixes servant de repères connus depuis toujours et non pas à des mesures arbitraires qui, sous la pression politique de certains chefs locaux, accepteraient des irrégularités cumulées depuis quelques décennies. On comprend aisément la signification politique de l'un des 'noms' de ce fondateur d'une nouvelle période:  *whm mswt*[4] 'Rénovateur de naissances,' nom qui renvoie au principe égyptien fondamental de rénovation dans la continuité des systèmes et des normes performants.

Ces prérogatives du pouvoir central s'avéraient également indispensables pour l'ordonnance des dispositions à prendre, en même temps et partout dans le pays, en vue d'assurer une gestion juste des eaux de l'inondation dont dépendait l'ordre public. Cet ordre était vulnérable à cause de la configuration géographique du pays en une longue bande, l'exposant au danger de scission pour différentes raisons, entre autres une maigre récolte due à une inondation insuffisante ou au contraire dévastatrice: famine et troubles pouvaient alors menacer les assises du pouvoir politique en place et même les fondements de l'unité politique associant en une seule entité la Haute et la Basse Egypte. Les troubles politiques survenus après l'Ancien Empire quand le pays a connu, pendant la Première Période Intermédiaire, un recul ou une absence de pouvoir politique unifié, en sont un exemple significatif.

Cette gestion nationale de l'inondation, secondée par un discours officiel insistant sur le respect de la justice sociale,  *m3ʿt*, personnifié par la déesse Maât,[5] assise de l'unité politique du pays, semble avoir été réellement appliquée ou tout au moins être un but social déclaré de l'action politique; les noms des rois, leurs titres officiels ainsi que ceux des hauts fonctionnaires l'indiquent.[6] Ils confirment surtout la responsabilité du pouvoir vis-à-vis de toutes les régions du pays et de tous

[3] Cette réparation a été faite, selon un texte conservé dans la tombe de Khnoumhotep, gouverneur du XVIe nome de la Haute Egypte, 'd'après ce qui était [noté] dans les documents [anciens], et a été vérifié selon ce qui était [établi] par le passé'; voir Newberry, *Beni Hasan*, vol. 1, pl. 22, 25–26 (lignes 40 sq.); Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 1:283 § 625; Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 129.

[4] *Wb*. I, 141, 2 sq.

[5] Pour cette notion fondamentale de la pensée égyptienne voir Assmann, *Maât*.

[6] L'Egyptien semble avoir réalisé de bonne heure l'impact, tant psychologique que matériel, de ce principe dans l'action politique pour une bonne gestion du pays.

ses individus ainsi que l'effort de l'organisation administrative de promouvoir des projets agricoles à cet effet.[7] Cette action renforce l'assise politique de l'Etat et crée, chez l'individu, un sentiment de confiance et des rapports positifs avec la structure politico-sociale; c'est un facteur d'unification qui affirme chez l'individu le sentiment d'appartenir à une communauté nationale, comme en témoigne l'ensemble des données et l'expriment d'une façon éloquente des œuvres littéraires tels les fameux romans de Sinouhé[8] et du Naufragé.[9]

I.2. *La spécificité du phénomène de l'inondation et ses conséquences sur l'esprit civique*

L'Administration doit affronter une difficulté inhérente à l'inondation, phénomène par nature variable, tributaire des pluies tombant sur les régions des sources du Nil. En effet, l'ampleur, la date et la hauteur de l'inondation étant conditionnées par des facteurs climatiques, celle-ci peut osciller entre une faible montée et une crue très haute. Cette variabilité rend inappropriée l'application systématique, chaque année, des mêmes éléments d'un plan unique pour organiser la participation aux travaux concernant l'inondation d'un pourcentage adéquat de la population, paramètre également variable. Vu ces variabilités, le succès de la gestion publique de l'inondation ne devait pas seulement être fonction de l'efficacité des mesures administratives ni de la politique officielle de rigueur et de prévoyance systématiques, que nous évoquerons plus loin, mais surtout du consentement global des habitants d'adhérer au principe des travaux communs, jugés nécessaires quelle que soit leur date ou leur ampleur. La conscience de cette variabilité et

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[7] Le discours politique en Egypte donne de l'importance à de tels projets; voir l'image du roi Scorpion prenant part à une cérémonie importante que nous croyons être celle du brisement des digues pour que l'inondation submerge les champs; reproduction *in* Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, pl. 2a. On connaît également les efforts des rois du Moyen Empire, par exemple, pour des projets agricoles dans le Fayoum.

[8] Cf. Lefebvre, *Romans et contes égyptiens*, 5 sq. Un des aspects importants de la littérature égyptienne est qu'elle permet d'exprimer certains sentiments que l'on ne trouve ni dans le discours politique de l'époque ni aussi clairement dans les biographies de particuliers. On peut citer, par exemple, une certaine fierté de Sinouhé de se sentir Egyptien ou sa profonde nostalgie pour son pays et ce qu'il représente ainsi que le désir viscéral d'être enterré dans son pays.

[9] Sentiment du *Naufragé*, même malgré l'enchantement de l'endroit où il a échoué après le naufrage du bateau, île animée par un être quasi divin et où il n'y avait que des merveilles, *image égyptienne du paradis*, voir Lefebvre, ibid., 32 sq.

de l'importance de ses conséquences socio-économiques directes pour leur survie sont des facteurs qui ont dû, avec le temps et la mémoire collective d'expériences malheureuses, façonner le caractère discipliné des habitants et leur esprit attentif et 'sage;' ils dépendent parfois trop, encore maintenant, des autorités. C'est un facteur, dont on ne fait pas état, du renforcement du pouvoir des autorités. En tout cas, les individus devaient être prêts à répondre à leur appel pour être affectés, en dehors de leur activité de paysan, dans les projets communs d'irrigation, même loin de leur propre localité, avant mais aussi après l'inondation. Cette prise de conscience de la responsabilité commune d'assurer un équilibre dynamique entre leur propre activité et les projets communs semble bien être un des principaux facteurs d'un certain sens civique chez les Egyptiens.

Par ailleurs, l'obligation de s'épauler entre habitants de la même localité pour parer aux dangers de l'inondation et pour en tirer ensemble un profit maximal renforce localement ce sens civique, ce qui représente un appui majeur pour le pouvoir central. Cette interdépendance locale contrebalance la centralisation du pouvoir politique et crée d'autres liens sociaux importants. Elle conditionne, par exemple, le comportement religieux, donnant une certaine primauté à un sentiment religieux de caractère local symbolisé par le  , la 'divinité locale,'[10] et ce par rapport à la divinité ou aux divinités officielles dont le culte était célébré à la capitale ou dans les grandes villes. Malgré la centralisation poussée qui caractérise l'organisation séculaire et religieuse officielles du pays, ces divinités locales sont invoquées non seulement par des particuliers mais également par le Pharaon[11] lui-même, officiant, par excellence, des divinités officielles.

L'importance du rôle civique de l'Egyptien face à l'inondation est mise en évidence par la transposition qu'il en fait dans sa vision de l'au-delà. En effet, l'individu est représenté, à un moment donné dans l'histoire des traditions funéraires, comme un paysan prêt, préparé matériellement à assumer, dans l'au-delà, cette obligation sociale de répondre positivement à l'appel des autorités pour participer, entre autres, aux travaux de gestion de l'inondation. La matérialisation de ce concept est une statuette, appelée  *wšbti*[12] (oushebti), 'répondeur,'

[10] *Wb.* II, 212, 8 sq.

[11] Même dans les Textes des Pyramides, ex. *Pyr.* § 891, voir Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 156.

[12] *Wb.* I, 373; ibid. IV, 435, 15.

placée en de multiples exemplaires dans la tombe à partir du Moyen Empire. Elle représente le mort momifié comme travailleur agricole avec ses outils, deux houes et un panier sur le dos, prêt à répondre  *wšb*[13] (*ouesheb*) à l'appel pour construire des digues ou pour, le cas échéant, les colmater. Il est intéressant que rois, nobles et particuliers soient représentés, à partir de Nouvel Empire, dans ce rôle civique d'attendre l'appel, pour participer au travail commun de leur propre gré. Le parachèvement, à l'égyptienne, de cette matérialisation est une émouvante imploration du mort à cette statuette qui le représente de ne pas manquer à l'appel,[14] invocation gravée sur *l'oushebti* et qui figurera aussi dans le Livre des Morts:

> Oh! *oushebti*, si je suis appelé, si je suis désigné pour faire tout travail…, de labourer les champs, *d'inonder les rives ou de transporter le sable* de l'Est à l'Ouest, réponds: 'Me voilà'.[15]

Le langage aussi reflète cette disponibilité et ce sentiment civique. En effet, ce qu'on louait chez l'individu dans l'Egypte ancienne était son aptitude à  *sḏm* 'écouter' (ce qu'on lui demande).[16] Or, sémantiquement ce verbe égyptien 'écouter' a de nombreuses acceptions: 'comprendre,' 'juger' mais surtout 'obéir,'[17] etc., comme c'est d'ailleurs le cas dans d'autres langues sémitiques ou, par exemple, dans l'arabe parlé égyptien. En outre, le terme substantivé  *sḏm ʿš*, lit. 'Celui qui écoute l'appel,' exprimé ici par deux idéogrammes, une oreille et un homme debout levant le bras pour appeler, a non seulement l'acception propre de 'répondeur à l'appel,' 'servant,'[18] employé pour désigner certains fonctionnaires spécifiques,[19] mais également une acception figurée de ce que l'individu se devint d'être: un répondeur à l'appel, celui du Roi[20] (c'est-à-dire obéir aux ordres de l'Administration) ou de divinités.[21]

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[13] Ibid., 371, 8 sq.

[14] Dans son approche foncièrement globalisante l'Egyptien était enclin à étayer l'expression plastique d'un fait ou d'une chose par un apport linguistique complétif.

[15] Chapitre 6, cf. Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 36.

[16] *In sḏmw sḏm ḏd, mrr sḏm pw ir ḏdt* 'L'écouteur est celui qui écoute, celui qui aime écouter est celui qui fait ce qui est dit': Sagesse de Ptahotep, cf. Sethe, *Ägyptische lesestücke*, 41, 5–6; trad. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:47.

[17] *Wb*. IV, 384 sq.

[18] *Wb*. IV, 389, 12.

[19] Ibid., 389, 13–16.

[20] Ibid., 390, 1.

[21] Ibid., 390, 2.

I.3. *Travaux requis face à l'inondation*

Les travaux que l'Administration devait orchestrer, avec la participation et surtout avec le consentement de la population, pour faire face à l'inondation étaient gigantesques. Ils étaient de deux ordres.

Tout d'abord, il fallait consolider systématiquement l'infrastructure autour du Nil, c'est-à-dire les digues, afin de pouvoir maximaliser l'emploi de l'eau précieuse, travail auquel participe en principe toute la population. En pratique, cette obligation signifie l'orchestration, chaque année à l'échelle nationale, de la participation directe ou indirecte d'un pourcentage suffisant de la population adulte dans une panoplie de travaux qui devaient commencer bien avant l'inondation. C'était une tâche complexe qui nécessitait bien entendu l'élaboration d'un plan et d'un calendrier précis pour pouvoir garantir le recrutement et le contrôle de contingents suffisants pour mener à bien ce projet national partout dans le pays, que ce soit dans les régions de haute ou de faible densité d'habitation. Dans ces dernières régions il faut surtout compter sur des mains d'œuvre levées dans d'autres localités,[22] ce qui nécessitait le transfert, peut-être par le Nil, de paysans, de leurs outils et de leur nourriture loin de leurs propres villages.[23] L'Administration devait mener à bien et en temps utile ce travail gigantesque imposé par l'inondation en même temps que les autres tâches comme la construction de fortifications, de temples, de tombes royales, ainsi que les autres travaux publiques ou les activités militaires, etc.

Le facteur temps était important pour la transmission des informations entre l'Administration centrale et ses postes avancés à travers le pays; il était un des paramètres dont il fallait tenir compte pour l'exécution de tout plan organisationnel conséquent de la gestion du calendrier fixant la date, dans chaque région, des travaux de construction de

[22] Ce principe d'avoir recours à des contingents de travailleurs issus de régions à forte densité de population pour être affectés ailleurs selon la nécessité a dû faciliter l'exécution de projets importants de construction comme par exemple les pyramides, les fortifications militaires, etc. Il est intéressant de remarquer une certaine continuité de ce procédé actuellement sous la forme de contingents d'*'ouvriers déplacés'* عمار الترا احيل recrutés à partir de régions peuplées, et affectés ici et là dans des projets importants.

[23] Les difficultés matérielles de ce travail ainsi que le dépaysement qu'il implique de se trouver affecté dans plusieurs régions loin de son village selon le plan des autorités chaque année semblent expliquer cette nostalgie de sa 'maison', sentiment bien exprimée dans des textes littéraires. Il est possible que l'impact de ce fait sous-tende un sentiment semblable chez l'Egyptien encore maintenant.

digues avant l'inondation ainsi que celle de leur rupture systématique, le moment venu, afin d'assurer, pour tous et dans toute région, une irrigation normalisée, suffisante et juste. Vu la variabilité de la date d'arrivée des eaux de l'inondation dans les différentes régions et surtout de leur hauteur rendant aléatoire toute application d'un calendrier fixe répété sans modification tous les ans, une communicabilité rapide entre l'Administration centrale et ses agents locaux partout dans le pays était essentielle pour pouvoir relayer à temps les informations concernant cette date d'une importance capitale mais surtout concernant la hauteur de l'inondation au sud du pays, donnée qui était prise comme indicateur économique de premier ordre pour les travaux et pour la récolte. Cette hauteur de l'inondation devait absolument être prise en compte, chaque année, dans le calcul du volume d'eau alloué à chaque province et à chaque localité selon des barèmes, probablement établis dans leurs grandes lignes au moins dès les débuts de l'époque historique, mais systématiquement mis à jour en fonction de ces variables. On peut ainsi saisir l'importance majeure de cette hauteur annuelle de la crue; sa mention figure comme une donnée majeure parmi les rares indications citées dans les annales officielles de l'Etat à partir de la Première Dynastie, comme on le voit sur la Pierre de Palerme qui est une des premières annales de l'Egypte ancienne.[24] Dans ces conditions on comprend la nécessité de l'invention en Egypte du nilomètre qui donnait cette information importante, affichée systématiquement à l'adresse de tous les agents de l'Administration et gardée aux archives. On comprend également l'utilité du retour systématique à ces archives pour consulter leurs données concernant la hauteur et la date de l'inondation dans les années précédentes; elles permettaient aux agents de l'Administration d'ajuster au mieux leurs décisions, d'améliorer leur performance et d'adapter le calendrier à suivre.

Ensuite, l'Administration devait veiller à ce que ses ordres, d'un intérêt capital comme les dates de rupture des digues, arrivent à temps dans les différentes provinces, proches ou distantes.

Ce double flux incessant de renseignements et de directives de la plus haute importance, qui ne pouvaient souffrir de délai, se faisait grâce à un système rapide et performant de communication via le Nil qui liait effectivement et dans les meilleurs temps toutes les régions de l'Egypte.

[24] Pour une traduction de ce document voir Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 1:75 sq.

Un autre résultat de ce fait est la conscience de la valeur du temps et l'intérêt de la maximaliser comme l'indiquent bien de bibliographies à partir de l'Ancien Empire.

La seconde obligation étatique était la maximalisation de l'emploi de cette seule ressource d'eau du pays pour l'irrigation de tous les champs afin d'obtenir une récolte parfaite,[25] non seulement pour maintenir en vie la population mais également pour augmenter les réserves permanentes de grain pour qu'elles soient suffisamment abondantes pour parer aux éventuelles conséquences catastrophiques d'une inondation insuffisante et d'une famine certaine.

Cette mesure préventive devint avec le temps, et probablement à la suite de plusieurs faibles inondations, un idéal socio-économique en soi, assurant une continuité de la prospérité, garante d'une paix sociale et base de pérennité de son système politique. Elle rejoint l'idéal affiché par plusieurs chefs de l'organisation administrative ainsi que par plusieurs fonctionnaires de 'faire mieux' et surtout 'plus rapidement' que les autres par le passé.[26] On peut ainsi comprendre l'origine de certaines idées sur la capacité légendaire de l'Egypte de pouvoir restaurer ses stocks de grain, image de l'Egypte déjà connue de certains peuples anciens, et reflétée dans des passages de la Bible;[27] d'ailleurs, grâce à sa gestion pertinente de l'inondation, l'Egypte bien que très limitée en terre arable,[28] est néanmoins resté pendant longtemps, à cause de sa récolte miraculeuse et sa gestion performante, le grenier de Rome,[29] de Byzance et des Arabes.

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[25] Dans ces conditions il n'est pas étonnant que le thème le plus important représenté dans les scènes des tombes en Egypte à partir de l'Ancien Empire soit celui de la culture du blé et de sa récolte miraculeuse. Ce thème va également être repris dans les vignettes du Livre des Morts, voir ex. Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 10.

[26] Remarquer l'importance donnée à l'idéal de toujours faire mieux que par le passé pour servir le roi dans tous les domaines, thème qui est mis en valeur dans les biographies à partir de l'Ancien Empire; un bon exemple en est la biographie de Weni, haut fonctionnaire qui a servi les rois de la VIe dynastie, où ce leitmotiv se répète plusieurs fois, cf. Sethe, *Urkunden des alten Reichs*, 98 sq.; 125, 10–11.

[27] Par exemple, l'octroi du blé égyptien aux gens de Canaan mentionnés dans la Bible, voir Gen. 41:57, 42:1–3, 42:5–7, 43:1–3, 45:23.

[28] Par exemple par rapport à un autre pays, la Mésopotamie.

[29] Le grenier de Rome se trouva à un moment donné en Egypte. La collecte du blé était effectuée sous le préfet de l'annone et ses services et transportée à partir d'Alexandrie.

I.4. *La nécessité d'un système de dénombrement et les implications de ce processus promoteur*

Cependant, ce rôle de l'Administration ne pouvait se réaliser sans l'aide d'un inventaire systématique des potentialités du pays, comprenant tous les habitants et leurs biens, au sens économique du terme, ainsi que les moyens de gardiennage et de transport des produits et leur distribution; sans un tel recueil complet on ne pouvait avoir une représentation quantitative, même simplifiée, des ressources potentielles du pays. En effet, sans une image semblable, toute proportion gardée, de ce qu'on appelle maintenant une comptabilité sociale, on ne pouvait envisager ni le recrutement à temps des contingents de paysans nécessaires pour exécuter ces tâches, ni l'agencement approprié de leur affectation, selon leur capacité physique, aux différents travaux[30] dans tout le pays, ni non plus la réalisation et le maintien en bon état des ouvrages de l'infrastructure comme les digues et les canaux exposés chaque année à une inondation. La complexité de cette tâche est amplifiée dans le contexte d'une économie en nature, où rémunération et salaires sont donnés en objets réels, ce qui multiple les opérations de prélèvement, de transport, de stockage et de distribution de produits de tout genre. La préparation d'un tel inventaire suppose, d'un côté, la disponibilité de moyens matériels suffisants et, de l'autre, un système administratif réfléchi et bien structuré et un effectif important et capable de représenter l'autorité de la 'loi,' de tenir la comptabilité de tout, de centraliser les renseignements et de présenter d'une manière claire aux autorités les données relatives aux potentialités de toutes les régions du pays.

Ce rôle impliquait la nécessité de tout savoir, tout compter, tout enregistrer, tout analyser, tout inventorier.[31] Le seul moyen était le recensement régulier,[32] conduit par les nombreux agents d'une imposante administration qui amassait ainsi des informations complètes qui

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[30] La répartition des mains d'œuvre obéissait à des critères stricts d'aptitude, répartissant les personnes selon leurs potentialités physiques, voir par exemple *Pap. Sallier* I, 7,1 sq., cf. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 84–85 et Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 317 sq.

[31] La biographie de Weni précise que lorsqu'il avait été nommé 'Gouverneur de la Haute Egypte' il avait veillé à '*tout noter*'; cf. ce texte en Sethe, *Urkunden des alten Reichs*, 106, 4 sq.

[32] Il y a plusieurs exemples de dénombrement, ou de tentatives de dénombrement, dans l'Antiquité, comme en Mésopotamie ainsi que dans les cités-Etats, en Grèce, à Rome (le terme de 'recensement' dérive du terme latin *censu*), en Chine à l'époque pré-impériale, au Japon, etc., mais sans une telle régularité à l'égyptienne.

permettaient une image réelle du cadastre, de l'assiette des impôts et de la main d'œuvre nécessaire pour l'exécution des travaux publics jugés indispensables;[33] mais ces informations devaient aussi être faciles à garder, à ventiler et à consulter à tout moment; elles étaient mises à la disposition de l'Administration centrale à la capitale ainsi que dans les bureaux de l'administration locale dans les différentes régions du pays. L'incidence de cet effort sur la cadence de la recherche de la systématisation des connaissances est bien évidente.

II. *Les besoins concrets pour la réalisation des dénombrements et pour la sauvegarde de leurs données*

II.1. *L'invention du système de chiffres*

Il est facile de comprendre que nous n'ayons pas de trace, ni d'idée claire, des moyens 'graphiques' employés lors des premiers comptages faits avant l'élaboration d'un système graphique complet. Lors de ces premiers comptages, la 'notation' sur place des renseignements nécessaires ainsi que celle de la suite des opérations s'y référant remontent aux périodes qui précèdent l'époque historique. Ceci nous prive de tout moyen d'en évaluer l'importance. Si on peut facilement comprendre que le principe d'exprimer une chose à l'aide de son image mène naturellement à la genèse de l'invention de l'écriture en Egypte, on ne peut formuler une idée claire sur les modalités de l'application de ce principe avant l'invention du système graphique. Comment faisait-on pour mémoriser les différentes quantités conséquentes d'impôts en nature exigées des habitants ou le nombre élevé de contingents de personnes à recruter d'ici et là pour les travaux liés à l'inondation, les matériaux mis à leur disposition, les calendriers nécessaires, etc., etc.? Il est probable

[33] Aucun élément précis ne permet de supposer que l'Etat ait dû recourir, en Egypte, à une justification religieuse pour 'légitimer' *directement* le principe du dénombrement aux yeux de la population comme ce fut probablement le cas, par exemple, en Israël (ex. Num. 26:2, Yahvé ordonne à Moïse de faire le recensement de toute la communauté des enfants d'Israël) et à Rome où on faisait des offrandes rituelles lors et à l'occasion du dénombrement. La prise de conscience du défide l'inondation et de ses conséquences pour chaque ville et village et la compétence du système politique fort étaient probablement suffisantes, sans devoir avoir recours à une justification de valeur religieuse. Il est vrai qu'à l'occasion de la récolte on faisait des offrandes à Ernoutet, Déesse de la Récolte, mais on ne peut établir dans ce cas une relation de cause à effet. Cette déesse n'était pas liée au dénombrement *per se*.

que ceci s'exprimait, par exemple, à l'aide de quelques 'bâtonnets' et 'billes'[34] de différentes grandeurs, dont plusieurs exemples de taille et de forme différentes se trouvent dans les musées; leur contexte et les modalités exactes de leur usage restent inconnus et leur emploi ne pouvait être que 'rudimentaire.' L'intérêt épistémologique de ce volet qui se situe dans les époques préhistoriques est bien évident.

En tout cas, à un moment donné vers la fin des époques préhistoriques en Egypte, la nécessité de conserver de tels résultats s'est fait sentir; ce système de bâtonnets et billes a dû alors être transcodé et exprimé par la notation de leur forme comme signes graphiques, c'est-à-dire en traçant des barres et des points, que l'on emploiera désormais comme chiffres. Cette organisation de ces premiers signes en un ensemble graphique est l'amorce d'un esprit de système qui a préparé le terrain pour l'invention, le moment venu, en Egypte d'un système complet, cohérent et structuré de chiffres, entiers et fractions, pour exprimer le nombre des mesures de grandeurs physiques employées dans la vie courante ou pour exprimer une construction abstraite.[35] C'est un outil facile et d'une importance capitale, qui a été initialement créé, dans le contexte égyptien, pour le service du dénombrement et qui va être maintenu tout au long de l'histoire de ce pays. Il va aussi permettre à l'Egyptien d'accéder aux notions arithmétiques, qui lui ont permis d'effectuer l'arpentage des champs et de parfaire une technique comptable[36] employée intensivement, et plus tard de parvenir à l'abstraction des données, processus qui œuvre pour la systématisation du savoir.

II.2. *L'invention du système de l'écriture*

Par ailleurs, il est compréhensible que l'invention des chiffres soit corollaire, dans le contexte du dénombrement, d'une autre invention, l'écriture, autre outil absolument indispensable pour en consigner les résultats. Nous ne parlons pas ici de l'usage de quelques pictogrammes utilisés ici ou là pour libeller les objets comptés, comme les signes

[34] Voir le schéma de points arrangés en une formation conservée sur le verso du *Pap. Sallier* IV, (Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 95 et Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 358). Il est possible que l'origine de ce système de calcul, dont on ne comprend pas le mécanisme, remonte aux périodes d'avant la découverte du système de l'écriture.

[35] Il en est de même dans d'autres civilisations de l'Antiquité comme celle de la Mésopotamie et de la Chine où la connaissance des chiffres et des notions mathématiques coïncident avec la connaissance du principe de 'statistique' et du dénombrement.

[36] Voir Megally, *Notions de comptabilité*.

employés à cet effet par certaines civilisations 'archaïques,' mais bien d'un système graphique complet, duquel découlent des conséquences culturelles importantes, réelles et constantes, quantitatives et qualitatives. Il a vu le jour comme outil de travail de l'Administration et est arrivé relativement rapidement à une maturité évidente; son emploi était bien commode malgré l'absence de notation des voyelles, et son apprentissage facile grâce au nombre relativement limité d'unités graphiques.

Sa commodité tient surtout au fait qu'il emploie des idéogrammes ainsi que des phonogrammes, les premiers représentant des réalités concrètes dont l'intelligibilité, et par conséquent la valeur phonétique, peuvent être rapidement saisies sans peine par le lecteur, alors que les seconds facilitent davantage la lecture. Le système utilise également des idéogrammes comme 'déterminatifs' pour parfaire la graphie du mot: par l'image d'une réalité concrète qu'ils représentent, facile à saisir, ceux-ci distinguent un mot de ses homonymes et compensent dans un sens l'absence de voyelles. En effet, d'être guidé par un signe qui, plastiquement, détermine le sens par l'indication, par exemple, d'un être, d'une action, d'un objet ou du symbole d'une idée abstraite, facilite l'appréhension du sens d'un mot écrit sans voyelles et aide, par la suite, à différencier la lecture appropriée du mot des autres catégories de formes dérivées—verbe, adjectif, substantif, participe, infinitif, etc.[37]—qui sont tirées sur la même racine et qui sont écrites par les mêmes radicaux, les mêmes consonnes.

La facilité de ce système a favorisé l'intensification de son emploi par l'Administration. L'Egypte est une des rares civilisations anciennes qui a maximalisé le rôle de l'écriture, ce qui lui a permis d'instaurer très tôt le recensement biannuel[38] puis le recensement annuel,  *ḫnwt*.[39] D'ailleurs, l'émergence, en Egypte, d'un pouvoir central politiquement fort et stable, doté d'un système économique solide et d'une organisation administrative structurellement centralisée se confond avec l'émergence

[37] Comme par exemple le manque de voyelles dans le système graphique arabe où une graphie composée des trois consonnes ب ت ك (k, t, b) par exemple peut être comprise et par conséquence lue, selon le contexte, comme signifiant: 'il a écrit,' 'il a été écrit,' 'il a fait écrire,' 'fais écrire' mais aussi 'écrire' et 'livres,' etc. Dans d'autres exemples il peut y avoir aussi d'autres dérivés tirés sur la même racine comme le participe présent ou passé ainsi que d'autres formes grammaticales.

[38] La Pierre de Palerme montre que cette mesure administrative du recensement de la population existait dès le début de la 1ere dynastie.

[39] *Wb*. V, 379, 5–16. Il est intéressant de se demander quelles sont les relations notionnelles entre cette acception et celle d'autres termes corrélés comme  *ḫnỉ* 'distinguer,' 'faire la différence,' ibid., 374, 1 sq. et  *ḫnt*, 'différence,' ibid., 376, 1, etc., dont la signification est en relation sémantique évidente avec l'essence d'un recensement.

de ce système graphique. On ne peut pas imaginer l'essor performant de ce système politico-économique égyptien sans l'apport de ce système graphique. Par ailleurs, l'histoire des systèmes politique et économique de l'Egypte ancienne qui se sont développés rapidement à partir de l'aube de l'époque historique, donc à partir de la Première Dynastie (± 3000 av. J.-C.), se confond surtout avec l'histoire du recensement, institutions se renforçant mutuellement.[40]

L'accroissement de la fréquence des dénombrements pour asseoir le calcul de l'assiette fiscale et l'ampleur des prestations exigées sur une base réelle et systématiquement ajustée selon les variations annuelles de l'inondation et l'augmentation du cheptel est une démarche audacieuse qui, dans le contexte d'une économie en nature comme celle de l'Egypte ancienne, était une tâche gigantesque. Elle signifie, en réalité, un dénombrement continuel[41] fait par les scribes qui devaient systématiquement cerner la main-d'œuvre et les biens dans le pays, qu'ils soient permanents, comme les biens-fonds, ou variables, comme la récolte enregistrée en été ou le cheptel dont l'accroissement ne peut être évalué qu'au printemps.

Bien que la pratique de l'écriture en Egypte ait été plus ou moins limitée au milieu des scribes et des prêtres, ces dénombrements successifs, répétés à ce rythme accéléré et organisés par une foule d'agents de l'organisation administrative, avaient un effet sur la population analphabète. Ils la mettaient en contact avec cet outil du pouvoir et véhicule du savoir attirant ainsi des jeunes pour le poste envié de scribe. Ceci a naturellement développé la relative propagation de l'écriture et a favorisé la création d'une base capable de la véhiculer. Par ailleurs, l'aura de mystère qui enveloppait l'écriture aux yeux de cette population analphabète semble être à l'origine d'une certaine 'divinisation' de cet outil civilisateur; les textes sacrés ont été appelés  *mdw-nṯr* 'les paroles des dieux,'[42] terme qui fût étendu à un moment donné à l'écriture elle-même, outil de pouvoir, de promotion sociale et de connaissance, mais surtout outil de 'création.'

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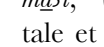
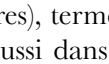
[40] C'est le cas en Mésopotamie, civilisation contemporaine et économiquement similaire. Le même phénomène est également connu chez les Chinois, les Grecs, les Romains, etc.

[41] Les textes emploient pour ces opérations des termes idiomatiques comme  *ỉp* 'compter,' ibid. I, 66, 1 sq., ex. Sethe, *Urkunden des alten Reichs*, 106, 7, ainsi que  *sḫr* 'enregistrer,' *Wb*. III, 106, 11 sq., ex. *Pap. Anastasi* V, 15,7 sq.; cf. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 64 et Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 247.

[42] *Wb*. II, 180, 13–181, 1 sq.

II.3. *L'invention du papyrus*

Originellement, les informations étaient notées sur un support disponible trouvé partout, des éclats de calcaire qu'on pouvait facilement ramasser ou des tessons de vases en terre cuite qu'on jetait, les ostraca. C'étaient des supports pratiques pour de petites notations mais ils n'étaient pas adaptés pour noter le volume de renseignements relatifs au recensement. Leur petit format privait le scribe sur le chantier, ainsi que les agents dans les bureaux de l'Administration Centrale, d'une vue d'ensemble des données. Une image globale des résultats nécessitait un support plus adéquat sur lequel on pouvait inscrire conjointement plusieurs données. L'invention du papier,[43] fait de la tige d'une plante répandue, le papyrus, offrait ce support idéal; on pouvait en préparer des grandes feuilles, d'environ 50 cm. de haut, sur lesquelles on pouvait écrire une masse d'informations portant sur une activité constante. De plus, on pouvait coller ensemble des feuilles pour en faire un  ou  *md3t*,[44] un 'rouleau de papyrus,' un 'livre,' ce qui présentait plusieurs avantages.

Ce rouleau pouvait contenir des données continues couvrant une longue période, données facilement disponibles pour toute consultation ultérieure, comme celles des dénombrements. Pratiquement, un rouleau de papyrus qui ne dépassait guère quelques centimètres de diamètre[45] une fois roulé était facile à manipuler et à transporter, ce qui faisait gagner du temps. Les scribes pouvaient les transporter, dans des sacs légers, pour les consulter sur place là où ils travaillaient. Et aux archives, ils étaient faciles à classer et à stocker dans des coffrets ou des jarres gardés dans un  *ḫ3 n sšw*,[46] (Salle des Ecrits), au  *pr md3t*,[47] (Maison des Livres), termes désignant les Archives dans la capitale et probablement aussi dans les provinces. Enfin, l'administration provinciale pouvait facilement communiquer à l'Administration Centrale des copies des documents importants existant dans les archives locales, mettant ainsi à sa disposition un aperçu exhaustif de leurs documents, ceux des tribunaux et notaires compris, auxquels on pouvait se référer en cas de litige comme l'indique, par exemple, l'inscription juridique de Mes.[48]

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[43] L'étymologie du mot 'papier' remonte en toute probabilité à un terme égyptien, non attesté, comme * *p3 pr ʕ*, pour le papyrus voir Černy, *Paper and Books*.

[44] Cf. *Wb*. II, 187, 5–6.

[45] Voir Černy, *Paper and Books*, 218.

[46] Cf. *Wb*. III, 222, 4.

[47] Cf. ibid. II, 187, 8.

[48] Voir Gardiner, The *Inscription of Mes*.

Sur ces rouleaux on copiait également tout genre de textes, littéraires, religieux, compositions mathématiques ou médicales, sapiences, textes didactiques, etc. On peut ainsi comprendre comment le papyrus, invention égyptienne et monopole d'Etat, spécificité égyptienne exportée partout, a permis à l'homme et non seulement en Egypte d'atteindre une étape décisive sur la voie de la thésaurisation du savoir et de sa dissémination bien aisée.[49]

III. *La spécificité du système égyptien d'écriture et ses implications*

III.1. *Aptitudes de schématisation, de généralisation et d'abstraction*

La pratique du système égyptien d'écriture et de ses idéogrammes, qui sont des images des êtres et des choses réelles, implique une adaptation d'une image donnée, proprement dite, et de ses traits morphologiques en un signe graphique, le pictogramme, qui est naturellement simplifié. Cette opération doit faire appel à une certaine faculté de simplification, de schématisation et de systématisation, aptitudes qui sous-tendent toute approche d'abstraction qui est essentielle à la systématisation des connaissances. Cette adaptation se fait en fonction de trois paramètres:

1. une simplification de l'image de l'objet en un idéogramme pour en garder uniquement les caractéristiques irréductibles,
2. une schématisation de la configuration de celles-ci de façon à assurer, à l'aide de quelques traits simples, un rapport sémantique clair avec l'objet que représente l'idéogramme, schématisation faite selon les normes de réduction qui gèrent la représentation plastique à l'époque,
3. une systématisation de toutes ces unités réduites, les idéogrammes, en un ensemble structuré et cohérent de signes graphiques ayant ensemble des rapports fonctionnels réciproques de façon à maintenir une différenciation morphologique spécifique, outil indispensable de distinction entre les éléments plus ou moins ressemblants.

C'est, donc, un système graphique essentiellement différent du système alphabétique que l'on connait; il transmet les items du champ sémantique

[49] Malgré l'invasion de l'informatique le papier reste encore pour une large population le support le plus pratique et le moins cher pour véhiculer la connaissance.

par une traduction plastique des images correspondantes impliquant une réduction de celles-ci à leurs éléments spécifiques, c'est-à-dire, opérant un choix de traits irréductibles capables de transmettre des significations et de leurs relations sémantiques précises. Par exemple, de passer en revue les idéogrammes représentant l'homme et ses occupations[50] permet de saisir la pertinence de leurs éléments irréductibles: peu de traits simples qui transmettent aisément des significations bien différenciées. De pratiquer la lecture, et surtout la notation, de ces idéogrammes est un exercice certain de schématisation.

Au début, pour noter un mot, le système graphique employait seul l'idéogramme correspondant, le signe-mot. Avec l'accroissement de l'emploi de l'écriture dû à l'obligation administrative de tout enregistrer, ce qui augmentait systématiquement le nombre de mots notés, on a dû adapter le système. On n'a pas multiplié outre mesure le nombre d'idéogrammes employés, ce qui serait un procédé compliqué et peu pratique. Par contre, on a utilisé certains signes-mots pour écrire plus d'un seul signifié. Ceci se fait en préfixant à l'idéogramme des phonogrammes correspondants; leur valeur phonétique appro-priée permet ainsi de noter un nombre grandissant de mots tout en employant un ensemble raisonnable d'idéogrammes, mesure qui facilite en même temps leur lecture.[51] L'idéogramme fait dans ce cas fonction de déterminatif, signe dont l'image détermine le sens voulu du mot et l'explicite.

Or, il fallait opter pour une rationalisation du nombre des déterminatifs employés dans le système graphique pour le rendre pratique. Vu la multitude des mots du lexique et de leurs nuances sémantiques, il s'avère impraticable d'utiliser autant de déterminatifs aptes à rendre compte de tous les phénomènes signifiants du vocabulaire d'une langue donnée ni même d'un seul ensemble de mots se rapportant à un même champ sémantique. Comme solution, l'Egyptien à opté pour une approche pragmatique: l'emploi d'une sélection suffisante, et relativement limitée, de déterminatifs. Ceci ne peut se réaliser sans une schématisation rationnelle de leurs détails spécifiques afin de les rendre à la fois faciles à transcrire et adaptables à un emploi aussi large que possible. L'élargissement de la signifiance de chaque élément de ce choix de déterminatifs est, en effet, un facteur qui conditionne le choix

[50] Voir Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, "Sign-list" A 1.
[51] Cf. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, § 23, *OBS.*

des traits considérés caractéristiques des signes graphiques employés à cet effet ainsi que leur morphologie afin d'assurer leur cohérence sémantique. Ceci ne peut se faire sans une analyse, à différents niveaux de signification, du contenu de chaque mot, de ses nuances et du contexte de son emploi, d'une part, et de l'autre, des relations entre les éléments du vocabulaire pour pouvoir isoler les mots aptes à avoir le ou les mêmes déterminatifs appropriés selon leur valeur sémantique. Ces procédés de simplification, de schématisation et de rationalisation représentent un exercice sémantique important dont les rapports avec la systématisation du savoir sont évidents.

III.2. *Catégorisation de notions et choix de déterminatifs*

Toute rationalisation de ce genre de la fonction de déterminatif demande un regroupement des éléments du vocabulaire et des concepts dans un nombre raisonnable de classes distinctes, classement qui les ordonne selon des relations logiques. C'est essentiellement une opération de catégorisation sémantique. La même approche domine le procédé de catégorisation des éléments du lexique suivi dans les compositions didactiques connues sous le nom *Onomastiques*.[52]

III.3. *Schématisation graphique: l'écriture hiératique*

Les conditions de travail imposées par le déroulement du dénombrement annuel entraînaient une autre schématisation de ce système d'écriture: la station debout des scribes, comme on les voit dans les scènes sur les parois des tombes par exemple, et la rapidité avec laquelle ils devaient exécuter leur travail sont des paramètres qui favorisaient une notation rapide et donc plutôt sommaire, surtout écrite à l'encre sur papyrus ou ostraca: c'est la naissance de l'écriture hiératique et plus tard du démotique. Il s'agit d'une schématisation graphique des idéogrammes par une 'interprétation' de nature plastique, afin de simplifier leurs parties constitutives. En d'autres mots, pour pouvoir écrire les signes rapidement à l'aide d'un pinceau chargé d'encre, le scribe doit schématiser leur forme de façon à capter l'essentiel de leur structure morphologique et à le condenser en peu de traits rapides. Cependant, par ces traits irréductibles il doit maintenir la capacité d'évoquer le prototype, base

[52] Voir Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*.

de la différenciation sémantique. Or, une schématisation de ce genre de tous les signes du système graphique, éléments analogues constituant un ensemble cohérent, n'est pas une tâche simple. De passer en revue les 'astuces' graphiques employées à cet effet est hors de notre propos.

Cette schématisation graphique implique un passage conceptuel du modèle intégral du prototype à l'époque, qui a déjà été sémantiquement simplifié mais reste encore chargé de détails plastiques, à un schéma formé d'un minimum de traits significatifs. C'est essentiellement un passage du complexe au simple, du minutieux au sommaire et du complémentaire au fondamental, le tout selon ce que nous avons appelé une 'logique interne' de la transformation graphique des signes hiératiques.[53] Ce qui ressort de cette transformation est un schéma condensé qui est perçu globalement. Mais une telle schématisation ne s'opère pas sans une analyse des traits constitutifs de la forme plastique du pictogramme selon des normes de nature logique, et sans l'option de l'une ou l'autre simplification graphique qui capte le trait significatif en un schéma qu'on modélise. C'est un processus qui a dû prendre un certain temps.

Ce qui est significatif dans ce passage du complexe au simple est qu'il soit exercé dans le domaine de la langue dont l'empreinte est incontestable dans la vision du monde; la langue d'un peuple et son identité sont intimement liées. Il est normal que cet exercice ait une influence directe sur les scribes lors de leur apprentissage puis lors de la pratique quotidienne de l'hiératique, stimulant ainsi chez eux un processus généralisé de simplification à travers l'analyse. Cette aptitude à schématiser les formes plastiques des éléments du système graphique rejoint une approche correspondante qui est suivie dans d'autres domaines comme par exemple dans l'art; les grandes lignes de la figuration plastique, comme on le voit dans les compositions artistiques montrant les êtres et les choses dans les scènes, présentent des caractères identiques à ceux de la schématisation, sémantique et graphique, des signes de l'écriture. C'est un aspect parmi d'autres de l'harmonie profonde entre faits culturels d'une civilisation créatrice.

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[53] Voir Megally, *Considérations sur les variations*. Cf. aussi les tableaux de signes hiératiques et leurs formes à travers l'histoire de cette écriture *in* Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie*.

IV. *Évaluation relative des choses et ses incidences sur la catégorisation et la hiérarchisation de ce qui est dénombré*

Un rythme annuel de dénombrement n'a de sens que s'il vise à capter les variations qualitatives en même temps que quantitatives des choses. Ainsi, l'important d'un dénombrement annuel n'est pas, en fait, le calcul arithmétique de ce qui est dénombrable mais la définition des choses à dénombrer selon des paramètres fixes.

Une première démarche indispensable est la distinction pragmatique des choses; on apprend au jeune scribe les noms des choses pour pouvoir identifier correctement ce qui est dénombrable.[54] On peut ainsi facilement comprendre la raison du soin pris par les textes didactiques d'inclure des exercices de définition comme c'est le cas également dans les Onomastiques.[55] Les termes de la langue y sont ordonnés dans des listes désignant les éléments du potentiel économique, social ou militaire, etc. Or, d'inclure des termes distincts mais qui sont plus ou moins connexes, sans donner d'explication aucune de leur signification, en une même catégorie ou classe selon des axes sémantiques non exprimés, les met en un contexte relationnel éclairant qui permet de distinguer les rapports étroits entre leur acception. C'est la méthode suivie dans ces exercices didactiques. Ces listes montrent qu'un signifiant est certes un terme pragmatique de convention et de référence mais également de classification par rapport aux autres signifiants et leurs signifiés. Ainsi les termes usuels de la langue y sont ventilés en catégories cohérentes selon les normes socio-économiques de l'époque et dans le cadre de l'économie agricole en nature du pays.

Par ailleurs, une connaissance de la valeur relative des choses ou de leur valeur d'échange, basée sur une estimation en quantités ou états physiques,[56] s'impose vu l'absence dans une économie en nature d'évaluation absolue, par exemple, par l'intermédiaire d'une unité monétaire de référence. Il faut donc une définition plus précise et plus caractéristique des items, comme des états spécifiques, les âges par

[54] Ce soin donné à la distinction pragmatique de choses caractérise un ensemble d'exercices pour jeunes scribes de l'époque du Nouvel Empire, voir l'ensemble de documents didactiques *in* Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*. Ces papyrus ont été traduits et commentés *in* Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*.

[55] Ce genre de documents est comme le 'thésaurus' un répertoire de termes normalisés selon le contenu dans des classements logiques; il sert de recueil ou lexique, un livre de référence. Voir Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*.

[56] Voir Janssen, *Commodity Prices*.

exemple pour les contingents de personnes recrutées pour un projet ou un travail précis. Ainsi donc, le nombre total de la population d'une localité donnée ne servirait en rien au plan de recrutement d'une main d'œuvre adéquate si ce nombre n'est pas ventilé en catégories selon l'âge et la capacité physique des gens.[57] Ceci explique la présence dans ces listes d'une certaine prolifération de termes voisins correspondants à ces paramètres variables.[58] Ceci permet de déterminer d'une année à l'autre si un membre d'une classe de personnes ou un élément d'une catégorie change de statut et par la suite passe à une autre charge fiscale. C'est un exercice continu de systématisation des connaissances, pour tous les scribes de l'Administration qui cadrent l'économie en nature dans tout le pays.

Ces listes didactiques prennent également en considération une hiérarchisation raisonnée du potentiel socio-économique selon les normes pratiquées où une place précise est allouée à chaque composante selon l'importance qu'on lui donne. Les titres administratifs et épithètes qualificatifs que portent les fonctionnaires en sont un exemple clair; ils sont échelonnés dans ces textes selon le même principe de l'hiérarchie administrative et la valeur qu'on leur attribue. Le même principe gère la place de titres mentionnés dans les documents administratifs ou les décrets officiels ou inscrits dans les tombes des particuliers.[59] Tout semble suivre un ordre logiquement réfléchi.

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[57] Ex. *Pap. Anastasi* IV, 7,2–3, voir Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 41, 15–16; Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 155. Nos dictionnaires, par exemple le *Wb*., donnent des traductions des termes égyptiens désignant des états successifs de l'âge d'un homme. Mais en dehors de ces acceptions plus ou moins vagues nous ignorons les conditions, sociales et autres, qu'elles impliquent. Malheureusement, les textes égyptiens ne sont pas explicites sur les barèmes qui sous-tendent la vraie différenciation entre ces expressions que les scribes prenaient soin d'employer non seulement dans les rapports administratifs ou les pièces comptables mais également dans les documents didactiques. C'est justement le cas des termes comme 'vieil homme,' 'homme,' 'jeune homme' et 'cadet' employés dans l'exemple en question. Par conséquent, on ne connait pas non plus les implications fiscales de cette catégorisation qui devait être définie, et par la suite mise au jour lors du dénombrement annuel, ni les vraies conséquences en matière de distribution de charges lors de l'exécution d'un plan organisationnel pour les travaux récurrents comme ceux concernant la préparation des digues avant et pendant l'inondation. Il en est de même pour leur responsabilité.

[58] Voir par exemple les différents termes qualifiant les bœufs selon les étapes successives de leur âge et de leur état dans le *Wb*. VI, 197.

[59] Malgré les multiples recherches sur les rangs des différents échelons des fonctionnaires de l'Administration égyptienne, on n'est pas encore certain à l'état actuel de nos connaissances de pouvoir dresser les riches ensembles de titres que portaient les hauts fonctionnaires selon leur ordre hiérarchique exact.

V. *Rapport du dénombrement avec d'autres domaines du savoir*

D'autres branches du savoir comme l'arpentage, la comptabilité, la géométrie, les mathématiques, etc. semblent procéder directement ou indirectement de la gestion, au sens large du terme, de l'inondation et du dénombrement. Par exemple, grâce aux informations en leur possession les scribes pouvaient identifier les limites des lopins de terre que les eaux de l'inondation risquaient d'estomper. Ils pouvaient aussi trancher une série de problèmes apparentés comme l'empiètement sur une propriété contiguë[60] quand les marques de séparation entre champs n'étaient plus à leur place, comme la dérobade aux prestations fixées ou la déviation de l'eau du voisin.[61] Le fait que ces actes soient mentionnés comme péchés au Chapitre 125 du Livre des Morts indique leur fréquence. Les scribes devaient posséder un minimum de connaissances, de notions juridiques et une capacité de saisir rapidement l'essentiel d'une situation pour pouvoir restaurer l'ordre.

VI. *Conscience du temps et de l'histoire, le calendrier et les annales*

Le rythme annuel de l'inondation qui règle le cycle de l'agriculture, la régularité du jour et de la nuit, le mouvement du soleil et de la lune, ont fait prendre conscience de la notion du temps, de même que la constance des mouvements des étoiles observées dans un ciel sans nuages, etc. Ce sont des éléments qui ont aidé l'Egyptien à systématiser le temps, à fixer une méthode pratique pour marquer son déroulement. La date de l'inondation qui marque le début du rythme agricole est prise comme point de départ d'une année nouvelle et de ses trois saisons: 1.  *ꜣḫt*, 'inondation,' temps des eaux submergeant les champs, 2.  *prt* 'l'hiver,' temps du labeur et du soin des plantes, 3.  *šmw* 'été,' temps de la récolte, du stockage du grain et du prélèvement

[60] Parmi les péchés dont le mort devait se laver devant les dieux selon le Chapitre 125 du Livre des Morts il y avait le fait 'd'empiéter sur les champs [d'autrui]' ainsi que les querelles sauf 'pour sa propriété,' cf. Allen, *Book of the Dead*, 98 (S 18), Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 31–32.

[61] Le fait de dévier l'eau ou de construire une digue illicitement était cité parmi les péchés dont le mort devait se déclarer innocent d'après le Chapitre 125 du Livre des Morts: 'Je n'ai pas dévié l'eau pendant sa saison, je n'ai pas construit une digue sur l'eau qui coulait [vers les autres]', voir Allen, *Book of the Dead*, 97; Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 31.

des impôts. De plus, selon les changements de phases de la lune et des astres, l'année est divisée en 12 mois de 30 jours de 24 heures, système[62] que nous utilisons toujours dans ses lignes essentielles. Le cadre ordonné et systématisé du temps facilite, en effet, la systématisation des connaissances.

Par ailleurs, lorsque, à l'époque de l'inondation les eaux submergent la vallée sauf les villes et les villages, la population est obligée de se concentrer dans ces lieux devenus des espaces de 'réunification.' Cette 'pause' de quelque trois mois sans travail dans les champs n'est cependant nullement une période passive. Son rythme récurrent en fait un 'événement' social important où délibération et réflexion peuvent s'activer, entraînant des échanges de connaissances, d'expériences acquises, de savoir et de souvenirs communs, renforçant le sentiment d'appartenance à une collectivité soudée et homogène. C'est un contexte qui aide à maintenir les mémoires et les traditions, vecteurs de l'histoire.

Grâce à cette conscience du temps et de l'histoire, l'Egyptien a très tôt senti qu'il était intégré dans la durée, dans l'histoire, ce qui l'a incité à remonter le temps et à élaborer des annales où il se situe et surtout où il situe les réalisations importantes de ses prédécesseurs comme le montrent les annales sur la Pierre de Palerme. Cette prise de conscience de l'histoire, qui est un facteur de développement, s'insère dans une approche plus large qui sous-tend la pensée égyptienne: sa profonde vénération pour les réalisations de ses ancêtres qui ont permis de systématiser des connaissances dans de multiples domaines.

À cette conscience collective et révérencieuse envers l'histoire on peut attribuer une volonté générale du maintien de l'acquit, une conviction de la pérennité des réalisations et de la nécessité d'en conserver les informations et de préserver pour les générations futures un savoir de valeur, auquel avait été attribué une origine quasi divine, tout au moins pour certaines inventions comme l'écriture, idée en rapport avec celle de la force créatrice de la parole.

Cependant, en parallèle avec l'admiration des réalisations du passé, il y avait une volonté d'actualiser le savoir. Les documents didactiques montrent clairement cet esprit d'innovation. À côté d'un certain conformisme des données pédagogiques qui reflétent un attachement à l'héritage du passé, l'éducation des jeunes scribes, ossature de la gestion du pays, montre une ouverture didactique certaine[63] au Nouvel Empire.

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[62] Cf. Parker, "Calendars and Chronology," 13 sq.

[63] On le remarque par exemple dans les documents didactiques du Nouvel Empire.

Grâce à ces scribes nous pouvons nous faire une idée du développement des connaissances dans plusieurs domaines. En effet, certains documents administratifs, économiques, judiciaires, etc.[64] du  *pr mḏ3t*, 'les archives'[65] ou du  *pr ʿnḫ*, la 'Maison de Vie,'[66] où étaient archivés et compilés les textes religieux,[67] ont survécu. De plus, habitués à élaborer des copies de documents officiels et administratifs, exercice qui a développé la calligraphie, certains maîtres et scribes de l'administration copiaient également pour le compte de particuliers, afin de former des bibliothèques privées, textes littéraires, religieux, magiques ou mythologiques, sapiences, manuels de mathématiques, traités de médecine, etc. On répétait un vieil adage selon lequel les livres étaient plus précieux que toute chose[68] et même utiles dans l'au-delà, ce qui a 'sauvé' quelques collections comme celles d'un prêtre lecteur du Moyen Empire trouvée dans le site du Ramesseum.

Mais beaucoup de textes ont disparu. Il y a plusieurs raisons à la disparition de ces collections. Le papyrus est une matière organique, exposée aux phénomènes de dégradation ou de décomposition par de multiples causes comme l'humidité ou l'usage. Il y a également la destruction délibérée lors des invasions successives de l'Egypte ou de désordres politiques intérieurs[69] quand on s'est attaqué aux symboles de l'Etat et surtout aux archives. Enfin il ne faut pas oublier la fameuse industrie qui, au Moyen Age, broyait des momies et des rouleaux de

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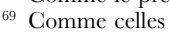
Parmi ces compositions beaucoup de passages sont contemporains de l'époque où on les enseignait, comme ceux qui concernent les colonies en Asie, ex. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 63 (13,6 sq.); 108 (9,9 sq.); Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*., 242, 401 sq.

[64] Quelques exemples de dates différentes: Posener-Kriéger, *Archives du temple funéraire* (Ancien Empire) comprenant des comptabilités et des tableaux de services du personnel d'un temple funéraire de la Ve dynastie; Hayes, *Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom* où sont consignés les noms des individus qui s'étaient dérobés de l'acquittement des services exigés par les autorités ainsi que les directives de la 'Grande Prison' les concernant et l'exécution de ces mesures disciplinaires; Megally, *Papyrus Hiératique Comptable*, document émanant de la direction du Grenier à la XVIIIe dynastie concernant les activités d'échange de blé et des dattes; Gardiner, *Ramesside Administrative Documents*, comprenant une série de documents relatifs à certaines activités économiques de l'époque ramesside; ibid., *Wilbour Papyrus*, qui comme ibid., "Ramesside Texts," 19 sq. traitent de la taxation en nature de certaines régions pendant l'époque ramesside.

[65] *Wb*. I, 187, 8.

[66] Ibid. I, 515, 8.

[67] Cf.  (*Wb*. II, *Belegstellen*, p. 273 [II, 187,8] 2e exemple): 'les documents qui sont conservés dans les archives religieuses.' On déclarait avec fierté qu'on connaissait (tous) les documents existants dans la salle des documents des archives:  , ibid., 3e exemple.

[68] Comme le précisent les sapiences.

[69] Comme celles commises pendant la Première Période Intermédiaire

papyrus en poudre pour être expédiés en Europe comme remède! Mais heureusement une partie de ce riche savoir avait déjà été accessible à d'autres peuples étrangers, surtout aux Grecs. Son contenu n'est donc pas réellement perdu.

L'Egypte est un pays de continuité, de permanence. Sa recherche de systématisation des connaissances a ouvert la voie vers le savoir et vers la création de la première Grande Bibliothèque du monde. C'est clairement un exemple intéressant de linéarité historique du savoir. Grâce à sa situation unique de carrefour et de charnière entre deux mondes, le 'hinterland' égyptien, chargé de savoir acquis, et d'autres civilisations, plus récentes, assoiffées de connaissance, Alexandrie a pu mettre en contact plus direct que par le passé l'héritage de l'Egypte ancienne avec l'hellénisme et certaines philosophies et sagesses du Moyen Orient. Les contributions égyptiennes essentielles qui ont permis la systématisation du savoir dans plusieurs domaines et la conception même d'une bibliothèque, sont l'invention des chiffres et de l'écriture, du papyrus, de la notation rapide à l'encre, du système de datation, du classement des archives, etc. Il serait intéressant de chercher à définir d'autres contributions profondes de l'héritage de l'Egypte ancienne dans ce qu'Alexandrie a transmis au monde antique dans des domaines comme la géométrie, la géographie, l'astronomie, la médecine, la philosophie, la rhétorique, etc., domaines qu'on traitait alors dans cette ville phare.

J'ose espérer que la Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie, ce forum culturel, scientifique et artistique très actif, puisse accueillir un jour un centre de recherches sur la transmission de connaissances entre la raison égyptienne et les autres raisons, hellénique ou moyen-orientales. On retracera peut-être quelques maillons du passage aux peuples voisins[70] ou de la métamorphose de certains thèmes littéraires ou concepts égyptiens d'ordre scientifique, métaphysique ou ontologique entre autres, comme, par exemple, l'analogie de certaines règles mathématiques égyptiennes et des formulations grecques, similaires ou comparables, en l'occurrence la valeur π sûrement employée mais non formulée dans le calcul égyptien; ou comme la correspondance entre *mdw*,[71] 'la parole créatrice

[70] Il est tentant de trouver des rapports entre le concept égyptien de l'*Océan Primordial* exprimé dans certains textes religieux au moins depuis le Moyen Empire mais exposé longuement dans un groupe de textes démotiques—cf. Smith, *On the Primaeval Ocean*—et certaines idées bibliques sur la Création exprimées en Gen. 1.

[71] Cf. *Wb*. II, 187, 6.

qui se réalise par le verbe' et le *logos* formulé par Philon d'Alexandrie ou plus tard dans l'Evangile selon St. Jean,[72] et maintes fois interprété ultérieurement surtout sous sa forme latinisée de *Verbum*.

La Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie ajouterait alors à son brillant rayonnement actuel une dimension épistémologique considérable.

[72] John 1:1–5.

PRIVATE COLLECTIONS AND TEMPLE LIBRARIES IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Fayza M. Haikal

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to serve as an introduction concerning books and libraries in Ancient Egypt, long before Ptolemy I established his famous Mouseion and Library in Alexandria. I shall attempt to show that these institutions were not a total novelty in Ancient Egypt, but rather a modernization and revitalization of an existing tradition in a forward leap on the infinite journey of knowledge. To illustrate this point, I shall begin my paper with a reminder of the conversation between an ancient Egyptian priest and a famous Greek visitor, Solon, as reported by Plato in *Timaeus*, as follows:

> …But the oldest one among the (Egyptian) priests exclaimed: 'Solon, Solon, you Greeks are always children; there are no old men in Greece!'
>
> 'What are you trying to say?' asked Solon.
>
> 'You are young in spirit,' replied the Egyptian priest, 'for you possess no truly antique traditions, no notion gray with time'…it is said that here are preserved the oldest traditions…Thus there is nothing beautiful nor great nor remarkable done, be it in your country (Greece), or here, or in another country known to us, *which has not long since been consigned to writing and preserved in our temples*.[1] (Plato *Timaeus* 22–23)

Indeed, temples and tombs are libraries, in as much as their walls preserve the oldest and longest religious books that we have in Egypt and maybe in the world, from the Pyramid Texts dating back to the middle of the third millennium B.C., to the last inscriptions of the Temple of Philae in the fifth century A.D.; in addition to historical records, geographical texts, and a large variety of inscriptions and scenes providing invaluable information on the economy of the country, its social life and the level of its scientific achievements. My presentation,

[1] Sauneron, *Priests of Ancient Egypt*, 114.

however, will not deal with this kind of information, but will rather focus on institutions concerned with the management and preservation of written documents for the purpose of their transmission.

I. *Evidence for the presence of archives and libraries in Ancient Egypt*

In spite of massive losses of texts written on perishable organic material such as papyrus, wooden tablets or leather rolls, the increasingly large amount of written data coming from Ancient Egypt and the variety of the text genres, ranging from administrative to religious, including literary and scientific texts point to the presence of some sort of system for administering all this material. More importantly, evidence of their transmission across time indicates clearly that certain texts must have been kept in depositories for preservation and easy access or retrieval. These depositories varied according to the categories of texts; whereas specific accounts and certain administrative documents (such as the fifth dynasty Abusir Papyri which deal essentially with the circulation and redistribution of man power, cattle and goods between different temples) may have required a shorter time of preservation, registration of personal property and legal texts required more permanence. For example, in order to ensure his possession of a parcel of land that belonged to his family for several generations and over which there had been much litigation among heirs, a Ramesside person had to provide evidence to the court through deeds of property, registered and kept in the proper governmental archives for more than three hundred years. This proprietor had the whole case inscribed on the walls of his tomb for everybody to know that he had won the case and to avoid further problems for his heirs.[2] Religious and literary texts as well as medico-magical prescriptions proved to have the longest life span, since Pyramid Texts dating from the third millennium B.C. can still be read on Graeco-Roman temple walls in the early centuries of the common era, while Middle Kingdom literary texts, written in the second millennium B.C. have been found recopied or mentioned until the very end of Ancient Egypt's history if not even later. The longevity of such 'sacralized' texts has induced research on the system ancient Egyptians

[2] Gaballa, *Memphite Tomb-Chapel of Mose*, 22–30.

used for their recording, preservation and transmission. In an article entitled "Bücher und Bibliotheken im alten Ägypten,"[3] Erika Schott collected titles of Pyramid Texts, spells and other religious incantations, not written on the walls of monuments because they were not read when the spells were recited. These titles were recorded on the outer side of the original papyrus rolls that served as master copy, in order to define their content, classify them and facilitate their retrieval from depositories for further usage. Research on writing material in Ancient Egypt, and more specifically on papyrus, the way it was manufactured and produced in different sizes to suit different needs, as well as the way how it was preserved, has been pursued by a number of scholars.[4] Fayence labels fixed to papyrus rolls or to their containers were also found.[5] Titles of texts related to daily life or rituals in the temple were also inscribed on walls of temple libraries of the late periods.

II. *The institutions*

II.1. *Difference between* ḫꜣ n zšw[6] *(Hall of Written Documentation)*, pr mḏꜣt[7] *(House of Papyrus Rolls) and* pr ʿnḫ[8] *(House of Life)*

Different names were given to the more generic appellation *Hall of Written Documentation* when referring to offices or rather archives connected with governmental institutions, such as those depicted in the Ramesside tomb of Thay (TT #23) or mentioned in literary references, such as the text found in the tomb of Rekhmire and other eighteenth dynasty officials. This paper however, will focus on the *House of Papyrus Rolls* and on the *House of Life*. Whereas the designation *House of Papyrus Rolls* clearly indicates some sort of library, the name *House of Life* is more ambiguous.

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[3] E. Schott, "Bücher und bibliotheken im alten Ägypten," 73ff.

[4] See Černy, *Paper and Books*; S. Schott, E. Schott, and Grimm, *Bücher und bibliotheken*; for examples, see Burkard, "Bibliotheken im alten Ägypten," 79–115.

[5] See Parkinson, "Two or Three Literary Artifacts," 49–57 which mentions, among other things, the labels coming from Amenhotep III private palace library in western Thebes.

[6] *Wb*. III, 222, 4.

[7] Ibid. I, 515, 12.

[8] Ibid., 515, 6, translated as 'House of the literates' (Haus der Schriftgelehrten).

II.2. *The* pr ʿnḫ *or House of Life*

Sir Alan Gardiner's (1938) scholarly article on the *pr ʿnḫ*[9] remains an essential reference on the matter, in spite of its early date and in spite of the author's modestly saying that his own 'investigations have brought to light nothing startlingly new.' In this article Sir Alan Gardiner collected *all* the texts including the word *pr ʿnḫ* available at the time, which referred to the institution or to its members.

The only Old Kingdom certain attestations of a *pr ʿnḫ* dates back to the sixth dynasty, more precisely to Pepi II's decrees in favor of the priests of the Temple of Min in Coptos, exempting them from a number of obligations (*corvée*) such as exemption from supplying the apparatus of the *House of Life* probably meaning the requirements in papyrus, reed pens and ink for this institution. Such an exemption could indicate that the *pr ʿnḫ* at that early date was already attached to or depended upon temple administration and subsidies. Dating from the Middle Kingdom, the earliest (?) direct mentions come from: an inscribed block from the time of S'ankhkare at el-Tod, reading Khnum foremost of the *House of Life*;' Prince Montuhotep of the Abydos Stela CGC20539 was a *ḫry sšt3w n pr ʿnḫ* 'Master of the secrets of the House of Life,' while at el-Bersheh we have an *ỉmy-r zš m pr ʿnḫ* 'Overseer of writings in the House of Life;' other titles begin to appear related to this house, like 'scribe of the House of Life,' etc.[10]

The New Kingdom gives us an actual evidence for this institution at Tell el-Amarna[11] where bricks stamped with the name of the *House of Life* were used for the construction of an independent building, close to the King's house and the Small Aten Temple and next to the records' office; J. R. Harris[12] has provided arguments for the circulation of Middle Kingdom literature at el-Amarna. He notes that the Ramesside version of the '*tale of Sinuhe*' on the Ashmolean Ostrakon includes features, such as the writing of Re and Aten which suggest that this copy was derived from a version transcribed in the Amarna period. We cannot prove, however, that it was copied in the *House of Life* but it might well have been.

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[9] Gardiner, "House of Life," 157–179.
[10] For later periods, see also Grimal, "Bibliothèques et propagande royale," 37–48.
[11] Kemp and Garfi, *Survey of the Ancient City of El-ʿAmarna*, 61, sheet 5.
[12] Harris, "Note on the Ramessid Text of 'Sinuhe'," 25–28.

With the nineteenth dynasty, evidence increases. In his book on History, Diodorus[13] mentions a library in the Ramesseum, Ramses II's memorial temple. However, the exact location of the library inside the temple is still under investigation.[14] Christian Leblanc who is currently cleaning, restoring and studying the temple, found a building with many rooms south-east of the temple and an open space in which a large quantity of inscribed literary ostraca were found, some of them look like school exercises, leading him to believe that the rooms were in fact *ʿwt sbȝyt* 'teaching class rooms' in the school of the temple, may be in connection with a *pr ʿnḫ*. The title of 'scribe of the *House of Life*' occurs frequently in different places in Egypt (Thebes, Memphis, Abydos,… etc.) and according to Leblanc different *pr ʿnḫ* could have specialized in different disciplines, each one being more closely related to the main divinity of the temple to which the *House of Life* was affiliated. Thus, the Temple of Sekhmet Bastet at Bubastis would concentrate more on medicine while that of Heliopolis would concentrate more on building and temple decoration. Leblanc also draws an analogy between these institutions and later Arabic compounds including a *dar el-ʿeloum* 'House of Sciences,' *dar el-hekmah* 'House of Wisdom,' and *dar el-kotob* 'House of Books' which also included a *kuttab* (scriptorium/school) for children's education. More titles related to the *pr ʿnḫ* continue to appear and Ramses IV has several inscriptions where *ṯst pr ʿnḫ* (a company/troupe of the *pr ʿnḫ*) is mentioned.

If the *Houses of Life* at Memphis, Abydos, el-Amarna, Akhmim, Coptos, Esna and Edfu are the institutions most referred to in the documentation at hand, it is generally assumed that all great temples must have had, as an annex, a *House of Life* where works of great scholarship were created and kept for re-transmission.[15] According to Pap. Salt 825, 6, 5–7, 7 the mythological/religious conception of the *House of Life* of Abydos describes it as a structure surrounded by gods and served by priests. It had an inner body surrounded by four other ones.

> As for the *ʿnḫy* he is (the living one) Osiris, and as for the 4 *pr* around it they are Isis, Nephthys, Horus and Thoth…Geb is its ground, Nut is its heaven. The hidden one who rests within it is the great god…There are 4 doors, one in each wall…It shall not be known nor shall it be seen, but

[13] Diodorus Siculus 1.49.2–3.

[14] Derchain, *Tombeau d'Osymandyas*, 165ff. Wessetzky, "Aegyptische tempel bibliothek," 54–59.

[15] See Grimal, "Bibliothèques et propagande royale," passim.

> the sun shall look upon its mystery. The people who enter it are the staff of Re and the *scribes of the House of Life*. The people who are in it, the *ḫkty* priest is Shu, the slaughterer (*ḥnty*) is Horus who slays the enemies of his father Osiris and the scribe of the sacred books is Thoth, and it is he who will recite the ritual in the course of every day, unseen, unheard…No Asiatic shall enter into it…The books that are in it are the emanations *bꜣw of Re* wherewith to keep alive this god and to overthrow his enemies. As for the staff of the *House of Life* who is in it, they are the followers of Re protecting his son Osiris every day.[16]

It is clear from the names of the gods mentioned, that we have here a representation of cosmic elements and the cycle of life as well as an evocation of the myth that dominated and explains ancient Egyptian civilization, namely that of divine kingship and its legitimacy. Re and Osiris are the two poles of existence, in this life and in life after death and they encompass all that exists. The Books are the *bꜣw rʿ* (the might and power of the god) by means of which Osiris is kept alive. To protect them is indeed to protect life and its perpetration, and this is the purpose of the 'scribes of the *House of Life*' and their ultimate goal. The fact that the *House of Life* is described as having an 'inner body surrounded by four other ones' reminds us of the four shrines of Tutankhamon surrounding the anthropoid coffins which protect his mummy, osirified and hence potentially alive *ʿnḫ* like the god lying in the *House of Life*.

II.3. *The pr mḏꜣt*

Scribes of the *pr mḏꜣt* (*House of Papyrus Rolls*) and scribes of the *pr mḏꜣt pr ʿꜣ* (*House of Papyrus Rolls of the Great House/palace*) were also known in the Old Kingdom.[17] Later, Papyrus Westcar, which dates to the Middle Kingdom, mentions that when the magician Djedi was summoned to Khufu's court in the Old Kingdom's fourth dynasty, he requested two barges for his transportation.[18] One of them was to transport himself, his family and household, while the other was to transport his books, thus already suggesting the existence of large private collections in the Old Kingdom.

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[16] After Gardiner, "House of Life," 168.
[17] Jones, *Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles*, 2:848ff.
[18] See Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1, *Old and Middle Kingdoms* (1975), 218.

Though often mentioned in relation to private houses or palaces in literary texts, these institutions are best known in temples. In the Temple of Edfu, the *pr md3t* is a small room near its entrance. This room bears inscriptions over narrow niches in the walls mentioning the title of the specific papyrus that was to be kept in it, in order to facilitate its retrieval for use during the temple's daily activities.

The meanings of the two words, *pr md3t* and *pr md3t* have probably developed with time, with *pr md3t* gaining in importance. Egyptologists generally agree now that in the later periods, the *pr md3t* was a small room inside the temple where a catalogue of the documents, and perhaps a copy of individual documents related to the temple's daily life (administrative and religious rituals) were kept, while the *pr ʿnḫ* was outside the temple and had a larger library and a more complex organization.[19]

II.4. *Divinities under whose patronage the institutions are placed*

Khnum, Thoth, Seshat lady of writing, Osiris, a particular form of Horus and Isis, *nbt pr ʿnḫ* are the main divinities under whose patronage the institutions were placed.

Diodorus,[20] mentions that the Ramesseum library that he called '*clinic of the soul*' was under the patronage of Seshat, *ḥnwt pr md3t, sfḫ ʿbw* (the mistress of the library, who loosens impurity), because books were meant to purify the soul. Seshat is most often seen attending Thoth in his writing activities. He is the inventor of writing and 'scribe of the gods.' It is his statue, mostly as a baboon, which is found in the different places where writing activities are exercised as for example, in the depiction of a scribal institution and archive in the tomb of Thay (TT #23).[21] Khnum is a creator god, Isis is 'mistress of magic,' the magic infused in knowledge as it helps heal and even revive, as Isis did

[19] See Grimal, "Bibliothèques et propagande royale;" Burkard, "Bibliotheken im alten Ägypten;" see also the extraordinary finds of Tebtunis now being studied by a number of scholars; see S. Quirke, review of *Hieratische papyri aus Tebtunis*, by Jürgen Osing, and, *Papiri geroglifici e ieratici da Tebtynis*, by Jürgen Osing and Gloria Rosati, JEA 89 (2003): 283–287.

[20] Diod. Sic. 1.49.2–3.

[21] Porter, and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*, vol. 1, *The Theban Necropolis*, pt. 1, *Private Tombs*, representations of scribes at work is common in private tombs from the Old Kingdom, but the actual depiction of the location of their work is rare.

when she revived Osiris to conceive their child Horus who inherited the knowledge of his mother and benefited from her infinite protection (see late tales). As for Osiris himself, he is the one who taught mankind civilization when he was ruling upon earth.[22]

II.5. *Administration of the institutions*

We are poorly informed on the administration of these institutions and on the daily running of their affairs. While titles such as *ḫry sšt3w n pr ʿnḫ* 'Master of the secrets of the House of Life' seem more related to academic or religious matters than to actual administration, *ỉmy-r zš* 'Overseer of writings' may correspond to an administrative title. One should go deeper in the matter of the *ṯst* 'troupe' related to these institutions and search for more titles. It is known however that in temple administration while the first prophet was in charge of the cult, the second prophet was in charge of administration.[23] Maybe the investigation of new documents can better clarify the situation.[24] While the actual everyday administration is still difficult to describe, we may assume that as everywhere else, the top positions were filled by royal decree.

II.6. *Organization of the collections*

The organization of the collections depended probably on the nature of the documents: papyrus rolls came in different sizes according to their content, religious books such as the *Book of the Dead* for example, being usually the longest and highest in size[25] while letters were usually smaller. Documents could be kept in special boxes or pots, and rolls could be deposited in niches in the walls of the *pr md3t* of the temples as can be seen in Edfu for example; wooden writing boards, potsherd and limestone flakes (ostraca) are more likely to be found in tombs or in settlement dumps like the great pit of Deir el-Medineh, a fact which indicates that they belonged to individuals rather than to public organi-

[22] See *Plutarch's de Iside et Osiride*, ed. and trans. Griffiths.

[23] Sauneron, *Priests of Ancient Egypt*, 61.

[24] On this matter see Quack, "Buch vom tempel und verwandte texte," 1–20 until his forthcoming publication of the whole text. See also Osing, *Hieratische papyri aus Tebtunis*, and Osing and Rosati, *Papiri geroglifici e ieratici da Tebtynis*, both reviewed by Quirke (see n. 19).

[25] The rolls could be up to 40 cm high and up to 30 m long or more. Literary texts were usually only up to 20 cm high and much shorter. See Černy, *Paper and Books*.

zations. Other official public artifacts must have had different systems of storage (probably similar to museum store rooms today). When temple stelae and statuary crowded the place or lost their immediate purpose, they would simply be dumped in a 'cachette' under the ground of the temple or inside a tomb.

We have seen that texts of older periods were re-copied by the scribes of the *House of Life* sometimes with annotations (glosses) or interpretations and we know that foreign as well as multilingual texts did exist in Egypt,[26] but we do not know how often foreign texts were actually translated for their scientific or literary value before the Alexandria Library was created and we definitely do not have any record of the place of provenance of any text. According to Michel Chauveau,[27] translation was into Greek rather than into Egyptian in the Graeco-Roman period, while some Aramaic texts in the Acheminid period may have influenced Demotic literature. However straightforward translation is not attested so far, though it might have existed if we believe what the Egyptian priest said to Solon.[28]

II.7. *The* House of Life *and its role in the society*

That the *House of Life* was considered as an institution rather than as a mere building, is clearly demonstrated by the fact that its name in Hieroglyphic was sometimes determined by a human being, in addition to the regular sign determining buildings.[29] Pap. Salt 825's description of the *House of Life*, mentioned above, emphasizes the protective and regenerative aspect of the institution that creates religious and scientific texts considered as the *bꜣw rʿ* (the god Re's might and power), for the perpetration of life upon earth. In the Late Period, the famous texts on the statues of Peftuaneith and Wedjahorresnet recall the restoration of different houses of life under Amasis I and then Darius respectively, after

[26] Foreign communities settled in Egypt quite early in its history. Foreign names are found already in the First Intermediate Period, if not earlier. From the New Kingdom on, foreign traders established in Egypt may have had correspondence with outposts in their original homeland or elsewhere. The international diplomatic correspondence kept in the Amarna archives was written in cuneiform and much later, in addition to settlers' documentation, tourists left inscriptions in their native language (graffiti) on many of the monuments that they visited. Multilingual royal decrees emitted by foreign rulers in the Late and Graeco-Roman periods are also common, see note 27.

[27] Chauveau, "Bilinguisme et traduction."

[28] See note 1.

[29] Parkinson, "Two New 'Literary' Texts," 190–93.

their destruction by Cambyses' armies.[30] The 'Famine Stela' at Seheil, the '*tale of the Princess of Bakhtan*,' Pap. Salt, and many other late texts mention the great knowledge of the scribes of this institution and we also know that they were given the status of priests.[31] Hieroglyphic in the Late Period is even called 'writing of the *House of Life*.' In Late Hieratic and Demotic literature, and probably even before, attestations of the *House of Life* and its personnel were becoming more frequent; scribes of the *House of Life* were also considered as magicians capable of practicing positive as well as negative sorcery.[32] In order to achieve such great knowledge and fame, the *House of Life* had specialists in the different fields of knowledge, and presumably a hierarchy within these fields.

> The renown of this wisdom crossed the sea, and numerous passages in the Greek and Latin texts speak of the wisdom and the technical knowledge of these scribes: they could heal the sick, knew the medicinal plants, geography, the signs of the sacred animals, the history of the ancient kings, knew how to foretell the future . . . Their colleagues . . . scribes of the divine books, baptized pterophores by the Greeks because of the great feathers which adorned their coiffure . . . occupied themselves with medicine . . . In the funeral ceremonies they participated as private ritualists, performing beatific ceremonies to the blessed spirits . . . and were also considered by the people as magicians . . . there were also the horologues (priest-time keepers) and the astrologers who had to know the mythological calendar etc. . . . in addition to these there were the official executor of sacrificial animals and all the artists and decorators who inscribed the walls.[33]

Under Psammetichus II, Peteese, a priest accompanying the king on an expedition to Syria was told: "Thou art a scribe of the House of Life; there is not a thing that they shall ask thee to which there is not a suitable answer."[34]

This remark emphasizes the vast knowledge expected from these scribes and also their role as envoys of the royal court. For the lay public however, the teaching instituted by the scribes of the *House of Life* and the presence of a serving medical body among its priests to help the people in their lifetime, were more tangible services to the

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[30] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 3, *The Late Period* (1980), 35, 39.

[31] For these stories, see Lichtheim, ibid.

[32] See Posener, *Papyrus Vandier*. See also Lichtheim, "The Stories of Setne Khaemwas," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3:125–151.

[33] Sauneron, *Priests of Ancient Egypt*, 63–64.

[34] Freedy and Redford, "Dates in Ezekiel," 462–485.

community. We also know that a healing center or sanatorium was related to this house, at least in the later periods if not before. Even after death, people needed the priests of the *House of Life* to recite the appropriate spells over their mummies and at their tombs to ensure their safety in the other world.

III. *Private collections and temple libraries: the documents*

Although the archeological context of a large part of the documents we have today remains unknown, there is clear evidence for the existence of private collections next to institutional libraries in Ancient Egypt.[35] Documents sometimes mention, in a colophon, the name of their owner or of the scribe who copied them (who could be the very owner himself). Hazards of excavations have also sometimes revealed entire collections whether in a temple, a tomb or a settlement. Every now and then Egyptological research updates and clarifies our understanding of these texts, and brings to our attention newly discovered ones. In the last decade or so, in addition to excellent monographs, a number of seminars have resulted in very important publications with compilations, descriptions and studies of texts of all genres and of all periods. Literary texts in particular seem to have attracted more attention.

III.1. *Private Collections*

Private collections are usually found in tombs or in settlements. They usually show a variety in their contents as they often conserve miscellaneous texts including private correspondence, literary compositions, medico-magical texts, scientific treatises and religious funerary texts according to the profession and the taste of their owners.

Apart from later mentions of Old Kingdom private collections, as we have seen above, we have still not found any Old Kingdom written papyrus coming from a private collection. The main collections dating to the Middle Kingdom are: the *Ramesseum Papyri* which were placed in a now destroyed wooden chest on which was the figure of a jackal representing *ḫry sšꜣw* (he who is upon the secrets), in a modest tomb beneath one of the store rooms of Ramses II's memorial

[35] Morenz, *Beiträge zur schriftlichkeitskultur im Mittleren Reich*, 14.

temple in the West of Thebes. The papyri contain a wide variety of texts, medico-magical, religious and literary as well as accounts. They must have formed a kind of family archive as they span over about a century; their last owner, a member of the *ỉtt-t3wy* court, must have lived under the thirteenth dynasty. The *el-Lahun Collection* at the Petrie Museum includes literary fragments '*tale of Hay*' and '*tale of Horus and Seth*' as well as priestly documents. The *Berlin Collection* probably found in a tomb, includes a version of the famous '*tale of Sinuhe*,' the '*dialogue between a man and his soul*,' the '*story of the herdsman*,' and the '*tale of the eloquent peasant*.' These collections have been compiled and studied in a number of publications.[36]

Apart from the palace of Amenhotep III in the West of Thebes which probably housed an important private collection,[37] the richest source of New Kingdom papyri that we have, is most certainly the village of Deir el-Medineh, where the teams in charge of the building and decoration of royal monuments in the New Kingdom lived with their families.[38] Some of the artists and scribes living there held among their titles that of '*scribe of the House of Life*,' but without reference to the house of life of any specific temple.[39] Among these learned people, Amennakht son of Ipouy and Qenherchepeshef are famous for their private collections of ostraca and papyri which contain copies of some of the most famous texts of Ancient Egypt. Private documents coming from Saqqara tombs are also numerous, but their exact provenance is unspecified.[40]

In the Late and Graeco-Roman periods, a private collection comprising papyri and ostraca was found at el-Hibeh in Middle Egypt. The archeological context of later great collections is less evident; most of them seem related to temple archives or libraries in spite of the fact

[36] For one of the best and most recent, see Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture*, 68–72.

[37] See Parkinson's article in note 5.

[38] Valbelle, *Ouvriers de la tombe*; Černy, *Community of Workmen at Thebes*; Demarée and Egberts, *Village Voices*.

[39] Bickel and Mathieu, "Écrivain Amennakht et son enseignement," 31–51; Derchain, *Tombeau d'Osymandyas*, 165–171.

[40] On Amennakht, his library and compositions, see Bickel and Mathieu, "Écrivain Amennakht et son enseignement;" On Qenherchepeshef 's library, see Hornung, "Wege zum altägyptischen Menschen," 139–140; for the Saqqara documents, see Quirke, "Archive," 391; for a compilation of literary texts of all periods, see Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*.

that their contents may also include a variety of texts unrelated to religious documentation.[41] This period also witnessed the proliferation of bilingual texts in Egypt.

III.2. *Temple archives and libraries: Walls of the temples*

Like the walls of tombs, the walls of temples were covered with different kinds of texts shedding light on different aspects of Egyptian life.

III.3. *Temple archives and libraries: Actual libraries*

Temple archives presenting a miscellany of texts related to the economic life and administration of the temple mixed with religious compositions are known since the Old Kingdom. In fact, the oldest written texts we have come from temple archives.[42]

III.3.1. *Funerary texts*

We have mentioned above that all funerary texts were inscribed on the walls of royal and private tombs as well as on coffins and sarcophagi. However, these very texts have also been copied or abbreviated on papyri for the benefit of tomb owners who wanted to supply themselves with more copies for their afterlife. Some of these papyri, richly illustrated with colored vignettes are probably the first illustrated books in the world. There must also have been master copies written on papyrus to be available for the scribes who inscribed the texts on the walls of tombs or on other funerary equipments; and it is very likely that all this documentation was made and preserved in the scriptoria of the temples. All these funerary compositions, from the Pyramid Texts written in the third millennium B.C. to the last funerary texts of the Graeco-Roman period, deal essentially with the accession of the deceased to the afterlife and his escaping its dangers before merging with the gods of the other world and spending eternal life in bliss. They all contain superb passages of intensive religiosity and great literary value, comparable with other

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[41] Quirke, "Archive," 391. Other great collections coming from the Graeco-Roman period seem rather related to temple libraries. See note 42 below.

[42] For the Abusir and Gebelein archives, see Black and Tait, "Archives and Libraries," 4:2204ff. For a full publication of the Abusir document, see Posener-Kieger, *Archives du temple funéraire de Néferirkarê-Kakaï*. For mention of the great collections of the late and Graeco-roman period, see Quirke in note 19.

religious texts from different traditions. Funerary compositions recited during mummification or at funerals were also kept in the libraries of the temples. All these texts have been compiled and presented in a number of publications.[43]

III.3.2. *Texts for temple rituals*

Temples had a life of their own. The daily ritual performed in them was not limited to the service and adoration of the gods, it served essentially to dispel chaos and maintain an orderly creation and the equilibrium of the world. In addition to the performance of the daily ritual, the calendar was full of festivals with rites performed inside the temple or even sometimes expanding outside the temple in processional journeys of the gods to different locations. All these rituals demanded great knowledge of specific texts preserved in the libraries of the temples.[44]

III.3.3. *Related texts*

In addition to religious texts, temple libraries housed other kinds of documentation for the smooth performance of the various functions in the temple's life, such as astronomical texts to establish among other things, the time of rituals, veterinary treatises to ensure the good health of animals slaughtered as offerings, texts on drugs and pharmacy, magic and medicine, dream interpretation, history, geography, economics, administration and geometry, all sciences needed for the service of the gods and their creations.[45]

Conclusion

The Alexandrian Mouseion and Library in the Egyptian context

According to P. M. Fraser:[46]

> …The *Mouseion* at Alexandria *takes its place in a combined tradition of cult and religious feeling and also of literary activity*. It is only in the Roman period

[43] See for example, Hornung, *Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*; Goyon, *Rituels funéraires de l'ancienne Égypte*.

[44] For a list of these texts, see Sauneron, *Priests of Ancient Egypt*, 138.

[45] See Sauneron, ibid., 135–170; Quack, "Historische abschnitt des buches vom tempel," 267ff.

[46] Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:313.

> that the Mouseia develop into secular centers of learning, the ancient equivalent of a University, a development due to the ecumenical prestige of the Alexandrian Mouseion.

He also adds that according to Strabo:[47]

> The Mouseion is part of the royal quarter and it has a cloister and an arcade and a large house in which is provided the common meal of the men of learning who share the Mouseion. And this community has common funds, and a priest in charge of the Mouseion who was appointed previously by the kings, but now by Caesar.

These citations indicate that the members of the Mouseion were presided over by a priest and that they were first regarded as a group of men of learning brought together for religious and scientific purposes (in as much as all sciences were part of philosophy), essentially to serve the Muses. Such was also the main purpose of the scribes of the *House of Life*; to serve the Gods.

Although the Mouseion was funded by the crown, it seems that it remained free to invest its funds as it pleased, in the same way as were regular temples in Egypt and elsewhere in antiquity. In addition to its priest as highest religious authority (equivalent to the 'first prophet' of Egyptian traditional temples), it seems that an Epistates or administrative director appointed by the crown was in charge of the administrative aspects of the Mouseion and its finances (this administrator could also be compared with the second prophet of Egyptian temples).

We do not know how the members of the institution were paid but it is likely that they were exempted from taxes as teachers since it is assumed that teaching was performed there through discussions and conversations.[48] This financial arrangement can also be compared to the prevailing situation in Ancient Egypt where people were encouraged to learn to write and one of the incentives was to be exempted from taxes.[49]

The Library on the other hand was presided over by a Librarian, a royal appointment associated from its inception with a very influential post, that of 'tutor to the children of the royal house.' Tzetzes says that

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[47] Ibid., 315.

[48] Ibid., 316–18. On the duties of the first and second prophets of Egyptian temples, see Sauneron, *Priests of Ancient Egypt*, 61.

[49] *Pap. Anastasi* V, 15, 6–17, 3 'the scribe is not taxed like the peasant.' Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*.

there were two libraries, 'the library outside the palace' and 'the library within the palace.'[50] The Royal Library must have been the equivalent of the *pr mḏ3t pr ʿ3* or 'House of Books of the Royal Palace' with its scribes.[51] As for the one outside the palace and related to the Mouseion, that one too could be paralleled with the *pr mḏ3t* of Egyptian temples, particularly that there is no clear indication that the Library at its inception was a public building similar to the libraries of today.[52]

It is interesting to see that institutionalized research centers and libraries were often associated with religious institutions and placed under the protection of divinities or muses. This tradition continued in the east even after the Hellenistic period when research was particularly active in monasteries and later on in mosques. Even in medieval Europe, great universities started with monks. Knowledge was somehow part of the divine, of the mysteries of the world.

[50] After Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 321ff.

[51] Jones, *Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles*, 2:849.

[52] Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 320. It is clear however that the conception of the Alexandrian Mouseion and Library developed greatly during the Hellenistic period. Particularly interesting in this respect are the acquisition methods, organization and translations of the contents, etc., which really modernized the concepts of a library. See Fraser, ibid., 320–35.

EARTH, WIND, AND FIRE: THE ALEXANDRIAN FIRE-STORM OF 48 B.C.

William J. Cherf

The Alexandrian Library and the fate of its intellectual content in 48 B.C. have been discussed by Classical philologists, historians, and archaeologists over the past 183 years. The select bibliography alone is simply enormous, numbering over fifty citations.[1]

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[1] Dedel, *Historia critica bibliothecae Alexandrinae* (1823); Klippel, *Ueber das Alexandrinische Museum* (1838); Parthey, *Alexandrinische Museum* (1838); Ritschl, *Alexandrinischen Bibliotheken unter der ersten Ptolemaern* (1838); *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, s.v. "Alexandria," 1:97; Göll, *Alexandrinische Museum* (1868); El-Falaki, *Mémoire sur l'antique Alexandrie* (1872); Kiepert, "Zur Topographie des alten Alexandria," (1872): 345; Lefort, *Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie et sa destruction* (1875); Weniger, *Alexandrinische Museum* (1875); Chastel, "Destinées de la bibliothèque d'Alexandrie," (1876): 484–496; Schiller, "Zur Topographie und Geschichte des alten Alexandria," (1883): 330–334; Bati, "Burning of the Alexandrian Library," (1884): 103–107; Cumpfe, "Beiträge zur einige das Museum und die Bibliotheken zu Alexandria betreffende Fragen," (1885): 63–71; Judeich, *Caesar im Orient: Kritische Übersicht der Ereignisse vom 9. August 48 bis Oktober 47* (1885); Hirtius, *Bellum Alexandrinum*, erklärt von Rudolf Schneider (1888); Cornelissen, "Ad librum de Bello Alexandrino," (1889): 52–55; Nourrisson, *Bibliothèque des Ptolémées* (1893); Puchstein, *RE*, s.v. "Alexandria," (1), col. 1376–1388; K. Dziatzko, *RE*, s.v. "Bibliotheken: v. Alexandrinische Bibliotheken," (3), col. 409–414; Teggart, "Caesar and the Alexandrian Library," (1899): 472; Jung, *Caesar in Aegypten, 48/47 v. Chr.* (1900); Blomfield, "Emplacement du musée et de la bibliothèque des Ptolémées," (1904): 15–37; Macaire, "Nouvelle étude sur la Serapeum d'Alexandrie," (1910): 443–456; Magdi Bey, "Résponse à S. B. Kyrillos Macaire à propos de l'incendie de la bibliothèque d'Alexandrie," (1910): 553–570; Ibid., "Observations on the Fate of the Alexandrian Library," (1911); Furlani, "Sull'incendio della biblioteca di Alessandria," (1924): 205–212; Ibid., "Giovanni il Filopono e l'incendio della biblioteca d'Alessandria," (1925): 58–77; Bell, "Alexandria," (1927): 171–184; Breccia, *Porto d'Alessandria d'Egitto*, (1927); Bushnell, "Alexandrian Library," (1928): 203; Staquet, "César à Alexandrie: L'incendrie de la bibliothèque," (1928): 169; Graindor, *Guerre d'Alexandrie* (1931); Calderini, *Dizionario de nomi geografici e topografici dell' Egitto Greco-Romano* (1935); Götze, "Antiken Bibliotheken," (1937): 225–247; Harvey, "Alexandrian Library," (1940); Parsons, *Alexandrian Library* (1952); Zeydan, "Burning of the Books at the Library of Alexandria and Elsewhere," (1952): 413–421; Westermann, *Library of Ancient Alexandria* (1954); De Vleeschauwer, "Bibliothèque Ptolémées d'Alexandrie," (1955): 1–39; Forster, *Alexandria* (1961); Adriani, *Topografia di Alessandria* (1966); Moschonas, "Sur la fin probable de la bibliothèque d'Alexandrie," (1967): 37–40; Niazi, "Destruction of the Alexandrian Library," (1968): 163–174; Mader, "Library of Alexandria," (1976): 2–13; Hemmerdinger, "Que César n'a pas brûlé la bibliothèque d'Alexandrie," (1985): 76–77; Canfora, *Vanished Library* (1990); Blum, *Kallimachos: The Alexandrian Library and the Origins of Bibliography* (1991);

At issue for these scholars are basically three questions that can be summarized as follows. First of all, where was the Library located—near the Eastern Harbour or safely beyond it? Second, do the ancient testimonia that refer to the loss of stored books mean the Great Library itself, or some other external collection? Third and finally, was the Great Library indeed damaged or destroyed as a result of the *Bellum Alexandrinum*, when Julius Caesar set afire the Egyptian fleet in the Eastern Harbour?

To date, no scholar has focused upon one detail that all of the ancient testimonia agree upon—the fire itself.[2] So the present thesis argues simply this: if the necessary conditions were available, could the

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El-Abbadi, *Life and Fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria* (1992); Ellens, *Ancient Library of Alexandria and Early Christian Theological Development* (1993); Jochum, "Alexandrian Library and its Aftermath," (1999): 5–12; MacLeod, *Library of Alexandria* (2000); Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (2001).

[2] Caesar *Bellum Civile* 3.111: Sed rem obtinuit Caesar omnesque eas naves et reliquas, quae erant in navalibus, incendit, quod tam late tueri parva manu non poterat, confestimque ad Pharum navibus milites exposuit. Seneca *De tranquillitate animi* 9.5: Quadraginta [codex Ambrosianus xl; Quadringenta Pincianus] milia librorum Alexandriae arserunt; pulcherrimum regiae, opulentiae monimentum alius laudaverit, sicut T. Livius quie elegantiae regum curaeque egregium id opus ait fuisse. Lucan *Pharsalia* 10.488–505: Sed adest defensor ubique, Caesar et hos aditus fladiis, hos ignibus arcet, Obsessusque gerit—tanta est constantia mentis—Expugnantis opus. Piceo iubet unguine tinetas, Lampadas inmitti iunctis in vela carinis; Nec piger ignis erat per stuppea vincula perque, Manates cera tabulas, et tempore eodem, Transtraque nautarum summique arsere ceruehi. Iam prope semustae merguntur in aequora classes, Iamque hostes et tela natant. Nec puppibus ignis, Incubuit solis; sed quae vicina fuere, Tecta mari, longis rapuere vaporibus ignem, Et cladem fovere Noti, percussaque flamma, Turbine non alio motu per tecta cucurrit… Quam solet aetherio lampas decurrere sulco, Materiaque carens atque ardens aere solo. Illa lues paulum clausa revocavit ab aula, Urbis in auxilium populos. Plutarch *Caesar* 49: δεύτερον δέ περικοπτόμενος τὸν στόλον ἠναγκάσθη διὰ πυρὸς ἀπώσασθαι τὸν κίνδυνον, ὁ καὶ τὴν μεγάλην βιβλιοθήκην ἐκ τῶν νεωρίον ἐπινεμόμενον διέφθειρε. Florus *Epitoma de Tito Livio* 2.13.59–60: Ac primum proximorum aedificiorum atque navalium incendio infestorum hostium tela submovit, mox in paeninsulam Pharon subitus evasit. Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 7.17.3: Ingens postea numerus librorum in Aegypto ab Ptolemaeis regibus vel conquisitus vel confectus est ad milia ferme voluminum septingenta; sed ea omnia bello priore Alexandrino, dum diripitur ea civitas, non sponte neque opera consulta, sed a militibus forte auxiliaris incensa sunt. Dio Cassius 42.38.2: κἀκ τούτον πολλαὶ μὲν μάχαι καὶ μεθ' ἡμέραν καὶ νύκτωρ αὐτοῖς ἐγίγνοντο, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ κατετίμπρατο, ὥστε ἄλλα τε καὶ τό νεώριον τάς τε ἀποθῆκας καὶ τοῦ σίτου καὶ τῶν βίβλων, πλείστων δὴ ἀρίστων, ὥς φασι, γενομένων, καυθῆναι. Ammianus Marcellinus 22.16.13: In quo bybliothecae fuerunt inaestimablies: et loquitur monumentorum veterum concinens fides, septingenta voluminum milia, Ptolomaeis regibus vigiliis intentis composita, bello Alexandrino, dum diripitur civitas, sub dictatore Caesare conflagrasse. Orosius *Historiae adversus paganos* 6.15.31: Ea flamma cum partem quoque urbis invasisset quadraginta mila librorum proximis forte aedibus condita exussit. Zonaras 10.10.3: ὅτε πῦρ ἐμβαλοντες Καίσαρος τῷ στόλω καὶ ἡ μεγάλη βιβλιοθήκη ἐμπεπρηστο.

intentionally set Alexandrian fire of 48 B.C. have reached fire-storm proportions?

In support of this thesis, a brief chronological overview of the *Bellum Alexandrinum* will first be necessary. Second, the meteorological conditions needed to produce a natural fire-storm will be outlined. Third, will be discussed the "fuel" which was readily available that could have fed such a fiery calamity. Fourth, the fire's initial ignition and its unintended inland spread will be described. Useful to this description will be the comparison of eyewitness accounts of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 with that of Lucan's. Lastly the author will posit the question, once having established the possibility that such a fire-storm could have occurred, how could the Great Library have survived such a fiery tempest?

I. *Definition*

What is a fire-storm? A fire-storm is usually a natural phenomenon that combines fire with the mass movement of air to create a fire of extreme intensity over a wide area. After an area catches fire, the air above the area becomes extremely hot and rises rapidly. Cold air then rushes in at ground level from the outside, creating high winds which fan the flames at ground level further. This vortex creates a self-sustaining "fire-storm" that can attain temperatures as high as 2000°C. While such fire-storms are common features of forest fires in the American West, they also have been known to form within the raging conflagrations that plague large urban areas. In fact, there is strong evidence that suggests that such was the case of the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64, the Great Fire of London 1666, the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and the 1906 San Francisco Fire.

II. *Chronology*

Chronological reckoning and the coordination of it with the seasons is a hazardous exercise, but we need to do so in order to establish whether the meteorological conditions could support the formation of a natural fire-storm. First what must be attempted, in order to approximate a modern time frame for the ignition of the Egyptian fleet by Caesar's troops, is a two-step chronological calculation in order to convert

pre-Julian calendrical dates into Julian dates, and then convert the Julian dates into those of the Gregorian calendar.

The pre-Julian dates that we know of include Caesar's arrival at Alexandria on either the 1st or 2nd of October 48 B.C.,[3] and that the date for the surrender of the Egyptian army was on the 27th of March 47 B.C.[4] Therefore, the burning of the fleet must have occurred sometime during that six month period. However, based upon internal textual evidence, several valuable chronological benchmarks are available to assist us in narrowing down when the fire was started. They include:

– The "successive days" of unrest that began with Caesar's arrival at Alexandria;[5]
– Caesar's inability to flee the city because of the Etesian winds;[6]
– Pothinus's call for the Egyptian army at Pelusium to liberate Alexandria;[7]
– Caesar's awareness of the approach of the Egyptian army;[8]
– His dispatch of a delegation to meet the approaching Egyptian army;

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[3] Velleius Paterculus 2.53.3 dates Pompey's murder at Pelusium to 28 September 48 B.C. (pre-Julian). Livy (*Periochae* 112) reports that Caesar arrived at Alexandria three days after that event, thus, on 2 October 48 B.C. (pre-Julian), Graindor, *Guerre d'Alexandrie*, 18 n. 1. This date has been accepted by most scholars, however, Bengtson, *Römische Geschichte*, 227 n. 1, quoting Heinen, *Rom und Ägypten von 51 bis 47 v. Chr.*, 70f., has preferred 1 October 48 B.C. (pre-Julian) for the date of Caesar's arrival.

[4] For the date of the surrender of the Egyptian army to Caesar, see Lord, "Date of Julius Caesar's Departure from Alexandria," 25.

[5] Caes. *B Civ*. 3.106.1–5; Livy *Per*. 112; Dio Cass. 42.7; Luc. *Phar*. 10.11. Caesar's sojourn in Egypt was most probably for financial reasons—after Pharsalus his soldiers and officers had to be paid. Thus, Caesar went to Alexandria to collect an old debt of Ptolemy XII for his kingly confirmation by the Roman Senate. The attempted collection of this debt may have caused the Alexandrian's rioting (Caes. *B Civ.* 3.107; Cicero *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.16.2; Suetonius *De vita Caesarum* 54.3; Dio Cass. 39.12.1 and Pliny *Naturalis historia* 33.136).

[6] Caes. *B Civ*. 3.107: *Ipse enim necessario etesiis tenebatur, qui navigantibus ibus Alexandria flant adversissimi*. Hirtius *Bellum Alexandrinum* 3: *Namque eum (Caesar) interclusum tempestatibus propter anni tempus recipere transmarina auxilia non posse*.

[7] Caes. *B Civ.* 3.108.2 and Dio Cass. 42.36.2. That Ptolemy XIII's reign occurred during the Alexandrian War, see Samuel, *Ptolemaic Chronology*, 168; Skeat, *Reigns of the Ptolemies*, 18, 41; Pestman, *Chronologie Égyptienne d'après les textes demotiques*, 82–83 and Heinen, "Caesar und Kaisarion," 182.

[8] Caes. *B Civ.* 3.109. To cross the Delta from east to west, the Egyptian army had to first march to the Delta's apex and cross the Nile near Memphis before advancing in a northwesterly direction towards Alexandria. Cf., Arrian 3.1 for Alexander's similar route from Pelusium to Alexandria.

– The murder of one of Caesar's delegation;
– Caesar's reaction to that murder by taking custody of young King Ptolemy XIII;
– The arrival of the Egyptian army at Alexandria;[9]
– The outbreak of hostilities known as the First Battle;
– The street-to-street fighting;
– Finally, the overwhelming pressure placed upon the already battle-weary Caesarian troops that drove Caesar to set afire the anchored fleet as a diversionary tactic in order to cover their retreat to the security of Pharos Island.[10]

The course of these events has been discussed elsewhere in considerable and exhaustive detail.[11] Suffice it to say, the *communis opinio* holds that the First Battle and the burning of the Egyptian fleet took place sometime early in November of 48 B.C. (pre-Julian), or about a month after Caesar's arrival.[12]

Admittedly, the assignment of precise Julian equivalents for pre-Julian dates can only be approximated, but the task can be done with some degree of probability.[13] After some calculations, the pre-Julian year of 48 B.C. had advanced some 47 days ahead of the Julian calendar.[14] When these 47 days are applied, Caesar's landing at Alexandria in early October (pre-Julian) corresponds to about mid-August (Julian).[15]

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[9] Caes. *B Civ*. 3.110.

[10] *Supra* note 2.

[11] Judeich, *Caesar im Orient*; Jung, *Caesar in Aegypten, 48/47 v. Chr.*; Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire des Lagides*; Veith, *Geschichte der Feldzüge C. Julius Caesars*; Drumann, *Geschichte Roms in seinen Übergang*, vol. 3; A. Klotz, *RE*, s.v. "C. Iulius C. f. C. Caesar," (10, 1), col. 186–275; Graindor, *Guerre d'Alexandrie*; Walter, *Caesar: A Biography*; Carcopino, *César*; Adcock, *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 9; Dodge, *Caesar*; and Heinen, *Rom und Ägypten von 51 bis 47 v. Chr*.

[12] Judeich, *Caesar im Orient*, 83; Drumann, *Geschichte Roms*, 3:483–484; Carcopino, *César*, 913.

[13] Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology*, 163–164.

[14] In 46 B.C. Julius Caesar, as *pontifex maximus*, reformed the Roman calendar by adding an intercalary month of 23 days plus an additional 67 days which had not been added to the preceding years of 51 through 47 B.C., Drumann, *Geschichte Roms*, 3:762; Carcopino, *César*, 1030. This calendrical discrepancy arose because the pre-Julian year contained 355 days and three biennial intercalations of 22, 23, and 22 days had not occurred to maintain the pre-Julian calendar with the solar year, Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology*, 155–159. Similarly, if intercalations are omitted, then the pre-Julian year would advance in relation to the solar year at a rate of approximately 10 days per year. Thus, if 46 B.C. was 67 days in advance of the solar year, then 47 B.C. would be approximately 57 days in advance, and 48 B.C. approximately 47 days in advance.

[15] Carcopino, *César*, 910.

Next, we are told that Caesar could not embark from Alexandria on account of the Etesian winds. The Egyptian trade-winds, or Etesians, typically blow out of the North to Northwest,[16] and according to the pre-Julian calendar did so from mid-September through mid-November. When corrected into Julian dates, these winds blew from early August through early October (table 1).

Table 1. Pre-Julian, Julian, Gregorian Correlation for 48 B.C.

Calendar	**Months**				
Pre-Julian (pJ)	Quintilis (31)	Sextilis (29)	September (29)	October (31)	November (29)
Gregorian (G)	July (31)	August (31)	September (30)	October (31)	November (30)

Alexandrian Events in 48 B.C.						
	Caesar's Arrival at Alexandria				Early Oct. (pJ)	
			Mid-August (J)			
		End July (G)				
	First Battle. Ignition of Egyptian Fleet					Early Nov. (pJ)
				Mid-Sept. (J)		
			End August (G)			
	Etesian winds (Duration: 60 day maximum)			Mid-Sept. thru Mid-Nov. (pJ)		
			Early August thru Early October (J)			
		Mid-July thru Mid-September (G)				

With Caesar's arrival at Alexandria in mid-August (Julian), he then would have been stranded there until the Etesian winds began to subside sometime in early October (Julian). These annual winds blew from the Northwest to North for approximately 40 to 60 days—their fluctuation being based upon a particular year's sun-spot activity.[17] In other words, Caesar sailed into Alexandria with the Etesian winds, which had been blowing since early August. These same winds will now pin him and his army down in Alexandria for the next 45–50 days.

[16] Strabo 17.1.17 (C793) and H. Gärtner, *Kleine Pauly*, s.v. "Etesien," (2), col. 381, lines 34–36.

[17] Judeich, *Caesar im Orient*, 71–72; Lamb, *Climate*, 1:456.

Indeed, Caesar's tactical dilemma was caused by the Etesian winds, and conversely, the Egyptian army's hope to defeat Caesar depended upon these unsettling conditions. In essence, the Egyptian army had to engage and quickly defeat Caesar's forces before the Etesian winds died down. Caesar, meanwhile, had to devise an urban defense that would frustrate a swift Egyptian victory if he had any hope in being relieved. The Egyptians soon realized, however, that Caesar's defensive strategy was working and that they were running out of time. The Egyptian decision was to attempt to man the anchored ships in the Eastern Harbour in the hope of preventing the Roman relief forces from arriving. This tactical ploy by the Egyptians forced Caesar's hand into burning the fleet.

So when the above Julian corrective is applied, Caesar's desperate act of burning the fleet should have taken place about a month after his arrival, that is, on or around the middle of September 48 B.C. (Julian).

Now in order to be able to apply the modern meteorological data, a correlation between the Julian calendar and the present-day Gregorian system must be made, for it was discovered during the sixteenth century that the Julian calendar advanced approximately 11 minutes every year, or about one day in every 130 years.[18] In short, between 45 B.C. and A.D. 2004 the Julian calendar has advanced some 15.7 days. When this final Gregorian correction is applied, the ignition of the Alexandrian fire corresponds to sometime near the end of August (Gregorian) (table 1 above).

III. *Meteorological conditions*

Recent research in palaeoclimatology has shown that the weather of Eastern North Africa and the Southeastern Mediterranean has not significantly changed since the third millennium B.C.[19] In fact; the direction of that region's prevailing winds has remained constant for the last 50,000 years.[20]

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[18] Carcopino, *César*, 1032.

[19] Brooks, *Climate Through the Ages*, 333; Butzer, *Environment and Archaeology*, 236; ibid., *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt*, 26.

[20] Ramly, "Shoreline Changes during the Quaternary in the Western Desert Mediterranean Coastal Region (Alexandria-Sallum), U.A.R.," 286.

With the burning of the fleet in the Eastern Harbour taking place sometime near the end of August 48 B.C. (Gregorian), modern meteorological data of the monthly temperatures, rainfall, wind directions, and wind rose velocities, can now be consulted. These data indicate that the air temperature in modern Alexandria during the months of June through September would have *averaged* between 23°C and 25°C. (75°F–78°F.) and that rainfall during that same period was practically non-existent.[21] Such conditions create a warm and parched environment.

Modern pilot chart data for the month of August reveals that the prevailing winds for that month come predominantly from the Northwest and measure at Force 3, or about 13–19 kilometers per hour. Most importantly, calm conditions occur only 1% of the time during August.[22] These data, therefore, describe the warm and parched conditions that one would expect at ancient Alexandria at the end of August (Gregorian) with the Etesian winds constantly blowing.

In addition, Alexandria and its Eastern Harbour were unprotected from these off-shore winds. The surface contour of Alexandria, from north to south, rises only seven meters for every linear kilometer. Flat Pharos Island provided the city with no wind break whatsoever.[23] In fact, the artificial crescent which formed the Eastern Harbour was constructed of several layers of man-made wave-breakers or moles.[24]

In short, the meteorological conditions at ancient Alexandria were warm, rainless, windy, and without any wind protection. Given such

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[21] Air temperatures, see *World Weather Reports, (= WWR)* 1941–1950 (Washington D.C., 1959) 142. Rainfall, see *WWR*, 1921–1930 (Washington D.C., 1944) 82, June to September, 0.0 mm.; *WWR*, 1931–1940 (Washington D.C., 1947) 70, June to September, 0.0 mm.; *WWR*, 1941–1950 (Washington D.C., 1959) 142, June to September, 0.6 mm.; *WWR*, 1951–1960 (Washington D.C., 1967) 466, June–September, 0.3 mm.

[22] Northwesterlies average a 54% occurrence, westerlies at 31%, northerlies at 8%, northeasterlies at only 2%. All other compass points observed fall below 2% in occurrence. U.S. Hydrographic Office, *Pilot Chart of the North Atlantic*, no.1400 (Washington D.C., 1947–February 1971) and U.S. Naval Oceanographic Office, *Pilot Chart of the North Atlantic*, no.16 (Washington D.C., March 1971–1980). A wind of Force 3 on the Beaufort Scale can be described as a breeze of 7–10 knots (12.8–18.5 kph), strong enough to extend light flags. Watts, *Instant Wind Forecasting*, 10–11.

[23] Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:18.

[24] These moles were extended to protect the Eastern Harbour from wave-action and off-shore currents, ibid., 1:21. The natural moles of the Island of Antirrhodus and the Poseidon Peninsula offered further internal protection for any ships at anchor in the harbour.

conditions, any flammable elements used in the construction of the moored fleet and the harbour-side features of boathouses, dry-docked vessels, naval arsenals, neighboring storage buildings and granaries would have been desiccated to the point of kindling wood.

IV. *Fuel*

Now must be considered the flammable capacity of the fleet, harbour-side architecture, and that of the royal architecture of the palace complex.

IV.1. *The fleet*

The literary sources speak of the loss due to the fire of some 110 ships both at anchor and in the naval dockyards.[25] Of these, 50 fully decked and outfitted quadriremes and quinqueremes were tied up at the quay.[26] In addition, we are told that another 22 decked warships that had been tasked to Alexandria were in the dockyards in dry-dock.[27] The remainder of these ships—some 38 vessels in all—was presumably smaller craft either moored in the harbour or laid up in the dockyards for repair or storage for the season.[28] The fifty warships, moored as many probably were side by side, would have resembled from the air a continuous row of gigantic match-sticks over one third of a kilometer long.[29] With their

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[25] Hirtius *B Alex.* 12: *Ac tam etsi amplius CX navibus longis in portu navalibusque amiserant, non tamen reparandae classis cognationem deposuerunt.*

[26] Caes. *B Civ.* 3.111: *Quarum erant L… quadriremes omnes et quinqueremes aptae instructaeque omnibus rebus ad navigandum.*

[27] Caes. *B Civ.* 3.111: *XXII (naves longas), quae praesidii causa Alexandriae esse consuerant, constratae omnes.* L. Casson discusses the necessity to seasonally dry-dock warships in order to prevent them from becoming water-logged. Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, 90.

[28] The size and displacement of these warships are unknown. However, late-Hellenistic warships tended to sit low in the water, had a displacement in excess of 40 metric tons, and were usually designed on a ratio of 1:10, beam width to hull length. The rigging of at least a main sail completed its upper, wooden cataphract structure. In comparison to a quadrireme or quinquereme, a trireme in 48 B.C. would have been considered a light unit. See ibid., 100, 116–117, 123; and Foley and Soedel, "Ancient Oared Warships," 149, 155–156.

[29] The average beam of a quinquereme or quadrireme was about 5 to 6 meters wide. With a conservative 2 meter gap between each ships' gunnels, fifty warships × 5 meters = 250 meters plus 2 × 49 (docking gap) = 98 m. The sum would have been approximately 350 meters in length *at a minimum*.

full rigging in place and hulls coated with pitch and wax, these warships represented an accident truly waiting to happen.[30]

IV.2. *Harbour-side architecture*

The architecture of the Eastern Harbour must have been a crowded and bustling place with a continuous ring of quay that stretched from the Timonium west as far as the naval dockyards. Behind these moorings were tightly packed in the many warehouses (ἀποστάσεις) that were either a part of or immediately adjacent to the Emporium.[31] Such warehouses "were presumably close to the quay for unloading goods" and are not to be confused with the dry-docks of the naval dockyard.[32] Alexandria after all was a foremost expediter of grains, papyri, glassware, textiles and hemp, and its commerce relied upon ample storage areas for these commodities. Therefore, logic and logistics placed them at or near the northern edge of the city for ease of transport to and from the ships.[33] Behind and mixed in with the presumably quay-side warehouses were the many storage houses (ἀποθῆκαι) of books, grain, and other goods that are mentioned by the literary sources.[34] Of particular interest to this paper was the seasonal condition of the grain warehouses. By late August most of them were either empty or only partially filled.[35] Empty or partially filled granaries are by nature coated with a fine layer of chaff, itself a highly combustible fuel.

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[30] If one does not think that an ancient ship was highly flammable, then consider the following telling, if irreverent tongue in cheek, passages from Aristophanes' *Acharnians* 190: ὄζουσι πίττης καὶ παρασκευῆς νεῶν; and 918–924: αὕτη γὰρ ἐμπρήσειεν ἄν τὸ νεώριον. νεώριον θρυαλλίς; οἴμοι, τίνι τρόπῳ; ἐνθεὶς ἂν ἐς τίθην ἀνὴρ Βοιώτιος, ἅψας ἂν εἰσπέμψειεν ἐς τὸ νεώριον δὶ ὑδρορρόας, Βορέαν ἐπιτηρήσας μέγαν. κεἴπερ λάβοιτο τῶν τὸ πῦρ ἅπαξ, σελαγοῖτ' ἄν αἴφνης.

[31] Strabo 17.1.9 (C794). Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 2:76 n. 175; and Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, 366.

[32] Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 2:75 n. 174, 2:76 nn. 175, 176.

[33] Fraser further emphasizes that the terms ἀποστάσεις and ἀποθῆκαι describe similar structures, with the qualification that the latter is a more generalized term for storage houses, while the former is a more specific term for dock-side warehouses, ibid., 2:76 n. 176.

[34] *Supra* note 2.

[35] The Nile inundation began at Aswan in late May or early June, while in Cairo, the high Nile occurred in early September through early October, see Kees, *Ancient Egypt*, 54. Consequently, the Egyptian harvest was staggered as well beginning in April and lasting until the end of May or later. Shipment to Alexandria usually took place from May through June, see Rickman, *Roman Granaries and Store Buildings*, 303 citing *P. Oxy*. 2182. Upon arrival the grain was immediately exported before the arrival of the

Beyond, to the west of the warehouses, stood the naval dockyards (νεώρια) that extended all the way to the Heptastadion.[36] Such installations included ship sheds (νεώσοικοι) where ships might be built, repaired, or laid up for the season and their accompanying armories (σκευθῆκαι or ὁπλοθῆκαι) where stores of pitch and caulking wax, sails, oars, tackle, and rigging were all housed.[37] Such boathouses were typically roofed and colonnaded with boat ramps facing seaward.[38] Nonetheless, these boathouses, with their ramps facing seaward fully exposed dry-docked hulls freshly caulked with wax and coated with pitch on their insides and out, containing highly flammable contents.

In short, much of the Alexandrian harbour-side architecture was most likely constructed of either stone walls or walls built of sun-dried mud brick mixed with straw. Internal roof supports and framing were, however, made of wood over which a ceramic tile roof was constructed. Given these observations, inscriptional and archaeological data from elsewhere throughout the Mediterranean report the extensive use of wood in Hellenistic harbour construction and decoration.[39] Therefore, we should consider that similar practices were employed at Alexandria as well. But in the final analysis, it was not so much the architecture that was so volatile, but rather the contents that were stored within them.

IV.3. *Royal architecture*

Located inland and behind the harbour-side architecture of warehouses, storehouses, and naval dockyards stood the stone architecture of the

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Etesian winds. But how much grain was exported from Alexandria during the years 49/48 and 48/47 B.C., while the civil war between Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XIII raged? Furthermore, Alexandria's granaries were probably empty since 50/49 B.C., a year when Egypt suffered a low Nile and poor harvest, see Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, 2:909.

[36] Strabo 17.1.9 (C794).

[37] Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, 363.

[38] The assumption that the naval dockyard or νέωρια of Alexandria were ramped and covered by a roofed colonnade can be argued by comparison with other Hellenistic harbours, such as Piraeus, Sunium, Apollonia in Cyrenaica, and Oeniadae in Acarnania, ibid., 363–366.

[39] A fine example of a Hellenistic naval arsenal was that at Piraeus. Built around 350 B.C. and destroyed by Sulla in 86 B.C., this arsenal had wooden doors, a continuous two-story wooden gallery, beamed frame supports for roofing, wooden architraves, and wooden blocks to support the central ridge beam, see IG II^2 1668 and *Syll*^{3} 969. Its outer construction was principally limestone measuring 400 × 55 ft. with 2.5 ft. thick walls 27 ft. high, Marstrand, *Arsenalet i Piraeus*.

palace complex, the many temples, municipal buildings and the housing of the wealthy. Such architecture surely was built with more care, with better materials, all to be more lasting. It is in this context that we should perhaps apply Aulus Hirtius' description of Alexandrian building construction as being almost fire-proof: "For Alexandria is almost safe from fire, because the buildings are without wooden floors and the construction is held together by arch-roofs which are of rubble or a plaster/cement mixture."[40]

Still and all, this statement remains nothing more than a sweeping generalization, for note the amount of wood that Hirtius tells us was still available in supposedly fire-safe Alexandria:

- Caesar has siege-works and pent-houses constructed;[41]
- The Egyptian army counters these defenses with lofty towers, 40 feet high, some of which are even wheeled;[42]
- The Alexandrians build timber barricades;[43]
- The Alexandrians, after having lost over 110 ships to the fire, then after it repaired their old ships, build 22 new quadriremes, and 5 new quinqueremes, by using the wooden beams scavenged from public buildings.[44]

While this author would be the first to admit that much, if not all, of the above recycled wood came from non-royal architecture, the point still must be made that there seemed to be no end to the wood supply in Alexandria.

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[40] Hirtius *B Alex.* 1: *Nam incendio fere tuta est Alexandrea, quod sine contignatione ac materia sunt aedificia et structuris ac fornicibus continentur tectaque sunt rudere aut pavimentis.*

[41] Hirtius *B Alex.* 1: *operibus vineisque agendis*.

[42] Hirtius *B Alex*. 2: *Praeterea alias ambulatorias totidem tabulatorum confixerant subiectisque eas rotis funibus iumentisque obiectis derectis plateis in quamcumque erat visum partem movebant.*

[43] Hirtius *B Alex*. 12: *et materiam cunctam obicerent.*

[44] Hirtius *B Alex*. 12: *Ac tam etsi amplius CX navibus longis in portu navalibusque amiserant, non tamen reparandae classis cognationem deposuerunt. B.A.* 13: *Naves veteres erant in occultis regiae navalibus, quibus multis annis ad navigandum non erant usi: has reficiebant, illas Alexandream revocabant. Deerant remi: porticus, gymnasia, publica aedificia detegebant, asseres remorum usum obtinebant… Itaque paucis diebus contra omnium opinionem quadriremis XXII, quinqueremis V confecerunt; ad has minores apertasque compluris adiecerunt.*

V. *Ignition*

Most likely, Caesar's firing of the warships at anchor was an act of military desperation. That the fire then readily spread from the anchored ships into the open seaward sides of the boathouses and on to the naval arsenals, quay-side warehouses, and neighboring storage houses cannot be considered impossible—especially given the prevailing winds. But even before the falling wind-borne embers and actual flames had even reached these structures, they had been preceded and primed for instantaneous combustion by the searing, superheated air from the burning fleet across a broad front—perhaps as wide as one third of a kilometer.[45] And so, the fire rapidly spread inland and became self-perpetuating—driven by the prevailing winds, superheated air drafts, flames, and continuous cinder fallout.

But it would be the granary warehouses—if superheated or ignited by so much as a spark—that immediately would have exploded upwards and outwards in a fiery plume. Such granary explosions themselves create tremendous heat convections and updrafts that can propel ash and cinders hundreds of meters into the air. The repetitive ignition of several such granaries could have escalated this massive harbour blaze to fire-storm proportions. Under such intense heat, limestone block calcines, flakes apart, and even explodes. Only kiln-dried brick can begin to withstand such heat,[46] and none of Alexandria's architecture was built with such a fire-resistant material.

Given the prevailing Northwest winds, this potential fire-storm, perhaps as much as one third of a kilometer in width, moved rapidly inland in a generally southeast direction. All these elements add up to a situation that would have placed at least the northern third of ancient Alexandria directly in harm's way.

Ptolemaic Alexandria, the intellectual and commercial focus of the ancient world,[47] covered in Strabo's time an area 30 stades long by 7–8 stades wide,[48] which calculates to about 25.5 hectares in area divided

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[45] See note 29 above.

[46] Eyewitness reports during the Chicago Fire of 1871 attest to the explosive reaction of superheated stone, see *Lakeside Monthly* 7 (Chicago 1872) 35; Moses and Kirkland, *History of Chicago Illinois*, 1:207; Sheahan and Upton, *Great Conflagration*, 228.

[47] Strabo 17.1.13 (C798): μέγιστον ἐμπόριον τῆς οἰκουμένης.

[48] Puchstein, *RE*, s.v. "Alexandria," (1), col. 1381, lines 25–26 quoting Strabo 17.1.8 (C793). Fraser tentatively agrees. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:13, 2:26–27 n. 64.

into five municipal principalities.[49] As for the Palace quarter, it covered both the northeastern peninsula of Lochias, which formed the eastern boundary of the Eastern Harbour, and the north-central to north-eastern part of the city proper. It is assumed that this quarter included the Mouseion and the Great Library. Unfortunately, the precise location of these structures is unknown.[50] According to a contemporary of the first century B.C., the city contained within its cramped confines some 300,000 free inhabitants.[51]

Since earliest antiquity, uncontrollable fire was one of man's most dread enemies. Whether naturally or intentionally set, the outbreak of fire in any cramped, congested, and overcrowded urban setting—prior to the advent of modern fire-fighting tactics and technologies—was truly something to be feared.[52]

This proposed reconstruction of the Alexandrian Fire was inspired by a passage from Lucan's *Pharsalia* and by several eyewitness accounts of the Great Chicago Fire of 8–10 October 1871.[53] Although greatly removed by time and space, the Alexandrian and Chicago fires share much in common: coastal locations, steady breezes, and granary installations. Furthermore, the Great Chicago Fire offers a better historical parallel to Alexandria of Caesar's day than other fire-storms of modern history on two counts: first, the rudimentary nature of its fire-fighting capacity; and second, the materials and artificial manner in which the fire-storms were started.[54]

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[49] Of these, only two are known as to what they contained: Alpha (the courts of justice); and Delta (the Jewish quarter). Beta is known only from Augustan and later documents to have contained the Square Stoa and its own granaries. Gamma and Eta have no references. Only the location of Delta has been located in the northeastern corner of the city near the palace complex, Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:34–35.

[50] Caes. *B Civ.* 3.111.3, 3.111.8–10; Hirtius *B. Alex*. 13.1; Diodorus Siculus 1.50.8, 17.52.4 and Strabo 17.1.8–9 (C793–794). Calderini, *Dizionario*, 1:97–100; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:14–15.

[51] Diod. Sic. 17.52.6 followed by Calderini, *Dizionario*, 1:200; Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, 2:1138 n. 74; Fraser considers 300,000 too low and estimates a population just "short of one million" inhabitants in 60 B.C. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:91, 2:171–172 n. 358.

[52] For the effect of urban fires on late Republican Rome, see for example, Yavetz, "Living Conditions of the Urban Plebs in Republican Rome," 500–517.

[53] Luc. *Phar*. 10.488–505. *Harper's Weekly*, October 21, 1871, 984–985; ibid., October 28, 1871, 1010–1013; ibid., November 4, 1871, 1028–1029; and *Lakeside Monthly* 7 (1872) 22–39.

[54] The firestorms of World War II, specifically those at Dresden, Hamburg, Tokyo, and Nagasaki can be removed from consideration, since they were the artificial creations of saturation incendiary or nuclear bombardment. None of these firestorms could have

As a native of Chicago, Illinois, the story of that city's fire, the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, made an indelible impression. With every stroll through the streets of its downtown area one is faced with two reminders, the only two structures that survived that awful conflagration: the Chicago Water Tower and its adjacent Pumping Station. These two lone islands of massive stone construction were all that were left standing in their neighborhood. In fact the phrase "Second City," when applied to Chicago does not refer to its importance in comparison with that of New York, but rather to the new city that arose phoenix-like from its own ashes. "Second City"—*Nea Polis*. Do not the meanings of these two phrases sound vaguely similar and appropriate? Old Chicago of 1871 sprawled over some 932 hectares of flat, lake-side plain that possessed no topographical wind barriers. While that city's area was three and a half times that of ancient Alexandria, it contained practically the same free population, reckoned at 334,000. Domestic architecture was predominantly wooden structures, whereas some of the urban landscape was punctuated with more ambitious structures of brick, marble, and stone. The Fall of 1871 had been particularly hot and dry with a meager summer's rainfall.[55] On the early evening of October 8th, 1871, the entire city was as dry as kindling wood.

We are told that many eyewitnesses were rendered numb or hysterical. Gale-like heat convections, described as "hurricanes" or "tornadoes," were recorded as high as 100 kilometers per hour. Burning embers were lofted over 300 meters into the air creating virtually an illuminated snow storm of fallout. Drafts that funneled through the city streets formed eddies of swirling smoke and leaping tongues of fire. The collective heat was so intense that stone structures failed and exploded, brick structures collapsed, glass flowed like water, and structural metal groaned—then failed. The superheated air alone, which preceded this fury, ignited wooden objects and reportedly made glass glow a ruddy red. Before the ordeal was over 810 hectares or 86% of Old Chicago, since called the "Burnt District," and nearly 18,000 structures were consumed in only two days time. Despite the Chicago fire-brigades' valiant and ceaseless toil, this holocaust spread at will, ran its course, and was only brought under control by the gentle rain of 10 October 1871.[56]

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occurred naturally. They occurred only because of the massive introduction of foreign, flammable, and explosive materials into a confined area.

[55] Musham, "Great Chicago Fire, October 8–10, 1871," 87.

[56] *Harper's Weekly*, October 28, 1871, 1010; *Lakeside Monthly* 7 (1872) 33; Musham,

In light of the Old Chicago Fire, we now turn to Lucan and his famous passage from the *Pharsalia*. Note the similarity of imagery in the description of the Alexandrian fire's spread that originated from the burning pitch and running wax of the warships.[57] He writes:

> Nor did the fire fall upon the vessels only: the houses near the sea caught fire from the spreading heat, and the winds fanned the conflagration, till the flames, smitten by the eddying gale, rushed over the roofs as fast as the meteors that often trace a furrow though the sky, though they have nothing solid to feed on and burn by means of air alone. This calamity for a time called off the crowd from the close-barred palace to rescue the city.[58]

Admittedly, Lucan's source for this memorable passage was his own probable eyewitness account of the Roman fire of A.D. 64. Nonetheless, the Alexandrian fire did take place, and did spread inland. We know this, because the papyri of the first through fourth centuries A.D. attest to the Alexandrian granaries as being located in a new quarter of the city significantly called the *Neapolis*.[59] On the basis of this evidence, Ausfeld rightly concluded that the *Neapolis* was none other than the name given to that part of Alexandria around the Eastern Harbour, which had to be rebuilt subsequent to the fire of 48 B.C.[60]

Strabo's post-fire account of Alexandria,[61] by far our best topographical description of the city and its surroundings, nevertheless, is based upon his autopsy dated to between 24 and 20 B.C.[62]—almost a full generation after the fire. Thus, some features and buildings visible from the Eastern Harbour were recent additions that had replaced the fire-gutted waterfront. Typical of the massive construction effort to hide the scares of the *Bellum Alexandrinum* were: the entire Emporium complex

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"Great Chicago Fire, October 8–10, 1871," 130, 135; Moses and Kirkland, *History of Chicago Illinois*, 1:205–206.

[57] Luc. *Phar*. 10.680–688: *Nulla tamen plures hoc edidit aequore clades, Quam pelago diversa lues. Nam pinguibus ignis, Adfixus taedis et tecto sulpure vivax, Spargiture; at faciles praebere alimenta carinae, Nunc pice, nunc liquida rapuere incendia cera. Nec flammas superant undae, sparsisque per aequor, Iam ratibus fragmenta ferus sibi vindicat ignis. Hic recipit fluctus, extinguat ut aequore flammas, Hi, ne mergantur, tabulis ardentibus haerent.*

[58] *Supra* note 2.

[59] The *Neapolis*, located northeast of Rhakotis, included the granaries and other new construction, Calderini, *Dizionario*, 1:131–132.

[60] Ausfeld, "Neapolis und Brucheion in Alexandria," 481–497.

[61] Strabo 17.1.9 (C794).

[62] Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:7, 2:12–13 n. 29.

that enveloped the Caesareion,[63] the Poseidon Peninsula's mole extension, the Timonium built by Marcus Antonius,[64] and the many newly constructed shops, warehouses, and granaries so necessary to such a commercial center.[65] It is not surprising then to note Strabo's silence concerning such pre-fire structures such as the Ptolemaic Arsinoeion,[66] and the Great Library. That these structures were not visible from the Eastern Harbour only underlines the extensive rebuilding in and around these structures, if one assumes that they themselves had survived intact at all.

In summation, how far inland the fire reached and whether it destroyed, or at least damaged in part the Great Library, remains unclear.[67] Fraser, however, noted that almost all references to the Alexandrian Library in Imperial times, which were not of a historical nature, referred to the Serapeum Library. That observation, in fact lead Fraser to openly

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[63] Strabo 17.1.9 (C794). Calderini, *Dizionario*, 1:110–111, 118–119; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:24, 2:66–69, nn. 153–156, 2:70 n. 161. The Emporium was the main market area that extended to the seafront, comprising more than one structure and including the Caesareion. Its general location is known, for the extant ruins of the Caesareion stand near the city's central shoreline.

[64] Strabo 17.1.9 (C794); Plutarch *Antonius* 69. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:24, 2:66–67 n. 153.

[65] Strabo 17.1.9 (C794); Dio Cass. 42.38.2. Calderini, *Dizionario*, 1:93, 135; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:25, 2:76 nn. 175–176.

[66] Ibid., *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:25. This structure, never fully completed and probably damaged during the Alexandrian War, was neglected to be later outdone by the Caesareion adjacent to it.

[67] *Supra* note 2. Of these sources, Caesar and Aulus Hirtius mention only the burning of moored and dry-docked vessels. Lucan provides a vivid account for the inland course of the fire, which was first fanned by the coastal breezes and then worsened by the fire's own draft. Florus has Caesar igniting the docks and neighboring buildings. Dio Cassius also has Caesar starting the fire in the dock area, but then adds the destruction of the neighboring granaries and the ἀποθῆκαι τῶν βίβλων. Plutarch is the first, followed by Orosius, to connect the burning of the fleet and the inland spread of the fire to the destruction of the Great Library. Zonaras simply records that Caesar torched the Alexandria's warehouses and Great Library. Plutarch, unlike the rest, seems to have followed an Alexandrian Greek source other than Livy, Teggart, "Caesar and the Alexandrian Library," 471–474. Unfortunately, Livy's Book 112, a critical source for the *Bellum Alexandrinum*, exists only as an epitome—*Periocha* 112.

This is not to say that the extraordinary archaeological efforts by the French and Polish missions in Alexandria have not been in vain. Professor Dr. Jean-Yves Empereur placed the library's destruction within second and third century A.D. contexts on the basis of numismatic evidence. In addition, Professor Dr. Empereur had kindly informed this author that core borings had also been undertaken throughout the city's confines. The results of these data, however, I have yet to examine regarding their number, location, depth and stratification. Therefore, I heartily encourage the reader to consult Prof. Dr. Empereur's data contained in this volume.

state that: "All considered then, we are justified in supposing that the contents of the Royal Library, if not wholly destroyed, were at least seriously diminished in the fire of 48 B.C."[68] Given the potential firestorm conditions that may have occurred in 48 B.C., this author finds Fraser's assessment difficult to refute.

The literary sources that chronicle the fiery events surrounding 48 B.C., however, are at times so contradictory that one must rely upon inference and comparative analysis in dealing with them.[69] Moreover, any archaeological approach to the question is hampered by the paucity of evidence, and of course, by the unknown location of the Mouseion and its Library collection.[70]

In the end, whether or not the Great Library survived the fiery tempest of the *Bellum Alexandrinum* of 48 B.C. cannot be proven.[71] However,

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[68] Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:335.

[69] Ibid., 1:334.

[70] The remains of the Mouseion and its library have yet to be found. The systematic archaeological investigation of Alexandria is hindered by coastal subsidence, building activity of the past century which created a new coastline, the mixing of stratigraphy during this and on-going construction, and ancient construction and demolition from Ptolemaic through Roman times, ibid., 1:9–10. Nonetheless, these structures are thought to have been located together or in close proximity in the southwest corner of the Ptolemaic palace complex, about 400 meters from the north-central shoreline of the Ptolemaic Eastern Harbour, southwest from the Heptastadion, behind the naval dockyard (νεώρια). K. Dziatzko, *RE*, s.v. "Bibliotheken: v. Alexandrinische Bibliotheken," (3), col. 412, lines 6–10; W. Helck, *Kleine Pauly*, s.v. "Alexandria," (1), col. 244, lines 30–32; and Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:15, 2:30–31 n. 77.

[71] The ancients were divided as to the extent of the fire's damage. Seneca (*Tranq.* 9.5), Dio Cassius (42.38), and Orosius (6.15.31–34) record the loss of either 40,000 or 400,000 books, depending upon the mss. reading, Reynolds, *L. Annaei Senecae*, 224 n. 6; White, *Scholia on the Aves of Aristophanes*, xxxii–xxxiii; Orosius. *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, ed. Zangemeister, 402 n. 1. Westermann outright questioned Seneca's lost Livian source for the number of volumes supposedly lost (40,000 or 400,000); Westermann, *Library of Ancient Alexandria*, 13. Dio Cassius (42.38) merely states that "the storehouses of grain and books of the greatest number and excellence were burned" and what he meant by these "storehouses of books" is not clear. The phrase, however, has been interpreted variously as either "a warehouse of books," a "storage area within the library," or even as "the Great Library" itself, see Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:335, 2:494 n. 226. If they can be trusted, Aulus Gellius (*NA* 7.17.3) and Ammianus Marcellinus (22.16.13)—both following a non-Livian source—report the loss of 70,000 and 700,000 books, respectively.

R. S. Bagnall, in his critical paper entitled, "The Library of Alexandria: Desires and Realities," rightly questions the great numbers of books supposedly lost, in some respects harkening back to the many known exaggerations of Herodotus. However, Bagnall based his low estimates only upon the known Classical corpus, which in this scholar's view excludes all the non-Classical sources that could well have been present within that universal collection—Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Persian and East Indian.

on the basis of modern meteorological data and a comparative historical analogy with the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, it has been suggested that an unintended, natural fire-storm had occurred. The key question as to whether the Great Library and its precious literary collection were in any way affected is unknown. But given the potential fury of such a fire-storm, this author would not be surprised if that literary collection had indeed been threatened and possibly damaged.

Also modern opinion is divided so as to the extent of the Great Library's damage in 48 B.C. On the one hand, there are those who contend that the library was either destroyed or damaged during the Alexandrian War. These scholars cite the testimonia of Seneca, Plutarch, Aulus Gellius, and Ammianus Marcellinus. On the other hand, however, there are those who argue that it was only stored books or papyrus rolls, either located dockside or transferred to the quays, which were destroyed, K. Dziatzko, *RE*, s.v. "Bibliotheken: v. Alexandrinische Bibliotheken," (3), col. 412; Mahaffy, *History of Egypt Under the Ptolemaic Dynasty*, 242–243; Sandys, *History of Classical Scholarship*, 1:112–113; Holmes, *Roman Republic and the Founder of the Empire*, 3:489; Bevan, *History of Egypt Under the Ptolemaic Dynasty*, 365; Irwin, *English Library*, 36; Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 270; Adcock, "Civil War: Part IV, Caesar at Alexandria," 671; Canfora, *Vanished Library*, 136; Jochum, "Alexandrian Library and its Aftermath," 9–10. It is also argued that the burning of these papyrus rolls led to the "legend" of the Great Library's demise and that Plutarch is guilty of Alexandrian propaganda, Teggart, "Caesar and the Alexandrian Library," 474.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINT

Jean-Yves Empereur

I. *The destruction of the Library of Alexandria*

The debate surrounding the destruction of the Library among modern writers has taken a rather striking ideological dimension. In effect, the Western tradition following the evidence of Seneca and Plutarch,[1] among others, has commonly attributed the fire that ravaged the building to Julius Caesar. Lucan and Dio Cassius recount how, as he tried to out-manoeuvre the attacking Alexandrians from the heights of the royal palaces, he set fire to vessels anchored in the Eastern Harbour.[2] This action led to the burning of an *apothiki* full of papyri and this has been interpreted as the destruction of the Library of Alexandria.

Another version attributes the destruction to ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs, the Arab conqueror of Egypt who took Alexandria in 642 A.D., the Library having apparently survived until this date. We know the tale: obeying the command of the Caliph ʻUmar, ʻAmr used the papyri to heat the furnaces of Alexandria's public bathhouses. . . .

Then, there is the intermediary version. The guilty party this time are the Christians led by Bishop Theophilus. In 391 A.D., this latter applied the edict of Theodosius prohibiting the practice of pagan cults and he led his troops in the destruction of the most famous sanctuary at Alexandria, the Temple of Serapis which dominated the city at the top of some one hundred steps upon the platform that the Alexandrians, somewhat pompously, called the *Acropolis* (fig. 1). Only ruins were left of the sanctuary and upon them a monastery dedicated to St. John was built. This violence against the pagans continued throughout the following decades and it was not only the cults themselves that were targeted, but also individuals. Thus Cyril, nephew and successor to Theophilus, in a desire to end the teaching of pagan philosophy, sent

[1] Seneca *De tranquillitate animi* 9.5; Plutarch *Caesar* 49.
[2] Lucan *Pharsalia* 10.486–505; Dio Cassius 62.32.8; Caesar *Bellum Civile* 3.111.

his hordes of monks to assassinate Hypatia in the open streets of Alexandria in 415 A.D.

So, what new arguments do we have to allow us to accept this or that theory rather than the other, or indeed, should we move away from the traditional lines of thought? Do we need to reread the texts?

It is certainly difficult to imagine the total disappearance of the Library at the time of Caesar since Strabo, who, in 25 B.C., gives us the most detailed description of ancient Alexandria, mentions the Mouseion in paragraph 8, chapter 17 of his *Geography*. It is perhaps somewhat brief a description for us, especially as he does not mention the word '*Library*.' But this silence speaks words that we might attempt to interpret. If one reads Book 17 in its entirety, with all the diverse information about the land of Egypt, one has the impression that Strabo was able to draw on a variety of sources at his disposition. Surely, Strabo would have deplored the destruction of the Library while he was dedicating a paragraph to the Mouseion.[3] The logical result of this has been that, during the past few years, one has come to see Caesar's fire as burning only a storehouse, either of manuscripts destined for export or of blank papyri, and that the Library itself was too far from the coast to have been ignited by the burning boats. Accordingly, ʿAmr is guilty.

That the destruction was due to the Christians is also problematic, the location of the sanctuary of Serapis would indicate the sacking of the Daughter Library and not the main institution attached to the Museum.

How do we break out of this circle? Without any new texts, what arguments might support one or the other theory? In fact, an examination of the terrain, thanks to a series of salvage excavations recently undertaken in the *Bruccheion* district, has brought to light information that allows for a new response.

II. *The archaeological viewpoint*

First of all, one should recognise the insignificance of any physical traces of the Library itself. Certainly, in the middle of the nineteenth century, a granite case was found that bore the Greek inscription

[3] Strabo 17.1.8; cf. also references to the Library from the time of Claudius and Domitian in Canfora, *Véritable histoire de la bibliothèque d'Alexandrie*, 210.

"Dioscourides, 3 volumes" (fig. 2),[4] and given the incertitude of the era concerning the topography of the ancient town, one could believe that this was one of the storage units of the Library that held the works of the botanist Dioscorides of Anazarbus. But from the beginning of the twentieth century this hypothesis was rejected and in 1908 A. Reinach underlined just how difficult it would have been to store the hundreds of thousands of papyri of the Library in this fashion.

In actual fact, the only papyri that archaeology has found for us in Alexandria are those of stone! Here, we are talking about the statues of philosophers or orators from the second century A.D. dressed in a toga and represented with a bundle of papyri at their sides lying upon a *capsa*; a metal box with a lock that was used for carrying their works (figs. 3, 4).

Not one of the excavations undertaken over more than a century has uncovered any papyri. There is one mention of the discovery of carbonized papyri that were found and then dumped by an engineer at Kom el-Dikka in the nineteenth century. Now that we know how to restore them,[5] it is a shame that they were not saved and we can but hope to find others in a similar condition during digs in town. However the climate is too humid for there ever to be finds of papyri in good condition, whilst our colleagues discover hundreds every year in the sands of Egypt's deserts.

Thus, the only hope is to find the remains of the Library itself. But what can we expect from such a discovery? What will there be to find but an empty stoa? Will we be able to recognise it for what it is when the city must have held multiple stoas; the four interminable stadia-long porticos of the gymnasium, the long stoas that ran along the Canopic

[4] Now held in the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna (inv. III 86 L): cf. É. Bernand, *Inscriptions grecques d'Alexandrie ptolémaïque*, 167–169. Before the object was rediscovered in Vienna by Tkaczow, numerous studies of this box were undertaken from the drawings of Harris, circa 1840 (his archives are held in the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria); Tkaczow, *Topography of Ancient Alexandria*, 201. This object was found to the south of the junction of Fouad and Sherif Streets, and the first publishers believed that from this they could deduce the location of the Library. This hypothesis was quickly abandoned: cf. the arguments *contra* in Reinach, "ΔΙΟΣΚΟΥΡΙΔΗΣ Γ ΤΟΜΟΙ," 350–370. Alone and in an inexplicable way, there is A. Bernand, *Alexandrie la grande*, 132 "H. Brugsch savant de notoriété mondiale (!), ayant affirmé, selon Botti, que ce coffre de pierre avait bien été trouvé là, il semble qu'il n'y ait guère de doute sur l'emplacement présumé du Musée, d'autant que cette localisation s'accorde avec les indications de Strabon."

[5] As has been demonstrated by the example of the Villa dei Papiri at Herculanum.

Figure 1. Bishop Theophilus standing upon the sanctuary of Serapis after its destruction in 391 A.D. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

Figure 2. Drawing of the papyrus box of Dioscorides. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

Figure 3. An Alexandrian orator with his papyrus box. White marble. Second century A.D. Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

Figure 4. The orator's papyrus box. Detailed view of figure 3. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

Way. . . How could we recognise the stoa of the Library, unless of course it had an inscription that identified it as such, the word ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ carved on an architrave much as the actual Graeco-Roman *Museum* bears the word ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟΝ (fig. 5). Otherwise, we might well have one more portico at Alexandria without being able to attribute it to any particular monument.

It should be emphasised that excavations at Alexandria are undertaken without directly being attached to the search for any specific monument. Aside from the research so well executed by the Polish mission within the archaeological park of Kom el-Dikka, there are no systematic excavations here in Alexandria. We are involved solely in urban salvage digs following the activities of construction companies. When a developer decides to demolish an old building to replace it with a modern tower, a brief period of time is allowed to the archaeologist to undertake a salvage dig and examine as fast as possible the underground strata before returning the parcel to its owner so that the construction project can be realised. Thus, one can never establish a true archaeological policy with predefined scientific aims. In reality, we are obliged to follow the developers' programme of building sites and it is not easy, given the increase in their projects these past few years.

The salvage excavations of the Centre d'Études Alexandrines (CEAlex)[6] are all so many parts of a giant puzzle on the scale of the ancient city. Alongside the underwater digs[7] and explorations in the necropolis[8] the CEAlex has concentrated its efforts in the district of *Bruccheion*, the royal palaces and environs. There the deepest layers have revealed signs of the first generations of Alexandrians, the settlers who accompanied the founder in 331 B.C. Such is the case of the house found in the garden of the former British Consulate with its little dining room decorated with a pebble mosaic that resembles those of Pella, the town in Macedonia where Alexander the Great was born (fig. 6). In a neighbouring parcel a grand house was uncovered. The style of mosaics that adorned the floors is quite different from our first example. Here we have floral and vegetal patterns, and in the dining room between the

[6] A team of the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (UMS 1812), based in Alexandria. Cf. the web site www.cea.com.eg.

[7] Cf. Empereur, *Phare d'Alexandrie*.

[8] Salvage excavations to the west, in the district of Gabbari (cf. Empereur and Nenna, *Nécropolis 1*) and to the east in the Latin cemeteries, around the Alabaster Tomb (digs began in September 2002).

Figure 6. Dining room of a Macedonian house with a pebble mosaic. End of the fourth century B.C. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

Figure 5. The façade of the Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria (with the inscription ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟΝ). Founded 1895. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

benches where the diners lounged, an Aegis, a shield of colourful scales with a head of Medusa at its centre (figs. 7, 8). This head is composed of miniscule tessera of some millimetres across, a technique known as *opus vermiculatum*, whilst the rest of the carpet is made of larger tessera, *opus tesselatum*. The Medusa with the serpents twined through her hair was supposed to ward off any potential trouble-making intruder, her petrifying gaze being directed towards the entrance of the room.

It is above all the chronology of the house that interests us. While the archaeological material (ceramics, coins etc.) found beneath the bed of the mosaic demonstrates that construction was around the year 150 A.D., the more recent material found in abandoned layers dates from the second half of the third century A.D. It would therefore seem that this grand dwelling was only used for a little over one century before being abandoned. Later, upon the filled-in ruins, different craftsmen, workers in coral and semi-precious stones, sculptors of bone and ivory (fig. 9) and glassmakers, established their workshops.

This House of Medusa is not unique. There is a parallel in the Villa of the Birds excavated by our Polish colleagues within the archaeological park of Kom el-Dikka that stands on the same ancient north-south road named R4 by Mahmoud el-Falaki.[9] This is the only house to be open to the public and one can admire a large dining room with small attached rooms. The building is decorated with remarkable mosaics, certain pavements depicting multi-coloured birds, parrots, pigeons etc. (figs. 10, 11); while in a room to the north there is a panther. In the excavation report, the archaeologist dates the construction of this house to the mid-second century A.D. and indicates that it was destroyed by a fire in the second half of the third century A.D.[10] Thus it suffered

[9] In the years 1865–1866, Mahmoud el-Falaki dug a series of trenches on the orders of the Khedive Ismail in order to draw up a map of ancient Alexandria. This map with an explanatory text was published in Copenhagen in 1872. All the plotted streets carry a name composed of a letter and a number (L for streets running east-west and R for those running north-south). Cf. Rodziewicz, "Débat sur la topographie de la ville antique," 38–48; esp. 40–42.

[10] Cf. ibid., "Quartier d'habitation gréco-romain à Kôm el-Dikka," 169–216. The Villa of the Birds (sounding R) is published in pages 175–192. One should note in particular the conclusion: "Toutes les mosaïques du sondage R furent détruites vers la fin du III^{e} siècle par un incendie d'envergure notable qui embrasa toutes les maisons étudiées par nous. La période de destruction des maisons coïncide avec la période de guerre avec Palmyre, quand le quartier alexandrin du Bruchium fut brûlé. Ce peut être un détail important permettant de ranger cette partie ou la totalité du terrain de Kôm el-Dikka justement dans ce quartier." (ibid., 192)

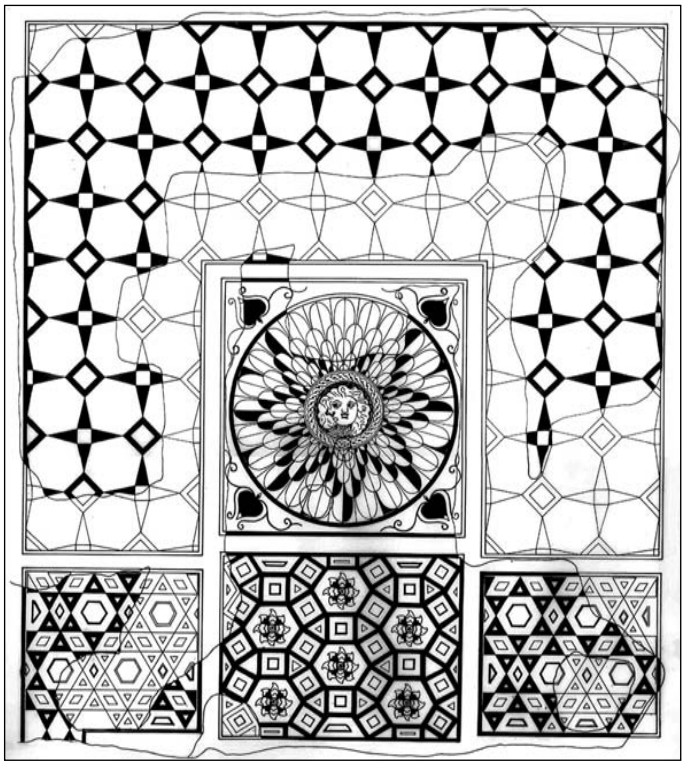

Figure 7. Drawing of the mosaic from the Roman House of Medusa, Alexandria. c. 150 A.D. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

Figure 8. The mosaic of Medusa, Alexandria; details of the central medallion. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

Figure 9. A bone panel decorated with a character from the entourage of Dionysus from a bone and ivory sculptor's workshop established above the Roman House of Medusa. Fifth century A.D. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

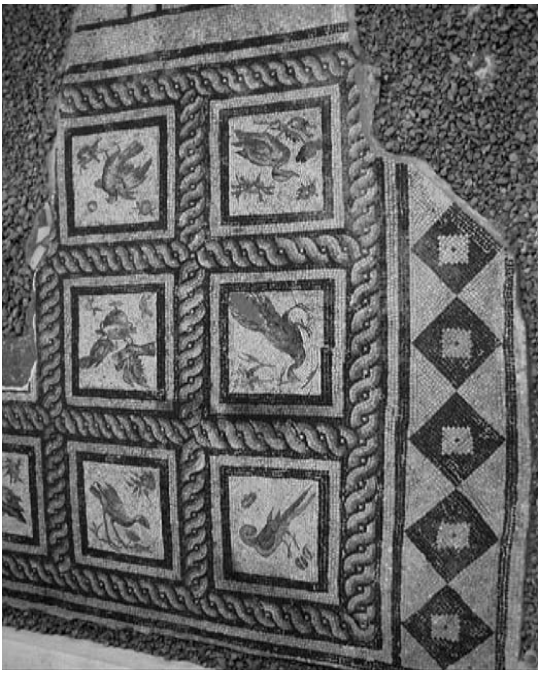

Figure 10. Mosaic pavement of the Villa of the Birds. General view. c. 150 A.D. Polish-Egyptian Mission at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo; M. Rodziewicz, "Un quartier d'habitation Gréco-Romain à Kôm el-Dikka," *Études et travaux* 9 (1976), 181.

Figure 11. Panel decorated with a parrot in the mosaic pavement of the Villa of the Birds, Alexandria. Detailed view of figure 10. Archives CEAlex/CNRS.

the same fate as the House of Medusa, being in use for little more than one century and then destroyed by an action—violent in this case—that happened during the second half of the third century A.D. According to the study of ceramics, it seems that the abandonment should be dated rather to the middle than to the end of this second half of the third century.

Now that we have examined the data from the terrain, should we see these acts of abandonment as individual fates or, given that we are dealing with not simply an isolated case but with two houses from the same district, could they be linked to an event within the history of the city?

III. *The trials of the second half of the third century*

The history of Alexandria was particularly troubled during the second half of the third century A.D. First of all, Queen Zenobia of Palmyra invaded the town in 269. The Emperor Aurelian rapidly sent his troops, which then spent more than one year trying to retake the city. A quarter of a century later it was an usurper, Domitius Domitianus, who seized Alexandria and, in 297, the Emperor Diocletian arrived from Antioch and besieged the city, protected as it was behind thick defensive walls. He too had to wait a year before reconquering the city. The evidence of this victory still stands in Alexandria today. It is in fact the sole monument still upright, the only one to have resisted all the many earthquakes that have hit the city over two millennia and which have destroyed the majority of monuments, with the Pharos as most notable. This is so-called Pompey's Pillar, the inscription of which tells us that it was erected by Publius, prefect of Egypt, in honour of Diocletian, a statue of whom would have stood upon the floral capital some 30 metres above the ground.[11]

Towards the end of the fourth century Ammianus Marcellinus, a Greek from Syria settled in Rome and writing in Latin, describes the *Bruccheion* district as deserted, wiped off the map of Alexandria:

> Under the reign of Aurelian, the civil quarrels having degenerated into murderous combats, the walls were destroyed and the town lost the greatest

[11] Cf. Kayser, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines (non funéraires) d'Alexandrie impériale (I^er^–III^e^ s. apr. J.-C.)*, 52–57.

> part of the quarter called Bruccheion, which for a long time had been the residence of people of distinction.[12]

It is also worth noting that at the end of this very same fourth century, St. John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, evokes the futility of glory on Earth by taking as an example the tomb of Alexander the Great, the very location of which has been lost to the memory of the Alexandrians. "Tell me, where therefore lies the tomb of Alexander? Show it to me and tell me the date of his death."[13] This district of *Bruccheion* is that of the royal palace and environs without our being able to give it any definite limits such is our overall ignorance of the topography of the ancient city. It would seem that the House of Medusa was situated within this district, in which stood the Museum, the Library as well as the tomb of Alexander. Does this mean to say that the palaces were also destroyed at this period? Such is not altogether impossible, since when 'Amr conquered the town in 642, the administrative centre was to the west of the city, and not to the east, and it would remain there until the arrival of the Ottomans in 1517, a period when it would move to the new city that was growing on the silted up tongue of land that had once been the Heptastadion.[14]

IV. *Earthquakes and fires*

In conclusion, what should we understand when we talk of the destruction of a library? In the past few decades historians have been considering the significance of earthquakes, how they are characterised by ancient writers and their consequences. Quite often, one realises that such a City that has supposedly been wiped off the map by an earthquake reappears a few years later in the inscriptions.[15] One needs only to read the news reports of the serious fire that struck the main University Library of Lyon few years ago, to understand that this form of exaggeration has not disappeared when one wants to get across to

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[12] Ammianus Marcellinus 22.15.

[13] John Chrysostom *Homily* 26.5 (Migne, PG 61, Joh. Chrys. 10, C581). On the Sôma, see most recently, Adriani, *Tomba di Alessandro: Realtà, Ipotesi e Fantasie*.

[14] Cf. Behrens-Abouseif, "Topographie d'Alexandrie médiévale," 113–125; esp. 118–121.

[15] Cf. *Tremblements de terre: Histoire et archéologie: 4es rencontres internationales d'archéologie et d'histoire d'Antibes, 2–4 novembre 1983*.

the public the gravity of an event. Certainly, one would not wish to minimise the extent of the damage inflicted at Lyon (and there was no need of Caesar, a simple electric malfunction was sufficient), with a fire that burned for six days and consumed 280000 volumes (out of a total of 460000), however, in April 2001 the Library was restored, opened once again to the public and through great acts of solidarity some 100000 volumes, donations from individuals and institutions, were reintroduced to the Library.[16] There is no longer any outward sign of damage and one has to read the newspapers to find any mention of that which happened. I would like to stress this point regarding continuance and reconstruction, because the philosophers, who continued their teaching in the Greek tradition up until the middle of the sixth century, if not until the Arab conquest the following century,[17] must have had the works of Plato and Aristotle to hand. These Fathers of the Church must have had access to the papyri of their predecessors. Books will have continued at Alexandria and the destruction of the Library did not mean the disappearance of books.

Clearly, should the activities of the developers lead us one day to excavate in the area of the Library (and we know roughly where it stood), we will perhaps have the chance to better date the destruction of the building. Of course, we would not let such an opportunity slip by, however, salvage archaeology at Alexandria is a difficult, if not dangerous, sport. The archaeologist's desire to preserve the city's heritage does not count for much when faced with the power of the construction companies and it is possible that the Library will one day be destroyed (or has already?) by a bulldozer. When confronted by the derisory means of the archaeologists, the motto of the modern builders would seem to be *Alexandrea delenda est*…

[16] Cf. the web site: Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de Lettres et Sciences Humaines, "L'incendie du 12 juin 1999," BIU LSH Lyon, http://osiris.ens-lsh.fr/reconstitution/incendie.htm (accessed July 2007).

[17] Cf. Sirinelli, *Enfants d'Alexandre*, 554.

DEMISE OF THE DAUGHTER LIBRARY

Mostafa A. El-Abbadi

The promulgation of an imperial decree by Theodosius I in 391 A.D. to put an end to pagan cults throughout the empire inspired fear and foreboding among many of the worshippers of the old gods.[1] Alexandria, as a centre of culture and learning, was no exception. At one stage of the implementation of the imperial policy, Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, was able to obtain the Emperor's approval to transform the Temple of Dionysus into a church. His drastic methods frightened many of the inhabitants who were still pagan, and, filled with anguish and anxiety, they sought refuge in the formidable compound of the Serapeum. It was a massively built construction on raised ground, more like a stronghold, and historians repeatedly described it as the Acropolis of Alexandria.[2] In order to storm the Serapeum, Theophilus sought assistance from the prefect and the commander of the Roman army in Egypt. Both refused to provide the military support he requested unless they had explicit authorization from the Emperor. This was soon forthcoming and Theodosius issued a decree sanctioning the demolition of the temples in Alexandria. Backed by this imperial decree, Theophilus led a fanatic mob to the entrance of the Serapeum, where he read aloud the words of the Emperor to a terrified crowd. Alarmed, they took flight while Theophilus walked up the hundred steps leading to the temple proper, himself delivering the first blow to the cult statue of Serapis. His followers emulated his example and ran amok in the temple, destroying, demolishing and plundering. When the devastation was complete, Theophilus ordered a church to be set up in its place, to be named after Honorius, the youngest son of Emperor Theodosius.[3]

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[1] Socrates *Historia ecclesiastica*. 5.16.

[2] Polybius *Historiae* 5.39; Aphthonius *Progymnasmata* apud G. Botti, *Acropole d'Alexandrie et le Serapeum d'apres Aphtonius et les fouilles*, 23–6; Clement of Alexandria *Protrepticus* 4.42 'ἄκρα'; cf. McKenzie, Gibson, and Reyes, "Reconstructing the Serapeum in Alexandria," *JRS* 94 (2004): 86.

[3] Full descriptions are found in Rufinus *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.23–30; Socr. *Hist. eccl.* 5.16; Sozomen *Historia ecclesiastica* 7.15; Theodoret *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.22; Eunapius *Vita Aedesii* 77–8; John of Nikiu 78.45; 83.38.

We are fortunate that in this connection, we possess several testimonies written by contemporary or near contemporary eye witnesses who all testify to the fact that the devastation was extensive. One, Theodoret asserts that "the temple was destroyed to its foundations."[4] Another witness, Eunapius (d. 420 A.D.), said that Theophilus and his followers "brought destruction on the temple, and made war upon its contents;" he then proceeds, "only the foundations they could not take away because of the magnitude of their stones which they were unable to remove, but they spoiled and destroyed practically everything."[5]

Yet apologists continue to resent the implications of such a total destruction, and questioned whether it included the collection of books which constituted a part of the Great Library, known as the 'Daughter Library.'[6] Against such arguments we can seek a clue in the writings of Aphthonius who visited Alexandria in the fourth century A.D. and wrote a description of the Acropolis of Alexandria, by which he meant the Serapeum. In the description, we read the following statement:

> …on the inner side of the colonnade, were built chambers, some of which served as book-stores and were open to those who devoted their life to the cause of learning. It was these studies that exalted the city to be the first in philosophy. Other rooms were set up for the worship of the old gods. The colonnades were roofed and the roof was made of gold and the capitals of the columns were made of bronze overlaid with gold.[7]

This statement was adopted by scholars of opposed opinions, as it proves that Aphthonius actually saw the book-stores when he visited the Serapeum. But disagreement arises about the time of his visit, the exact date of which is unknown. In one opinion, it took place before 391 A.D. and cannot therefore be taken as evidence on what happened to the temple during that year.[8] Another opinion assumes that the visit occurred after 391 and could thus be a proof that the books survived the destruction of the temple.[9]

Unfortunately, very little is known about the life of Aphthonius. As a pupil of the great rhetorician Libanius of Antioch (314–393 A.D.), it is agreed upon that he lived in the second half of the fourth and

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[4] Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.
[5] Eunap. *V. Aedesii* 77–8.
[6] Parsons, *Alexandrian Library*, 359–361.
[7] Aphth. *Prog.* 40.
[8] Butler, *Arab Conquest of Egypt*, ed. Fraser, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1978), 382, 415.
[9] Matter, *Histoire de l'école d'Alexandrie*, 319ff.

the beginning of the fifth centuries. With no further details to guide us on the date of his visit to Alexandria, we have to fall back on his text. A careful reading reveals that the text does not justify either of the two hypotheses. It is obvious that Aphthonius, in his description of the temple is presenting to his readers an image of the past, as it once had been and was no more at the time he wrote, hence his use of the imperfect tense and the past participle. Nowhere, within this context, does he use the present tense. From this observation, we may gather that during his visit, Aphthonius had seen that the Serapeum had had "rooms, some of which served as book-stores…, some others were set up for the worship of the old gods." It is surely unthinkable and unacceptable to expect these words to be a description of the building after its transformation into a church by Theophilus in 391. The continued worship of the old gods would be quite impossible.

It follows from this argument that Aphthonius visited the Serapeum and saw the book-stores and the places where the old gods were worshiped some time before 391. But when he came to writing down his '*Description*,' presumably some time after 391, those features were no longer to be seen, hence his use of the past tense.

This grammatical argument finds further support in the writings of yet another contemporary, Rufinus of Aquileia, who witnessed the events of 391 in Alexandria. Writing in 399, he also uses the past tense to describe what had existed in the Temple before its destruction and turns to the use of the present tense for things that survived. For instance, he speaks of structures above ground, "the exederae (meeting rooms) and pastophoria/tabernacula (shrines) *occupy* the outer spaces of the whole enclosure." In his description of other parts pertaining to the Temple and its functions he uses the past tense, such as:

> On the upper level there *extended* habitations in which temple staff and those whom they called hagneuontes, meaning those who are pure, normally *resided*.… In the middle of the entire area, there *was* the sanctuary distinguished by its precious columns, in it *was* a statue of Serapis, so large that its right hand touched one wall and its left, the other. That monster *was said to have been made* of all kinds of metal and wood. The interior walls of the sanctuary *were believed to have been covered* first with gold plate, overlaid with silver and finally with bronze, the last as a protection for the more precious metals.[10]

[10] Ruf. *Hist. eccl*. 2.23 (Emphasis mine).

Perhaps it is not out of place here to say a word about the general atmosphere within the church itself. The division into conservative and moderate parties was always present within the church—as within any group of any faith—but during the troubled times of the fourth and fifth centuries the division was bitter in the extreme.

One of the issues that divided opinion within the church was the attitude that should be taken towards pagan learning of the past. The rigid school of thought almost categorically prohibited that kind of education. Their attitude is best summed up in the famous dictum, "One mouth cannot couple the praise of Christ with the praise of Jupiter."[11] They argued that Christians should adopt a purely Christian course of education uncontaminated by pagan philosophy and literature. *The Apostolic Constitution*, a document of great popularity in the fourth and fifth centuries, especially in the East, stated their argument as follows: "Do you want history? There is the Book of Kings; and if you want eloquence? The Book of Prophets. Lyrics? The Psalms. Cosmology, law and ethics? The glorious law of God."[12]

That rigid attitude left the moderate and more tolerant party in an extremely uneasy position. They were fully aware that the whole education system up until that time was based on principles of Greek philosophy, rhetoric and logic. They even saw that such an education, far from being dangerous, was in fact essential for the cultivation of the minds of the Christians themselves. This school of thought was best represented by the historian Socrates '*Scholasticus*' of Constantinople, who lived at the end of the fourth and the first half of the fifth centuries. Socrates, very wisely, sets out by stating the arguments of his opponents who claimed that:

> the education of the Christians in the philosophy of the heathens, in which there is constant assertion of polytheism, instead of being conducive to the promotion of true religion, is rather to be deprecated as subversive to it.
>
> He then proceeds to refute this argument by appealing to Christian religious feelings:
>
> First, he says, Greek learning was never recognized by either Christ or his Apostles as divinely inspired nor, on the other hand, was it wholly rejected as pernicious. Second, there are many philosophers among the Greeks who were not far from the knowledge of God. Third, the divinely

[11] Gregory I, the Great *Epistle* 13.34.
[12] *Apostolic Constitution* 1.6.

> inspired scriptures undoubtedly inculcate doctrines that are both admirable in themselves and heavenly in their character; they also eminently tend to produce piety and integrity of life in those who are guided by their precepts… But they do not instruct us in the art of reasoning, by means of which we may be enabled successfully to resist those who oppose the truth. Besides, adversaries are most easily foiled when we can turn their own weapons against them.[13]

Thus, we see the sharp division within the church itself with regard to the whole of the classical heritage. In the troubled times of the fourth and fifth centuries, extremists often won the upper hand. To say the least, classical literature and philosophy were looked upon with grave suspicion. In this connection, we may call to mind the troubled soul of St. Jerome as the result of having surreptitiously read the texts of Cicero. He reports in one of his Epistles a dream he had, that on the Day of Judgement he was asked, "What kind of man are you?" When he answered, "A Christian," the retort came, "You lie, you are a Ciceronian and not a Christian."[14]

We can understand the trepidation felt by St. Jerome when we realize that the extremists waged a war upon pagan books and learning, not only in Alexandria, but throughout the Empire. In 364 A.D., we are told, Emperor Jovian put to the fire the library of the Trajanum Temple in Antioch.[15] It is no coincidence that Ammianus Marcellinus, almost at the same time, speaks of "certain people in Rome who hated learning like poison" and that libraries "were closed forever like the tomb."[16] Finally, the Christian historian Orosius, who visited Alexandria in 415 A.D., records with sorrow, "There are temples nowadays, which we have seen, whose book-cases have been emptied by our men. And this is a matter that admits no doubt."[17] It is clear from the above discussion that the war against pagan cults did not spare pagan books; and in the light of Aphthonius' account, there can hardly be any doubt that the attack on the Serapeum in 391 A.D. put an end to the temple and the Daughter Library.

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[13] Socr. *Hist. eccl.* 3.16.
[14] St. Jerome *Epistle* 22.3.
[15] See the *Suda*: Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*, s.v. "Jovian," I 401.
[16] Ammianus Marcellinus 28.4.14; 14.6.18.
[17] Orosius *Historiae adversus paganos* 6.15.32.

CE QUE CONSTRUISENT LES RUINES

Lucien X. Polastron

Une grande bibliothèque a cela de bon,
qu'elle effraie celui qui la regarde Voltaire

Au mois de mars 2003, un incendie éclate à la Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie: 45 minutes après l'évacuation de tous les lecteurs, des employés et des touristes, le sinistre est maîtrisé. Seule la zone administrative a été touchée. C'est donc un non-événement ou presque, mais dans l'heure il fait la une de la presse internationale.[1]

De la même façon, une inondation s'est produite dans quatre étages de la Tour des Temps à la Bibliothèque nationale de France le 7 avril 2004[2] et a ranimé l'émotion qui avait déjà ravagé l'opinion en 1999 quand l'eau envahit les gigantesques sous-sols tout neufs.[3] Le communiqué officiel du 15 avril prétend que les dégâts sont minces, mais l'inconscient collectif a pris bonne note de cette nouvelle péripétie dramatique. Le contribuable français aussi d'ailleurs, même s'il admire le talent de nos ingénieurs, qui parviennent à noyer le sommet d'une tour tandis que le rez-de-chaussée reste bien sec.

Le concept de la Grande Bibliothèque a donc un épiderme sensible et, si les illettrés eux-mêmes se sentent concernés par ses malheurs—comme on l'a vu dans les tabloïds anglais quand la British Library fut prise, la main dans le sac, en train de jeter des livres[4]—c'est que le rassemblement des connaissances a "accablé d'une splendeur féroce l'imagination des hommes."[5] Cette empreinte est d'autant plus vive que les tout premiers établissements ont connu à leur naissance une suite de spectaculaires destructions, autant à Xianyang, première capitale de Chine, qu'à Alexandrie, encore que ce soit pour des raisons diamétralement opposées.

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[1] *BBC News*, March 2, 2003.
[2] *Le Monde*, April 10, 2004.
[3] C'est d'ailleurs à la suite de cet incident de 1999 que fut *soudainement* décidé de hisser une partie des magasins dans les huit derniers étages des quatre tours.
[4] Polastron, *Livres en feu*.
[5] "Babylone, Londres et New York ont accablé d'une splendeur féroce l'imagination des hommes." Borges, "Funes ou la mémoire."

Une *bibliothéké* est le dépôt des textes inscrits sur un support dont le nom vient du cœur du papyrus, celui-ci étant une spécialité alexandrine bien connue. On peut donc dire que la dénomination primitive du lieu de la connaissance a son ombilic végétal sous nos pieds ici même et que, chaque fois que "nous autres, au bout de l'Occident" (Voltaire) prononçons le mot '*bibliothèque*,' nous nous référons inconsciemment non seulement à Aristote mais surtout à Ptolémée Soter.

On n'a pas assez dit le génie du fils de Lagos. Voilà un parvenu qui, tout en guerroyant au loin contre ses anciens collègues devenus ses plus dangereux rivaux, réussit à ne prendre de décisions que grandioses sur le plan symbolique. Ainsi:

- la fabrication parfaitement cynique d'une nouvelle divinité et d'un nouveau culte,
- le rapt du corps d'Alexandre et son enfouissement à Alexandrie pour justifier la légitimité surnaturelle de la nouvelle dynastie,
- l'érection du monument à la puissance virile du roi,[6] enseigne lumineuse de la réussite politique et commerciale de la cité,
- et, au sommet de ces ambitieuses initiatives, l'établissement de la première Grande Bibliothèque universelle et encyclopédique, ouvrant les rayonnages grecs aux mots hébreux, persans ou recherchés dans l'Inde lointaine.

Les trois premières mesures sont pharaoniques et pas tellement originales; la dernière en revanche créa un choc chez les princes de l'époque, qui virent bien ce qu'un tel signe extérieur de richesse pouvait peser dans les relations internationales. On sait que plusieurs bibliothèques fleurirent alors autour de notre chère Méditerranée, dont celle, fameuse, de Pergame. La plus petite ne fut pas la moins coûteuse: elle se trouvait sur un navire de plaisance hors normes baptisé *Dame d'Alexandrie*, que le tyran de Syracuse Hiéron II avait lancé avec la collaboration d'Archimède, à ce que raconte le merveilleux *Deipnosophistai*.

Le contraste entre la démesure du projet et le peu qu'il en reste suscite de temps en temps la question infâme: a-t-il réellement existé une Grande Bibliothèque à Alexandrie?

Les banques de données actuelles regorgent de références: 39,600 sites en anglais, auxquels s'ajoutent les 4,460 en langue française, des centaines de livres en papier. On juge la qualité d'une bibliothèque disparue à ce qu'elle produit toujours des ouvrages.

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[6] Sur un îlot que le petit peuple de la ville a peut-être, dès lors, renommé Phallos.

Mais cette pléthore d'études, vue de près, n'est qu'une forêt de points d'interrogation:

– Qui doit être considéré comme le vrai fondateur de l'institution?
– Quel est l'emplacement, l'apparence et l'organisation de ses bâtiments? Chaque fois que des témoins les eurent sous les yeux ils faisaient comme s'ils ne les voyaient pas,
– On ignore la quantité de livres qui y sont conservés, principalement à cause d'une estimation basée sur les qualificatifs *amigeis/summigeis* que chacun interprète à sa façon; à cause aussi d'une virgule baladeuse qui aurait fait passer la volumétrie de 40,000 à 400,000 livres entre Sénèque et Orose,

Timon, Hérondas, Strabon, Cicéron, Tite Live, Sénèque, Plutarque, Dion Cassius, Aulu-Gelle, Ammien Marcellin, Orose, Athénée de Naucratis et d'autres contribuent à la publicité: ils sont les auteurs le plus souvent cités à l'appui de la recherche alexandrine, généralement pour bien noter qu'ils ont ignoré le sujet, qu'ils n'en ont presque rien dit, ou que leur témoignage est douteux. Quant aux sources les plus complètes sur l'objet de notre enquête, toutes prêtent à la controverse: la *Lettre d'Aristée* est un texte de propagande, Tzetzès a mille ans de retard, le lexique de Suidas, à peine plus ancien, est d'origine obscure.

Le Mouseion avait été dédié aux neuf filles de Mnémosyne, la mémoire omnisciente. D'une certaine façon, ce fut un mauvais choix: il en reste plus d'oubli que de certitudes. Selon le canon bouddhique,[7] "Les Dieux tombent du Ciel lorsque (…) leur mémoire s'embrouille."

Or c'est justement l'accumulation des silences qui, loin de repousser l'historien, va assurer le succès d'Alexandrie, au point qu'un auteur et bibliothécaire de Buenos Aires, qui n'est pas aveugle, recense aujourd'hui toutes ces contradictions et s'exclame que "si la Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie n'avait pas existé nous l'aurions inventée."[8]

Voltaire nous apprend[9] que "la ville fut peuplée d'Egyptiens, de Grecs et de Juifs, qui tous de pauvres qu'ils étaient auparavant devinrent riches

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[7] *Digha Nikaya*, I, 19–22, cité par Eliade, *Aspects du mythe*, 147.

[8] Parada, Alejandro E. "The Library of Alexandria: Time Retrieved," *Greek Mythology Link*, http://www.maicar.com/GML/003Signed/AEPAlejandria.html (accessed July 2007).

[9] Voltaire, *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, s.v. "Alexandrie," 22–25. Par ailleurs la citation que nous avons choisie pour épigraphe est tirée de la rubrique 'Bibliothèque' de ce même ouvrage.

par le commerce. L'opulence y introduisit les beaux-arts, le goût de la littérature, et par conséquent celui de la dispute."

Edward Gibbon le confirme: "Dans la tumultueuse cité d'Alexandrie, le sujet le plus léger suffisait pour donner lieu à une guerre civile;" on ne s'étonnera donc pas de ce que donnèrent les sujets les plus lourds, comme les aspirations à s'approprier le pouvoir branlant de l'empire et la féroce concurrence des religions. Aux premiers siècles de notre ère, Alexandrie connaît une succession de troubles où le livre est souvent une victime propitiatoire ou collatérale, quand il n'est pas le bouc émissaire.

Au bout du compte, la mère des bibliothèques, qui semble avoir offert une atmosphère remarquablement paisible à quatre ou cinq générations de lecteurs, brille moins par la liste des brillantes découvertes qu'elle a favorisées que par la glorieuse litanie de ses malheurs.

La première avanie enregistrée date de 145 av. J.-C., quand un militaire nommé Kydas remplace Aristarque et dirige l'institution d'une main plus apte à manier l'épée que le calame, sauf preuve du contraire, pendant une trentaine d'années. Après quoi ne peuvent se succéder que des "personnalités insignifiantes."[10] Déclin suivi de la décennie hautement romanesque dont les péripéties, lacunes et hypothèses sont connus de tous: incendie par César (48 av. J.-C.), probable pillage des collections pour alimenter la lecture à Rome (47 av. J.-C.), cadeau d'Antoine à Cléopâtre (41 av. J.-C.).

De 213 à 412, on n'y compte pas moins de huit occurrences néfastes[11] et, finalement en 642—date que la postérité retiendra le plus, comme une apothéose—il ne se passera rien. Si le général ʿAmr ne trouve pas

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[10] El-Abbadi, *Vie et destin de l'ancienne bibliothèque d'Alexandrie*, 94.

[11] Détails (Gibbon, Marlowe, et El-Abbadi):

- 213, Caracalla condamne à mort tous les Alexandrins et supprime les subsides du Musée,
- 272, Aurélien envahit la ville, occupée par Zénobie, le quartier royal est ravagé, les savants courent au Serapeum, fuient le pays,
- 296, Dioclétien met Alexandrie à feu et à sang après un siège de huit mois,
- 297 ou 298, il fait détruire tous les livres anciens des Egyptiens susceptibles de les aider à fabriquer de l'or,
- 303, Galère, l'inspirateur de Dioclétien, fait brûler les écrits des prophètes chrétiens,
- 362, la Bibliothèque Fille est saisie par Constantinople, peut-être brûlée par Jovien (Botti),
- 391 (389?) Théophile rase le Serapeum et, si elle subsiste, la Bibliothèque Fille,
- à partir de 412, l'archevêque Cyrille lance une campagne meurtrière contre les tenants d'idées concurrentes du christianisme, que ce soient les juifs ou les derniers représentants de l'hellénisme.

de quoi contribuer à la bonne marche des hammams de la ville, c'est qu'il a donné onze mois à ses riches habitants pour la quitter avec la totalité de leurs biens. Les derniers rouleaux de valeur des bibliothèques privées eurent tout le temps nécessaire pour rejoindre Constantinople, comme on sait.[12] Mais en restait-il sur des rayons plus officiels? Jean Moschus dit Eucratès, qui venait de passer huit années sur place et décrivit en détails des collections de livres dans son *Pratum spirituale*, n'en dit mot.[13] À moins de taxer ce moine sévère de '*strabonisme*' (une sorte de strabisme aggravé), il faut croire qu'il ne subsistait rien.

Parce qu'ils peuvent combler les larges trous de l'histoire avec leurs propres (non moins larges) désirs, les beaux esprits s'enflamment à l'évocation de la bibliothèque ancestrale. Et les anciens ne furent pas les derniers.

Ibn al-Nadīm[14] pense qu'Alexandre devait envoyer en Egypte les livres des pays qu'il conquérait. Juste Lipse puise dans la destruction du Serapeum par l'intolérance religieuse la conviction qu'une bibliothèque publique doit être mise à l'abri de toute 'orientation confessionnelle.'[15] Ibn Khaldūn[16] très curieusement n'en parle pas mais vole à al-Qiftī

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[12] Et finir peut-être à Moscou chez les tsars? Cf. Arans, "Note on the Lost Library of the Moscow Tsars," 304.

[13] John Moschus *Pratum Spirituale*, ed. J. P. Migne (after Fronto Ducaeus and J.-B. Cotelier), with the Latin translation of Ambrose Traversari ("Fra Ambrogio"), 1346–1439, the Florentine humanist; French translation by M.-J. Rouët de Journel: Moschus, *Pré spirituel*, [1946]; Italian Translation by Riccardo Maisano: Mosco, Prato, 1982; English translation by John Wortley: Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 1992.

[14] Le libraire du Quartier latin à Bagdad à qui l'on doit le *Fihrist*, répertoire de tous les livres disponibles en 988 pour le lecteur arabisant, tient pour sûr qu'Alexandre "envoya en Egypte les ouvrages de science, les bibliothèques et les savants qu'il trouva au cours de ses campagnes." Et encore que "Ptolémée Philadelphe, empereur d'Alexandrie, rechercha les livres scientifiques et désigna Zamîrah pour ce soin. Celui-ci réunit 54,120 livres."

Ibn al-Nadīm *Fihrist* cité par Eche, *Bibliothèques arabes publiques et semi-publiques en Mésopotamie, en Syrie et en Egypte au Moyen-Age*, 239–240.

[15] L'humaniste néo-stoïcien d'origine flamande Justus Lipsius (Overijse, près de Bruxelles, 1547–Louvain, 1606) a basé son enseignement sur le constat que la sagesse est fille de l'érudition ; son approche de la bibliothèque indispensable à cet effet émane des réflexions que lui a fournies l'exemple d'Alexandrie et la destruction de celle-ci par l'intolérance religieuse. Paul Nelles montre que le *De Bibliothecis* va à contre-courant du modèle dominant de la collection ecclésiastique et préconise "un lieu de recherches sans orientation confessionnelle," On note que l'archive parfaite contient "des livres de toutes sortes, même des livres sacrés." Cette première étude des bibliothèques antiques coïncide avec la première formulation d'un "idéal de la bibliothèque publique." Nelles, "Juste Lipse et Alexandrie: Les origines antiquaires de l'histoire des bibliothèques."

[16] "Les sciences intellectuelles acquirent une grande importance chez les Perses, et leur culture fut très-répandue; ce qui tenait à la grandeur de leur empire et à

l'anecdote du général ʿAmr pour l'appliquer aux livres de la Perse, que ʿUmar aurait ordonné a Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqās de détruire avec le même argument: "Jette-les à l'eau; s'ils renferment ce qui peut guider vers la vérité, nous tenons de Dieu ce qui nous y guide encore mieux; s'ils renferment des tromperies, nous en serons débarrassés, grâce à Dieu!" Une autre licence remarquable est celle de l'auteur des *Génie du christianisme*, qui modernise la célèbre épigraphe du Ramesséum pour l'appliquer au Mouseion: "Un soir, j'étais resté presque seul dans le dépôt des remèdes *et des poisons* de l'âme. Du haut d'une galerie de marbre, je regardais Alexandrie éclairée des derniers rayons du jour…" Ainsi parlait Cha-teaubriand,[17] avant d'annoncer que "Cette superbe

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sa grande étendue. On rapporte que les Grecs les apprirent des Perses à l'époque où Alexandre tua Darius et se rendit maître du royaume des Caïaniens. Alexandre s'empara alors de leurs livres et (s'appropria la connaissance) de leurs sciences. Nous savons cependant que les musulmans, lors de la conquête de la Perse, trouvèrent dans ce pays une quantité innombrable de livres et de recueils scientifiques, et que (leur général) Saad Ibn Abī Oueccas demanda par écrit au khalife ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb s'il lui serait permis de les distribuer aux vrais croyants avec le reste du butin. ʿUmar lui répondit dans ces termes: "Jette-les à l'eau; s'ils renferment ce qui peut guider vers la vérité, nous tenons de Dieu ce qui nous y guide encore mieux; s'ils renferment des tromperies, nous en serons débarrassés, grâce à Dieu!" En conséquence de cet ordre, on jeta les livres à l'eau ou dans le feu, et dès lors les sciences des Perses disparurent au point qu'il ne nous en est rien parvenu." Ibn Khaldūn, *Prolégomènes d'Ibn Khaldoun*, ed. de Slane, 3:125.

Ibn Khaldūn a donc trouvé à son goût et adopté l'image lue chez al-Qiftī, ou qui flottait peut-être dans l'air du temps, mais ne l'applique point à Alexandrie, dont il n'évoque d'aillleurs pas la bibliothèque. Par ailleurs, il rappelle dans *kitab al-ʿibar* (Beyrouth: Dar al-Kotob al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), 1:225, 5:642 les destructions mongoles des dizaines de bibliothèques bagdadies en 1258: là encore, c'est l'image des collections jetées à l'eau, plutôt que dans le feu, qui semble parler davantage à l'imagination de l'auteur.

[17] «Avant de rejoindre Dioclétien dans la Haute-Egypte, je passai quelques jours à Alexandrie pour en visiter les merveilles. La bibliothèque excita mon admiration. Elle était gouvernée par le savant Didyme [Il y a deux Didyme, tous deux savants: le second, qui vivait dans le IV^{e} siècle, était chrétien et versé également dans l'antiquité profane et sacrée. On peut supposer sans inconvénient que le second Didyme est l'auteur du Commentaire sur Homère. Il occupa la chaire de l'école d'Alexandrie: c'est pourquoi je l'appelle successeur d'Aristarque, qui corrigea Homère, et qui fut gouverneur du fils de Ptolémée Lagus. J'ai voulu seulement rappeler deux noms chers aux lettres. (N.d.A.)], digne successeur d'Aristarque. Là, je rencontrai des philosophes de tous les pays, et les hommes les plus illustres des Eglises de l'Afrique et de l'Asie: Arnobe [L'apologiste, dont nous avons les ouvrages. (N.d.A.)] de Carthage [Continuation du tableau des grands hommes de l'Eglise à l'époque de l'action: ce sont à présent ceux de l'Eglise d'Orient. Il y a ici de légers anachronismes: encore pourrais-je les détendre et chicaner sur les temps, mais ce n'est point de cela qu'il est question. (N.d.A.)], Athanase [Le patriarche. (N.d.A.)] d'Alexandrie, Eusèbe [L'historien. (N.d.A.)] de Césarée, Timothée, Pamphile [Le martyr, maître d'Eusèbe. (N.d.A.)], tous apologistes, docteurs ou confesseurs de Jésus-Christ. Le faible séducteur de Velléda osait à peine lever les

Alexandrie périra à son tour comme son fondateur. Un jour, dévorée par les trois déserts qui la pressent, la mer, les sables et la mort la reprendront comme un bien envahi sur eux."

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yeux dans la société de ces hommes forts qui avaient vaincu et détrôné les passions, comme ces conquérants envoyés du ciel pour frapper les princes de la verge et mettre le pied sur le cou des rois.

"Un soir, j'étais resté presque seul dans le dépôt des remèdes et des poisons de l'âme [note 54: On connaît la fameuse inscription de la bibliothèque de Thèbes en Egypte: *yuchz iatreion*. N'est-il pas plus juste pour nous avec le mot que j'y ai ajouté? (N.d.A.)]. Du haut d'une galerie de marbre, je regardais Alexandrie [J'ai souvent aussi contemplé Alexandrie du haut de la terrasse qui règne sur la maison du consul de France; je n'apercevais qu'une mer nue qui se brisait sur des côtes basses encore plus nues, des ports vides, et le désert libyque s'enfonçant à l'horizon du midi. Ce désert semblait, pour ainsi dire, accroître et prolonger la surface jaune et aplanie dos flots; on aurait cru voir une seule mer, dont une moitié était agitée et bruyante, et dont l'autre moitié était immobile et silencieuse. Partout la nouvelle Alexandrie mêlant ses ruines aux ruines de l'ancienne cité; un Arabe galopant au loin sur un âne, au milieu des débris; quelques chiens maigres dévorant des carcasses de chameaux sur une grève désolée; les pavillons des divers consuls européens flottant au-dessus de leurs demeures et déployant au milieu des tombeaux des couleurs ennemies: tel était le spectacle. (N.d.A.)], éclairée des derniers rayons du jour. Je contemplais cette ville habitée par un million d'hommes et située entre trois déserts: la mer, les sables de la Libye et Nécropolis, cité des morts aussi grande que celle des vivants. Mes yeux erraient sur tant de monuments, le Phare, le Timonium, l'Hippodrome, le palais des Ptolémées, les aiguilles de Cléopâtre; je considérais ces deux ports couverts de navires, ces flots témoins de la magnanimité du premier des Césars et de la douleur de Cornélie. La forme même de la cité frappait mes regards: elle se dessine comme une cuirasse macédonienne [Comment ai-je pu traduire le mot chlamydes de l'original par cuirasse? Voilà bien ce qui prouve que mes descriptions ne sont bonnes que pour ceux qui n'ont rien lu sur l'Egypte. Aurais-je par hasard quelque autorité que je me plaise à cacher, ou n'ai-je eu l'intention que d'arriver à l'image tirée des armes d'Alexandre? C'est ce que la critique nous dira. (N.d.A.)] sur les sables de la Libye, soit pour rappeler le souvenir de son fondateur, soit pour dire aux voyageurs que les armes du héros grec étaient fécondes, et que la pique d'Alexandre faisait éclore des cités au désert, comme la lance de Minerve fit sortir l'olivier fleuri du sein de la terre.

"Pardonnez, seigneurs, à cette image empruntée d'une source impure. Plein d'admiration pour Alexandre, je rentrai dans l'intérieur de la bibliothèque; je découvris une salle que je n'avais point encore parcouru. À l'extrémité de cette salle, je vis un petit monument de verre qui réfléchissait les feux du soleil couchant. Je m'en approchai; c'était un cercueil: le cristal transparent me laissa voir au fond du cercueil un roi mort à la fleur de l'âge, le front ceint d'une couronne d'or, et environné de toutes les marques de la puissance. Ses traits immobiles conservaient encore des traces de la grandeur de l'âme qui les anima; il semblait dormir du sommeil de ces vaillants qui sont tombés morts ["*Et non dormient cum fortibus cadentibus… qui posuerunt gladios suos sub capitibus suis*." (Ezechiel, cap. XXXII, v. 27). (N.d.A.)] Et qui ont mis leur épée sous leur tête.

"Un homme était assis près du cercueil: il paraissait profondément occupé d'une lecture. Je jetai les yeux sur son livre: je reconnus la Bible des Septante qu'on m'avait déjà montrée. Il la tenait déroulée à ce verset des Machabées:

> *Lorsque Alexandre eut vaincu Darius, il passa jusqu'à l'extrémité du monde, et la terre se tut devant lui. Après cela il connut qu'il devait bientôt mourir. Les grands de sa cour prirent tous le diadème après sa mort, et les maux se multiplièrent sur la terre.*

Plus près de nous, l'inspiration débride aussi les poètes, voire les brigands.

Un bibliothécaire de l'université de Toronto s'amuse à imaginer que le *bibliophylax* chargé par Cléopâtre de préparer les 40,000 rouleaux pour leur expédition à Rome les a remplacés par de la paille et que, pendant que celle-ci flambait dans les docks, il a caché les livres dans un endroit secret où ils dorment encore, à l'instar des manuscrits de la Mer morte ou d'Oxyrhynchos.[18] L'idée de la résurrection des textes chatouille les angoisses secrètes de l'humanité et il est facile d'en tirer de grands profits. Plusieurs écrits à coloration maçonnique du XVIII^{e} siècle évoquent la perte des livres et la fondatrice de la Société théosophique au XIX^{e} siècle, Helena Blavatsky, en promet le retour pour nous sauver.[19]

Mais l'univers ne pouvant être entièrement compris par l'hellénisme seul, l'histoire de la Grande Bibliothèque occidentale doit s'éclairer des événements qui se produisent simultanément dans l'Est lointain chez sa grande concurrente en paradigme.

Si le savant alexandrin a une opportunité de prendre conscience de la multiplicité des civilisations grâce à ses incursions en Inde, le contact ne se fera pas encore avec la Chine. Que se passe-t-il alors, bibliothécairement parlant, dans cette autre moitié du monde?

Au moment où Ptolémée s'active en son palais du *Bruccheion*, la période dite des *royaumes combattants* (V^{e}–III^{e} s.) touche à sa fin, cent philosophes et 'cent écoles' se sont déjà succédé: Confucius (551–479), Laozi, Mozi, Xunzi, Mencius et Zhuangzi sont les noms des maîtres à penser qui nous sont conservés. La nouveauté est que, grâce à l'ardeur des disciples, leurs œuvres sont en train de se matérialiser sous la forme de boisseaux de réglettes en bambou ligaturées ou parfois de rouleaux de soie. Sur les rayonnages, elles viennent côtoyer ce qui sera

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"Dans ce moment je reportai mes regards sur le cercueil: le fantôme qu'il renfermait me parut avoir quelque ressemblance avec les bustes d'Alexandre… Celui devant qui la terre se taisait, réduit à un éternel silence! Un obscur chrétien assis près du cercueil du plus fameux des conquérants, et lisant dans la Bible l'histoire et les destinées de ce conquérant! Quel vaste sujet de réflexions! Ah! si l'homme, quelque grand qu'il soit, est si peu de choses, qu'est-ce donc que ses oeuvres? disais-je en moi-même. Cette superbe Alexandrie périra à son tour comme son fondateur. Un jour, dévorée par les trois déserts qui la pressent, la mer, les sables et la mort la reprendront comme un bien envahi sur eux, et l'Arabe reviendra planter sa tente sur ses ruines ensevelies!» Chateaubriand, *Les Martyrs*, Oeuvres complètes de Chateaubriand, vol. 11.

[18] Blackburn, "Ancient Alexandrian Library: Part of It May Survive!" 23–34.

[19] Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, 1:xxiii–ix, 2:692, 763.

standardisé, édité et intitulé 'Classiques' avec les Han.[20] En outre, déjà, sont présents les premiers livres d'histoire, sous la forme d'archive des dynasties.[21]

On constate que les cartes et textes ne se séparent pas des autres trésors que possède jalousement l'homme de pouvoir: jades, bronzes, objets de divination. Aussi appellera-t-on d'abord la bibliothèque impériale *bifu*, dépôt secret des archives, et, d'ailleurs, quand il y aura des bibliophiles (à partir de l'apparition du papier), le mot choisi pour collectionner les livres sera tout naturellement *cang*, dont le premier sens est "cacher, dissimuler."[22]

Parce que les premiers idéogrammes ont servi de vecteur aux oracles, l'empereur et son peuple accordent à l'accumulation des écrits "des vertus magiques et cosmologiques,"[23] une "fonction symbolique, à la fois sacrale et politique."[24]

La logique de cette conception va être poussée à son extrême conséquence en 213, où il est décrété que posséder les livres est une exclusivité impériale.

Une telle décision s'appuie sur une théorie de la destruction qui date d'époques reculées, où on ne savait régner sans tourner le dos à l'histoire. Ainsi Mencius (372?–289?) rapporte-t-il que les rois de Zhou (XI^{e}–III^{e} s.) se débarrassaient des archives car "leur contenu leur faisait injure."[25] On dit que Shang Yang (390?–338) exhorta un dirigeant à brûler tous les écrits afin de gouverner sans risque ni contrainte. Car d'une part "celui qui étudie se noie dans ce qu'il apprend,"[26] d'autre part la destruction de la Bibliothèque seule "permet l'émergence des lois et des ordonnances:" ce dernier précepte[27] est développé par le penseur Han Fei, mort en 233, vingt ans avant le grand autodafé impérial: "Dans l'Etat du prince éclairé, pas de littérature, de livres

[20] Classiques des Mutations (*Yijing*), des Poèmes (*Shijing*), de la Musique (*Yuejing*), ainsi que les Livres des Rites et des Documents (*Liji, Shangshu*).

[21] Comme le *Chunqiu*, "Printemps et Automne," chronique du royaume de Lu entre 722 et 481 peut-être rédigée par Confucius.

[22] Cf. Edgren, "*Cangshu: The Tradition of Collecting Books in China*." En revanche, la bibliothèque publique est aujourd'hui toujours nommée *tushuguan*, "salle des cartes et des textes," expression qui reste en vigueur également au Japon: *toshokan*.

[23] Leys, *L'Humeur, l'honneur, l'horreur: Essais sur la culture et la politique chinoises*.

[24] *Dictionnaire de la Civilisation chinoise*, s.v. "Bibliothèques."

[25] Sima Qian, *Mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien*, trans. Chavannes, vol. 3.

[26] Comme le cite Sima Qian dans le *Shiji*, achevé vers 90.

[27] Formulé dans le *Shangjun shu*, un écrit attribué à Shang Yang (390?–338) mais sans doute rédigé près d'un siècle plus tard.

ni de tablettes de bambou, la loi est la seule doctrine."[28] Or un de ses disciples est Li Si, qui devient ministre de Shihuangdi, le "premier auguste empereur;" c'est lui qui impose l'anéantissement de toute source de contestation et met en pratique les théories bibliocides: "Tous les livres des dépôts d'archives, à l'exception de l'histoire de Qin, doivent être détruits; chaque personne dans tout l'empire (…) qui oserait posséder des classiques ou des discussions des philosophes divers, doit se rendre auprès des autorités civiles ou militaires de façon que ces livres soient brûlés,"[29] ceux qui n'obtempèrent pas sont envoyés construire la Grande Muraille et les 460 intellectuels qui défient alors l'empereur sont ensevelis vivants l'année suivante.

Le décret épargne les ouvrages de médecine, d'agriculture et d'astronomie—comme d'ailleurs le feront plus ou moins tous les grands biblioclastes de l'histoire: Alexandre en Perse, Scipion à Carthage ou Cisneros à Grenade—au détriment de la philosophie, de la poésie et de l'histoire, car ces dernières pourraient être imprégnées du message confucéen selon lequel régner non par la force mais par la sagesse est souhaitable, et les archives des Etats anciens sont nocives parce qu'on pourrait y découvrir que cela s'est déjà produit.

Mais très vite l'empereur est mort; une révolte générale met un terme à la courte dynastie Qin. La capitale, Xianyang, brûla dit-on pendant trois jours (ou trois mois, suite sans doute à un coup de pinceau mal placé) et là furent perdus tous les livres des ministres et du palais, parachevant ainsi l'autodafé impérial. Si on estime aujourd'hui à 20% ce qui a subsisté, directement ou par recoupement, de la bibliographie des Han, personne en revanche n'ose avancer de chiffre pour les périodes antérieures, Qin et Zhou.

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[28] *Hanfeizi*, cité par Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions*.

[29] "I therefore request that all records of the historians other than those of the state of Qin be burned. With the exception of the academicians whose duty it is to possess them, if there are persons anywhere in the empire who have in their possessions copies of the *Odes*, the *Documents*, or the writing of the hundred schools of philosophy, they shall in all cases deliver them to the governor or his commandant for burning. Anyone who ventures to discuss the *Odes* or *Documents* shall be executed in the marketplace. Anyone who uses antiquity to criticize the present shall be executed along with his family. Any official who observes or knows of violations and falls to report them shall be equally guilty. Anyone who has failed to burn such books within thirty days of the promulgation of this order shall be subjected to tattoo and condemned to 'wall-dawn' labour [*chengdan*: build the Great Wall during the day and stand guard until dawn]. The books that are exempted are those on medicine, divination, agriculture, and forestry. Anyone wishing to study the laws and ordinances should have a law official for his teacher." Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty*, 55.

Le décret de Li Si ne sera aboli qu'en 191, soit vingt-deux ans plus tard. Les décennies suivantes voient alors se dérouler, par réaction, de vastes campagnes de reconstitution des fonds de livres, en particulier sous l'empereur Wu des Han (Wu, 'Le Martial,' règne de 140 à 87), qui envoie des émissaires sur l'ensemble du territoire à la recherche des textes et organise des ateliers de copie, comme à Alexandrie. Mais ici la prudence est de mise: reproduire trois exemplaires par titre est un minimum, cinquante copies n'est pas rare.

Les livres dissimulés malgré la loi de Qin devaient être assez nombreux pour qu'à la suite de ces efforts, la collection impériale atteigne, à la fin du II^e^ siècle avant notre ère, 677 titres couvrant environ 13,000 volumes.[30] La première bibliographie et le premier catalogue descriptif sont antérieurs à l'an 23 de notre ère.[31]

Mais la grande destruction des livres en 213 a profondément impressionné l'imaginaire chinois. Aujourd'hui encore, on utilise couramment la locution proverbiale *fenshu kengju* pour dire d'une décision trop radicale que c'est comme "brûler les livres et enterrer vivants les lettrés." Le vieil autodafé fait cependant partie des actes qui fondent la nation; la société chinoise trouve sa cohésion dans le respect du texte manuscrit, valorisé par sa qualité calligraphique, et ce respect se transformera en culte du livre et de l'histoire pour les vingt siècles suivants.[32]

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[30] Ces chiffres passeront à 6,500 titres et 57,000 rouleaux à la fin du VI^e^ siècle, cf. *Dictionnaire de la Civilisation chinoise*, s.v. "Bibliothèques."

[31] "In 191 B.C. the criminal law against possession of books, which had been initiated by the first emperor of Ch'in (Qin) was abrogated [Ban, *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, trans. Dubs, 1:182]. The next few decades brought the beginning of the restoration of the Confucian classics destroyed by the Ch'in.

Systematic, large-scale recovery of ancient works was not begun, however, until the reign of emperor Wu (r. 140–87 B.C.), who "set plans for restoring books and appointed officers for transcribing them, including even works of various philosophers and the commentaries, all to be stored in the imperial library" [*Han Shu*, 30/1b]. It is said that after the strenuous efforts made by his minister Kung-sun Hung (Gongsun Hong), books were piled up like hills [*T'ai-p'ing yü-lan*, 619/1a]. Official agents were sent to search out all the surviving books, giving rewards, so they could borrow the books from private collections for transcribing. In ancient times, books were preserved in archives which were usually attached to the government offices where the documents were produced. Now, for the first time in Chinese history, a centralized imperial library was established, where a wide range of materials was systematically collected and administered.

The search for books throughout the country continued while they were being collated and arranged in systematic order. (…) Liu Hsiang's (Liu Xiang, *ca.* 80–8 B.C.) work is the earliest known bibliography in China and Liu Hsin's (Liu Xin, his son), the first system of subject classification and descriptive cataloguing of Chinese books." Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions*, 13–14.

[32] Sur le poids de l'histoire, de l'écrit et, en particulier, du manuscrit dans la civilisation chinoise, lire Chavannes, Leys, *L'Humeur, l'honneur, l'horreur: Essais sur la culture et la*

A l'inverse donc du modèle alexandrin, le mythe chinois démarre par l'enfermement superstitieux puis la destruction brutale de la Grande Bibliothèque, un traumatisme tel qu'il entraîne une solide sacralisation de l'archive. L'acte de reconstituer les collections se produira à de nombreuses reprises et de façon systématique, puisque, à chaque changement de dynastie ou presque, la Bibliothèque Impériale est annihilée ou endommagée.[33]

Grecque ou chinoise, l'institution se construit par ordre du potentat, qui met à son service savants, commissionnaires, copistes et traducteurs; de la même façon, l'arrangement des titres et du catalogue s'organise en grandes branches du savoir. Mais, tandis que la mère des bibliothèques occidentales n'en finit pas de succomber aux malheurs de toutes sortes, et que le ciel médiéval se couvre des nuages monothéistes—autrement dit monolivresques—le modèle chinois déclenche un vaste mouvement bibliophilique dans les couches supérieures de la société puis dans les monastères; les collections des lettrés prolifèrent à partir du III^e^ siècle de notre ère et, le jour où la bibliothèque de Cambridge peut aligner 122 volumes (1424), les bibliophiles chinois sont nombreux depuis deux ou trois cents ans déjà à posséder chacun plus de 1,500 œuvres manuscrites, sans compter les imprimés.[34]

Les ruines ne sont pas faites seulement de pierres mais aussi de papyrus: des lacunes dans les textes, des volumes disparus et des silences plus ou moins innocents ouvrent la porte à l'interprétation, voire au vent de la fantaisie. Le mythe n'attend que cela pour s'engouffrer. Le mythe, selon la définition de Mircea Eliade, raconte les moyens surnaturels avec lesquels "une réalité est venue à l'existence" et, en cela, il s'oppose aux "histoires fausses," que sont les fables et les légendes.

Plus troublante encore que l'assassinat du Roi, la destruction de la Bibliothèque est un "meurtre du père" qui longuement traumatise peuples et nations: en plus des trous dans l'histoire, elle laisse une large ecchymose à l'inconscient collectif et procure à l'imagination philosophique un de ses plus puissants ferments.

Homère dit que les dieux tissent des malheurs afin que les générations futures ne manquent pas de sujets pour leurs chants.

Pour Borges, la Bibliothèque est interminable, l'infini est indestruc-

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politique chinoises; ainsi que Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy*. Et encore Lewis, *Writing and Authority in early China*.

[33] Drège, *Bibliothèques en Chine au temps des manuscrits: Jusqu'au X^e^ siècle*.

[34] Edgren, "*Cangshu: The Tradition of Collecting Books in China*."

tible. Ce thème sous-tend *La Bibliothèque de Babel*, il est consolidé dans l'idée de la réécriture du *Quichotte*. C'est toutefois le poème *Alexandrie 641 a.d.* qui l'exprime sans détours:

> j'ordonne à mes soldats de détruire
> par le feu la vaste Bibliothèque,
> qui ne périra pas.[35]

En conséquence, "Qu'est-il arrivé à l'ancienne Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie?"

Edgar Poe pourrait inspirer une réponse acceptable: vous l'avez évidemment sous les yeux, ici, maintenant.

Mais attention, dit l'histoire, son avatar actuel pourrait bien s'avérer plus fragile que dans l'ancien temps.

[35] "Les Infidèles affirment que, si elle brûlait,
brûlerait l'histoire. Ils se trompent.
Les veillées humaines engendrèrent
les livres infinis. Si, d'eux tous, il
n'en demeurait aucun, les hommes recommenceraient
à engendrer chaque page et chaque ligne,
chacun des travaux et des amours d'Hercule,
chaque variante de chaque manuscrit."
Aussi le chef des vandales peut-il proclamer sans risque:
"j'ordonne à mes soldats de détruire
par le feu la vaste Bibliothèque,
qui ne périra pas." Borges, "*Alexandrie, 641 a.d.*"

THE NAG HAMMADI 'LIBRARY' OF COPTIC PAPYRUS CODICES

Birger A. Pearson

I. *Discovery and publication of the Nag Hammadi Codices*

One day in December 1945, eight *fellahin* rode out on camel-back from their village in the Nag Hammadi region of Upper Egypt, el-Kasr, and stopped at the base of the Gebel et-Tarif some four kilometers away. Their purpose was to dig for fertilizing nitrates (*sebakh*) for their fields. One of them, Abu el-Magd, dug up a large earthenware jar sealed at the top with a bowl. He left it up to his older brother, Muhammad Ali, to decide what to do with it, and the latter finally broke the jar in the hope of finding treasure. Much to his disappointment, out came thirteen leather-bound papyrus books and a lot of papyrus dust. Muhammad Ali divided the papyri into eight portions, but the other men declined their shares, and Muhammad Ali brought them home to el-Kasr. There he dumped them on the kitchen floor, and his mother, Umm Ahmad, used some of the papyrus leaves as fuel for her bread oven.

The story of the find and the subsequent fate of the papyrus books (codices, not scrolls) has been pieced together by James M. Robinson of the Claremont Graduate University in California.[1] They have come to be known as the "Nag Hammadi Codices" or "Nag Hammadi Library," after the main town in the region some nine kilometers from the find-site. They are now housed in the library of the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo.

One interesting problem associated with the story of the discovery of the codices is the question of precisely how many there were. Muhammad Ali consistently maintained that thirteen bound books were found in the jar. But what is now referred to as Nag Hammadi Codex (NHC) XIII consists of eight leaves of papyrus that had been

[1] Robinson et al., *Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, vol. 12, *Introduction*, 3–31; Robinson, "From the Cliff to Cairo," 21–58; cf. Birger A. Pearson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Nag Hammadi Codices," 4:984–93.

ripped out of a codex in antiquity and stuffed into the cover of Codex VI. Our Codex XIII, therefore, cannot count as one of the thirteen separate books found in 1945, for it was then part of Codex VI. Was a complete codex destroyed in Umm Ahmad's oven, together with leaves of papyrus from other codices now incomplete? Or will it, or parts of it, eventually turn up on the antiquities market?[2]

The Nag Hammadi manuscripts date from the fourth century and are inscribed in Coptic.[3] Several dialects of Coptic are reflected in them. Several of the manuscripts have suffered severe damage and only exist in fragments. All of the texts in the manuscripts are Coptic translations of writings originally written in Greek. A few of them could have been composed as early as the first century, but most date to the second or third centuries. Many of the texts (perhaps most) were composed in Greek in Egypt; the others would have been brought to Egypt from Syria or elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

The manuscripts remained inaccessible to scholars until the 1950s when the first publications appeared.[4] In 1961 UNESCO became involved in plans for publishing a complete facsimile edition, and several hundred photographs were taken and sent to Paris. In 1970 an international committee of scholars was appointed, with a subcommittee working on the technical problems of identifying and assembling papyrus fragments for definitive photography. The first volumes of the facsimile edition appeared in 1972, and the last of the codices were published in 1977.[5] The project was completed in 1984 with the publication of *addenda et corrigenda* as part of the introductory volume.[6]

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[2] Robinson, "From the Cliff to Cairo," 38–40.

[3] The Coptic language is the latest manifestation of the ancient language of the Pharaohs written in a modified Greek alphabet and incorporates numerous Greek words into its vocabulary.

[4] The most important of these is the Gospel of Thomas (NHC II,2); Guillaumont et al., *Gospel according to Thomas* (in English, German, and French versions), all versions were published in 1959 by Brill (Leiden), Collins (London), Harper & Brothers (New York), Presses Universitaires de France (Paris). For a summary of the early publication activity see Birger A. Pearson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Nag Hammadi Codices," 4:985–986.

[5] Robinson et al., *Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, vol. 1, *Codex VI* (1972); vol. 2, *Codex VII* (1972); vol. 3, *Codices XI, XII, and XIII* (1973); vol. 4, *Codex II* (1974); vol. 5, *Codex V* (1974); vol. 6, *Codex IV* (1975); vol. 7, *Codex III* (1976); vol. 8, *Codex VIII* (1976); vol. 9, *Codices IX and X* (1977); vol. 10, *Codex I* (1977); vol. 11, *Cartonnage* (1979); vol. 12, *Introduction* (1984).

[6] Ibid., vol. 12, *Introduction*.

In 1966 Professor Robinson began to organize a group of scholars who would produce critical editions and English translations of the Nag Hammadi Codices, based on photographs he had obtained from the UNESCO office in Paris. That project, based in Claremont, California, was entitled 'The Coptic Gnostic Library,' and eventually involved some 38 scholars.[7] The last of the sixteen volumes comprising the series was published in 1995, 50 years after the initial discovery.[8] However, a one-volume translation of all of the Nag Hammadi Codices, plus two from the closely related Berlin Gnostic Codex, prepared by the Claremont team, was published several years earlier in 1977.[9]

While the Claremont project was in the initial stages of work a group of doctoral students studying Coptic with Hans-Martin Schenke at Humboldt-Universität in East Berlin began to focus their work on the Nag Hammadi texts, and this was the genesis of the Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften, directed by Schenke. The German project began to publish translations of selected texts in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, and continued with dissertations published in the series, "Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur." The third phase of the project has recently been completed with a two-volume translation of all of the Nag Hammadi and Berlin tractates.[10]

In 1974 The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada provided an initial grant to a group of scholars associated with Laval University in Québec for the purpose of publishing a complete French-language critical edition of the Nag Hammadi and Berlin texts, "Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi." The first volume was

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[7] I joined the project in 1968, and was assigned to work on the highly fragmentary codices IX and X. The edition was published in 1981; Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*. I was also editor of the last volume published in the series (see n. 8).

[8] Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codex VII* (1996) [published November 1995]. The series (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies) includes the four tractates contained in the closely related Berlin Gnostic Codex (BG), purchased in an antiquities shop in Akhmim in the nineteenth century and acquired by the Berlin Museum. It was finally published in a first critical edition in 1955; Till, *Gnostische Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502* (1955). "The Coptic Gnostic Library" series came to include two other volumes of Coptic texts which were not part of the Nag Hammadi find, the Askew and Bruce Codices first published in the nineteenth century; Schmidt, *Pistis Sophia* (1978); and ibid., *Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex* (1978).

[9] Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library in English* (1988).

[10] Schenke et al., *Nag Hammadi Deutsch* (2001, 2003).

published in 1977, and the series now numbers some 30 volumes, with additional ones projected.

Thus, over the years since the first publication efforts of the 1950s, a growing number of texts, translations, and studies have accumulated, numbering now in the thousands.[11]

II. *Religious content of the Nag Hammadi Codices*

The texts in the Nag Hammadi collection number 52 in all. Five of these are represented by more than a single copy; the number of different tractates is 46. Of the four tractates in the closely related Berlin Gnostic Codex, two are also represented in the Nag Hammadi collection. Most of the tractates are 'Gnostic' writings hitherto unknown to scholars that shed important new light on ancient Gnosticism. Before the discovery of the Coptic writings, scholars were largely dependent for their knowledge of ancient Gnosticism on the polemical writings of the church fathers, who roundly condemned what they called "knowledge falsely so-called." The most important of these fathers was Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon in Gaul, who wrote his five-volume work against Gnostic heretics towards the end of the second century (ca. 185). In the view of Irenaeus and the other church fathers adherents of 'the Gnostic heresy' were Christian 'heretics' who posed a serious challenge to emerging Christian orthodoxy.

What historians of religions now refer to as 'Gnosticism' is a religion that emerged around the turn of the first century.[12] It originated independently of Christianity, but soon took on Christian forms that integrated the figure of Jesus Christ into their mythological systems. Gnosticism is a religion of salvation based on the acquisition of a special kind of *gnosis* (a Greek word for 'knowledge'). Adherents of Gnosticism regard *gnosis* (rather than faith, observance of law, etc.) as requisite to salvation. The saving 'knowledge' involves a revelation as to the true nature both of the self and of God; for the Gnostic

[11] See Scholer, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1948–69* (1971); ibid., *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1970–1994* (1997). Annual supplements are provided in the journal *Novum Testamentum*.

[12] One of the best full-length treatments of Gnosticism is Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*. On the scholarly issues involved in defining Gnosticism see Pearson, "Gnosticism as a Religion," chap. 7 in *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt*, 201–23.

(a person in possession of *gnosis*) self-knowledge *is* knowledge of God. Gnosticism has a characteristic theology according to which there is a transcendent supreme God beyond the god or powers responsible for the world in which we live. It has a radically dualist cosmology, according to which the cosmos, having been created by an inferior power, is a prison in which human souls are held captive. Gnosticism also has a special anthropology, according to which the essential human being is a divine spark that originated in the transcendent world and is now held captive in a material body. This spark, co-substantial with the transcendent God, can, through *gnosis*, be released from the cosmic prison and return to its divine origins.

These ideas were given expression in elaborate mythological systems, some of which were discussed by the church fathers. These mythological systems are now much better understood, thanks to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices.

Several varieties of ancient Gnosticism are represented in the Nag Hammadi tractates, and not all the tractates are typically 'Gnostic' in character. The religious orientation of all of the treatises, including those of the Berlin Gnostic Codex, can be described briefly as follows:

II.1. 'Sethian'[13] *or* 'Classic'[14] *Gnostic texts*

The most important of these texts, of which we have four copies, is the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG,2). In it is presented an elaborate Gnostic myth describing the divine world, the "fall" leading to the creation of the world, the creation of humans and their imprisonment in a material body, and the means of their salvation. In this myth a heavenly projection of the biblical figure of Seth, son of Adam, plays an important role. The myth is presented in a dialogue between Jesus Christ and his disciple John, but the narrative frame and dialogue features are probably secondary additions effectively 'Christianizing' an earlier Jewish Gnostic myth.[15] The other Sethian texts are the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II,4), the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III,2), the *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V,5), the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5), *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1), *Melchizedek* (NHC IX,1), the *Thought*

[13] See esp. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*.
[14] See esp. Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 5–214.
[15] Pearson, "The Problem of 'Jewish Gnostic' Literature," chap. 7 in *Emergence of the Christian Religion*, 122–46, esp. 126–34.

of Norea (NHC IX,2), *Marsanes* (NHC X,1), *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3), and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII,1). In addition, several other Nag Hammadi tractates, more difficult to classify, reflect the use of Sethian Gnostic sources and/or traditions.

II.2. *Valentinian Gnostic texts*

The most important Gnostic Christian teacher known to us was Valentinus, who was born in the Egyptian Delta and flourished as a teacher in Alexandria and Rome in the early and mid-second century. By adapting '*Sethian*' or '*Classic*' Gnosticism, he created a new interpretation of the Christianity that had come to Alexandria in the first century. Only fragments of his writings in Greek remain, but one of the Nag Hammadi tractates may plausibly be assigned to him, the *Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,3; XII,2). Other tractates representing the Valentinian school are the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* (NHC I,1), the *Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC I,4), the *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I,5), the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3), the *Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI,1), and a *Valentinian Exposition*, with liturgical appendices (NHC XI,2). In addition, several other Nag Hammadi tractates, more difficult to classify, reflect the use of Valentinian sources and/or traditions.

II.3. *Gnostic texts of uncertain affiliation*

The earliest of these, *Eugnostos the Blessed* (NHC III,3; V,1), is thought to be a first-century Alexandrian text of Jewish Gnostic origin. The latest of them, probably dating from the late third or early fourth century, are composite texts reflecting the use of various sources, the treatise *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II,5: XIII,2) and the *Concept of our Great Power* (NHC VI,4). Other Gnostic texts difficult to classify are the *Apocryphon of James* (NHC I,2), the *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,6), the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (NHC III,4; BG,3), the *Apocalypse of Paul* (NHC V,2), the *(First) Apocalypse of James* (NHC V,3), the *(Second) Apocalypse of James* (NHC V,4), *Thunder: Perfect Mind* (NHC VI,2),[16] the *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII,1), the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (NHC VII,2), the *Apocalypse of Peter* (NHC VII,3), the *Letter of Peter to Philip* (NHC VIII,2),

[16] Layton includes this text among the "Classic" (Sethian) Gnostic writings; Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 77–85.

the *Testimony of Truth* (NHC IX,3), *Hypsiphrone* (NHC XI,4), and the *Gospel of Mary* (BG,1).

II.4. *Hermetic texts*

There is a whole corpus of writings in Greek which feature Hermes Trismegistus ('Thrice-Greatest') as a revealer of *gnosis*. There are Coptic versions of two of these among the Nag Hammadi tractates, the *Prayer of Thanksgiving* (NHC VI,7) and *Asclepius 21–29* (NHC VI,8). There is also a Hermetic text previously unknown, the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (NHC VI,6).

II.5. *Texts of the Thomas Tradition*

An Eastern Syrian tradition featuring Jesus' 'twin' brother, Judas Thomas, is represented by two of the Nag Hammadi texts, the *Gospel of Thomas* (NHC II,2), and the *Book of Thomas the Contender* (NHC II,7). Scholars differ on whether these should be included under the umbrella term 'Gnosticism.'

II.6. *Miscellaneous non-Gnostic texts*

These include a fractured Coptic translation of a passage from the writings of Plato of Athens, (*Republic 588A–589B*; NHC VI,5); Christian apocryphal works, the *Dialogue of the Savior* (NHC III,5), *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* (NHC VI,1), and an *Act of Peter* (BG,4); a text of second-century Christian Platonism, *Authoritative Teaching* (*Authentikos Logos*, NHC VI,3); and two Christian 'wisdom' texts of moral philosophy, the *Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII,4) and the *Sentences of Sextus* (NHC XII,1).[17]

It can readily be seen that there is no theological unity reflected in the Nag Hammadi collection as a whole. Most of them are 'Gnostic,' but the Gnosticism represented in the texts is of various types, and many of them are not easily classified by sectarian origin as defined by the polemical writings of the church fathers. Several of them are not

[17] Only fragments remain of the Coptic version of *Sentences of Sextus*, but the original Greek version is extant, and versions in several other languages also exist. There are also two fragments of the highly damaged Codex XII which are incapable of identification.

Gnostic at all, and one of them, the *Teachings of Silvanus*, is explicitly anti-Gnostic.[18] One can, nevertheless, see a certain degree of unity in these disparate writings in terms of lifestyle. Many of the texts in the collection advocate an ascetic lifestyle, and all of them could easily be read in that light. That certainly has a bearing on who would have been interested in copying, reading, and preserving these texts.

III. *The Nag Hammadi corpus as a 'Library'*

The first Western scholar to study the Nag Hammadi manuscripts was a Frenchman, Jean Doresse, and his impression was that they constituted "nothing less than the sacred library of an ancient sect, to all appearances complete."[19] He remarked on the 'homogeneity' of the writings, "their undoubted unity," indicating that most of the texts "belong to the same religious body." Noting the prominence of the name Seth in a number of writings, he concluded that the sect was that of the 'Sethians' described by several church fathers.[20]

We now know that the supposed 'unity' of the writings was illusory, for there is a great deal of diversity among them, as we have already noted. That the manuscripts were part of a 'library' is certainly apparent, but to whose library did they belong? There is considerable circumstantial evidence that points to an answer to that question: The books belonged to a Christian monastery near the site of their discovery, very probably the one at Chenoboskion[21] (modern el-Kasr) 4 kilometers away. That monastery was one of a network of monasteries founded or organized by Pachomius (ca. 290–346)[22] in the early fourth century. Three major factors point to this monastic connection.

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[18] The text warns against being "defiled by strange kinds of knowledge" (*gnosis*, 94, 29–33), and contains a polemic against those who regard the creator of the world as an ignorant deity (116, 5–9).

[19] Doresse, *Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, 120.

[20] Ibid., 249–51. Doresse's use of the term 'library' for the collection as a whole has certainly impacted subsequent scholarship, as can be seen in the terminology used in various editions and translations: 'The Coptic Gnostic Library;' 'The Nag Hammadi Library in English;' 'Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi.'

[21] 'Goose-pasture' in Greek, also called Chenoboskia (pl.); its Egyptian (Coptic) name is Sheneset, 'Trees of Set.' St. Pachomius was born in that village, and was baptized a Christian there.

[22] On Pachomius, founder of "Coenobitic" monasticism, see esp. Rousseau, *Pachomius*. Pachomius' headquarters was eventually located at Phbow (or Pabau, modern Faw Qibli), up the river from Chenoboskion.

First, there is the site of the discovery. The jar containing the codices had been buried midway up the talus of broken rock at the foot of the Gebel et-Tarif. There is evidence that this area was used for burials in the early Byzantine period. In addition, over 150 caves are located in the cliff; the one nearest the site of the discovery has on one of its walls a Coptic inscription, in red paint, of the opening lines of several biblical Psalms.[23] The caves in question were presumably used by monks from the nearby monastery for retreat and meditation. The burials were also probably those of monks. So it is highly likely that Christian monks used a monastic burial site as a place in which to deposit a cache of books. One can also posit that those monks buried their books because their contents had come under suspicion in the monastic community.[24]

Second, the cartonnage[25] found in some of the book covers points to a monastic context for the manufacture of the codices. This is at least true in the case of the cartonnage found in Codex VII, which contains fragments of a biblical codex and a homily, as well as private letters indicating a monastic provenience, including one from a 'Paphnoute' to a 'Pachomius' (no. 6).[26] There is a strong likelihood that the codices were manufactured by monks in one or more of the Pachomian monasteries. It is equally likely that the blank codices were inscribed by monks as well.

Third, the colophons and scribal notes in some of the manuscripts contain pious Christian prayers and other expressions of Christian piety. Such colophons and notes are indications of a monastic provenience for the writings in the books. The scribes who copied from other books the various texts now found in the Nag Hammadi Codices evidently treated those texts as edifying religious literature.

So why did those monks bury their books? That story begins in Alexandria in the year 367, when Archbishop Athanasius sent out his annual encyclical letter to all the churches and monasteries in his jurisdiction, setting the date for the up-coming Easter observance. He included in that letter a vigorous condemnation of the use of 'heretical'

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[23] Robinson, "Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices," 206–24, esp. 213.

[24] Wisse, "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt," 431–40, esp. 436–37.

[25] Cartonnage consists of scraps of discarded papyrus glued into the leather covers to stiffen them. Cartonnage was found in Codices I, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, and XI. See Barns, Browne, and Shelton, *Nag Hammadi Codices*.

[26] For a balanced discussion see Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt," 271–306, esp. 278–83.

and 'apocryphal' writings in the churches, and a list of the 27 New Testament writings which he declared to be authoritative for church use. His letter was translated into Coptic and read in all the monasteries of Egypt. The abbots of the monasteries were expected to seek out unacceptable books and destroy them, either by burning them or throwing them into the Nile River. We can safely assume that some of the monks at Chenoboskion did not want to see their favorite writings destroyed in that way. So they stashed them in a large jar, sealed the jar with a bowl,[27] and buried the jar at the Gebel et-Tarif. There they remained for some fifteen hundred years.

The aforementioned colophons and scribal notes not only reveal something of the piety of the scribes, but also tell us something about libraries and scriptoria in fourth century Christian monasteries in Egypt. Let us take a look at the ones that we have in the Nag Hammadi manuscripts.

A colophon usually occurs at the end of a book, and later colophons usually tell us something about the scribes who wrote them.[28] Codex I[29] has no colophon at the end, but has one on the verso side of the front flyleaf of the codex (B,9–10), right after the short text that was added to the codex after the last tractate was completed, the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* (NHC I,1). After the subscript title, written in Greek and marked by decoration, the words 'in peace' occur. Further decoration includes crosses and Egyptian *ankh* signs (life), and then the words 'Christ is holy.' 'Christ' is written with the standard *chi-rho* monogram (see fig. 12), and the entire colophon is in Greek. It is possible that this colophon was already found in a Greek codex from which the Coptic translation was made.

Codex II has a colophon at the end (145, 20–23), enclosed in a decorative rectangle marked by lines (see fig. 13). The text reads, "Remember me, also, my brethren, [in] your prayers. Peace to the saints and spiritual ones." The scribe, unnamed, asks for prayers from fellow-monks in his monastery.

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[27] The bowl used as a lid for the jar is still extant; it is red slipware of the fourth or fifth century; Robinson, "Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codice," 213.

[28] The standard work on Coptic colophons in the Sahidic dialect is Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d'Égypte*.

[29] Codices III, V, VI, and VIII have no concluding colophons. The end pages of Codices IX, XI, XII, and XIII are missing; so we don't know if they had colophons. The accompanying plates are taken from, Robinson et al., *Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*.

The second tractate of Codex III, conventionally called the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, has its correct title at the very end, separated by decorations: "The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit. Amen." After the end of the tractate itself, but before the subscript title, there occurs the following colophon (69, 6–17; see fig. 14), which pertains not to the codex as a whole but only to the tractate:[30]

> The Egyptian Gospel.[31] The God-written, holy, secret book. Grace, understanding, perception, prudence (be) with him who has written it, Eugnostos the beloved in the spirit—in the flesh my name is Concessus—and my fellow lights in incorruptibility. Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, *Ichthus*.[32] God-written, the holy book of the great, invisible Spirit. Amen.

In this colophon we have the name of the scribe who copied it, Concessus (a Latin name), who has adopted a spiritual name that means 'well-knowing.' He prays for special grace for himself and his 'fellow-lights,' presumably fellow monks enlightened by *gnosis*.

Codex VI, which lacks a concluding colophon, has an interesting scribal note placed between tractate 7 and tractate 8 (65, 8–14), both treatises attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. It is written with smaller letters and framed in a decorated box (see fig. 15):[33]

> I have copied this one discourse of his.[34] Indeed, very many have come to me. I have not copied them because I thought that they had come to you. Also, I hesitate to copy these for you because they have perhaps (already) come to you, and the matter may burden you, since the discourses of that one, which have come to me, are numerous.

This notice is not very clear, but the anonymous scribe is probably apologizing for copying into the codex the preceding tractate, the *Prayer of Thanksgiving* (NHC VI,7), which is quite short. Interestingly, the rest of the codex is written with smaller letters and lines with more words per line. When the scribe got to the point of copying tractate 8, he

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[30] The translation is that of A. Böhlig and F. Wisse in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, but modified.

[31] Böhlig and Wisse translate, "The Gospel of <the> Egyptians," "correcting" the received text with a Coptic morpheme meaning "the." This is the source of the (incorrect) title of the tractate now conventionally used.

[32] Greek for "fish." The initial letters are those of "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior," a widely used early Christian acrostic.

[33] The translation is that of J. Brashler, P. Dirkse, and D. Parrott in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, modified.

[34] The reference is to Hermes Trismegistus, who is also referred to as "that one" in line 14.

evidently decided to make room for tractate 7, a prayer that seems to have had a special meaning for him. The people he is addressing are monastic superiors who have engaged him for scribal work. It is interesting that he remarks how copious the Hermetic literature is. He implies that he has enough on hand for additional copying work which, however, might not be necessary if his superiors already have enough of this material.

Codex VII has a concluding colophon (127, 29–32; see fig. 16) following the subscript title of the last tractate, the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5). It reads as follows:[35] "This book belongs to the fatherhood. It is the son who wrote it. Bless me, O father. I bless you, O father, in peace. Amen." Here the scribe identifies himself as a 'son' to a superior monk, perhaps the abbot of his monastery. The 'fatherhood' probably refers to the collective leadership of his monastery, or perhaps of the entire network of Pachomian monasteries.

Codex VII has an additional colophon (118, 8–9) following the conclusion of tractate 4, the *Teachings of Silvanus*. It is written in Greek, and surrounded by 'magical' symbols consisting of three Greek *phi*s, three *eta*s, and an 'anchor' symbol plus a *tau* and an *upsilon* (see fig. 17).[36] The intelligible text of the colophon reads: "*ichthus* (fish),[37] indescribable wonder." There is nothing in it that relates it specifically to the *Teachings of Silvanus*. It was probably found at the end of another codex in which the *Teachings of Silvanus* was the concluding tractate, and used by the scribe of Codex VII as an exemplar for copying.[38] This colophon is expressive of a mystical piety centered upon "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

The Berlin Codex has a colophon at the end (142, 1–3), the only text inscribed on the last page. It reads: "God of Gods, God of Gods, Lord of Lords, King of Kings!"[39]

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[35] The translation is that of James M. Robinson and James E. Goehring in Pearson, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 421.

[36] For an attempt to decipher these symbols see Williams, "Interpreting the Nag Hammadi Library as 'Collections' in the History of 'Gnosticism(s)'," 3–50, esp. 18–19.

[37] See n. 32, above.

[38] Schenke et al., *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 2:604.

[39] Till, *Gnostischen Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502*, 2nd ed. by Schenke, 320–21. I do not have a photograph of this colophon.

IV. *Concluding Observations*

The Nag Hammadi Codices constitute one of the most important manuscript finds of the twentieth century, comparable in importance to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Study of these Coptic manuscripts has opened up new vistas for scholarship in the fields of biblical studies, early Christian history, and the general history of religions. Thanks to that discovery we have ample primary evidence for ancient Gnosticism, an important religious current in the Roman era. We also have acquired new insights into the history of Middle and Neo-Platonism.

Before the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices, there were very few scholars interested in the study of the Coptic language. Now there are many institutions of higher learning in which Coptic is studied, and great strides have been made in understanding the history of the Coptic language and its dialects. There is now also an International Association for Coptic Studies, founded in Cairo in 1976, with members from all over the world. The IACS meets every four years, and has its own journal.

The Nag Hammadi Codices reveal much, too, about fourth-century monasticism in Upper Egypt. The texts reflect a great deal of religious diversity, and show that strict lines between 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' had not yet been established in the monasteries. As 'apocryphal' and 'heretical' books came to be proscribed in the monasteries, some monks chose to hide their favorite books at a monastic burial site rather than have them destroyed.

Finally, the Nag Hammadi find sheds a great deal of light on the production, copying, and circulation of books in the monasteries, especially those in the network of monasteries organized by Pachomius and his successors. The cartonnage in some of the manuscripts provides evidence pertaining to the manufacture of papyrus books. There is also considerable diversity in the writing styles used by the various scribes who copied the Nag Hammadi texts, up to fourteen scribes in all,[40] not all of them from the same monastery. It would also appear that there was a definite plan for each uninscribed codex as to which writings would be copied into it.[41]

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[40] Some of the individual codices were copied by more than a single scribe. For the estimate of fourteen see Emmel, "Nag Hammadi Codices Editing Project," 10–32, esp. 27–28.

[41] Williams, "Interpreting the Nag Hammadi Library as 'Collections' in the History of 'Gnosticism(s)'."

As noted above, it was first thought that the Nag Hammadi Codices constituted a 'library' of sectarian books. It is now evident that the books constituted part of a larger library in a monastery not far from the find site. The evidence of the colophons surveyed above tells us more. It would appear that several of the monasteries in the Pachomian network each had its own library, and probably its own scriptorium, where books were copied and then circulated. The monastic leadership commissioned monks who had been trained as scribes to copy selected writings into newly manufactured books, and these were then circulated from one monastery library to another.

Unfortunately, those monastic libraries are irretrievably lost. The Nag Hammadi 'Library,' important as it is, constitutes but a small part of that larger whole. We also have that little bit thanks to a chance discovery made by an Egyptian peasant digging for *sebakh* in the desert soil.

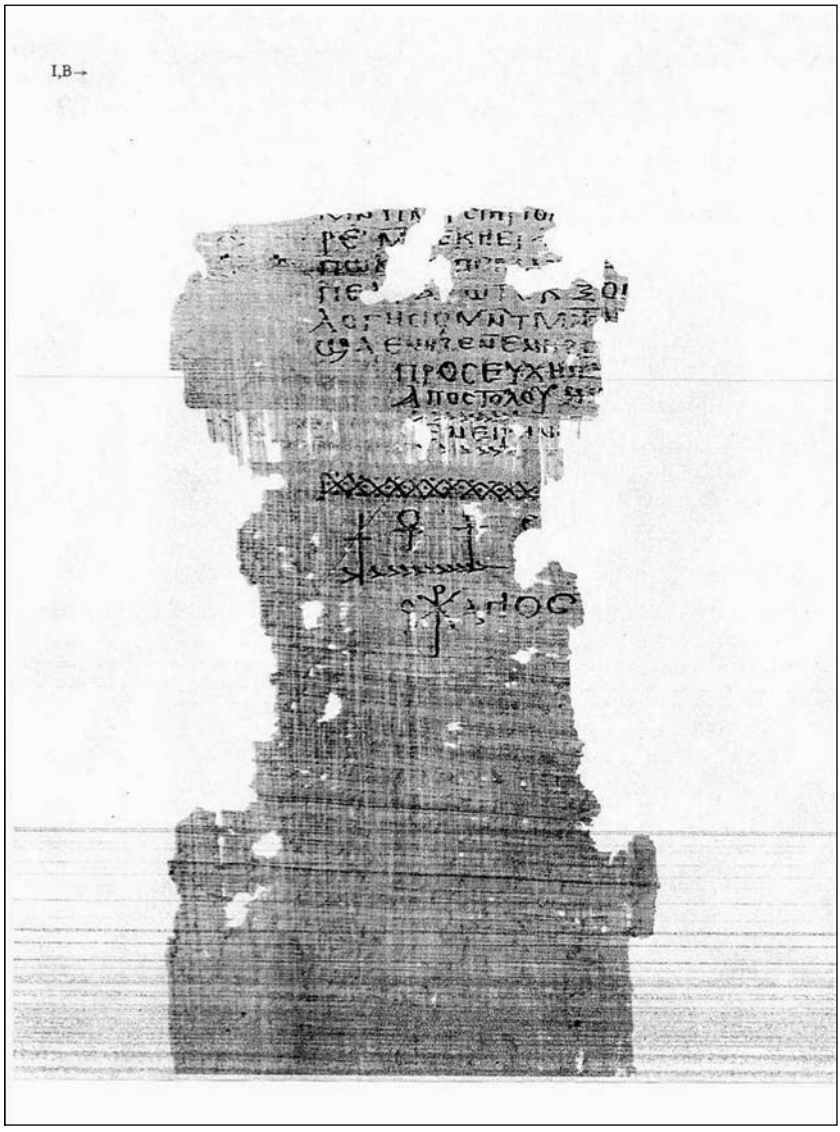

Figure 12. Nag Hammadi Codices: *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* (NHC I,1)

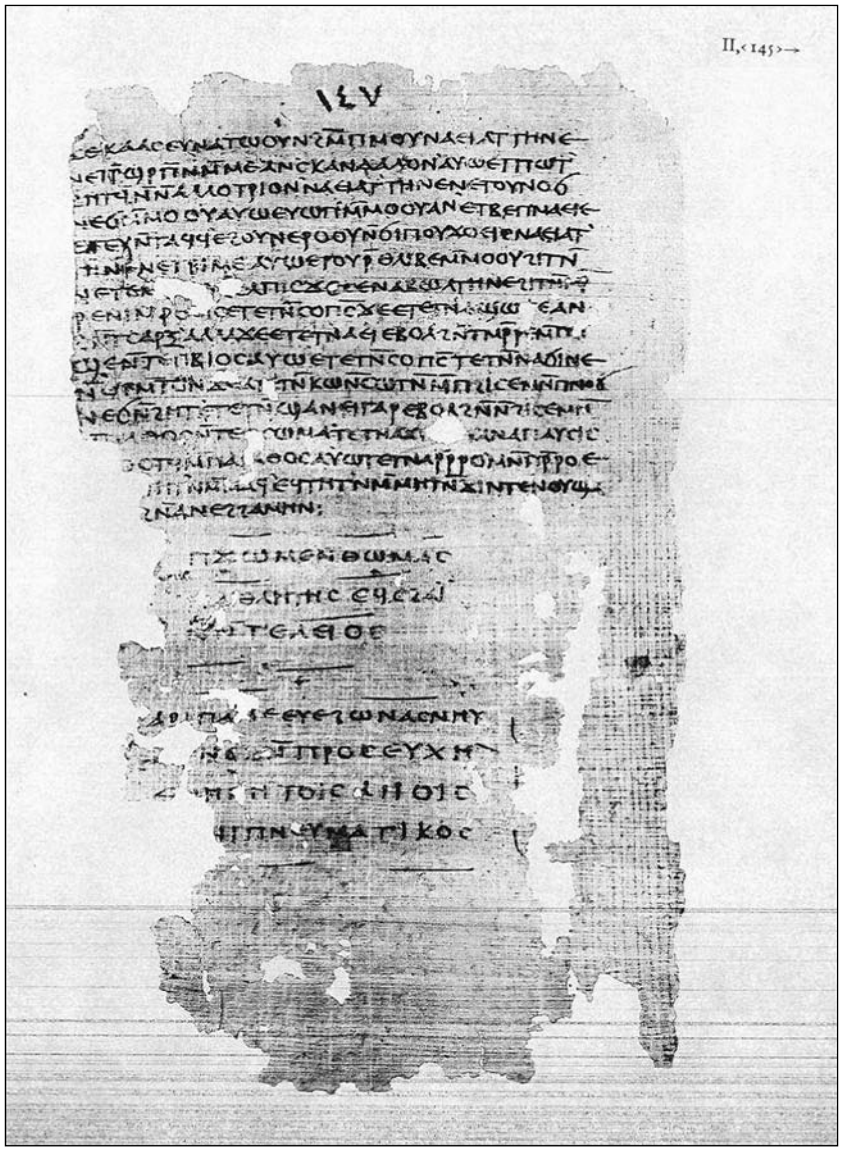

Figure 13. Nag Hammadi Codex (NHC II).

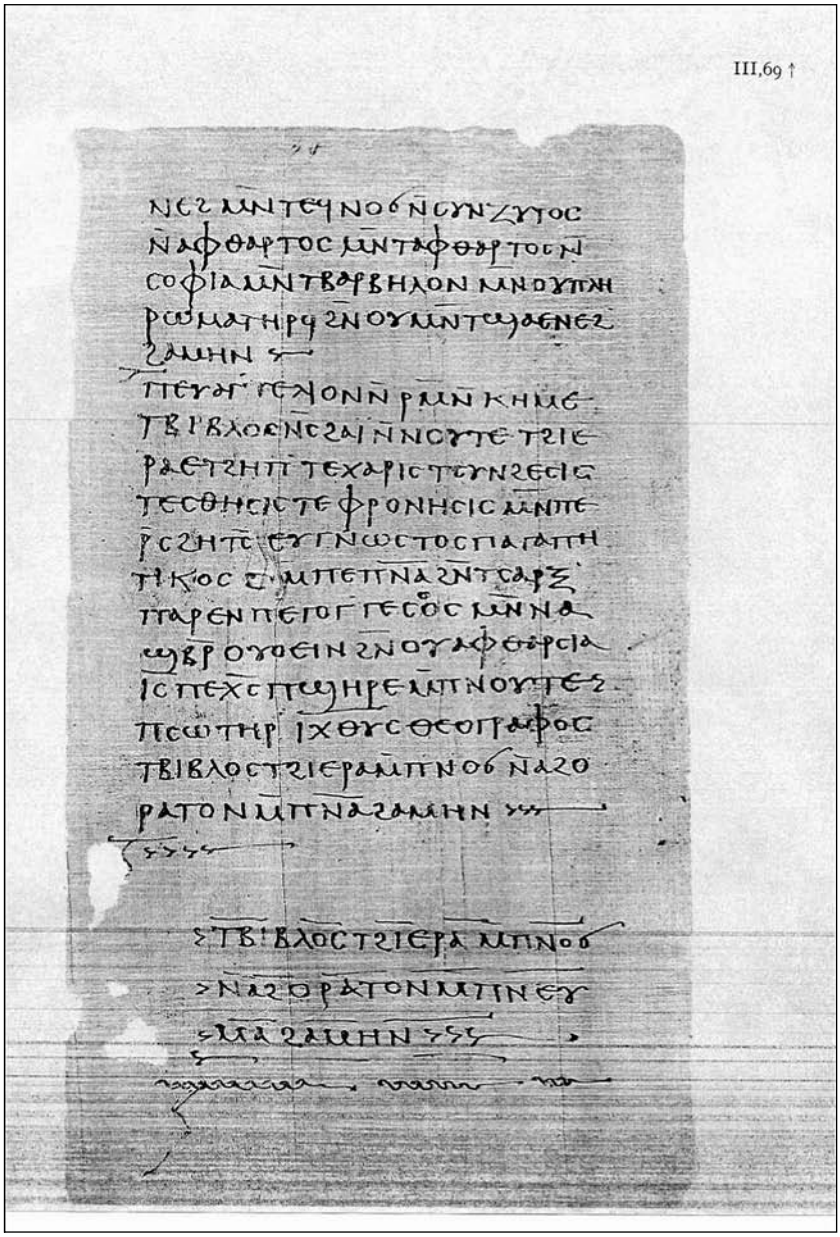

Figure 14. Nag Hammadi Codices: *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III,2).

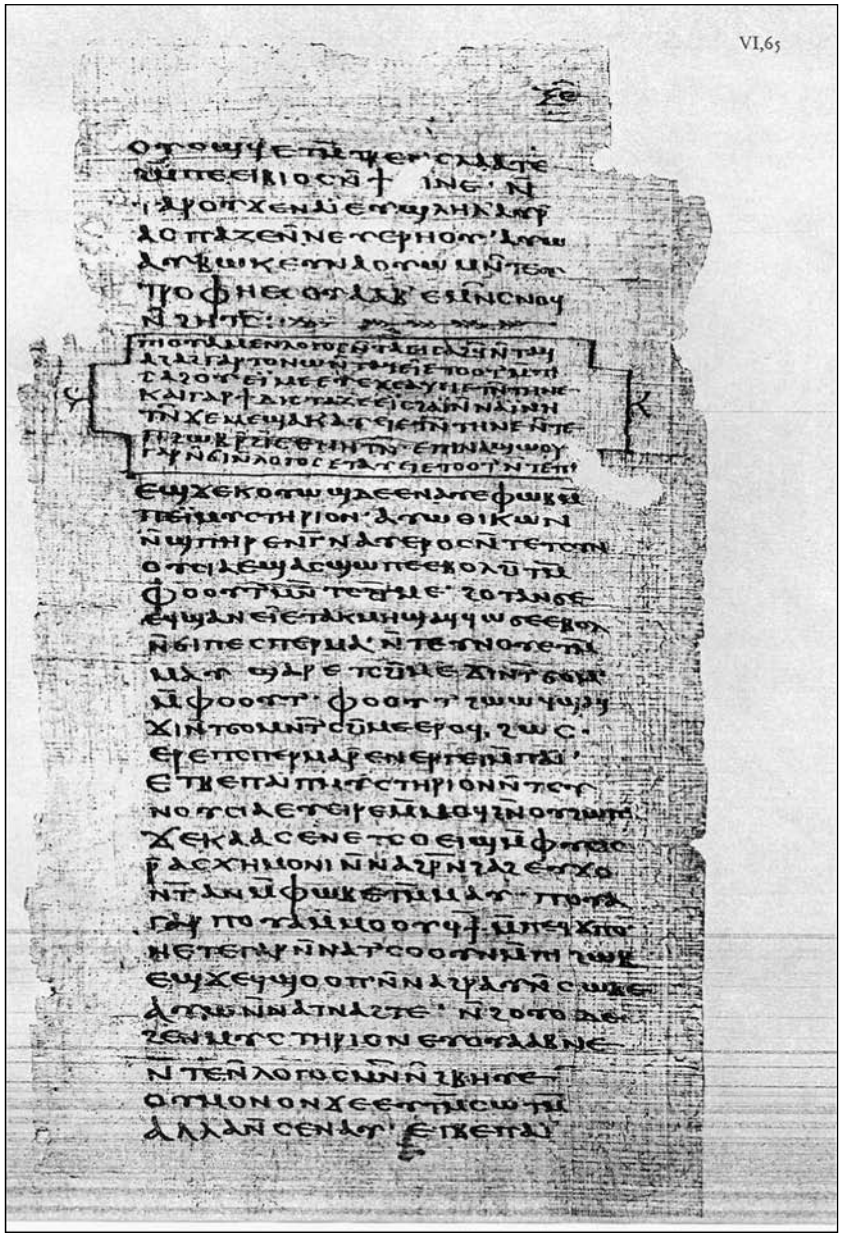

Figure 15. Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC VI,7–8).

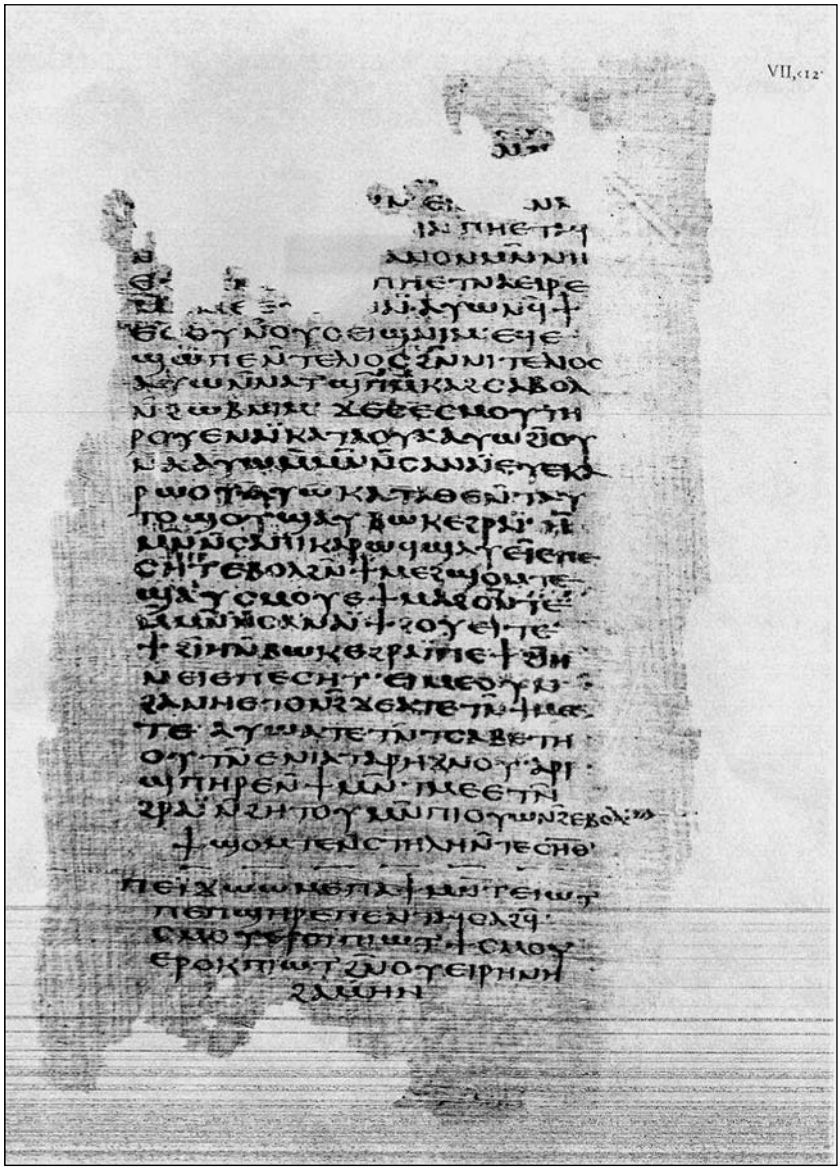

Figure 16. Nag Hammadi Codices: *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5).

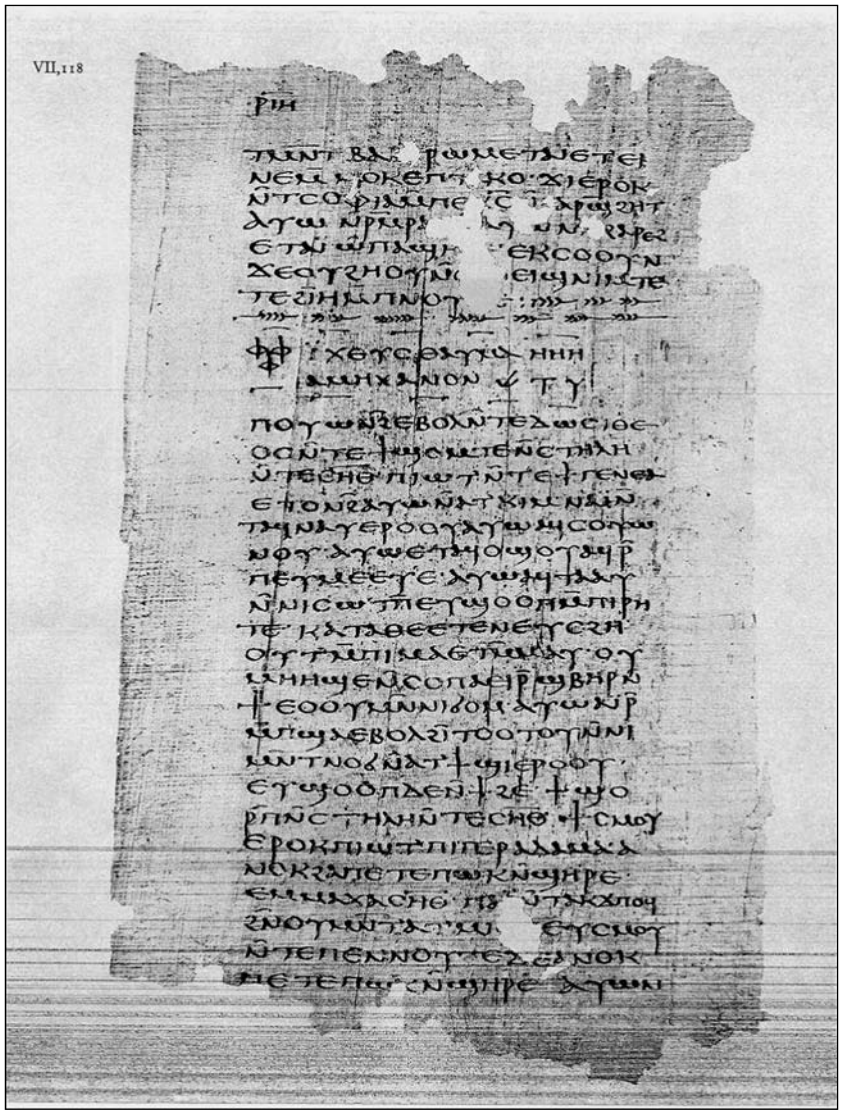

Figure 17. Nag Hammadi Codices: *Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII,4).

LEARNED WOMEN IN THE ALEXANDRIAN SCHOLARSHIP AND SOCIETY OF LATE HELLENISM

Maria Dzielska

In our seminar we ask a question about the fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria and search for answers. Yet we should not forget that mysterious signs of powerful fates marked the fortunes not only of the city's grand institutions but of distinguished Alexandrians as well. Among the latter, divine power bestowed its unfathomable gifts on certain Alexandrian women. It exercised its whimsical rule over the energetic and ambitious queens who played a decisive historical role under the Ptolemies, and under the Romans as well as over a new type of heroines—women who shaped the intellectual milieu of Alexandria in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.

We know barely a few of them, some by name only, and others in greater detail—such as in the case of *Hypatia*,[1] whose tragic fate continues to this day to inspire literary creation. Ever since the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, Hypatia has been quoted by men like Voltaire and Edward Gibbon, as the symbol of a bygone civilization, a pagan martyr, victim of the last struggle to save the perfect world of Greek harmony and religion from the onslaught of the new Christian faith. Nineteenth-century intellectuals followed her dramatic biography in Charles Kingsley's novel *Hypatia or New Foes with an Old Face*; lovers of poetry read of her in the poems of the French poet C. Leconte de Lisle, to whom she appeared as the embodiment of the Hellenic ideal: *beauty and wisdom combined*. It was from his poem titled *Hypatie* that a phrase was borrowed and used repeatedly with reference to her: "The spirit of Plato and the body of Aphrodite." It is such a portrait of Hypatia that still lingers in contemporary literature, one of them being the Italian dramatist Mario Luzi's play titled *Libro di Ipazia*.[2] In it, Hypatia falls dead in a church, in a house of the Lord, torn limb from limb by a mob. But her death is justified by the

[1] Cf. *DPA*, s.v. "Hypatia," H 175, 3:814–817; Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*.
[2] Luzi, *Libro di Ipazia*.

highest rationale as it helps bring together the two hitherto incompatible worlds: Greek thought is reconciled with the Christian logos. On the soil of Alexandrian struggles and dramas, on the Hypatia's sacrifice, on the fanaticism of the mob and anguish of her disciples, Luzi says, the structures and ideas of Christian Europe took root. The ancient world had attained fulfillment in them.

In reality, Hypatia did not aspire either to be a pagan or a pagan-Christian heroine, or a pivotal figure in historical transformations and vocations as her legend would suggest. She was free from any enmity towards Christianity; what polytheism she practiced arose from sentiment more than worship, Hellenism for her was more of a cultural than religious nature.[3] She was a trueborn daughter of the great Greek culture of Alexandria. She spent all her life in that city and never once set foot outside it. The walls of that magnificent city enclosed her entire material and spiritual world. The city offered all she needed: the Mouseion and the Great Library (still existing in one form or another), temples of deities (subsequently closed) with the Great Serapeum[4] (demolished during her lifetime together with the Daughter Library); here flourished the sciences she practiced: mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, medicine; here developed various sects and schools; here thrived a sizeable Jewish community involved in the Alexandrian economy and culture.

That was the city in which she lived with her father Theon, a notable and respected figure, "the geometer and philosopher" as the *Suda*[5] and Socrates Scholasticus[6] (as well as other sources) tell us. His elevated status—that of a mathematician and a member of the Mouseion[7] and notably, the last member of the Mouseion known to us[8]—indicates that Hypatia's family belonged to the Alexandrian elite, to the primates, first citizens who stood out for their wealth and culture, who were the ruling class.

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[3] Cf. Cameron, Long, and Sherry, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*, 58, 62.

[4] Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 138–152.

[5] Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*, 4:644, 1–2, Υ 166.

[6] Socrates *Historia ecclesiastica* 7.15.

[7] We read of this in the entry on Theon in the *Suda*; Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*, s.v. "Theon," Θ 205, 2:702.

[8] See for example, Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 42.

It was in such an affluent and illuminated Alexandrian family that Hypatia "was born, brought up and educated," Damascius writes.[9] We do not know her exact date of birth, but most probably, as I argue in my book,[10] it was about the year 355 A.D., and consequently she was about sixty when she died. Quite naturally, she was educated in mathematics by her father, from whom she inherited her mathematical passions and talents. Theon, like his daughter after him, nurtured himself on the spiritual wealth of this intellectually affluent city and devoted his scholarship to the study of his eminent Alexandrian predecessors: Euclid and Ptolemy. She too, published and commented upon the works of renowned Alexandrian mathematicians. As the *Suda* tells us: "She wrote a commentary on Diophantus, the *Astronomical Canon*, and a commentary on the *Conica* of Apollonius." Thus, we know that she wrote commentaries on the *Arithmetic* of Diophantus of Alexandria, who lived probably around the middle of the third century A.D.,[11] and to the *Conica* of Apollonius of Perge, who flourished in the third century B.C. neither work has survived to our time, all we know of are their titles.

The community of historians of science is busy developing various theories and speculating on whether some comments by Hypatia can be traced in the surviving writings of Diophantus and Apollonius of Perge and in later commentaries on their works.[12] The same applies to the *Astronomical Canon*, her third work mentioned in the *Suda*, which is believed to be Hypatia's edition of the *Handy Tables* of Ptolemy, or astronomical tables which supplemented his major work, the *Almagest.* Hypatia collaborated with her farther on an edition of the entire *Almagest*. We are informed about their collaboration in the debated heading to book III of Theon's commentary on the *Almagest*: "Commentary by Theon of Alexandria on book III of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, edition revised by my daughter Hypatia, the philosopher."[13] A. Cameron, by analyzing this inscription in philological parallels with the headings in the remaining books of this work and in the texts by other late Alexandrian commen-

[9] Damascius, *Philosophical History*, trans. Athanassiadi, frag. 43A, p. 129.
[10] Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, 67–68.
[11] See G. J. Toomer, *OCD*[3], s.v. "Diophantus of Alexandria," 483.
[12] Cf. Sesiano, *Books IV to VII of Diophantus' Arithmetica*, 68–75; Knorr, *Textual Studies in Ancient and Medieval Geometry*, 765ff.; Cameron, Long, and Sherry, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*, 47–49; Deakin, "Hypatia and Her Mathematics," 234–243.
[13] Rome, *Commentaires de Pappus et de Théon d'Alexandrie sur l'Almageste*, vol. 3, *Théon d'Alexandrie: Commentaire sur les livres 3 et 4 de l'Almageste*, Studi e testi 106 (1943), 807.

tators of mathematical works, and also disputing with W. Knorr and other students of Theon's *Almagest*, concludes that Hypatia's revision was not merely confined to Book III, but that she actually edited the whole text of the *Almagest* starting from book III.[14] Thus, father and daughter divided the work on the edition of the *Almagest* between them, Theon writing the commentary and Hypatia revising an edition of Ptolemy's work. It is therefore possible, Cameron believes, that the surviving text of the *Almagest* comes largely from Hypatia's hand.[15]

However, Toomer in a review of my book judiciously states that with regard to the content, due to Hypatia's mathematical genius in works of Diophantus, Apollonius of Perge, and Ptolemy, it is difficult to say more than what has recently been said by scholars.[16] After all in writing on Hypatia's mathematical and astronomical achievements, we are treading on hypothetical ground. What we can state with certainty is that her accomplishment as a creative mathematician, like that of her father, lies in their attempting to keep alive and transmit to their own and following generations of students the great mathematical and astronomical tradition of Alexandria. At the time of the destruction of the Serapeum and the closure of the Mouseion (which was probably connected with the demolition of that great Alexandrian Temple), father and daughter believed that to uphold the scientific and cultural heritage of Hellenism was a primary task set before them. Both of them therefore, devoted much of their scientific efforts to bring that task to fruition. It should be added that we have no evidence of philosophical works of Hypatia, nor even titles of any such works are extant. Most probably, she was not an original, creative philosopher but only of profound erudition in classical philosophical thought. To her, philosophy was primarily her way of life; she embraced the late Platonic vision of the world and passed it on to her disciples, teaching them how to attain higher levels of assimilation to the divine. Yet, there are scholars who believe that her philosophical works were lost in the destruction of the Library of Alexandria.[17]

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[14] Cameron, Alan, "Isidore of Miletus and Hypatia," 103–127; Knorr, *Textual Studies in Ancient and Medieval Geometry*, 755–803.

[15] Cameron, Long, and Sherry, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*, 48. Newest edition of the *Almagest*: Toomer, *Ptolemy's Almagest* (Princeton, 1998).

[16] G. J. Toomer, review of *Hypatia of Alexandria*, by Maria Dzielska, *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 27, no. 2 (1996): 174.

[17] E.g. Richeson, "Hypatia of Alexandria," 82.

Such textbook commentaries and editions of the great mathematicians and astronomers of the past were used by Hypatia in her teaching at her private Neoplatonic school of philosophy operating in her home from the late 380s. We understand from the words of Socrates Scholasticus that she "succeeded to the Platonic school derived from Plotinus."[18] As we hear from the correspondence of her famous disciple Synesius of Cyrene, her students were upper-class young men not only from Alexandria and Egypt, but also from Syria, Cyrenaica, and Constantinople. For it was she—Socrates writes—who "had achieved such heights of erudition that she surpassed all the philosophers of her time" and therefore, "everyone who wanted to study philosophy flocked to her from all directions."[19] Damascius adds that, being an uncommonly "gifted teacher" and orator "skilled and dialectical in speech,"[20] Hypatia also gave public lectures: "Though a woman she wrapped herself in the philosopher's cloak and went out into the *midst of the city* (διὰ μέσοῦ τοῦ ἄστεος), publicly interpreting the works of Plato, Aristotle and any other philosopher to those who wished to listen."[21] Sokrates also mentions that "she delivered all the philosophy lectures to those who wished to listen." Damascius does not tell us that she was a street—corner philosopher as some scholars want to suggest treating her as a latter—day Cynic.[22] Damascius does not mock her but on the contrary he informs us about the significance of her teaching.

We thus have source evidence to suppose that it was in the city's lecture halls,[23] of whose educational significance we can read in Grzegorz Majcherek's article, that Hypatia gave her lectures in the form of commentaries on the classics before a broader audience, addressing all students in Alexandria who were interested in the legacy of the great Greek philosophers, her predecessors. Probably also attending were Alexandria's intelligentsia: pagans, Christians, and Jews alike, city and imperial officials too, lent her their ear. She would travel to the lecture hall from her home, which must have been in the city center, by carriage

[18] Socr. *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.
[19] Socr. *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.
[20] *PH* frag. 43A, 43E, pp. 128, 130.
[21] *PH* frag. 43A.
[22] Cf. Cameron, Long, and Sherry, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*, 43.
[23] E. Rodziewicz, "Late Roman Auditoria in Alexandria in the Light of Ivory Carvings," 269–279; Kiss, "Auditoria romains tardifs de Kôm El-Dikka (Alexandrie)," 331–338; Ibid., "Les auditoria romains tardifs?" In *Alexandrie VII: Fouilles polonaises à Kôm el-Dikka (1986–1987)*, ed. Kiss et al., 9–33.

as was becoming her dignity, but dressed—as Socrates before her—in a modest tribon, a grey philosopher's cloak (it was not the stylish himation with which Alcibiades covered Socrates, himself donning a paltry tribon of Socrates, as we remember from the *Symposium* of Plato!).

That Hypatia traveled the city's streets in a carriage we know from Socrates, and Damascius gives us to understand that there was nothing surprising or inappropriate in seeing this distinguished lady freely moving about the city. After all she was part of the cityscape and "the entire city naturally loved her and held her in exceptional esteem."[24] Consequently, Damascius in stressing her exceptional status in the city writes: "local officials (ἄρχοντες), on assuming their office, paid their respects first to her, as indeed was the custom in Athens." Of her contacts with municipal officials and her influence in the city, we also hear from Socrates, which suggests that urban clerks (βουλευταί) exercising authority in the city—as well as imperial officials performing their duty in Egypt—maintained contacts with her, turned to her for advice and consulted important political and administrative decisions with her. With this practice, Alexandria at that time, according to Damascius, became similar to fifth-century Athens, where politicians used to visit famous philosophers and follow their advice in the affairs of their polis. It was through Hypatia's authority, Damascius adds, that "even if philosophy in practice was dead (because of Christianity!), its name at least still seemed most honourable and worthy of admiration to those who ran the affairs of the city."[25]

Hypatia, Damascius reports, "had reached the summit of practical virtue, was just and moderate."[26] Hers was the achievement of the highest level of practical sciences and virtues: that of political science and political virtues (ἀρεταὶ πολιτικαί). She was "wise in her acts and political"[27] and it was due to her practical wisdom (φρόνησις) and political, civic virtues that she engaged in Alexandria's political life and served as a counselor to the city's rulers. But Socrates particularly extols her virtue of self-restraint, moderation (σωφροσύνη), which manifested itself in her dignified and composed conduct towards men, and especially men exercising power, for "she came face-to-face even with the magistrates without losing her moderation (σωφροσύνη), and felt no shame at being

[24] *PH* frag. 43E, p. 130.
[25] *PH* frag. 43E, p. 130.
[26] *PH* frag. 34A, p. 128.
[27] *PH* frag. 43E, p. 130.

in the presence of men." But Socrates tells us more in pointing out that her (*sophrosyne*) inspired such respect and admiration as she was outstanding and belonged to higher than political order of Neoplatonic virtues. Hypatia, Damascius emphasizes, was superior to her father in natural talents (φύσει); not content with mathematical knowledge, she aspired to rise to the highest level of theoretical sciences, to theology (metaphysics). Of course for her as a Neoplatonist, theoretical knowledge corresponded to intellectual virtues, to divine-like life. She knew after Plotinus, that political virtues are merely characteristics for the life of the good man, while higher virtues are for those of the divine man that is a life assimilated to gods that is our destiny.[28] In his efforts to live a life ascending to divinization (θέωσις), a Neoplatonic philosopher reached, past the stage of political virtues, the stage of purificatory virtues (ἀρεταὶ καθαρικαί), at which ethical/political virtues acquired a divine character, then ascended even higher to theoretical (ἀρεταὶ θεωρητικαί) and finally paradigmatic virtues (ἀρεταὶ παραδειγματικαί). At this stage, he was only living the life of the *Intellect*, had completely forgotten practical wisdom, acquired contemplative wisdom (σοφία θεωρητική) acquired in enlightening cognitive ecstasy as he became united with the divine *Intellect* and the *One*. Faithful to the requirements of the virtue of moderation (σωφροσύνη), on the purificatory and theoretical levels, Hypatia persevered complete chastity (she remained a virgin all her life), led a modest and ascetic life despite family wealth, completely free of bodily and material dependencies.

The remark in the *Suda* referring to her as the "wife of the philosopher Isidorus" is simply a historical error, repeated after an entry on Hypatia in Hesychius of Miletus' *Onomatologus*.[29] After all Isidore of Alexandria was not born until long after Hypatia's death in 445/450 and flourished in the late fifth century. No less surprising is Damascius' claim that Isidore and Hypatia were "not only as man differs from woman, but as a true philosopher differs from a mathematician."[30] Isidore was also a mathematician like all Neoplatonists of the Iamblichean type (it was required as we know in order to understand Neoplatonic ontology and cosmology) and probably not inferior to Hypatia. The reason Damascius extols Isidore as a philosopher is that he, more than

[28] Plotinus *Enneads* 1.2, 7.19–28; Cf. O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 40–60.
[29] See Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, 114–115.
[30] *PH* frag. 106A, p. 254.

Hypatia, followed the theurgic way of Iamblichus in the understanding of Platonic theology. Damascius describes Isidore as a devotee pagan, immersed in theurgic activity, invoking epiphanies of gods, gifted with the talent of dream divination and other theurgic powers.[31] Except for a single source, more on which will follow, our sources are silent about Hypatia's pagan ritualism, material theurgy, her divination, miracle-working, and her sacrifices to gods. There is no doubt, however, that this "divine guide," whose philosophical mysteries Synesius describes using terminology borrowed from the *Chaldean Oracles*, employed in her teaching an immaterial, higher theurgy to establish contact (σύστασις) with the divinity. It was mathematical theurgy, mysticism of numbers and geometrical figures; it was prayers, hymns, incantations, sacred silences and other noetic means. Damascius simply found in Isidore the model of a pagan philosopher-priest, much more appealing than Hypatia's and hence he called him a "true philosopher."

Through the hierarchy shown above of practical and higher, intellectual virtues and sciences in displaying to them her moral perfection, Hypatia led her disciples to true assimilation with the divine. Students attending Hypatia's private school in her home came from higher social strata, from urban and manorial families (predominantly Christian). With time, they rose to prominent positions in the state and church (e.g. two of them, Synesius of Cyrene and his brother Evoptius became bishops). They created around their mistress a kind of Pythagorean community united by sacred bonds of friendship (ἱερὰ φιλία).[32] Synesius' letters to Hypatia and to his colleagues tell us how great an inspired teacher of Neoplatonic philosophy she was, a mystic who ardently taught her disciples to treat philosophy as a sort of religious mystery as "to be the most ineffable of ineffable things" (*Ep.* 137). Her students gathered around their mistress and called her "the lady who is a genuine guide in the mysteries of philosophy" (*Ep.* 137), a "blessed lady" whose "divine spirit" they felt near wherever they went (*Ep.* 10), a "mother, sister, teacher, and withal benefactress and whatsoever is honoured in name and deed…" (*Ep.* 16). The feeling of attachment to the philosopher Hypatia is so deep that an absence of correspondence from Hypatia drives Synesius to the depth of despair (*Ep.* 10). While complaining of the immensity of calamities and losses he suffered in his family life and

[31] *PH*, Section II (Isidore: frag. 5–38), pp. 83–121.
[32] Synesius *Ep.* 143; Garzya, *Opere di Sinesio di Cirene*, 348.

in his civic and bishop's duties in Libyan Pentapolis, he confesses to Hypatia that "the greatest loss of all, however, is the absence of your divine spirit" (*Ep.* 10). In another letter, he would say that he was willing to abandon for her all that was dearest to him and even in *Hades* he would remember his beloved Hypatia (*Ep.* 124).

At the side of such an exalted teacher, disciples felt they were the chosen few. Synesius writes to his dear friend Herculianus that their trip to study under Hypatia changed into a supernatural journey to the divine, available to them only: "a voyage in which it was granted to you and me to experience marvelous things, the bare recital of which had seemed to us incredible" (*Ep.* 137). For at Hypatia's, in joint strenuous work to uncover in their inner selves the sources of the divine, to open "the intellectual eye buried within us," as Synesius calls it (*Ep.* 137), they attained a state of contemplation (θεωρία), the bliss of being filled with the divine (ἐνθουσιασμός), divinization (θέωσις). But Hypatia also instructed her students that the wisdom that encouraged a study purely of the divine elevated the person to supracorporeal perfection. Hypatia taught that in order to reach the farthest limit of cognition, where *Beauty* and pure *Good* reign supreme, one must be morally beautiful, free of emotions and bodily passions, indifferent to worldly things. Towards those students who would not understand this fundamental truth, she knew how to use very brutal disciplinary measures, as we learn from Damascius.[33] Educated in such a grueling school of moral education, Synesius, in *Ep.* 140 addressed to his friend Herculianus, asks him to remember in his mature life to live a different and higher life, to practise spiritual exercises in higher-level virtues, third and fourth degrees, theoretical and paradigmatic. For manliness of soul (or political virtue) "which springs from the first and earthly quaternion of the virtues," he reminds Herculianus, is inferior to them and constitutes merely a step leading up the soul to assimilation with the divine.

Surrounding their divine guide, as Synesius says, like so many choristers around their leader (*Ep.* 5), Hypatia's disciples were united by a bond of secret knowledge bestowed on them by their divine teacher. Convinced that cognition of the supernatural reality towards which they were being guided is incommunicable, they despised those who took divine philosophical truths outside the elitist circles of those chosen to practice them. After all, Hypatia taught them that the mob could

[33] *PH* frag. 43A, 43C, p. 128.

never understand the secret of god and cosmos. As Synesius puts it: "To explain philosophy to the mob is only to awaken among men a great contempt for things divine" (*Ep.* 143). It meant replacing divine truth with popular story. Synesius persevered in his belief in the secretiveness of god and philosophy also when he became a priest. It was then that he said: "What can there be in common between the ordinary man and philosophy? Divine truth should remain hidden, but the vulgar need a different system" (*Ep.* 105). Nor did any member of that rabble Hypatia and her disciples so despised hasten to her aid when she was attacked and slain.

Enjoying such a great prestige in the city, noted for her "majestic outspokenness" (παρρησία) and independent opinion, Hypatia took part in a conflict of power over the city that broke out in the years from 412 to 415 A.D. between bishop Cyril (elected patriarch of Alexandria in 412) and the imperial prefect of Egypt Orestes. It led to unrest among the Alexandrian plebs, series of murders, vandalism, strife between Jews and Christians, monks and the prefect's guard. In the clash, Hypatia sided with the lay authority. The support of such a popular and respected person in the city now having former disciples in positions of power in the imperial services, exerting much influence on pagans and Christians alike, provoked panic in church circles on the other side. As we read in Socrates, a slander, calumny (διαβολή) arose (and was helped to spread among the Christian populace) "that it was she who prevented Orestes from being reconciled to the bishop."[34] Socrates reveals that Hypatia's fame and success gave rise to envy (*phthonos*), while Damascius adds that Bishop Cyril envied her the respect and influence she enjoyed especially among the Alexandrian intelligentsia who flocked to her home.[35] Damascius goes on to indicate that it was the bishop who planned for her to be killed. But since Damascius is our only source directly accusing Cyril, and a source emphatically hostile to Christianity, we must refrain from fully trusting him. We can take it as read, however, that the appearance of a faction centered around the imperial prefect in which Hypatia played a large part caused Cyril to feel threatened and people of various groups connected with the church made efforts to help him.

[34] Socr. *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.
[35] *PH* frag. 43E, p. 130.

As regards the slanders that were spread about Hypatia, we know of them from the Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu in Lower Egypt late in the seventh century, it is a valuable work as it is the product of a local author who had access to records of the Alexandrian church, no longer extant. It was spread among the Alexandrian people, John of Nikiu tells us, that a noted woman philosopher in the city was in fact an abominable emissary from hell, "devoted at all times to magic, astrolabes and instruments of music."[36] It was alleged that with her "satanic wiles" she beguiled many people and used her magic to control the prefect who "honoured her exceedingly" himself a Christian. Under her magic spell "he ceased attending church" and what is more "he drew many believers to her and received the unbelievers at his house." As we can see in *Ep.* 81 written by Synesius in 413, Hypatia still, as civil strife in the city unfolded, maintained her elevated status and served as patroness and benefactress, he asked her to intercede for two young casualties with her powerful friends, "both private and magistrates alike," Synesius, well familiar with Hypatia's political connections and her influence within the city, repeats: "You always have power (δύνη), and you can bring about good by using that power (δύνασθαι)." Importantly, the letter contains authentic words of Hypatia. In fact, we have two sentences spoken by her. Owing to the patronage and benefactions performed by Synesius to his local community first when he was a curialis of Cyrene and then as a bishop of Libya's Pentapolis, Hypatia called him "a good thing for other people." Furthermore, it was during his studies with her that he had acquired the (ἀρεταὶ πολιτικαί) and had learned that a Neoplatonic philosopher must introduce the highest moral standards to political life and act for the good of the citizens.

That (*diabole*), the slanderous rumor of Hypatia's sorcery and its conflict-rousing effects on the city, Socrates notes, had the effects desired by its masterminds, far from that company emerged a group that resolved to kill the philosopher. They were probably the (*parabalanoi*), a body of strong, healthy men chosen by the bishop and accountable to him, serving as hospital attendants for the Alexandrian church. These men incited against Hypatia the Alexandrian mob, which was noted throughout the empire for its savagery that could be easily a roused into all manner of riot. The leader was, Socrates says, Peter the Reader (a

[36] John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, trans. Charles, 84.87–88, pp. 101–102.

church lector) or a magistrate named Peter as John of Nikiu identifies him. The monks had by then left Alexandria. The criminals, whom Damascius calls "a crowd of bestial men—truly abominable—those who take account neither of divine vengeance nor of human retribution,"[37] and John of Nikiu terms "a multitude of believers in God" (referring to Peter as "a perfect believer in all respects in Jesus Christ"[38]) assaulted her—in the words of Socrates—one day in March 415, during the fast "when she was returning home from somewhere" in her carriage (according to Damascius "as soon as she left her house in her usual manner"). They dragged her down the streets of Alexandria all the way to the Caesareion cathedral church near the Great Harbour. Here "they stripped off her clothes and then killed her with tiles" (or shells), piercing her eyes in the process—as Damascius reports. Her body was then carried outside the city to a place called Kinaron and burnt there.

A different account of Hypatia's assassination is offered by John of Nikiu.[39] The murderers first "learned the place where she was" in the city, "proceeded to her and found her seated on the [lofty] chair" and from there they dragged her through the streets to the great church named Caesareion." Archeological discovery of the lecture halls at Kom el-Dikka helped me decipher John of Nikiu's oblique story. Is John of Nikiu not telling us that the scene where those people under Peter's command found Hypatia was an Alexandrian lecture room where she was giving a usual lecture, sitting on an elevated stone seat between listeners seated in rows? She was thus attacked during a lecture, dragged from her speaker's chair (and not dragged down from the chariot) and murdered in a way described by John of Nikiu similarly to Socrates.[40] This reading of John of Nikiu's description of Hypatia's death enables us to trace her "last route," and identify the streets and squares along which she was dragged from the city center (and thus from Kom el-Dikka) to the Caesareion.

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[37] *PH* frag. 43A.
[38] Joh. Nikiu *Chronicle* 84.100, p. 102.
[39] Joh. Nikiu *Chronicle* 84.101–102, p. 102.
[40] Joh. Nikiu *Chronicle* 84.102, p. 102.

The account of Hypatia's death handed down by John of Nikiu is consistent with Damascius' information discussed above which indicates that Hypatia gave public lectures in philosophy in the *midst of the city*. The killers found her, after all, in a lecture room situated, as recent archeological discoveries demonstrate, near to the agora. Neither does Damascius' description make any mention of Hypatia being assailed in her carriage. We are only told that it happened when she was out of home. Socrates is alone in his version. It would thus seem that the discovery of university halls at Kom el-Dikka casts new light and complements the scant literary sources speaking of Hypatia's teaching and the circumstances of her death. At the same time, material sources acquire a semblance of life as the imagination fills the ruins of the Alexandrian Academy with students and seats a lecturing Hypatia on a stone "throne" elevated above them.

Despite John of Nikiu's tendentious statement that with Hypatia dead Cyril "had destroyed the last remains of idolatry in the city,"[41] the remaining sources make the criminal act appear as the murder of a political, not religious nature (with an admixture of envy caused by Hypatia's status in the city), connected with social tensions and conflicts fought at the time in Alexandria between rival groups within lay and church authorities. As we analyse the event that has bred legends in modern writing, we should bear in mind—as the *Suda* points out—that such exterminatory practices were pursued by pagans and Christians alike in Alexandria, as a kind of local ritual exercised there against those deemed criminal seditionists threatening the city's very existence. Hypatia's murder was not the exception to a rule, as is sometimes suggested in historiography. Similar events took place in Alexandria during anti-Jewish pogroms (e.g. in 38 A.D.), or during persecution of Christians in 250 A.D., under Emperor Gaius Decius, when martyrs were dragged along the streets and put to death. Similar fate befell two bishops imposed on Alexandria by emperors: in 361 George, the Arian bishop named by Constantius II, and in 457 Proterius appointed by emperor Leo I.[42] They too, suffered the customary ordeal of being dragged through the whole town, burned before a crowd, finally to have their remains thrown into the sea. The same rough treatment was

[41] Joh. Nikiu *Chronicle* 84.103, p. 102.
[42] Cf. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 86–88; 313.

executed on pagan idols, (e.g. the majestic figure of the god Serapis following the destruction of the Serapeum in 391/2).

It was thus a common criminal's summary justice that was meted out on her disciples' beloved "divine guide" who had conducted them to a contemplation of ultimate *Good* and *Beauty*. This heinous crime was committed on one who, according to Neoplatonic political theory, had been as though a Platonic philosopher-queen shared her participation in supreme *Good* also in her political involvement, playing an active and providential role in the city. But her renunciation of living the life of the higher levels of virtue in favor of sharing with others the knowledge of the transcendent *Good*, her descent from the divine to the human, to the earthly world of ignorance and opinion, ended in a tragic failure. The rabble to which she refused to speak of virtue, for she knew that nothing was more senseless than that, showed her its primitive, mindless facet, having been persuaded by its leaders, manipulating this dark fearful force that it was acting "pro publico bono." All our source records, except John of Nikiu, refer with indignation to the murder of an elderly, about-60-year-old woman, a widely respected mathematician and philosopher, and paint a resentful picture of a depraved Alexandrian people. Damascius writes that those who perpetrated the act "thus inflicted the greatest pollution and disgrace on the city,"[43] while Socrates concludes: "This deed brought no small blame to Cyril and to the Alexandrian church. For murder and fighting and other such things are completely alien to those who profess Christianity."[44]

I said above that Theon annotated his commentary to book III of the *Almagest* with an inscription devoted to Hypatia. Earlier still, Theon's elder colleague, the noted mathematician Pappus of Alexandria, living at the beginning of the fourth century, like Theon a commentator of Euclid and Ptolemy, addressed book III of his *Collectio mathematica* (*Συναγωγή*) to a certain "most illustrious *Pandrosion*"[45] (*Kratiste Pandrosion*). Apart from this brief mention, we know nothing of her identity. We can only conclude that some two generations before Hypatia, there had also been a woman mathematician active in Alexandria.

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[43] *PH* frag. 43E, p. 130.

[44] Socr. *Hist. eccl.* 7.15. The impunity of Hypatia's murderers, through bribery of an imperial official named Aedesius, a question impossible to reconstruct due to fragmentary text of Damascius (*PH* frag. 43E) was recently treated by Zuckerman, "Comtes et ducs en Égypte autour de l'an 400," 142–143.

[45] K. Ziegler, *RE*, s.v. "Pandrosion," (18, 3), col. 553; *PLRE*, s.v. "Pandrosion," 1:664.

After Hypatia's death, Greek intellectualism and scholarship did not die in Alexandria as is tendentiously alleged in various publications, some of them, unfortunately, scholarly. On the contrary, intellectual life in the city became singularly vigorous. In the fifth century and later, we have here a whole academic dynasty, numerous philosophers of religious Neoplatonism of the Iamblichean type and at the same time Aristotle's commentators, rhetors, and grammarians. It was in Alexandria that the young philosopher Proclus (born 410) studied the logic of Aristotle with Olympiodorus,[46] the commentator of Aristotle's works, and mathematics with Heron,[47] a devout pagan, who introduced him to the mysteries of Pythagorean philosophy. Olympiodorus educated his *daughter*, whose name is now lost, to be a philosopher and insisted that Proclus marry her. The latter declined, preferring, like Hypatia, to remain celibate for the sake of philosophy.[48]

Neither did Proclus accept the hand of *Aedesia*,[49] *la grande dame alexandrine* who was bent on marrying him, herself "the most beautiful and noble of the Alexandrian women,"[50] a relative of the philosopher Syrianus of Alexandria. Syrianus, who was a successor of Plutarch of Athens in the Athenian School from 432, became a master of theurgic Neoplatonism for Proclus when the latter arrived in Athens in 430 to study. In return for the gift of opening his eyes to the divine mysteries of Plato's philosophy, Proclus called Syrianus his "true father," lived in his house in Athens, and took part in pagan religious rites practiced by Syrianus. We can therefore imagine how hard it must have been for Proclus to refuse his "father" to marry his learned relative, but "it was some god who had prevented him from this marriage," Damascius says, and certainly Syrianus understood that reason! Aedesia ended up marrying Hermeias, Proclus' fellow pupil under Syrianus at Athens, who later taught in Alexandria, where he ran an official philosophy chair with a city salary. Aedesia, like her husband Hermeias, was gifted with a "simple and honorable character," and endowed with ethical virtues (ἀρεταὶ ἠθικαί) among which Damascius emphasizes justice (δικαιοσύνη) and moderation (σωφροσύνη). Above all, Damascius extols her pagan sainthood, her deep devotion to god. It was so deep that

[46] *PLRE*, s.v. "Olympiodorus 2," 2:799.
[47] *PLRE*, s.v. "Heron 1," 2:552.
[48] Cf. Marinus *Vita Procli* 9; Ibid., *Vita di Proclo*, trans. Masullo, 66.
[49] *PLRE*, s.v. "Aedesia," 2:10–11; *DPA*, s.v. "Aidésia d'Alexandrie," A 55, 1:74–75.
[50] About Aedesia: *PH* frag. 56, pp. 156–159.

for her reverence towards the gods, her piety (εὐσέβεια) and holiness the gods loved her so much that they often revealed themselves to her, "that she was blessed with many divine epiphanies." Such grace the gods bestowed—we know—only on those Neoplatonic philosophers (or admirers of this philosophy) divine men and women, who following the theosophy of Iamblichus, performed religious rites and practices and used theurgic methods to make contact with the gods.

After all, Aedesia, like Hypatia and Proclus, belonged to the circle of the last of the Hellenes, as they called themselves, philosopher-priests, uncompromisingly devoted to the pagan past and entrusted with the task of saving the traditional religion and Platonic philosophy.[51] After she quickly became widowed, she did not renounce this holy obligation. To perpetuate a succession of the "holy, sacred race" of the first rank of humans, the philosophers of the greatest Platonic tradition, she extended loving care onto her orphaned sons Ammonius and Heliodorus "wishing to hand down to them their father's professional skills as if it were an ancestral inheritance." Lavished with exceptional respect and honour in Alexandria, "she managed to retain for her children the public maintenance given to their father" and then she brought them to Athens where none other than the "Great" Proclus, from 435 the Scholarch of the Platonic School, took care of them. In Athens, as in Alexandria, "her virtue was admired by an entire chorus of philosophers," and so by disciples of Proclus and their leader, Proclus himself. Later she returned with them to Alexandria, where Ammonius assumed the chair of philosophy previously held by his father, and Heliodorus also taught philosophy.

Aedesia and Hermeias had one more son who died as a little child. To an extraordinary extent, he inherited his parents' divine qualities. Damascius tells us elsewhere[52] that when he was seven months old, Aedesia once called him tenderly "babion" or even "little child." As soon as he heard it, he "became angry and castigated these childish diminutives, pronouncing his criticism in a clear and articulate voice." By the age of seven years old, he had grown so weary of bodily existence that he decided to leave this pitiable world as, Damascius adds, "his soul could not be contained in this earthly region."

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[51] Athanassiadi, "Persecution and Response in Late Paganism," 1–29.
[52] *PH* frag. 57A, p. 159.

A learned and divine woman, Aedesia in her devotion to god did not forget her obligations to human beings. It was from her love of god (τὸ φιλόθεον) that sprung her love for people, her *philanthropia*. Her charity, for which she was celebrated in Alexandria, she extended to "holy and good men," to her pagan compatriots living in dire material circumstances. She probably also extended financial assistance in her circle to Alexandrian philosophers she knew and students in their schools. Her generosity was so famous that Damascius, hostile to Christianity as he was, admits that she was loved for it even by "the most wicked" of the citizens, a code word used by the late Platonic philosophers for Christians. After all, like Hypatia, she was interested in the fate of her soul after death, spiritual immortality, blissful unity with god; she was filled with a desire to escape from the world rather than a mere lust for material well-being, triviality, or an earthly love of money. She extended her charity oblivious to the fact that she was spending beyond her means, encumbering her sons with debts they actually had to pay back after she died.

Damascius met Aedesia in the early 480s when she was already an old lady and he, "very young, a mere boy," was just beginning studies in Alexandria at the famous school of rhetoric and philosophy of Horapollon, a center of paganism. Here, in Horapollon's circle, he encountered all the major Alexandrian philosophers and scientists of the day while he probably remained under the special influence of Aedesia's spirituality and pagan religiousness. Subsequently, he was asked by her sons and friends to deliver a funeral oration on her grave, which he tells us, he adorned with heroic verses (and thus probably Homer) to honor her piety to gods and other ethical virtues. The pious and learned Aedesia passed on to her sons the duty to guard inviolable the holy mysteries of the philosophy of Plato and harmonized with him Aristotle, who, we know, was particularly generously commented on by Alexandrian Neoplatonists. Ammonius taught many distinguished disciples (like Eutocius, John Philoponus, Olympiodorus, Simplicius, Asclepius) who made Alexandria famous throughout the Eastern empire as a center for philosophy and science in the sixth century and later in the first half of the seventh century until the Arab conquest.

To conclude, I would like to mention *Theodora*,[53] to whom Damascius, himself a disciple of Ammonius and Heliodorus, dedicated his

[53] *PLRE*, s.v. "Theodora 6," 2:1085.

Philosophical History, better known under its alternative title of the *Life of Isidorus*.[54] For it was Theodora, his disciple and the daughter of Kyrina and Diogenes, descended like the 'divine' Iamblichus from the royal house of Emesa, who, together with other students of Damascius, turned to him to describe the life and views of the extraordinary philosopher and theurgist that Isidore had been.[55] Damascius probably needed little encouragement, as Isidore had been his beloved teacher who had made Damascius abandon rhetoric for philosophy, and thanks to whom he had undergone a philosophical conversion.[56] Theodora, too, knew Isidore well, as she along with her younger sisters had studied philosophy at his school in Alexandria at different times. We do not know exactly when that took place. Perhaps she was his pupil in the 480's, when Isidore was already an influential person in the Alexandrian intellectual milieu, which Aedesia covered under in her protective care as an honorary leader, or in the late 490's when Isidore had returned to his school in Alexandria from Athens, where he had briefly served as a *diadochus* in the Platonic School.[57]

Intellectually formed by Isidore, and then by his faithful disciple Damascius, Theodora was a Neoplatonist of the Iamblichean type, and thus also a deeply devout pagan; she performed pagan rites and theurgical operations.[58] She was also an expert at poetics and grammar, a mathematician versed in geometry and higher arithmetics. We know nothing more of Theodora's scientific accomplishments or of any works she might have written, nevertheless, her contribution to Alexandrian scholarship is invaluable. Through her creative inspiration and motive power, a work was composed in the period 517–526 which, though not extant in its entirety, is our uniquely comprehensive source on the professors and university life in fifth-century Alexandria. Without it, we would be left with meager fragments.[59] The learned women of Alexandria of the fourth and fifth centuries (Hypatia, Aedesia, Theodora, and

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[54] *PH*, pp. 39–42.

[55] Ibid. *Testimonia* 3:334–336; Photius *Bibliotheca* Codex 181.1–18; Ibid., *Bibliothèque*, trans. Henry.

[56] *DPA*, s.v. "Damascius," D 3, 2:545; *PH*, pp. 35–36, 39.

[57] *DPA*, s.v. "Isidore," I 31, 3:870–276.

[58] Since Photius describes her as a "Hellen by religious persuasion," and her ancestors as "all of them first prize winners in idolatrous impiety," See *PH*, p. 335.

[59] See *PH, Introduction*, pp. 19–70.

nameless others like Olympiodorus' daughter) fulfilled their Hellenic mission and helped ensure that Platonic philosophical truths were saved and the achievements of the "sacred race" of late Platonic divine men and women were not forgotten.

SYNESIUS OF CYRENE AND THE CHRISTIAN NEOPLATONISM: PATTERNS OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL SYMBIOSIS

Dimitar Y. Dimitrov

I. *The question of the three objections in Letter 105 and the religious and philosophical views of Synesius*

The three main philosophical and theological objections, as they were posed in *Letter 105*, were traditionally considered as an evidence of Synesius' affiliations to pagan Neoplatonism as well as an act of non-acceptance of the main doctrines of Christianity. Crawford was the author—who in a more detailed way—developed such a thesis in the already remote year 1901. Synesius was declared to be a non-original philosopher, who did not succeed in solving the controversial issues between Christianity and Neoplatonism; moreover, he did not even realize them. According to the English author, Christianity and Neoplatonism were very different, to the extent even of being opposite doctrines, diverging radically on at least twelve points. Concerning Synesius, he was not a Christian thinker, but rather remained all the time devoted to pagan Neoplatonism and Hellenism. Crawford labeled his eclectic and chaotic doctrine in a witty way as *Synesianism*. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that Crawford was not well acquainted with Neoplatonism and knew Plotinus only through the medium of the French philosopher De Pressensé.[1]

Later scholars were more tolerant towards the person of Synesius, but anyway, they continued to repeat the arguments from *Letter 105* as an evidence of his pagan or at least crypto-pagan views.[2] H.-I. Marrou

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[1] Crawford, *Synesius the Hellene*, 122ff. The work on Neoplatonism and Christianity, used by him, was of De Pressensé, *Histoire des trois premiers siècles de l'Église Chretiénne*.

[2] Here I allude mostly to the British translator of the letters of Synesius, A. Fitzgerald—Synesius of Cyrene, *Letters of Synesius of Cyrene*—as well as to the French scholar Lacombrade, *Synésios de Cyrène*. I have used predominantly the edition of the whole literary inheritance of Synesius, done by Garzya, *Opere di Sinesio di Cirene: Epistole, operette, inni*. Some references were made to the new edition of the letters by A. Garzya and D. Roques; Synesius, of Cyrene. *Synésios de Cyréne: Correspondance: Lettres I–CLVI*.

was the first to divide the problem into two different levels of reasoning.[3] The posed questions are quite difficult to solve, they were the key-problems dividing pagans and Christians, but they were far from being settled even in the Church at the time when Synesius lived. The charge of paganism seems to be unjustifiable. The discussion continued in R. T. Wallis, Barbanti and Vollenweider, but without any explicit conclusion.[4]

I would like to add something which could change the angle of treatment and evaluation of these three objections and for a better understanding of *Letter 105* in general. Synesius undoubtedly raised questions to Patriarch Theophilus, but did he set forth positions as well? And if there were such positions, how to define them? Not to prolong too much my presentation, I will pass to the concrete parameters of the problem.

After explaining why he accepted the bishopric with fear and reluctance, but also with a notion of duty and dignity, Synesius moved on to *difficillimae quaestiones*, very important and crucial. "It is difficult, if not quite impossible, that views should be shaken, which have entered the soul through knowledge to the point of demonstration."[5] After such a definite position, concerning the importance of the rational and *scientific* methods, the future bishop of Ptolemais stated something no less important, although generally neglected: "You know that philosophy rejects many of these convictions which are cherished by the common people."[6] Could it be Christianity that he meant, especially if we consider the fact that Synesius was writing, though in an oblique way, to the rigorous patriarch of Alexandria? It could hardly be so. The man from Cyrene was an elitarian by all means, but I think that such a statement is to be a key to important conclusions.

Concerning the objections, here is the first of them: "For my part I can never persuade myself that the soul is of more recent origin than the body."[7] Plato already had defended the immortality of the soul and

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[3] Marrou, "Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neoplatonism," 126–50.

[4] Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 101–5; Di Pasquale Barbanti, *Filosofia e cultura in Sinesio di Cirene*, 114–148; Vollenweider, *Neuplatonische und christlische Theologie bei Synesios von Kyrene*.

[5] Χαλεπόν ἐστιν, εἰ μὴ καὶ λίαν ἀδύνατον, εἰς ψυχὴν τὰ δι'ἐπιστήμης εἰς ἀπόδειξιν ἐλθόντα δόγματα σαλευθῆναι. I used the English translation of Fitzgerald as well, but very often with disagreement and serious changes from my side.

[6] Οἶσθα δ'ὅτι πολλὰ φιλισοφία τοῖς θυλλομένοις τούτοις ἀντιδιατάττεται δόγμασιν.

[7] Ἀμέλει τὴν ψυχὴν οὐκ ἀζιώσω ποτὲ σώματος ὑστερογενῆ νομίζειν.

this view was developed by the later (Neo)Platonic tradition. To accept that the soul was created after the body meant to place on the same footing the highest life principle with the transient of the material world. This point was one of the main objections in pagan criticism against the Christian theory of Creation.[8] Anyway, what Synesius stated with this first objection was that he could not agree with the view that the soul had been created *after* the body. That he meant *after* was obvious from the word he had used—ὑστερογενῆ. In his writings, the erudite from Cyrene was quite fond of the Neoplatonic tradition of the immortality of the souls and their *descent* into the bodies, sometimes even mingling his theories with Gnostic stereotypes of thinking. Unlike bodies, souls are not produced by the material parents; their generative source (πηγήν) is different. Moreover, they descend from two distinctive sources, which explain their principal differences here on earth.[9] Once fallen down into matter, the soul has to do everything possible to ascend up again to the divine prime source. Quite often the misfortunes of this material world are even a stimulus for ascension.[10] Bodies are principally different from the immortal soul.[11] Such literary and philosophical treatises, as *On providence* and *On dreams*, reveal a noticeable influence of Porphyry. There is, however, one main difference; Porphyry' views were more pessimistic concerning the fortunes of the material world, whereas, in the case of Synesius, the negative attitude towards matter was balanced by a positive evaluation of Christ's descent as a guarantee for salvation.[12]

With his first objection, Synesius entered into the dispute concerning the origin and the fate of souls in their descent from and ascent to God. In that context we can notice an important detail, missed even by such scholars of Synesius, as Marrou and Vollenweider. Synesius did not agree with the thesis of the later origin of souls compared to bodies indeed, but he thus has left opened a loophole for two possible interpretations: 1. that he has been defending the pre-existence of souls; 2. that he has been inclined to accept the simultaneous act of creation for both body and soul.

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[8] See Origen *Contra Celsum* 5.14; Porphyry *Contra Christianos* frag. 94; Augustine *De Civitate Dei* 10.31. See also Gen. 2:7.

[9] Synesius *De providentia* 1.2.

[10] Syn. *De insomniis* 6–7. See also the *Sententiae* of Porphyry.

[11] Syn. *De ins.* 9.

[12] For the descent of Christ as a philosophized and positive image of Incarnation (*positiven Abstiegs*), see Vollenweider, *Neuplatonische und christlische Theologie*, 155–60, 173–6.

Volkmann was the first to express the view of a possible chain of influence from Origen to Synesius.[13] I agree, however, with the later scholars, that it is very difficult to trace a real word-by-word influence, neither is it very clear what the true teaching of Origen was, if we are to base our opinion on the later intentional writings, mostly from the sixth century. It is not clear too, if Origen himself was an *Origenist* according to the anathemas before and during the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553 A.D.[14] What we know from *De principiis*, concerning the free will as a main reason for the descent and fall of souls, does not fit too much with Synesius' philosophy (and theology), where free will occupies only a modest place. If we agree that Origen did not recognize the autonomous existence of the world of ideas out of the imagination, it makes him too spurious a follower of Plato, while Synesius kept that tradition nearly intact.[15] Moreover, in Synesius we notice neatly presented Iamblichus' scheme νοητός—νοερός—αἰσθητικός (κόσμος).

The ideas of the pre-existence of souls, which most of the scholars ascribed to Origen, could be an attempt to react in a still undeveloped theological system against two popular teachings in the third century—I mean traducionism and creationism. Similar opinions have been shared in the fourth century by Apollinarius and Eunomius respectively. According to the creationism, supported by the followers of Eunomius, the soul, although a non-corporeal substance, was created in the body. Every individual soul is built up in an already created embryo entering it. "But if we accept," wrote Nemesius, the Bishop of Emesa in the early fifth century, "that the soul was created in the body, we have therefore to recognize that it was created *after* the body."[16] Such a thesis, however, seems to be far from the truth. "Eunomius will have to admit," continues Nemesius, "that either the soul is mortal, or that it

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[13] Volkmann, *Synesius von Cyrene*, 208–17.

[14] Kuraev, *Rannee khristianstvo i pereselenie dush* [The early Christianity and the migration of souls], 209–20; in Russian. The author has even supported the idea that at least part of Origen's writings had been forged. We could find a certain kind of 'defense' of Origen from the point of orthodoxy in Crouzel, *Origen*. See also Dillon, "Origen and Plotinus," 7–26. According to Dillon, Origen has been influenced by Platonism, but, however, he has subdued all these influences and borrowings to his specific vision of God and the world.

[15] Origen *De principiis* 2.3.6.

[16] Nemesius *De natura hominis* 2.46: εἰ δή ἐκ τοῦ μετὰ τὴν διάπλασιν τοῦ σώματος ἐμβεβλῆσθαι τήν ψυχήν ἡγοῖτο μετὰ τὸ σῶμα γεγενῆσθαι αὐτήν διαμαρτάνει τῆς ἀληθείας. See also the old, but not obsolete translation into Russian of T. Vladimirsky (Pochaevsko-Uspenskaja Lavra, 1904).

was not created in the body." According to Apollinarius, who shared *traducionist* (or *generationist*) opinions, souls were born one from another, like bodies. Following such logic, our soul is a product of our parents, which also contradicts the idea of the immortality of souls. Finally, Nemesius concluded that the soul, being imperishable and immortal, combined indivisibly with the body.[17] In that case, the soul logically pre-exists the body, accordingly the soul is not enclosed in the body, but rather the opposite. Thus, the bishop of Emesa, who was almost a contemporary of Synesius, was an extreme supporter of the thesis for the autonomous and leading role of the soul.[18] We also see how Origen and Nemesius, being divided by approximately two centuries, reached, in their fight against traducionism and creationism, similar conclusions concerning the pre-existence of the soul. Even Augustine of Hippo demonstrated hesitation, in his *Retractationes*, when discussing the origin of souls and their binding with bodies.[19] All the problems started from the interpretation of *Genesis* 2:7, especially when the Neoplatonic way of thinking and argumentation was applied, which was the most popular conceptual system among the intellectual elite of the Late Empire. In *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*, Gregory of Nyssa rejected the idea of pre-existence and tried in his turn to solve this very complicated theological issue.

> Gregory wrote: "If we accept that the soul lives somehow before the body, we will necessarily have to acknowledge that those stupid doctrines (δογματοποιίας) which put the soul in the body are tendentious in thinking that this happens for some evil purposes. Nobody who is sensible enough would admit, moreover, *that it happens after birth* (ἐφυστερίζειν), so that the souls are newer than the created bodies. It is clear to everybody that something inanimate cannot contain a moving and growing force within itself. But there is no doubt that the embryo in the womb demonstrates growth and movement. Therefore, nothing remains than to accept the simultaneous beginning of soul and body."[20]

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[17] Nemesius *De natura hominis* 2.47–54; 3.57. Gregory of Nyssa has detached in his *De opificio hominis* an intermediate level between the body and the reasonable soul—this is αἰσθανομένη, the sensible force.

[18] Nemesius *De natura hominis* 3.58.

[19] Augustine *Retractationes* 1.1.3 (*difficillima quaestio*), see Marrou, "Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neoplatonism," 146; Crouzel, *Origen*, 169ff.

[20] Gregory of Nyssa *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione* 125a–c. Gregory has disputed obliquely with a passage from Origen *C. Cels.* 3.75.

Thus, Gregory defended through words which he put into the mouth of his sister Macrina, the simultaneous creation of body and soul. His criticism alluded to the supporters of the pre-existence of the soul and also to the creationists (in that case, the Eunomeans), as well as to the teaching of Methodius of Olympus, who went so far in his refutation of Origen's doctrines as to start defending the post-existence of the soul. Gregory of Nyssa expressly criticized such a view in *De opificio hominis* (229b–233b).

Synesius, too, refused to accept the *post-existence* of the soul compared with the body. This was his main objection. Based on *scientific methods*, the future bishop of Ptolemais maintained the Neoplatonic conception of the soul's descent into bodies, without, however, explicitly supporting the pre-existence theory, thus contradicting orthodox Christianity of the day. The theories, which he supported, were criticized by Gregory of Nyssa yet on another occasion, both Gregory and Synesius fought together in a battle against the simplistic and heretic views, "cherished by the common people."

Let us return to *Letter 105*. After the body-soul problem, Synesius passed on to another definite statement: "Never will I admit that the world and the parts (τἄλλα μέρη), which make it, must perish at a certain moment."[21] Was the man from Cyrene ready to defend in front of Theophilus the pagan concept of the world's eternity?

The Neoplatonic philosophers have always defended such a thesis energetically, rejecting the Christian notion of a single and unique act of God's Will. For the pagan followers of ancient cosmogony and Plato, the creation proceeds from itself in eternity, as an out of time act of descent from the higher to the lower levels of existence according to the well known scheme μονή, πρόοδος, ἐπιστροφή. Christians held quite a different view: according to them the world has its beginning and end in God, to be in the likeness of *Him* is only possible for man through *His* blessing. As Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa stated, as the world has its beginning, it will be necessary to conclude that it also has an end.[22] This problem started to be an important dividing line between pagan philosophers and Christian theologians, although they usually had received a similar educational and world-view background.

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[21] Τὸν κόσμον οὐ φήσω καὶ τἄλλα μέρη συνδιαφθείρεσθαι.

[22] Basil the Great *Homiliae in Hexaemeron* 1.4; Gregory of Nyssa *De opificio hominis* 229b.

Within the framework of Christian theology, this question was far from being unanimously solved. Let us go back once more to the much disputed texts of Origen. The letter of Emperor Justinian I to Patriarch Menas, concerning *De principiis* (1.2.10) presumed that Origen was disposed to accept some kind of eternity of the world. He had supposedly maintained the idea of the existence of numerous worlds changing each other, until the final break of this chain of periodical re-establishments (ἀποκαταστάσεις).[23] In justification of Origen's propriety as an author, we have to say that he did not answer this question conclusively, at least according to what remained from his writings. He offered to his readers three different, but plausible, hypotheses without decisively supporting any of them.[24] According to the first hypothesis, only the material and mortal world will be definitely destroyed. The second hypothesis implies that it would be possible for the material nature to be transformed into some ethereal condition, while the third postulates complete destruction of the world together with all its elements. Though the Christian outlook prevailed in Origen's writings, yet the lack of an authoritative Christian theory of Creation in the third century, (at least on the level of philosophical and theological speculations) drove him—if not to the point of merely accepting the Biblical fact—to fall back on the (Neo)Platonic theories of emanation, subordination and the concept of the 'eternal reversal.'[25] Feeling justified in his uncertainty, Origen preferred to expostulate different theories in order to reject the Gnostic and Manichaean views.

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[23] Origen *Princ.* 1.6.2–3, 2.3.1, 3.5, based on *Isaia* 66.22 and *Ecclesiast* I.9–10.

[24] Origen *Princ.* 2.3.6.

[25] Ivanka, *Platonismo cristiano*, 110–3. Dillon has found out some parallels between the subordinationist doctrine of Origen, concerning the levels of penetration and influence in the framework of the Trinitarian model, and the respective interpretations of Proclus two centuries later in the *Elements of Theology* (*Institutio Theologica*). The great scholar of Neoplatonism has concluded that both Origen and Proclus had followed conceptions, laid down already in the tradition of the Middle Platonism, especially in Numenius. It is not impossible that Origen would have been influenced by the spiritual atmosphere of his own time, in particular by the popular Gnostic ideas, which he has otherwise refuted in *De principiis*. See Dillon, "Origen's Doctrine of the Trinity and Some Later Neoplatonic Theories," in *Golden Chain*, XXI. For more detailed exposé of the Neoplatonic motifs in Origen, see also Weber, *Origenes der Neuplatoniker*, who has held the view, that it should be some other Origen, a Neoplatonic philosopher and pupil of Plotinus, different from the Christian Origen. Crouzel has 'defended' the Christian theologian Origen against all accusations, from crypto-paganism to heresy or the spurious existence of two Origens.

If Synesius had defended in front of Theophilus such heretical, and even pagan, views of the world's eternity, or if he had exposed his hesitation, following Origen at a time when the Patriarch of Alexandria had started a real war against his followers, why did the author from Cyrene miss to mention the Creation, but only the (eventual) end? Why did he add this καὶ τἆλλα μέρη?

According to Marrou, Synesius expressed some reservations concerning the possibility of the destruction of the sun, the moon and the stars.[26] Did he actually mean the eternity of the *noetic* world in contradistinction from the material world? It is a plausible hypothesis, but the laconic character of the statement prevents us from any definite answer. What we can do is to compare this objection with *Hymn 3*, where the praise of the Creator and the creation is expressed in these words:

> You, Leader of the worlds, cleansed from any filth, You are the Nature of natures. You give warmth to nature, the creation of things mortal and the visible images of eternity, so that even the latest part of this world receives the gift of life in its own turn. The law of God will not allow the filth of the world (τρύγα τὰν κόσμου) to be equal with the heights of heaven. Never will perish completely (ὅλως) what has been put in order in the choir of the existing beings,[27] so far as each one depends on another and all of them taste the benefit from their common existence. From elements destined to death the eternal circle has been formed, whose spark of life is drawn from Your breath. (Synesius *Hymn* 3.309–332).[28]

This fragment from *Hymn 3* raises a lot of questions. The influence of Neoplatonism is noticeable, especially the hierarchical structure of beings as a result of emanational descent. When *existing beings* are opposed to *non-being* and matter is unanimously accepted as *non-being* everywhere in the hymns, then what really exists can never perish completely, having in itself a spark from the higher entities. However, the fragment could not so easily be deciphered. God's breath (πνοιαῖς) gives life even to things which are mortal and destined to death (ὀλλυμένων), and warms them so that they form an eternal circle (κύκλος ἀίδιος).

Searching helps interpretation, we should, therefore, examine different texts as well. In *On providence* (2.7), Synesius presented the *Werdung* of events in the world in the following manner: "If there is generation in

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[26] Marrou, "Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neoplatonism," 147.

[27] The word used is ὄντων (gen. pl.) '*Beings*,' that have existence as opposed to non-beings.

[28] Translation is mine from the edition of Garzya.

the realm about us, the cause of generation is in the realm above us. It is from this source that the seeds of events arrive here."[29] Moreover, events recur periodically, which gives the wise man opportunity to realize the truth. Thus, the author from Cyrene developed an idea of cyclical movement, which reminds us of the Stoic teaching of the *seminal logoi*, and also of the *apokathastaseis* of Origen. At the end of this part of *On providence*, Synesius was wise enough, nevertheless, to call these teachings myths and allegories, just to ensure himself against possible accusations of the non-Christian or at least heretical theory of the *eternal reversal*.

As I have already mentioned, the dispute on eternity or the necessary destruction of the world was quite a current and pressing issue in the fifth and sixth centuries, provoking many polemical works. Proclus defined 18 arguments in favor of the world's eternity and John Philoponus later did his best to refute them.[30] Zacharias Scholasticus, already referred to, was the author of a polemical dispute, probably fictitious, with his pagan teacher, the Alexandrian philosopher Ammonius, and with another opponent hidden under the name of *Iatrosophistus*. Defending the Christian idea of Creation and the end with different arguments, Zacharias made this statement: "God is good even when destroying the visible world, so far as *He* does not intend to remove the cosmos away, nor to will its full destruction, but to transform it and change it to the better."[31] For a Christian and Neoplatonist, like Synesius, such a thesis would be more acceptable, while the full-scale destruction of the world would have necessarily implied the inevitable destruction of the forms-ideas as well, which would sound absurd for the pupil of Hypatia.

Such a view could find *modus vivendi* with Christian orthodoxy about the beginning of the fifth century, the objections of Synesius, being harmless and current, even in the context of the Cappadocian synthesis, in comparison with Nemesius, also Platonic and a bishop, who *floruit* one or two decades later.

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[29] Εἰ δὲ γένεσις ἐν τοῖς περὶ ἡμᾶς, αἰτία γενέσεως ἐν τοῖς ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς, κἀκεῖθεν ἐνταῦθα καθήκει τὰ τῶν συμβαινόντων σπέρματα.

[30] The classical edition of H. Rabe still remains trustworthy; Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, Edidit Hugo Rabe, (1899).

[31] Translation into Bulgarian of the fragments from the disputes of Zacharias was made by I. Hristov and V. Marinov from Zacaria Scolastico, *Ammonio. Zacaria Scolastico* (1973). (English translation is mine).

Here follows the third objection in *Letter 105*: "As for the resurrection, which is an object of common belief, I consider it as a sacred and mysterious allegory, being far from sharing the views of the vulgar crowd thereon."[32]

This statement by no means implies that Synesius refuted the act of resurrection, though he defined it as "a sacred and mysterious allegory." Even in his extremely Platonic writing *On dreams*, he affirmed that principally nothing could impede, in certain conditions, the corporal substance (σωματικὴν οὐσίαν) to ascend to higher "regions," to *resurrect* (ἀναστᾶσαν) from its fallen position and together with the soul to reach the light and the heavenly spheres.[33] This is that εἴδωλον, thanks to which not only the soul, but even the lower elements can enter into contact with the divine. If Synesius was protesting against something, it was undoubtedly the rough and vulgarized understanding of that act. His intentional resentment of rough naturalism in presenting the resurrected bodies was close to what Origen had written in *De principiis* (2.10.3). The language of Synesius is (Neo)Platonic, but such a style was also used by Gregory of Nyssa. In describing the resurrection as a recovery of the combination of elements and building up again what had been destroyed, Gregory emphasized the role of the 'God-seeing soul' (θεοειδὲς), striving towards similar entities, but 'covered up by body and nailed in it.' Such Neoplatonic imagery with elements of a dualistic thinking can also be found in Synesius.[34]

If we are to understand Synesius' position, additional details should be put into consideration. The last 20 years of the fourth century were the 'golden period' of the Egyptian monasticism in Nitria and Scetis. Different ideas grew rank there. A certain Hierax of Leontopolis in the Delta had refuted the resurrection of bodies all together. A new trend, usually called *anthropomorphism*, became popular among the monks, especially among the illiterate or the insufficiently educated among them. God was thought of as being in a human form, and this conception was connected with different chiliastic views and expectations. A serious conflict had arisen between the "intellectuals" and the "villagers" among the monks, which to a great extent coincided with the traditional misunderstanding between the Copts and the Hellenized

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[32] Τὴν καθωμιλημένην ἀνάστασιν ἱερόν τι καὶ ἀπόρρητον ἥγημαι, καὶ πολλοῦ δέω ταῖς τοῦ πλήθους ὑπολήψεσιν ὁμολογῆσαι.

[33] Syn. *De ins.* 10.

[34] Gregory of Nyssa *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione* 76a–80a, 97a–100b.

(and also Romanized) *foreigners*. In his Pascal letter for the year 399, Theophilus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, a friend and supporter of Synesius, had ultimately forbidden *anthropomorphism* as a wrong and heretical infatuation. This letter was positively accepted by the "intellectuals," but negatively by the *anthropomorphites*.[35] Synesius was a witness of those events and, as far as we know from his *Dion*, clear-sighted with regard to Egyptian monasticism. In the aforementioned treatise, the future bishop of Ptolemais showed himself as a man with intellectual affiliations, who emphasized the priority of the rational approach to knowledge above imitation of the divine. *Anthropomorphism* together with the rough physical notion of resurrection was always unacceptable to him, being part of what he usually labeled as 'vulgar conceptions.' That there were many common features between Augustine and Synesius should not be accepted with surprise. Augustine himself confessed that for a long period of time he had been thinking of God in human form. Only his occupation with philosophy had made him change this wrong view which was so popular among the ordinary people.[36] The man from Cyrene never made such a mistake. He was a loyal Christian, but also an elitist intellectual, pretending to be a philosopher more than anything else.[37]

In conclusion, we have no reason to regard the three objections of Synesius in his *Letter 105* as a testimony for his formal belonging to paganism; neither should we consider his way of thinking as incompatible with Christianity. It is important to re-emphasize that these objections were not an obstacle for Theophilus to be the active promoter of his ordination. My opinion is that in the case of Synesius, we have to deal with a representative of the highly educated intellectual *strata* in the Christian church at that time. Those people were not prone to abandon the Neoplatonic stereotypes of thought and behavior, but nevertheless, they took part in the formation of a refined and cultivated philosophical and theological system, which obtained its perfection in the following few centuries. Notwithstanding his (Neo)Platonic background and affiliations, Synesius was a Christian, interested in the deep

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[35] These events were fairly examined in the well known work of Chitty, *Desert a City*, esp. 53ff.

[36] Augustine *Confessiones* 7.1.1.

[37] This elitist attitude could be summarized in his rhetorical question in *Letter 105*: "What can there be in common between the ordinary people and philosophy?" (Δήμῳ γὰρ δὴ φιλοσοφίᾳ τί πρὸς ἄλληλα;).

foundations of faith, probably not so profound in pure theology, as the Cappadocians were, but an active supporter of the union between faith, Empire and civilization. When discussing his beliefs, we should not miss the hymns.

II. *Neoplatonic and Christian motifs in the hymns of Synesius*

I have already discussed this problem elsewhere,[38] so that my intention is to present it here in brief. It is impossible, however, to summarize the main aspects of religious, philosophical and cultural symbiosis without the poetic inheritance of Synesius.

The hymns were written in a Doric dialect, as a sign of respect to the traditions of Cyrene, the only Spartan colony from the time of the Great Greek Colonization.[39] The language is difficult to understand, archaic and revealing erudition as well as a certain eclecticism of thought. This is the reason why the hymns were always a stumbling block for scholars. The problems concerned with the dating and the true order of the nine genuine hymns reveal some even more important questions: Are they pagan or Christian, or do they point to a gradual process of accommodation to Christianity by their author? What can they reveal from their author's views?

All the hymns are devoted to a general idea—the raising of the author's soul from the bonds of material existence to the higher spheres of the Divine. The hymns can be divided into two main groups: the first six (according to the order proposed by Vollenweider)[40] are mainly concerned with the Trinitarian problem, while the last three (8, 9 and 7) are mostly Christological. We can trace different influences, from the Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, to the *Chaldean Oracles* and the contemporary Christian thought. There are especially extensive borrowings of thoughts and terminology from the *Chaldean Oracles*, so far as we know them from the remaining fragments and Porphyry' *exegesis* (through Augustine). In

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[38] Dimitrov, "Neoplatonic and Christian Motifs," 1:112–28 [in Bulgarian, with English summary].

[39] The hymns were translated and cited by the edition of Garzya, but some references and verifications were made in other editions as well; Garzya, *Opere di Sinesio di Cirene*.

[40] Vollenweider, *Neuplatonische und christlische Theologie*, 25–7, 70–88.

some places, we recognize a number of Plotinus' statements and ideas. Synesius stands close to Plotinus, Porphyry and the Neopythagoreans in his attitude towards matter. In all the hymns, matter is mentioned in a negative context as a prison for the soul. In *Hymn 3*, he invokes the *Father* to have mercy on his soul and not to allow the once escaped soul to return to the body (*Hymn* 3.375–380). The very expression σῶμα φυγοῖσαν reminds us of Porphyry' principle *omne corpus fugiendum*, criticized by Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 10.29, 22.25–28).[41] The liberation of the soul from the fetters of matter was, indeed, the main motive in all the literary inheritance of the man from Cyrene and the hymns were the best illustration of this.[42]

However, there are important differences as well. Synesius was far alien to the subordination of the hypostaseis, so typical of the (Neo)platonic tradition.[43] The three Persons of the Godhead in the hymns are considered equal and coexisting together out of time and beyond human understanding. The descent of the Divine (the Son, the

[41] O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine*, 134–9; Di Pasquale Barbanti, *Filosofia e Cultura in Sinesio di Cirene*, 71–84. For the negative appreciation of matter in Plotinus see *Enneades* 2.4.16; 1.8.3.

[42] A possible influence from Numenius could be traced, especially in the latter's definition of matter as something evil and separated by God (usually called *Good in Itself*, the Pythagorean *Monas*). According to the triadic construction of Numenius the *First God* is totally transcendent. With the sensible world and the evil matter contacts the *Second God*, The Son-Demiurge. We should realize, however, that together with some slight parallels there are a lot of differences between Numenius and Synesius. We cannot find any sign of negativism towards the second hypostasis in Synesius, while in Numenius this is the "undefined Dyas," the Demiurge. The World Soul of Numenius is identical with Evil—such an idea would by necessity have sound blasphemous for the (future) bishop of Ptolemais. See Numenius, *Fragments*, trans. Édouard Des Places (Paris, 1973), frags. 21, 11, 14–15, 52, 64–75. For Numenius' influence on Plotinus see Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*. See also Bogdanov, "Neoplatonic Trinitarian Schemes," 1:9–22 [in Bulgarian, with English summary].

[43] Barbanti was disposed to recognize in the Son the third hypostasis of Neoplatonism, notwithstanding His explicit binding with the Reason and the Wisdom of God; Di Pasquale Barbanti, *Filosofia e Cultura in Sinesio di Cirene*, 116–126. This confusion is a result, according to my modest opinion, of the very strictly followed presumption, that Synesius has used and created a synthesis in a nearly unchanged manner of the higher entities of Plotinus, Porphyry and the *Chaldeans*. An attentive and unbiassed reading of the hymns would clearly indicate that the author used the language and the ideas, but freely and accordingly to his main concept of presenting the Divine *simultaneously* as Unity and Trinity, as *presence* in the world and *absence* from it in the same time (*time* being not the proper word for God). Synesius' views of Trinity differed too much from the emanational theory of Plotinus, according to which the divine grows weak and worsens its quality (τὴν χείρονα, *Enn.* 5.2.2) when proceeding downward in various emanations. The monistic theory of Porphyry could not be fully identified with the total equality of the hypostasis, present in the hymns of Synesius.

Holy Spirit) was presented not so far as a diminution and degradation, but as an act of God's Will to save His creatures from the material bonds. Synesius, moreover, did not debase the Holy Spirit to the level of the *Chaldean* World Soul, but rather represented it as a hypostasis equal to the other two.

Synesius' language and style strongly followed the ancient traditions. Conservative traditionalism, anyway, was a typical feature of an intellectual *snob* as the author from Cyrene certainly was. He tried very often not to mention the relatively new Judaic and Christian terminology, being attached to the classical, sometimes to archaic Greek terms and notions of religious and philosophical poetry. But however complex his language and style are and however rich of Neoplatonic and *Chaldean* terminology, they reveal a sincere Christian religiosity, even if not pretending to be Orthodox in the sense of the later Byzantine religious and theological literature. If Synesius had lived in the eleventh century, let us say, he would have been in danger of being accused of Sabelian or Manichaean heresy because of the tendency to equate the hypostases to a level of erasement of differences, or because of his negative attitude to matter. In the very beginning of the fifth century, however, when Christian theology was still in the making, he was well set in his place.

The hymns were created somewhere between 402/3 and the death of Synesius (413 or 414). If there was any development at all, it was not from paganism to Christianity, but rather from Trinitarian topics with strongly anti-Arian sentiment, connected probably with his policy against the Eunomeans, to more Christocentrical, and connected with the liturgical cycle. In one of the earlier hymns (*Hymn 3*)—the longest of all, Synesius quite openly mentions the act of his own baptism, already in mature age, as it was typical for the time.[44]

III. *Religious, philosophical and cultural synthesis in Synesius' literary legacy*

Synesius received a rich education at the school of Hypatia in Alexandria, which included the then fashionable Neoplatonism. This influence is obvious with regard to his language and stereotypes of think-

[44] Syn. *Hymni* 3.528–539: Ναί, πάτερ, ἀγνᾶς/παγὰ σοφίας/λάμψον πραπίσιν/ἀπὸ σῶν κόλπων/νοερὸν φέγγος/στράψον κραδίᾳ/ἀπὸ σᾶς ἀλκᾶς/σοφίας αὐφάν/κάστὰν ἐπὶ σὲ/ἱερὰν ἀτραπὸν/σύνθημα δίδου/σφραγῖδα τεάν. See also Syn. *Hymn.* 3.619–621: Ἤδη φερέτω/σφραγῖδα πατρὸς/ἱκέτις ψυμά.

ing in all his writings, prose and hymns alike. The religious concepts were presented as well, in a highly philosophized form. According to Synesius, philosophy alone could give a meaning and dignity to human life, ensuring a true contact with God through ἀλήθεια, against the erroneous views of the mob. The wise man is akin to God—this is the concept, which Synesius supported and had once openly stated in the treatise *On dreams*.[45] The typical Plotinian notions of *advent* (πρόοδος) and *return* (ἐπιστροφή) are present in the hymns.

On dreams was the most purely philosophical writing of Synesius, based generally on *Sententiae* of Porphyry, on Iamblichus and *Chaldean* literature.[46] We find in it, different topics and notions, frequent in the Neoplatonic milieu from the third to the sixth centuries, including the problem of the Divine Reason (Νους) and Its sinking into the sensual world (*De insomniis* 1, 7–8), the descent and ascent of souls (*De insomniis* 5–6, 8–10), their bearer (ὄχημα) (*De insomniis* 5–6);[47] the phantasms and the possibility of soothsaying (*De insomniis* 2, 5, 7, 14–17). The treatise is imbued with certain pantheism. Following Plato (*Timaeus* 30b), Plotinus (*Enneades* 2.3.7), and Iamblichus (*De Mysteriis*), Synesius defended soothsaying (μαντεία) through dream-interpretation, starting from the principle, that in the *cosmos* all is in all, but everything, according to its properties, can contact only with a similar.[48] Wise is the man, who realizes the unity of the *cosmos*, so that he can be able to use it.[49]

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[45] Syn. *De ins.* 1: οἰκεῖος θεῷ.

[46] For ἱερῶν λογίω as a source of wisdom Synesius has mentioned in chapter 4 of *De insomniis*. One of the citations in chapter 5 we find as a fragment 118 in the edition of Des Places, *Oracles chaldaïques*. For a possible Chaldean influence on Synesius see Theiler, *Chaldäischen Orakel und die Hymnen des Synesios*, 1–40.

[47] N. Aujoulat has concluded, that the word ὄχημα had been firstly used by Iamblichus and later by Synesius in a sense of being some kind of shining envelope of the soul, its *boat-bearer*, while Porphyry had preferred to use another word—πνεῦμα. See Aujoulat, *Néo-Platonisme Alexandrin*, 230. Actually Synesius has used both words in his *De insomniis*, so it would not be impossible that he has used πνοία in the hymns in order not to confuse it with the well known (from Porphyry) meaning of the word πνεῦμα.

[48] See the wonderful book of Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*; and the older, but still relevant book of Lewy, *Chaldæan Oracles and Theurgy*.

[49] Syn. *De ins.* 2: διὰ πάντων πάντα…τῷ κόσμῳ; Syn. *De ins.* 2: σοφὸς ὁ εἰδὼς τὴν τῶν μερῶν τοῦ κόσμου συγγένειαν; Syn. *De ins.* 7: ὁμοίῳ γὰρ τὸ ὅμοιον ἥδεται. Syn. *De prov.* 2, 7: καὶ οὐκ ἀσυμπαθῆ πρὸς ἄλληλα τὰ μέρη θησόμεθα. This treatment concerning the unity of *cosmos*, the reciprocal similarities, the sympathetical magic and the possibility of soothsaying sounds very much like the defense of theurgy in *De mysteriis* of Iamblichus. See my article Dimitrov, "Theurgy of Iamblichus," 1:83–93 [in Bulgarian, with English summary] and also the fragments of *De mysteriis*, translated by myself in the same edition, 189–92.

The idea of the *middle* (τι μέσὸν; *Hymn* 3.234–44), the *mediating principle* (μεσάτη ἀρχή) and God's Will (ἰότας) as a *middle nature* (μέσα φύσις ἄφθεγκτος; *Hymn* 3.217–20) is noticeable in the hymns. This idea fits in perfectly with the context of Porphyrian Neoplatonism, so far as the philosopher from Tyrus had put the Soul as a hypostasis between the One and the Reason in the souls's capacity of being a mediator in the context of the monistic trend towards 'telescoping' the hypostaseis.[50] The mediating principle between the transcendent one (the *Ineffable* of Iamblichus) and the development into the plurality of generation finds its place in later Neoplatonism as a possibility of overcoming the otherwise insurmountable barrier between full transcendence and the creative principle.[51] Like all the Neoplatonicians, Synesius defended the dichotomy in the structure of man. The body, being material, constitutes the lower register of human entity, while the soul is immortal and divine by nature. Falling down, nevertheless, the soul becomes filthy and prone to serve the mistress-earth (χθονὶ θητεῦσαι; *Hymn* 3.573). Only with effort and God's help, enhanced by prayers and philosophical pursuits, can the soul escape from its unhappy existence *here* and reach spheres free from the 'jurisdiction' of material nature and the laws of fortune (εἰμαρμήνη).[52] But woe to the sinful soul that will not be able to ascend after its first fall!

The concepts of the boundary character of souls and the two kinds of souls (intelligible and fallen in matter) betray the concrete influence of Plotinus.[53] Souls descend from the world of light, of the clear and simple forms, into the world of becoming and diversity.[54] These topics—of the different kinds of souls, of the imaginary and fortune-telling abilities of ψυχή φανταστική, of its ethereal envelope (πνεῦμα) and bearer (ὄχημα)—take a central part in the aforementioned treatise *On dreams*, confirming Synesius' interest in traditional topics of ancient philosophy, which received popularity in the context of (and because of) Neoplatonism and *Chaldean* literature.[55] As a Neoplatonic, we can

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[50] The word "telescoping" was used by A. C. Lloyd in Armstrong, *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, 283–96.

[51] See Proclus *Institutio Theologica* 27, 100.

[52] Syn. *De ins.* 8–9.

[53] Syn. *Hymn.* 3.549–608, 714–717; 4.202–295; Plotinus *Enn.* 6.4.14.

[54] Syn. *Laus calvitii* 7: Τὰ πρῶτα τῶν ὄντων ἁπλα κατιοῦσα δὲ ἡ φύσις ποικίλλεται. Ἡ δὲ ὕλη τῶν ὄντων τὸ ἔσχατον· ταύτη καὶ ποικιλώτατον.

[55] In *De Civitate Dei* 9 Augustine has attributed the idea of *anima spiritualis*, a medium for soothsaying, to Porphyry. For the word φαντασία and the possible influence of

define his specific attitude towards eternity *versus* the liquidation of the world, as has already been discussed, with all the important reservations and additions. Without opposing Christian opinions, Synesius kept intact some principles, based on his education, like the eternity of at least the highest part of God's creation. His Christian belief, which I cannot doubt at all, was too intellectualized and elitist, but this was an important facet of Synesius mentality. We cannot, therefore, escape the feeling that, for the pupil of Hypatia, philosophy and culture were an end in themselves, far from the specific ethos of humbleness, noticeable, for example, in the writings of the great Cappadocians. It would probably be more correct to designate Synesius as a traditionalist and elitarian Christian Neoplatonician, but not a Christian theologian.

We have to realize, however, that an intellectualized belief does not mean a lack of belief. The hymns of Synesius are a good example of that. He was prone to divide the philosophical truth as a part of a sophisticated religious system, from the vulgar beliefs of the common people. But such a snobbish attitude is not unique in the Christian tradition. Origen used to state in *Contra Celsum* (1.9), that πίστις was necessary for the common people insofar as only a small number of men were endowed with the capacity to be reasonable and deeply involved in thought and understanding. The mass of the people were strongly influenced by the material conditions and the nearly inevitable human weaknesses. In his *First homily*, Synesius states the following: "Our God is Wisdom and Word." While explaining the holy act of the Eucharist with the help of philosophical language, the bishop of Ptolemais called for modesty and sobriety of reason.[56] Even when summoning the flock, he put intellectual principles first.

From everything written until now two questions arise logically. The first is connected with the philosophical and theological system of Synesius, if any. The second question is: Was it a Christian Neoplatonism or anything else? What is the justification for using such a label?

Extensive research of his writings will convince us not to speak of a system in the proper sense of the word. I would not, however, agree with Crawford's negative evaluation of Synesius as a chaotic and

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Iamblichus see Aujoulat, "Avatars de la phantasia dans le *Traité des songes* de Synésios de Cirène," *Koinonia* 7 (1983): 157–77; 8 (1984): 33–55.

[56] Ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν σοφία καὶ λόγος. Κρατὴρ ὁ παρακινῶν τὸ φρονοῦν, ὁ ταράττων τὸ λογιζόμενον οὐδὲν προσήκει τῷ λόγῳ.

eclectic dilettante, far from real philosophy and even farther away from Christian theology.[57] To my understanding, we witness in Synesius an interesting combination of philosophical schemes and Christian foundations of faith. We can hardly find such a combination of philosophy, religious belief and poetics elsewhere in late antique literature. Being a different author from the Cappadocians and Augustine, for example, Synesius possessed features, which made him akin to them. They all received a similar type of education in the framework of a *curriculum*, bequeathed from pagan Hellenism. Through his Hymns and Letters the author from Cyrene enlisted himself among the fighters for the developing post-Nicaean orthodoxy. Moreover, these writings reveal not only commitment, but also a deep knowledge of the essence of the problems. The language of Synesius was philosophical and traditionalist, and he never pretended to be, or to be considered as, a theologian *par excellence*—just the opposite, he all the time emphasized his desire to be thought of as a philosopher.[58] His approach was just *another kind* of approach to the questions of faith and their treatment for himself as well as for others. In *Dion* (4) it is clearly stated, moreover, that Synesius would never accept to be treated only in this *emploi*. He was a many-sided person, active in spite of his contemplative nature and a great lover of *belles-lettres*. Such pieces of literature and cultural polemics, like *Dion*, *Laus calvitii* (Praise of baldness) and the lost *Cynegetica*, witness that inclination is combined with a fine sense of humor.

Like Augustine and the Cappadocians, Synesius also became a bishop in the last years of his short life. He was, moreover, an active bishop who took care of his congregation for the good weal of the faith, for higher morality and for more education. At the beginning he hesitated and later accepted the bishopric unwillingly, but with a clear sense of duty. His hesitations were connected with a deep sense of obligation so far as it implied a total change of life style. Such hesitations, nonetheless, can also be noticed in the case of Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine. If there were something which radically differentiates Synesius from them, it is the lack of any tension between paganism and Christianity, at least in his writings. But it was not so,

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[57] Wallis has described him in a witty manner as a "gentleman-farmer-cum-amateur-philosopher;" Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 131.

[58] For the Neoplatonic language and its possible symbolic application, even beyond any discursive expression, see the wonderful research of Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*.

because Synesius was a crypto-pagan. Simply such a problem did not exist in his mental arrangement at all.

According to Lloyd, the Platonism of Synesius was of a simple kind, going back to the Middle Academy, being too far removed from the Neoplatonism of the time.[59] We have already traced some influences from Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus, but the assertions of the English scholar are not lacking reason. The author from Cyrene used the imaginary language of the Neoplatonicians on the descent of the higher entities into bodies and the reversal ascent of the souls, but nowhere in his writings did he develop, in a full scale, the emanational theory, neither did he discuss different levels of existence except the well known Trinity of Father—Son (Logos, Nous)—Holy Spirit (The World Soul, Will, Force). Neoplatonism solved, to a great extent, Plato's original dualism, creating a conception for linking through different units the higher world of Ideas with the world of "shades." The lower reality is already present as a necessary form of emanation of the higher Forms and not just an antipode.[60] In the case of Synesius, we notice a more openly expressed dualism, the same as in Porphyry, the most inclined Neoplatonician, to dualism, with possible borrowings from Middle Platonism, including Plutarch and Numenius.

The last question, which I have partly answered so far, or at least tried to do so, is focused on the philosophy of Synesius as seen through actual Christian theology. It will be accompanied by some conclusions as well. Moreover, we have to realize how Christian Neoplatonism was possible at all?

In the Christian way of thinking, the Creation was a conscious and unique act of God's Will, while in the case of (pagan) Neoplatonicians, the Creation proceeded from higher to lower levels in eternity. Moreover, in Neoplatonism the act of descent and generation (*Werdung*) was evil to a certain extent, being a worsening by necessity and by no means a conscious act of God. The idea of original sin was totally alien to the Neoplatonic philosophy/theology. The Neopythagorean ideas of *Monas* and *Dyas* (One/Itself/Unity as opposed to Two/Another/Plurality) have supposed a certain dichotomy, not only in the process of generation, but also in the highest spheres of the Divine, while Nicaean

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[59] Armstrong, *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, 314: "The Platonism that appears in Synesius, who was her (Hypatia's) pupil, is of a simple kind and is supposed to go back to the Middle Academy, perhaps through Porphyry."

[60] Ivanka, *Platonismo cristiano*, 49–68.

Christianity has always insisted on the *Monas* and *Trias* as an essential part of Trinitarian theology. The depersonalization of the creation, as an out of time phenomenon, did not allow Neoplatonism to imagine some clear and personalized relationship between God and the world. In Christian theology, God's advent, here on earth, was the most important moment and the focus of the Christian soteriology without any decrease from Father to Son and the Holy Spirit.[61]

Following these important points of divergence, the British scholar McEvoy defended the idea of the very impossibility of Christian Neoplatonism, being a contradiction in itself.[62] However, it is a well known fact that Christian theology developed in the context of Neoplatonic philosophy. Augustine of Hippo was the first to show similarities and the possible paths of influence from Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy towards Christian theology. The Cappadocian synthesis was a good example of that, too. According to Augustine, there were similar points between the two doctrines, like the Logos-teaching, Trinity and the levels of intelligence, on the other hand, there were main differences concerning Incarnation, Redemption and God's Will.[63] Moreover, Augustine found certain similarities with Christianity, even in the teaching of Porphyry, a great enemy of Christianity. These similarities were connected with the notion of the three main hypostaseis, with the real catharsis through philosophy, allowing a union with God's Reason, and, surprisingly, with the teaching of Good, which the philosopher from Tyrus had been willing to interpret in a sense not far from that of Christianity.[64] In the context of his oblique dispute with Porphyry, Augustine announced him to be the closest pagan philosopher to Christianity. The Cappadocians also borrowed from Neoplatonism in order to create a new language of theology and a new symbolism, without any doubt being cast on their Christian affiliation.[65]

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[61] Because of its subordinationist trends Arianism could be considered as a concession to the Platonic models of thinking.

[62] McEvoy, "Neoplatonism and Christianity," 155–70. See also Armstrong, "Man in the Cosmos: A Study of Some Differences between Pagan Neoplatonism and Christianity," in *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, XXII.

[63] August. *Conf.* 7.9.

[64] August. *De civ. D.* 10.23, 28–9.

[65] Hristov, "Platonic Elements in the Cappadocian Synthesis," 1:94–111 [in Bulgarian, with English summary]. For the exaggerated influence of Plotinus on the Cappadocians in the works of many scholars, see also Rist, "Plotinus and Christian Philosophy," 386–413.

In the case of Synesius, we do not notice any tension between his (Neo)Platonic and Christian positions. Intentionally or not, the author from Cyrene cast off any possible conflict between them. His language was predominantly Neoplatonic, while his thoughts lacked the depth and spirit, characteristics of the great Cappadocians.[66] Indeed, Christian motifs and conceptions predominated in his writing, such as the idea of the Creation as an act of God's Will, the equality of the hypostasis in the Holy Trinity, the immortality of the soul and the underworld. The three persons of the Holy Trinity he treated in a way close to Christian orthodoxy of the fourth century. The connection between God and the created world is presented directly everywhere in the hymns. The world of Ideas (the pure Forms) is considered to be a part of the Creation, not an ontologically compulsory mediator in the connection between God and the beings. The created world is a "product" of God's Will and dependent on God's Law, not just an outcome of necessity. What differentiated Synesius from the well-known examples of Christian theology is a more abstract and depersonalized approach to the Divine. However, this approach is more personal than any pagan Neoplatonician would be able to acknowledge. For Synesius, Jesus Christ is the Savior who descended into hell in order to overcome death and devil. If Synesius has demonstrated some leanings towards Neoplatonism and the school of Hypatia, it was in his willingness to think of the rescuing role of Christ in a cosmological and out of time context, not in a concrete historical plan. One can also trace such an inclination in Origen as well.

The end of the world is the doctrine that Synesius was least of all prone to accept, being trained in the fairway of the ancient tradition. Synesius interpreted the end as a partial, not absolute event, so far as the higher entities should survive, when bringing sparks from the Divine. Concerning the Christian idea of Good (χάρις), it was mentioned in letters 147 and 41 (57), but its importance for Synesius was lesser than for the Fathers of the Church.

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[66] According to Barbanti, the hymns of Synesius were Christian in their form and pagan, when concerning their content; Di Pasquale Barbanti, *Filosofia e cultura in Sinesio di Cirene*, 142. I'm prone to support just an opposite conclusion. Neoplatonic (and Chaldean) phraseology has permeated all the hymns, but besides this phraseology, however, we could find relatively clear Christian conceptions as, for example, the redemptive role of God's Son, the Incarnation, the relationship among the hypostaseis of the Holy Trinity, and finally, the fate of the souls in the underworld.

There is no chain-like descent from God to the higher and lower entities in so far as God is everywhere, in every created being. At the same time, God is beyond every being so that beings can receive participation only through His Good Will. This is the statement, which summarizes the Christian teaching of the Cappadocians as a result of their disputes with the Arians and Eunomeans. Although supporting orthodoxy and the general Christian outlook, Synesius stood apart from this trend, staking more on the divine onset, deeply hidden in the soul, which like a spark, kindles the will for living in God and wisdom. Thus, he supported the human initiative towards the Divine more than expecting God's Will to fall on men. As a defender of intellectual freedom, the man from Cyrene would not like to be set in the chains of strict definitions.[67] That is why he so painfully hesitated before accepting the bishopric as a new role, which he was not eager to play, but God showed him that he would have to. For souls fell down because of free will, but for Synesius this was an unhappy event of merging with filthy matter. He personally wanted to keep his soul clean and intact, but the new obligations made this intention impossible.[68]

In conclusion, I would say that, even towards this world of ours, Synesius was not always so negatively predisposed. How can we explain otherwise his humanistic attitude, his appreciation of the weal of life: books, hunting dogs, family, friends, even the social burdens, when it is the result of God's Will and his own resolution.

Finally, I shall permit myself to consider Synesius as one of the *Fathers of Byzantinism* for three main reasons: his skillful melting of pagan and Christian motifs in his writing, his contribution to Christian Hellenism in a cultural form and to Christian Neoplatonism in a philosophical manner and finally his political theories which bridged the old Hellenistic examples and the typical Byzantine doctrine in the structure of which the author from Cyrene occupied a very important place.

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[67] *Dion, or how to live according to his ideal* is a nice piece of polemic literature with a clear message for more education and freedom. See my article, Dimitrov, "Dio of Synesius," 8:165–217 [in Bulgarian, with a translation of the treatise].

[68] As it became obvious from the *Letter 105*.

DAMASCIUS AND THE *COLLECTIO PHILOSOPHICA* A CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES IN THE NEOPLATONIC TRADITION[1]

Georges Leroux

The history of the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* has benefited in recent years from the work of scholars mostly interested in literary matters, and the importance of the Library as an institution where philological tools were developed for the transmission of texts has been duly stressed. Although our knowledge of the content of the first Library remains very partial, we know from later editions of such classical works as the Greek tragedies that the Library served not only as a conservation deposit, but also as an institution that we could identify today as a scholarly edition program. This, already, is much clear from the founding work of P. M. Fraser on the Ptolemaic period,[2] and when we turn to the transmission of philosophical texts, we are entitled to work our way towards a similar hypothesis. The Library must have played a crucial role in the process of editing the texts that would become later part of the philosophical canon of the schools. We are well acquainted with the Platonic tradition that was very lively in Alexandria from the beginning to the end,[3] and we know from both pagan and Christian authors that philosophical Platonism was the foundation of the schools in the city with no interruption from Philo to Hierocles; and from this starting point we can suggest that the Platonic corpus of texts and

[1] I wish to thank Dr. Richard Goulet, from the CNRS in Paris, who read an earlier version of this essay and was kind enough to comment on many aspects of the discussion. In a forthcoming essay (see *infra*, note 31), he discusses the formation of philosophical libraries in Late Antiquity, and he brings forward important new results on the transmission of philosophical texts. He also discusses the Library of Caesarea, see *infra*, note 56. I am of course fully responsible for all that remains speculative in my effort to grasp the phenomenon of school libraries in their relation to institutional or civic libraries such as the *Alexandrina*.

[2] Fraser, "Alexandrian Scholarship," in *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 447–478.

[3] See Whittaker, "Platonic Philosophy in the Early Centuries of the Empire," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. Temporini and Haase, (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1987), vol. 2, bd. 36, 1, 81–123.

commentaries was part of the scholarly enterprise in the Library from the beginning to the end. The other hypothesis, suggesting that these philosophical texts were confined to the schools where they were matter of study and debate, seems less plausible than the one we are about to discuss here. We are also aware of the importance of the Aristotelian tradition, since the Library owes its very origin to a disciple of Aristotle, and although there is still much discussion on the influence of the philosophical program of the Lyceum on the research program of the first Library, this influence cannot be underestimated.

The question I wish to discuss is the following: what knowledge concerning the fate of the later Library, from the fourth to the sixth centuries A.D., can we gain from a study of the transmission of the philosophical texts discussed in the schools at that period? To begin with, I would like to put before our eyes the great figure of the philosopher Damascius, who was born in Damascus in the mid fifth century (c. 460) and came to study in Alexandria when he was sill young.[4] He is the author of a *Treatise on the First Principles*, which came down to us complete and is an important example of philosophical transmission for our subject. He was living in Athens for sometime, most probably a few years already, when Proclus died in 485, but like Hierocles, who lived and taught before him, he was trained and began teaching in Alexandria. He was a master of rhetorics, and had studied under Theon (fl. 464) in Alexandria.[5] There is some debate concerning the reasons behind his decision to leave Alexandria for Athens, since the growing influence of the Christian schools cannot be considered a clear motivation. There he converted to philosophy, in the year 491/2, under the influence of Isidorus. For some time, he studied under Marinus and Zenodotus. As we know, after the famous Justinian decree of 529, he

[4] On the life and works of Damascius, see in the first place, Philippe Hoffmann, *DPA*, s.v. "Damascius," D 3, 2:541–593. This article gives all the evidence and presents a complete bibliography; it stands by itself as an independent monograph. The text of the *Life of Isidorus* is known to us through seven hundred fragments, preserved in part by Photius and for the remaining by the Suda, and must have been written, according to Westerink, between the death of Ammonius after 517 A.D. and the death of Theodoric, 526 A.D. See the edition by Zintzen, *Damascii Vitae Isidori reliquiae* (1967). An English translation with notes is available in the edition by Polymnia Athanassiadi (1999), published under another title transmitted by the tradition, *Philosophical History*; see also an interesting review of this edition by Brisson, "Dernier anneau de la chaîne d'or," 269–282. In this review, Brisson discusses several aspects of the life of Damascius.

[5] Photius *Bibliotheca* Codex 181, 126b40–127a14, where we can read that Damascius was in charge of rhetorical formation during nine years.

fled with many friends to Persia, where his presence is attested in 532. A full biography of this extraordinary figure has yet to be written.[6]

Why should we turn to Damascius to discuss the question of the Library in Alexandria in Late Antiquity? The main reason is very simple: the most important works of Damascius, his *Treatise on the First Principles* and his commentary on the *Parmenides* have been transmitted in a Greek manuscript that once belonged to Cardinal Bessarion, the *Marcianus graecus (246)*, and that was part of a collection of a group of canonical texts in the Platonic tradition, later known as the *Collectio philosophica*. What is exactly this *Collectio philosophica*?[7] It is a great collection of Platonic and Neoplatonic texts, but not exclusively, that has survived from the Alexandrian school, including Plato, Plotinus and Proclus, as well as the great series of late commentaries from Simplicius and Damascius. The group of manuscripts assembled in the collection is made up of six manuscripts from one and the same hand, as well as another group of thirteen others, coming out of the same scriptorium. The content of the *Collectio* can be described with a fair degree of precision,[8] but this is not our topic in this paper: our question is how this collection could have been copied by a Byzantine scholar in the second half of the ninth century, without having been first assembled at a much earlier date in Alexandria? The process of collecting these manuscripts is of course a matter of debate, but the unity of content is made clearer when we present the whole as a collection assembled for teaching purposes.

In the present paper, we shall suggest that it was assembled so that Damascius could bring it from Alexandria to Athens in the late fifth century, from where it was at a later date brought to Constantinople. The argument for the Alexandrian origin has already been put forward by L. G. Westerink,[9] and of course other hypotheses would be worth discussing; for example, that some of these manuscripts could have been copied in libraries in Constantinople. What do we know about the transfer from Alexandria to Athens, since some of these texts are considered to be later than Damascius? Should we try to isolate the

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[6] See for a preliminary survey of the material Trabattoni, "Per una biografia di Damascio," 179–201.

[7] For a short introduction, see Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 37ff.

[8] See the discussion of L. G. Westerink, in his edition prepared with J. Combès; Damascius, *Traité des premiers principes*, 1:LXXIII–LXXX.

[9] Ibid., 1:LXXVI.

kernel of the collection in Alexandrian teaching? Another question is the following: what sort of library did Damascius have access to in Alexandria in order, if our hypothesis is sound, to put up this collection? To answer this question, which has a great significance in relation to the whole question of the transmission of philosophical canons in this late period, we must try to understand the variety of institutions which gave rise to collections of this sort. The present essay is of course an attempt to follow a path in the dark, and in doing so we try to shed some light on the hypothesis put forward by L. G. Westerink in his introduction to his edition of the *Treatise* of Damascius. One is invited to read this essay as an effort in speculative history, since so many elements remain obscure, but we do think that in the process of analysing the knowledge we can gain from these texts, some new understanding of what a library might have been in these later times can be at least put forward as a new hypothesis.

1. Our first question is to assert the philosophical background of Damascius in Alexandria and his connection with Neoplatonic circles. Born at a date near 460, he was a close friend of Aedesia,[10] the widow of Hermeias,[11] who had been a great commentator and whose commentary on the *Phaedo* had been transmitted to us in complete form. The art of Platonic commentary was the center of philosophical teaching, and Hermeias mastered it beautifully.[12] This Hermeias must have been the most famous Alexandrian teacher, after having been trained in Athens under Syrianus. Damascius of course knew very well their two sons, Ammonius and Heliodorus, who also became philosophy teachers in Alexandria after having been trained in Athens under Proclus. Aedesia herself is an intriguing figure; she had been proposed as a wife to Proclus, who preferred to remain single. We get all this information from a life of the philosopher Isidorus, written by Damascius[13] and although there is still some discussion on the exact chronology of his philosophical formation and the succession of his masters, the portrait of Damascius as a philosopher emerges with clarity: he was trained in

[10] See R. Goulet, *DPA*, s.v. "Aidésia d'Alexandrie," A 55, vol. 1, who quotes Damascius *Vita Isidori* frag. 124.

[11] See R. Goulet, *DPA*, s.v. "Hermeias d'Alexandrie," H 78, 3:639.

[12] See on this matter the introduction of Westerink, "Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions to their Commentaries," 325–348.

[13] On Theodoric 526. See Zintzen, *Damascii Vitae Isidori reliquiae*.

all the main fields of rhetorics, science and dialectics, following what seems to have been an ideal curriculum in that period.[14] When we study this period, which seems filled with an impression of intense anxiety to maintain the pagan heritage in a Christian society such as Alexandria, we cannot escape the fact that most of these figures lived in two different worlds at the same time: Athens and Alexandria. They seem to have been able to travel, frequently and without difficulty, moving from a Christian society to a city where pagan thought was still flourishing. Recent findings, for example in the House of the Philosophers in Athens before 529, suggest a certain prosperity of the School[15] and a feeling that it was not about to vanish.

Proclus was of course the great Athenian figure, but all his pupils traveled to Alexandria and came back. Isidorus for example, had been mandated from Alexandria to make sure that the succession of the Platonic school should proceed correctly and the story of how he declined to stay on in Athens, remains obscure. Later, Damascius himself was mandated from Athens to go back to him in Alexandria and try to persuade him to come back to take responsibility of the School in Athens,[16] mainly because Marinus' health was declining. As we learn from the *Life* written by Damascius, Isidorus did not stay long in Athens, most probably in the company of Damascius, who was like him much displeased with the prevalence of theurgy in the Athenian school.[17] At a much later date, Damascius traveled again to Athens to assume the leadership of the Academy, somewhere around 515.[18] There must have been in Athens a feeling that the Alexandrian schools, despite their vitality, were more in danger than the Athenian

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[14] According to Tardieu, *Paysages reliques*, 21f.

[15] Philippe Hoffmann has discussed the evidence, see his article in the *DPA*, based on recent archaeological surveys in Athens, particularly on the houses of the philosophers and the much discussed "House of Proclus;" Hoffmann, *DPA*, s.v. "Damascius," D 3, 2:548–555.

[16] This trip has been the object of some discussion, after the publication of the study of M. Tardieu (1990), who argues for another interpretation of the motives behind the decision of traveling on land; according to him, it was more from a desire to visit a number of pagan shrines along the road through Syria than the project of getting back to academic responsibilities in Athens, that motivated the long travel extending to eight months. See also Brisson, "Dernier anneau de la chaîne d'or," 273f.

[17] Dam. *Isid.* frag. 292.6–11. A fragment that J. Combès compares with a note in Dam. Commentary on the *Phaedo* 1.172.1–5, where the philosopher distinguishes between the two traditions: the philosophers, like Porphyry, Plotinus and others, and the hieratics, like Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus.

[18] See Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy*, 155ff.

Academy. The stories about violence with the Christians[19] had certainly made their way to Athens, but the Greek city was not itself free from such an ideological conflict, at least of what we know from the story of a man like Hierocles.[20]

Let us go back to the youth of Damascius in Alexandria: as already mentioned, he was first trained in the field of rhetorics, and around the age of thirty, he converted to philosophy. We must try to figure what this conversion meant: of course, it must have meant that he started to assist in the teaching of a master, but in which institutional context? What exactly was a school in those times, and how did the students gain access to the texts? What were the relations of the philosophical schools with other institutions, like libraries, if anything had survived from the 391 destruction of the Serapeum?[21] Poetry and rhetoric had been in Alexandria the main research field of the Mouseion, if we trace it back to the Hellenistic period. All the great scholars, even if they were mostly preoccupied with astronomy and physics, had an inclination towards literary learning. But the connection between the sciences in their research remains for us quite a mystery. For example, when we try to represent the scholarly enterprise in Alexandria, even if as early as the foundation years of the Ptolemaic rule,[22] we still have no model of the structure of knowledge like the model inherited from the Aristotelian classification of the sciences. According to some scholars, philosophy was not an important part in the first period of the Library, but with the renaissance movement initiated within the Academy in Athens, things became different.[23] The testimony of Cicero on Antiochus of Ascalon[24] allows us to see in him maybe the first figure

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[19] A very impressive portrait of Alexandria in those times, written from the perspective of archaeological evidence can be found in the work of Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*. In this study, Haas relies, among other findings, on the work of the Polish team on the amphitheatres, which can be viewed as lecture halls for the philosophers of the schools. See Rodziewicz, "Late Roman Auditoria in Alexandria," 269–279.

[20] See my discussion of the travels of Hierocles, "Hiéroclès d'Alexandrie: Pluralisme et violence à la fin de l'Antiquité;" Boulad-Ayoub and Cazzaniga, *Traces de l'autre*, 299–320.

[21] See on the later history of the Library, and especially on the so called 'Daughter Library' the study of El-Abbadi, *Vie et destin de l'ancienne bibliothèque d'Alexandrie*, 160–167.

[22] See Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:480ff.

[23] See El-Abbadi, *Vie et destin de l'ancienne bibliothèque d'Alexandrie*, 124ff.

[24] On this important figure, see Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy*. Antiochus was in Alexandria in the years 84 to 87, approximately.

of the inspiration of later Alexandrian philosophy, which is a preoccupation with the synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian perspectives. The main structure seems to have been Platonic, with a bias for astronomy, but as time passed, the integration of the Aristotelian corpus leads us to the curriculum of the Neoplatonic schools, as we can reconstruct it from the order of reading the Platonic dialogues.[25] This uninterrupted history of the philosophical commentary rested on a canon formed by convergent traditions. This leads us in turn to the question of the work on the texts inside the schools. Damascius himself seems to have written his commentaries on Plato in Athens, but other parts of his work stem from his teaching in Alexandria.

We still have to explore the evolution of the Library in Alexandria, from a research perspective: for example, how is it that an institution which was started as a scientific enterprise, dominated by the Aristotelian ideals of natural science through the inspiration of Demetrius and the *scholarchs* of the Lyceum, opened at a later period to literary matters? This is a first difficult question, but the second is even more complex: how is it that philosophy as a discipline seems to have rapidly severed its links with the Mouseion and led an independent life in private circles?[26] What can we know of the relations between these philosophical circles and the Library before its final destruction under Christian rule, around 391? as studied by Garth Fowden.[27] Was there after 391 any remnant of a scholarly institution able to work in connection with the philosophical circles? Since the Library was a state supported institution, and was led by great head-librarians, such as Callimachus, it is most important to try to understand how a collection such as the *Collectio philosophica* could have been assembled without the support of the *Alexandrina* when it was still functioning? The collection was most certainly gathered after the destruction of the Serapeum Library, but my suggestion is that it could rely on the wider collections that influenced the schools at the period that would stimulate their interaction. Alexandria was a city of books and reading, it was also a city of debate and learning and the later period cannot be understood without a constant reference to the role of the Library before 391 A.D. It is altogether wholly improbable that

[25] See Festugière, "Ordre de lecture des dialogues de Platon aux V^e^–VI^e^ siècles," 281–296.

[26] See the stimulating description of Fowden, "Platonist Philosopher and His Circle in Late Antiquity," 359–383.

[27] Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society," 48–51.

the work being done inside the philosophical circles would have been totally disconnected from the activities of the main Library, whatever that institution had become during the fourth century.

2. So much for the problems, all of them quite awesome, but we can still try our best to get a glimpse into the intellectual life of this late period and for this purpose, we must now turn to the discussion of the transmission of the philosophical canons. Damascius was trained in literary matters; we know that he could comment on Demosthenes and also on the *Treatise on style*[28] by Hermogenes. In his *Life of Isidorus*, he alludes to his respect for the ancient tradition of Egyptian wisdom, and we also know that under Marinus, he gave himself a very good training in geometry and other sciences. The wide extension of his learning is of course very impressive and since he was always in contact with Isidorus, it is only natural, as an Alexandrian, that he should have been mandated to accompany his master from Alexandria to Athens to succeed Marinus. As we have just recalled, they finally made the trip together through Syria and Asia Minor. At that time, the Athenian school was in a sort of philosophical crisis, due to some excess in the practice of theurgy, and Isidorus, trained in the most classical manner, must have been shocked when he arrived there. The story goes that he was much displeased with what he saw in Athens and soon traveled back to Alexandria, where the practice of a more spiritually orientated Platonism was still encouraged by the masters. There is still much discussion on this orientation, and there is no reason to look at this difference in philosophical practice as a difference separating an Athenian and an Alexandrian school, but it must have influenced the form of the teaching and the relation to texts.[29] Damascius followed him to Alexandria, where he resumed work with Ammonius on the *Physics* of Ptolemaeus. It is during this period that we must examine with utter scrutiny the way the *Collectio philosophica* was assembled, because after this period, he himself was called to Athens as a *scholarch*, and here we might suggest that he assembled the collection for that reason, with a prevision of his long stay in Athens. On what type of resources could he rely for that task, if not on the existing libraries in Alexandria? At this

[28] See the discussion of his formation in Hoffmann, *DPA*, s.v. "Damascius," D 3.

[29] This discussion stems mainly from a comparison between Simplicius and Hierocles; see the important discussion in I. Hadot, who gives all the necessary background; Hadot, *Problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin*.

point, we cannot prove beyond doubt that there was still an important central Library remaining in the city,[30] but we can suggest that most schools had their collections completed and copied from originals that were first in the Library.

3. At that time, i.e. around the end of the fourth century, much of the literature that has not survived for us was still available. We can estimate that around one text out of forty has been preserved and transmitted to us.[31] This is of course a very imprecise estimate, drawn mainly from the corpus of historical works, but we can think of it as a proportion applicable to all categories. When we read that the destruction of the Serapeum at the end of the fourth century resulted in the burning of many pagan texts, we can of course only try to measure the loss, but we can also suggest that many collections had already been copied from originals in the Library before its ultimate destruction. But we have very few mentions of planned destruction of texts in Antiquity and as the recent work of Christopher Haas on Alexandria has shown,[32] the city was known for its reputation both of political intensity and ideological tolerance. Emperors like Constantius and Theodosius II are also known for having taken measures to ensure the protection of texts. But there is another factor that has to be mentioned to complicate matters: during the period from the fourth to the sixth centuries, a great amount of the texts that had been collected in the libraries on rolls of papyrus were copied on parchment codex. This was of course the main material condition of transmission, most probably the most important factor of the structure of new collections:[33] the texts that we have not retained must have perished more for material reasons than planned destruction, especially the ones which were not copied. If the papyrus copy had not been copied on parchment, there is slight chance that it

[30] On this question, see El-Abbadi, *Vie et destin de l'ancienne bibliothèque d'Alexandrie*, 162. The discussion of the testimony of Aphtonius of Ephesus, after his visit to the Serapeum which he described as containing study rooms which were proof of the philosophical glory of Alexandria is very important.

[31] See the forthcoming essay by Richard Goulet, "Conservation et la transmission des textes philosophiques grecs," 29–61, who discusses the conditions of transmission of philosophical texts in Late Antiquity, with an interesting chart on the proportions of texts that have been transmitted according to schools. Although he has some interesting remarks on the *Collectio philosophica*, his main focus lies on the Library of Caesarea and its neoplatonic background.

[32] Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*.

[33] See under the direction of Cavallo, *Biblioteche nel mondo antico e medievale*.

would survive. There is also at a later date the change from uncial to minuscule. Since we know that, from the beginning, the *Alexandrina* had collected in every field of knowledge and that the collection was on rolls, we can ask what portion of that collection survived the repeated assaults on the Library? If we go back to Demetrius, we note that he figured that a universal library would require at least 500,000 rolls. Crews of copyists and translators were hired to transmit into Greek all the collection. This story has been told in the works of the main historians of the Library,[34] and we shall now concentrate on the consequences for philosophy.

4. We must now try to figure out what the place of philosophy was in this collection. We know that, in the beginning of the Hellenistic period, Theophrastus bequeathed his collection to Neleus, a disciple of Aristotle, but we know that due to his conflict with Straton of Lampsacus, he sold only part of Aristotle's library to the *Alexandrina*. Therefore the nature of the first philosophical collection is already problematic. When we study the Catalogues (*Pinakes*) of Callimachus, we notice more of an inclination towards the literary disciplines in the formation of the first collections.[35] There are six sections for poetry, and five for prose. But as many scholars have noted, the Aristotelian scientific project, as it had been elaborated in the main part of the philosopher's work concerning physics, seems to have been lost in the process. All that was transmitted through Demetrius was split into different categories, and philosophy, comprising dialectics and physics as such, was not a part of these categories. A close study of the redaction of the catalogues, from the doxographical tradition, up to Aristophanes and Didymus, shows us in fact that literary texts had gained the privilege of being placed in the kernel of conservation. This we know for example from the description of Diodorus Siculus, who got most of his information

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[34] El-Abbadi, *Vie et destin de l'ancienne bibliothèque d'Alexandrie*.

[35] See ibid., 103–142. In his important study, *History of classical Scholarship* (Pfeiffer 1968, 123–151), Pfeiffer discusses the work and method of Callimachus; he also discusses a fragment of a work of Callimachus, *Against Praxiphanes*, a peripatetic philosopher who is quoted as his master by an ancient source, the *Life of Aratus*. He summarizes his view as follows: "The learned collections and also the *Pinakes* may give the impression of being rather Aristotelian in subject-matter, despite their new purpose; but in literary criticism Aristotle's theory and Callimachus' views are plainly incompatible" (ibid., 136). For a more recent discussion and summary, see R. Goulet, *DPA*, s.v. "Callimaque de Cyrène," C 22, 2:171–174.

from double copies of the *Alexandrina* original, that had been stored in the Temple of Serapis. Later, after the Roman conquest, the description of Strabo, studied in Alexandria under the patronage of Xenarchus, an Aristotelian, confirms this orientation towards the literary commentary. This description is also confirmed, as the historian Luciano Canfora has already noted, by a mention of Posidonius that in the stoic milieu of Roman expatriates, there was a feeling of surprise. If the library of Aristotle was the kernel of the *Alexandrina*, why is it that the Library apparently became so indifferent to philosophy?

5. The answer to this question is not so simple, since the facts tend to show that this was not quite the case. We know from Plutarch, a Platonic philosopher, priest in Delphi in the second century, that there was widespread concern about the Aristotelian legacy up to his time. Plutarch tells us the story of Sulla, and how coming to Athens, he took for himself the library of Apellicon of Teos, the Aristotelian philosopher who had just then died. This explains why the collection ended up in Rome, where it was edited by Andronicus of Rhodes.[36] I do not wish to discuss in detail the subject of the Aristotelian collection, but only to stress the fact that philosophical preoccupation was not forgotten with regard to libraries at that time. Now, why should it have been forgotten? Because, from the beginning in the Hellenistic period of formation in Athens, the structure of the philosophical schools was different according to each of them: some schools like the Stoic and the Aristotelian gave priority to erudition and scientific projects, this orientation resulting in the priority of physics; while others like the Epicurean and Platonic schools were oriented more towards spiritual experience and inner wisdom, which led to a more metaphysical and ethical enterprise. This remains of course a matter of priority or accent, and all philosophers did not practice their discipline with the same fidelity to programs of reading and teaching.

The place of books in different traditions might have differed widely: the Aristotelian canon is much more important in the perspective of controlling the accuracy and breadth of the *Alexandrina* project, since we can try to measure by comparison the lists of the Librarians and the other lists in circulation. We must then presume that the Library,

[36] This part of the history of the Library has been told in the book of El-Abbadi, *Vie et destin de l'ancienne bibliothèque d'Alexandrie*, 95–99.

in its first phases and until the first destruction, played a great role at least in the transmission of the Aristotelian canon and the expansion of the Aristotelian research program. But what was its role in the Platonic tradition, for which Alexandria as a centre of schools was so widely known at a later period? In the case of the Neoplatonic tradition, beginning in the third century A.D., it seems that books were widely available: the greatest testimony to this is, of course, the *Vita Plotini* by Porphyry, where the Syrian philosopher takes great care in detailing the works available to the school in Rome when he was taking part in the discussions led by Plotinus.[37]

If the books were available, we must then draw a distinction to try to understand their preservation and the principles of their collection: some of them were only copies circulating mainly in the schools; others were preserved in public libraries as in the *Alexandrina*, where they were classified in collections. On the basis of wide evidence, we must ask: first, what were the relations, if any, between the schools and the Library? Second, which of these institutions succeeded most in transmitting texts to later generations? According to some historians, the schools might have possessed smaller collections of texts, and in most cases already very specialized, but since they were isolated, and in no way linked to institutional or political power, they must have been less at risk in the transmission of texts.[38] They would, for example, not be prime targets for fire or assault. In other words, a collection such as the *Collectio philosophica* would have been preserved mainly because of its presence in a scholarly milieu, otherwise it would have vanished. Here we must bring in the figure of Damascius.

6. The Alexandrian school is mainly a Neoplatonic school, and its most important characteristic is the abundance of commentary activity as a philosophical exercise necessary for the practitioners, young and older.[39]

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[37] Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* has been edited with an important series of studies by Luc Brisson, and a group of scholars. See Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, "Arrière-plan scolaire de la *Vie de Plotin*," in *Vie de Plotin*, ed. Brisson, 1:277–280.

[38] See Canfora, *bibliothèque d'Alexandrie et l'histoire des textes*, 44, 55; and the note of R. Goulet, "Conservation et la transmission des textes philosophiques grecs," who writes: "Les fonds des écoles philosophiques, plus spécialisés et plus restreints, étaient moins susceptibles de disparaître au hasard d'un siège. Ils pouvaient être plus facilement reconstitués."

[39] See Hoffmann, "Fonction des prologues exégétiques dans la pensée pédagogique néoplatonicienne," 209–245.

Now, this commentary bears mainly on the Platonic and Aristotelian corpus, of which the Neoplatonic school examined the coherence and would tend to demonstrate the harmony. Their main goal was to assert that there was no contradiction between the two canonical traditions, following the model that was set for example in Porphyry and Dexippus.[40] Now, as Richard Goulet has noted,[41] following a suggestion by Luciano Canfora, we see no text from the stoic tradition, nor from the Garden of Epicurus in the transmitted corpus of philosophical texts at this later date. According to this scholar, this is proof enough that the tradition does not stem from an institutional library such as the *Alexandrina*, but directly from the schools. The tradition of texts would have been much richer if it had been derived from institutional libraries.

This is a very provocative statement, but can we understand why this domination of two traditions imposed itself as the main characteristic of later Greek philosophy? And can we infer from this domination anything that could lead us to a more precise description of what was collected in central institutions and what was gathered only in schools? Tragic as it is, the disappearance of all other traditions, including the Presocratics that we know mainly through the quotations of Simplicius in his commentary on the *Physics* and on the *De Caelo*, is not to be explained solely by the selection of the Neoplatonic school. We have to consider on a wider scale the convergence of the *Alexandrina* scholarship and the preferences in the schools. And here, it seems to me clear enough that the *Alexandrina* Library, which from the beginning had been inspired by an Aristotelian program, at first mainly scientific and in a second phase, transformed into a more literary program, was also subject to a more complex evolution at a later date, especially during the period which saw the flowering of Neoplatonic philosophy. In this perspective, the process which has still to be explained is the philosophical activity of the Alexandrian scholars as commentators on physical matters: in my opinion, as the Hierocles and the Damascius later examples show clearly, it is the interest of the Alexandrians in cosmological and metaphysical matters that contributed the most to the constitution of the *Collectio philosophica*. The constitution of a body of doctrines later known as '*Neoplatonic*' relies mainly on a systematic view of the *Principles* and their relation with the *Universe*. And in this

[40] See the discussion in Hadot, *Problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin*, 73ff.
[41] R. Goulet, "Conservation et la transmission des textes philosophiques grecs."

enterprise, they have certainly benefited from the conservation activity of the *Alexandrina* from the beginning to the end, where they could rely on perfect copies of canonical texts of both the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. The example of Galen of Pergamum is a very good illustration of this, since his commentaries, written from a syncretic perspective, all bear on scientific matters (e.g., the creation of the soul in the body according to the *Timaeus*, the natural faculties, medicine, etc.) and all have been preserved. Many commentaries, of course, were lost, but when we look at the tradition of commentaries, we must note how they bear on the structure of the doctrine.

Can we be more precise on this process? Alexandria had remained the most active city in matters of philosophy, and the interaction between the Serapeum (the external Library for scholars), the Mouseion, as described by scholars like P. M. Fraser, and the philosophical fraternities or private schools could not have been anything else than very intense. We know that this way of combining institutions of learning towards better scholarship and spiritual proficiency was the trademark of Alexandria, and even after the Christian destruction it remained an ideal, as shown for example, in the story of the philosopher Hypatia.[42]

Now the process of conservation must distinguish between preserving the ancient copies, or archetypes, and working on the edition of newer copies: the *Alexandrina* must have been, with the passage of time, first and foremost a Library of conservation, where the Librarians kept busy with collecting and cataloguing. On the other hand, the schools needed new copies for their incoming students and therefore the Library had to edit these texts and furnish new collections leading to the constitution of canons. Since none, if we except Herculanum,[43] of these libraries has survived, we have to reconstruct the process though the extant collections, even small like the *Collectio philosophica*, and mention of the process in extant literature.

For example, we know that after the burning of the Libray of the Portico of Octavia in Rome, in 80 A.D., Domitian sent a delegation to Alexandria to get new copies of quality. In the fourth century, Themistius, a Neoplatonic philosopher, wrote an apology of libraries (c. 357) in his fourth oration, *Discourse to the Emperor*.[44] He argues

[42] On this exceptional figure, see Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*.
[43] See the recent work by Sider, *Library of the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum*.
[44] Themistius, *Orationes quae supersunt*, ed. Schenkl, Downey, and Norman.

in favor of the transmission of Plato and Aristotle, and he calls for the responsibility of the Emperor to gain for these works immortality through the founding of libraries. This is a good indication of the role of institutional libraries in later times. It is therefore by no means easy to say that the transmission of texts resulted mainly, or exclusively, from the selection of the schools. In the case of Alexandria, it is clear enough that the interest for Stoic or Epicurean philosophy had never penetrated the program of the Library as profoundly as the Platonic-Aristotelian, and therefore the absence of their tradition in the extant literature is not the result of the selection of the Neoplatonic school, but the combined effect of ideological factors in the intellectual life of the City from the beginning to the end of the fifth century. Zeno, Chrysippus and Epicurus were probably collected much more seriously in Rome. Diogenes Laertius who has given us complete lists of their works enables us to measure, by comparison with the Platonic-Aristotelian canon, the vast amount of philosophical literature which does not seem to have ever traveled to Alexandria. The same can be said for Johannes Stobaeus, a compiler posterior to Themistius, who quotes Epictetus for example. These authors were not important in Alexandria, and this observation applies not only to the schools, but also to the institutions of the Library. This comparison between different traditions is of vast importance when we turn to the discussion of the conservation of the texts of the Platonic-Aristotelian canon, including the commentaries. We cannot identify which texts of this canon were formally present in the *Alexandrina*, but we must surmise that most of them were, if only from the study of the subject matter of the commentaries.

We must now turn back to the constitution of the *Collectio philosophica*. We know from the fragments of a lost commentary of Porphyry on Aristotle's *Categories* that the perspective of harmonizing Plato and Aristotle had been for a long time an Alexandrian practice, even a principle for philosophical exercise.[45] Porphyry takes it back to Ammonius Sakkas, the Alexandrian master of both Plotinus and Origenes the Platonician, and the tradition shows that it was transmitted to Athens with the help of all the Alexandrian scholars who traveled and taught there, as did at a later date Damascius. This principle explains for

[45] This position we can read in a Porphyrian commentary, written by Dexippus; see on the question the discussion of Hadot, "Harmonie des philosophies de Plotin et d'Aristote selon Porphyre dans le commentaire de Dexippe sur les Catégories," 31–47.

example the constitution of the tradition of the commentary on the *Categories*, with the preservation of the important work by Simplicius based on a tradition of more than twenty philosophers between Plotinus and himself. This commentary is the work that exemplifies the most, the ideal of harmonization that was typical of Alexandria and then transmitted to Athens. It is then by no means surprising that the *Collectio philosophica* would borrow this principle from Alexandria to transfer it to Athens. This seems to have been the work of Damascius, or at least took place through his influence. One could object that this collection shows few traces of some great Neoplatonic scholars, like Iamblichus, or literary traditions so important for the Neoplatonic schools, like the *Orphic Poems* or the *Chaldean Oracles*. Both were not transmitted directly, but only by quotations. How can we explain that they were not copied at the same time and integrated into the *Collectio*?

The study of the philosophical work of Damascius is made rather easy by the fact that many of his great treatises and commentaries have been preserved. Even if Photius does not seem to have read or taken any interest in these great works and restricted his reference to Damascius to the *Life of Isidorus*, we must take into serious consideration, following an indication by L. G. Westerink, that the greater part of the *Collectio philosophica* was copied in the second half of the ninth century in Constantinople.[46]

To study this in detail, we have to examine the whole series of manuscripts in the *Collectio philosophica*, and this is beyond our immediate purpose here, but we can rely on the study of the *Marcianus graecus (246)*, by L. G. Westerink, or of the *Parisinus graecus (1962)*, by John Whittaker.[47] In this latter case, the table shows most of the collection: beginning with Alcinous, the Lessons of Gaius, and others up to Damascius, Olympiodorus, the Proclus commentaries and of course Simplicius. This manuscript (*Parisinus graecus*) plays an important part in my analysis concerning the problem of transmission, since it was copied like the other parts of the collection in the ninth century, in Constantinople, from originals copied in Alexandria at an earlier date.[48]

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[46] See Westerink, "Rätsel des untergründigen Neuplatonismus," 105–123.

[47] Whittaker, "Parisinus graecus 1962," a series of three articles published first in *Phoenix* 28 (1974), for the study of Albinus, no. 1 and 2, and 31 (1977), for the study of Janus Lascaris, then reprinted in 1984 in: ibid., *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought*, 320–423.

[48] See on this movement the important article of Irigoin, "Survie et renouveau de la littérature antique à Constantinople (IX^{e} siècle)," 189–192.

Now, let us follow the main thread of the argument: if the selection of the collection had been purely a matter of school preference, we would not have found in it the early Hellenistic Platonists, such as Alcinous, who were held in low esteem by a man like Proclus and by all later Scholarchs who would have favored Plotinus as a starting point; and even for Plotinus there is a widespread perplexity stemming from what seems on his part (Proclus) a real indifference to Plotinus. The collection then must have had its starting point in an institutional Library in Alexandria, and if not, in pagan circles in Alexandria.[49] Some of them were linked to schools, others might have been religious. Now, the date of the presence of Damascius in Alexandria and his preparation to travel to Athens coincides perfectly with the copy of the originals and scholia in Alexandria. The hypothesis of a copy made in Athens, before the final form of the collection in Constantinople, is also part of this complex story.

The modern editor of Damascius, L. G. Westerink, cannot but suggest to look in this direction, and this is exactly where we started from: he suggests that the whole of the philosophical library, that is the library of the school of Hermeias and Ammonius, could have been transferred from Alexandria to Constantinople by Stephanus of Byzantium in the early seventh century.[50] According to him, the copy was ordered by a Byzantine scholar, whom we cannot identify. But one could object that the collection might have existed independently of the command of some later patron, and that its composition indicates an earlier process of assembly, that is the need to put together, in order to save them for further transmission, the kernel of the Neoplatonic canon. One could also suggest that such a collection was intended mainly for the Athenian School, where Alexandrian scholars traveled quite frequently. Damascius seems to have been the right person to take the responsibility of doing so, if only from the fact that the collection included all of his main treatises. The commentaries of philosophers who wrote at a later date might have been added either in Athens or Constantinople.

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[49] This much has been suggested by Whittaker, "Proclus and the Middle Platonists," 281.

[50] Westerink, in his introduction to his edition of the treatise of Damascius on the *Frist Principles*, argues in favor of an already assembled collection, since it represents "une collection de copies très soignées d'un fonds existant." Damascius, *Traité des premiers principes*, 1:LXXVII.

There is a very strong argument to follow this path: it is the work of Damascius himself as a philosopher, as P. Hoffmann has rightly stressed, to reinforce the coherence and the rigor of the Platonic tradition. Was he not the philosopher who had worked towards the restoration of the full program of philosophical teaching that is the commentary of the complete list of canonical Platonic dialogues, together with Aristotelian philosophy?[51] In his *Life of Isidorus*, we find a deep interest in the continuity of the School and a plea for responsibility in the process of transmission.[52] We can find a clear example of this process in his commentary on the *Phaedo* (*in Phaedonem*).[53] This series of notes for students was transmitted in a manuscript which was part of the *Collectio philosophica* (*Marcianus graecus*, *196*), and so was also the text of Damascius' *Treatise on the First Principles* and his commentary on the *Parmenides* (*Marcianus graecus*, 246). Of course, one could suggest also that private collections, taken generally and without the consideration of a particular curriculum in the schools, could have been the base of this corpus, and that the elimination of so many traditions cannot be explained only by institutional practices in the Alexandrian scholarly milieu. But when we consider the content of the collection, stemming from the efforts of a ninth-century scholar and great copyist,[54] we cannot avoid the conclusion that the texts copied in these *codices vetustissimi* existed as an assembled whole for a long time, and we must follow the suggestion of Westerink: it must have been the result of an already existing collection, and this collection is of Alexandrian origin. The Plato and Olympiodorus manuscripts must have come from the library of the school of Hermeias and Ammonius, but the rest illustrates the philosophical concerns of the Alexandrian school. Of course, we must surmise that it was at a much earlier date that the collection of the Library (Mouseion and Serapeum) must have granted preference to this type of work over others, but we cannot ascertain the owner of the collection in Constantinople.[55] But in the period in between,

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[51] Hoffmann, *DPA*, s.v. „Damascius," D 3, 2:571, 580ff.

[52] See the discussion of the edition by P. Athanassiadi. Brisson, "Dernier anneau de la chaîne d'or," 269–282.

[53] Westerink, *Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo*, vol. 2, *Damascius*.

[54] Westerink speaks of one principal copyist, leaving open the hypothesis that there might have been several others; see his edition of Damascius. Damascius, *Traité des premiers principes*, 1:LXXVII.

[55] Westerink discusses several possibilities, but he excludes Photius and Arethas, and he presents no clear hypothesis as to who was the patron owner of the collection.

that is from the time of the first Alexandrian Platonic schools and the trip of Damascius to Athens, the preservation of the collection is a direct result of interaction between institutional and school libraries. This conclusion, thin as it may look, is already a research program on the relations between the school libraries, when they were developed for teaching purposes, and the greater Library, since it is during this period that the schools would need good copies of the important works for their use. Where could they find them if not in the Library? This intricate process testifies for the intensity of Alexandrian scholarship during the flourishing period of the Alexandrian Platonic schools, from Plotinus to Damascius. Precise studies of all the manuscripts brought together in the *Collectio philosophica*, together with a historical analysis of the *Life of Isidorus*, should bring more light on this fascinating period of intellectual history.[56]

[56] The parallel example of the Library of Caesarea, founded around 230 by Origenes or Pamphylus, according to a note in a letter of Jerome (*Epistle* 34, *Ad Marcellam*), reinforces our argument: this institutional Library was in fact in relation with the schools. This Library was studied recently by Carriker, *Library of Eusebius of Caesarea* (2003), who suggests that Origenes had established a school in Caesarea, a hypothesis which would deserve a discussion we cannot offer here. In his study, Carriker has shown that the collection of Origenes was transported from Alexandria to Caesarea and copied again there. Part of this collection was of course the whole corpus of Philo, and we learn from Eusebius that Isidorus, the Bishop of Sevilla, speaks of 30,000 volumes in this Library. A comparison with other great Libraries (Pergamon, Athens, Hadriana in Rome and Athens, Constantinople, etc) tells the same story: the number of books is impressive and shows direct relations with contemporary schools. These institutional libraries could not have been put up if they had been without scholarly relations with schools, and conversely the schools could not have gained access to good-quality originals if they could not have relied upon institutional libraries, such as state supported libraries or municipal libraries.

ACADEMIC LIFE OF LATE ANTIQUE ALEXANDRIA: A VIEW FROM THE FIELD

Grzegorz Majcherek

The Alexandrian Library has always been a great, living legend that archaeology has tried vainly to come to terms with. Ever since Mahmoud el-Falaki began a comprehensive digging for ancient remains, the finding of the ruins of the Library has been a challenge, matching that of discovering the tomb of Alexander the Great, and emotions have invariably run high among scholars and the general public laity. Archaeology has proved almost completely powerless in the face of this myth, failing to keep step with changing reality. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina stands rebuilt in new form, as an ultra modern library, yet we are still looking for an answer to a couple of simple questions of key importance: Where was the original Library? And what happened to it ultimately?[1]

It is a great pity that efforts to resolve these two issues have ended in almost total failure for the moment. Neither excavations nor even the relative wealth of historical sources has brought us any closer to solving the mystery. Current views on the subject have never really passed beyond the stage of more or less unproved theories. A find that was the source of hope and controversy in equal degree, a find that had prompted even Mahmoud el-Falaki to suspect that the Ancient Library was situated in the spot where it was discovered, the stone block bearing an inscription of Dioscorides has been shown recently by Roger Bagnall not to have been a book container at all, but simply a base for a statue.[2]

The recent discovery of lecture halls at the Kom el-Dikka site, which has generated much popular interest, has been also hastily and erroneously linked by some journalists with the Library, again raising fruitless

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[1] On the fate of Library in general, cf.: Canfora, *Vanished Library*; El-Abbadi, *Life and Fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria*.

[2] Bagnall, "Dioskourides: Three Rolls," 11–25, with a detailed overview of previous hypotheses.

hopes that it could be found.[3] But even if the discovery does not bring us any closer to determining the actual location of the Library, at least it throws entirely new light on the nature of academic life in Alexandria of Late Antiquity.

The excavations of the joint Polish-Egyptian expedition, working on the site for the past forty plus years, brought to light the only extensive section of ancient urban architecture to be seen in Alexandria to date.[4] Most of the excavated area is occupied by public monuments of the Late Roman age with the bath constituting the main architectural complex. This large, symmetrical edifice designed on a rectangular plan was constructed most probably at the end of the fourth century as an imperial foundation.[5] The huge elevated structure of the cistern that supplied it with water occupies the central part of the site. In the western part of the area, a residential district combining industrial and domestic functions was unearthed.[6]

But perhaps the best advertised of the Kom el-Dikka discoveries was the theatre or to be more precise an odeum opening off a long portico, 180m of which have been explored on the site, running from north to south.[7] It is in this part of the site that a set of surprisingly well preserved lecture halls was recently uncovered.

All of the newly discovered halls line the back wall of the portico, which is in itself a monumental setting for these structures (fig. 18). The halls are rectangular and follow the same orientation, differing only in size.[8] Five of the halls (J-M) located directly to the north of the theatre are of approximately the same dimensions. Their length runs in the range from 9 to 12 m. Hall (H) is clearly different; at 7 m length, it is obviously the smallest of the lot (fig. 19). All five of the halls are bordered on the east by a long casing wall; as a result, all of them are slightly over 5 m wide. The wall separates the auditoria from an area that had already been abandoned in the period of their functioning

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[3] See *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 2004; *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 10, 2004; *BBC News*, May 12, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/.

[4] For the general topography of the site, cf. Tkaczow, *Topography of Ancient Alexandria*, 85–90, 94–102.

[5] Kołątaj, *Imperial Baths at Kom el-Dikka*.

[6] M. Rodziewicz, *Habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie*.

[7] For the theatre, cf. Kołątaj, "Recherches architectoniques dans les thermes et le théâtre de Kôm el-Dikka à Alexandrie," 189–190.

[8] Majcherek and Kołątaj, "Excavations and Preservation Work, 2001/2002," 19–31; Majcherek, "Kom el-Dikka: Excavations and Preservation Work, 2002/2003," 25–38.

and had become a dumping ground for rubbish and debris, one of the typical *kopriai*, several examples of which have been recognised in other parts of the town.[9] Our mound extends well to the north and east towards the bath complex, culminating some 7–8 meters above the level of the Theatre Portico.

The biggest differences are to be observed in the case of halls lying nearer to the northern end of the portico. Auditorium (N) is definitely the longest of the complex, reaching 14 m in length (fig. 20). Auditorium (P) to the south of it evidently departs from the described scheme, not only in size and orientation (E-W axis), but also in the internal layout. Instead of the benches lining three of the walls, there are two distinct tribunes rising high on two opposite walls and, separately, benches inside the apse projecting to the east, closely recalling a *synthronon*, and suggesting a function quite unlike a regular auditorium (fig. 21). The building might have been used for ceremonial purposes, while remaining part of the complex as a whole. The similarity with some church layouts may be largely superficial and misleading. Although it generally recalls a conventional church design, the absence of any kind of evidence for an altar speaks against such a theory. Moreover, even a summary review of known church plans from Egypt reveals no close parallels for such an arrangement.[10]

In spite of the variations of sizes, the internal arrangement of the halls is virtually the same. All are entered from the portico, the doorways pierced in the thick back wall of the portico, invariably closer to the northern end of each of the rooms. This creates a kind of functional vestibule that was occasionally even emphasised by the introduction of poorly built partition walls, of which faint traces have been recorded in a few cases, in halls (M) and (N), for example. The floors in the newly discovered halls are just as varied, from limestone pugging (hall M) to painstakingly laid limestone slabs (halls H and N).

The benches are undoubtedly the most important and conspicuous furnishing. The three tiers of benches lining the wall (although there are exceptions to this rule) are c. 35–40 cm high and almost as wide. They can seat comfortably from 20 to 30 persons. Some benches follow

[9] M. Rodziewicz, *Habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie*, 31, 252.

[10] Grossmann, *Christliche architektur in Ägypten*. One should note, however, that churches with lateral benches extending well into the aisle are known from Jordan and Palestine, cf. Duval, "Architecture et liturgie dans la Jordanie Byzantine," 35–114; Dayr ʿAyn ʿAbata, fig. 13; Esbus, fig. 17; Gerasa, fig. 39 a–c.

a rectangular layout (halls H and M) (fig. 22), but in most cases, they take on the form of an exedera (halls J, K, L and N) (fig. 20). Benches are usually made of a single row of large blocks, but very often, smaller randomly set irregular stones were used. In several cases, larger segments of brick walls cut from abandoned structures, most probably the bath or the cisterns, were reused—a phenomenon previously noted also in other constructions of the Late Roman age.[11] The benches were normally plastered over, covering all the irregularities.

The central seat at the end is a distinctive feature in all of the halls. It could be an ordinary block of stone elevated somewhat above the neighbouring seats, but very often it takes on a more imposing form with separate steps leading up to it. The most monumental one was unearthed in auditorium (K), featuring seven steps flanked with low sidewalls, and giving access to the seating placed some 1.60 m above the floor level (fig. 23). Another significant feature found in almost all of the halls is a low pedestal projecting above floor level. It is invariably in the centre of the room, opposite the prominently positioned main seat, and it is most commonly a stone block covered with plaster; although in one case a marble capital was used for this purpose (hall L).

The latter two features seem to be of key importance for identifying the function of the newly discovered halls. The central seat was destined undoubtedly for the most important person heading the gathering. Associations come to mind with a lecturer's 'chair'—a customary fitting of lecture halls.

Available ancient iconographic sources largely confirm this hypothesis. The high chair is an almost invariable attribute of existing representations of teachers and philosophers. Representations of professors seated in such chairs, undoubtedly based on actual scenes, were quite common and widespread in Late Antique art. Later they were also adopted on a large scale in Christian art, usually depicting Christ as a teacher. The best evidence of this is a series of ivory plaques and pyxides, some of them even attributed to Alexandrian workshops.[12] Of special significance is a wall-painting preserved in the Via Latina catacomb in Rome, showing a teacher seated in an exedera and sur-

[11] M. Rodziewicz, *Habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie*, 249, 276, 299.

[12] Cf. recent discussion of such representations in E. Rodziewicz, "On Alexandrian School for Ivory Carving," 49–69, where some of the examples are discussed in the context of the lecture halls from Kom el-Dikka.

rounded with disciples during a lesson of anatomy.[13] That seats of this kind were not exclusively movable furniture is demonstrated by this stone pulpit of striking similarity, discovered in the monastery of Apa Jeremias in Saqqara.[14]

How far all these compositions are firmly rooted in the realities of the period is also well attested by literary sources. Libanius in a short but very significant passage in his *Chreiai* describes the teacher as "established in an imposing chair, like judges are."[15] In the same fragment, the author also added that students were obliged to present their written or memorized orations before their professor, standing up in the middle of the 'classroom.'

This short description appears to correspond very well with the functional layout of the interior of the lecture halls. It could also be viewed as a possible clue to the purpose of the low blocks positioned invariably in the centre of almost all of the auditoria. They would have been used by students during their rhetorical exercises or declamations (μελέται).

There is no need to emphasize at this point that in Late Antiquity, besides the obvious conflict between paganism and Christianity, the nature of higher education was left literally unchanged. Students still read Homer and Cicero, not only the Bible, and rhetorical education remained at the core of the system.[16]

The dating of the complex of lecture halls is still far from precise. The chronological evidence available is still quite modest and somewhat ambiguous. No finds that could be directly associated with the function of the halls were recorded. Our preliminary conclusions are based on examination of pottery, some glass finds and a small number of severely corroded and largely illegible coins found in layers sealed under the benches. Overall, the available material points to the late fifth-early sixth century A.D. as the most probable time for the construction of this complex.

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[13] Du Bourguet, *Early Christian Painting*, fig. 111.

[14] Quibell, *Excavations of Saqqara (1908–9, 1909–10)*, pl. XIV.

[15] Libanius *Chreiai* 3.7 in ibid., *Libanii Opera*, recensuit Foerster, (1915) 8:84–85. It is also worth recalling that, in his report of the tragic death of Hypatia, John of Nikiu said that the mob "found her seated on the lofty chair," cf. John, Bishop of Nikiu. *Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*, trans. Charles, LXXXIV 101.

[16] For the literary culture of Late Antiquity, cf. Kaster, *Guardians of Language*; Cameron, "Education and Literary Culture," 665–707; in Egypt: Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*.

Significantly, all of the cleared halls are adaptations of earlier structures. With some slight modifications, they use extant architecture, the original function of which remains undetermined. It is not to be excluded that they had served the same role throughout and the available chronological evidence concerns only the last stage of the rebuilding. While the exact chronology of particular lecture halls is yet to be established, it is clear that the whole complex was expanded over the time. The auditoria forming the southern run, adjoining the theatre (halls H-M), are certainly the earliest. Those located further north (halls N and P) were apparently added later. The finds from structure (P), are fortunately quite explicit and exact in this respect. The fill trapped under the benches yielded quite a numerous collection of imported tableware, consisting mostly of African Red Slip and Cypriot Red Slip forms, assigned to the late sixth century, surprisingly late in time.

The date of the abandonment and destruction of the lecture halls is still provisional at best. In the superimposed strata, a stratigraphic sequence from the Mamluk down to Umayyad period was identified. In all the investigated halls graves of the earliest, late seventh-eighth century phase of the Arab cemetery were recorded, in many cases cut into the pavement or the benches of the auditoria, from which it can be reasonably inferred that they were abandoned rather late in time, quite shortly before the earliest internments.[17] The graves were dug in relatively thin (ca. 0.60–0.80 cm) strata of loose soil, apparently accumulated there shortly after the structures lost their roofs, but significantly still within walls that were standing quite high. In hall (L), a large section of the eastern wall was found collapsed over the graves.

The datable material from the fill consists mostly of residual pottery obscuring possible chronological conclusions; however, the absence of glazed wares is conspicuous. It seems that the auditoria were not abandoned earlier than in the second half of the seventh century. This is in turn rather surprising, especially in view of the fact that the nearby bath complex was destroyed in all likelihood in consequence of the Persian invasion and was never rebuilt.[18] The lecture halls, however, appear to have survived all the political tribulations of the first half of the seventh century and continued in use for quite some time still. A

[17] For the dating of the so called Lower Necropolis, cf. Promińska, *Investigations on the Population of Muslim Alexandria*, 46–50.

[18] Kołątaj, "Dernière periode d'utilisation et destruction des thermes romaines tardifs de Kom el-Dikka," 218–229.

terminus ante quem is provided by an Arab inscription dated to the very beginning of the eighth century A.D., found on one of the pedestals in the theatre.[19] Its presence may presumably indicate the time of the final abandonment of not just the theatre, but the entire adjoining complex as well. If that was indeed the case, it raises wider issue of linking our chronological findings with the evidence supplied by Arab historiographers. According to some sources, in A.D. 718, by order of Umayyad Caliph ʿUmar ibn Abdel ʿAziz, 'the Alexandrian Academy' was moved to Antioch, to be closer to the then capital in Damascus.[20]

Lecture halls of similar character had been excavated earlier on the Kom el-Dikka site. Four similar structures (building 32) were discovered in the early 1980s at the northern edge of the site.[21] Here, too, in two rooms, the benches formed a kind of hemicycle in the southern end, while the third one featured a rectangular layout. In one of them, a stone pedestal located in the middle of the floor, opposite the main seat, is still preserved *in situ*.

An almost identical arrangement of the interior is also demonstrated in the case of three subsequently excavated auditoria (A, B and C) situated by the south entrance to the bath complex.[22] At present, there can be no doubt that all these structures constituted part of the same complex including as many as 15 already discovered auditoria.[23]

The newest discoveries also throw new light on the function of the nearby theatre, which was excavated in the early 1960s. Excavators have ascertained that the building, most likely built as an odeum in the fourth century, underwent a comprehensive rebuilding in the first half of the sixth century A.D.[24] The stage building was then removed and the interior was transformed quite radically. New rows of seats appeared

[19] Kubiak and Makowiecka, "Polish Excavations at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria in 1965 and 1966," 102.

[20] Saffrey, "Chrétien Jean Philopon et la survivance de l'école d'Alexandrie au VI[e] siècle," 396–410.

[21] M. Rodziewicz, "Excavations at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria 1980–1981," 233–245. For yet another presumed lecture hall uncovered by the southern wall of the theatre, cf. M. Rodziewicz, "Review of the Archaeological Evidence Concerning the Cultural Institutions in Ancient Alexandria," 317–332.

[22] Kiss et al., *Alexandrie VII: Fouilles polonaises à Kôm el-Dikka (1986–1987)*.

[23] It should be expected that the lecture halls lined the entire length of the portico, thus their number could exceed 20 in all.

[24] Kołątaj, "Recherches architectoniques dans les thermes et le théâtre de Kôm el-Dikka à Alexandrie," 187–194; ibid., "Theoretical Reconstruction of the Late Roman Theatre at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria," 631–638.

in place of the blocked lateral *parodoi*. The classical semicircular plan of the *cavea* was thus changed into a horseshoe-shaped arrangement that one can easily recognize as similar to that found in the auditoria. The rebuilding was apparently necessitated by the need to adapt the structure to a new function. Zbigniew Borkowski, in his publication of circus factions graffiti preserved on the theatre seats, linked them to the Heraclius revolt and accordingly dated the whole corpus to A.D. 608–610.[25] He argued convincingly that the Theatre in its latest phase was rebuilt to serve as a meeting hall for the faction of the Greens. While this view is not to be entirely rejected, it appears now that the theatre might well be seen as part of the newly excavated complex of auditoria, the biggest lecture hall of them all intended to seat a larger audience.[26] Theatres in Late Antiquity were after all a common venue for public lectures by prominent orators.

The most important issue now is to understand what exactly did this complex represent. The entire evidence, so far, indicates that we are dealing with a large educational institution operating in Late Antique Alexandria. The central location of the complex in the ancient town further corroborates the conclusions drawn based on the characteristic functional arrangement of particular halls.

It might prove instructive to reconsider the topography of the complex as a whole. The great portico cutting through the area appears now to have been one of the colonnades surrounding the great square located in the very centre of the city, at the intersection of the *Via Canopica* with street R5 (fig. 24). Fragments of similar colonnades were discovered in the 1930s on the south[27] and west, in Nabi Daniel Street, which repeats the course of the ancient R5 Street.[28] It seems that these colonnades surrounded a grand square located at the crossing of the main arteries of the ancient city. However, excavations conducted in the northern part of this presumed square have shown that the square was never paved being left most likely as a green area.[29] The idea is hardly surprising: after all, palm groves and gardens were not the least

[25] Borkowski, *Inscriptions des factions à Alexandrie*, 82–86; for a dissenting view, cf. A. Cameron and R. S. Bagnall, review of *Inscriptions des factions à Alexandrie*, by Z. Borkowski, *BASP* 20 (1983): 75–84.

[26] For the probable function of the theatre as an auditorium, cf. Kiss, "Les auditoria romains tardifs de Kôm el-Dikka (Alexandrie)," 331–338; E. Rodziewicz, "Late Roman Auditoria in Alexandria in the Light of Ivory Carvings," 269–279.

[27] Adriani, *Annuaire du Musée Gréco-Romain (1935–1939)*, 55–63.

[28] Ibid., *Annuario del Museo Greco-Romano (1932–1933)*, 1:19–27, pl. IV.

[29] M. Rodziewicz, *Habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie*, 241.

unusual in the landscape of Late Antique Alexandria, and John Moschus describes such urban *paradeisai* as quite a common feature.[30]

The location of our lecture-hall complex in a square of such monumental proportions suggests special status, further emphasized by the nearby presence of imperial baths. This entire urban district—encompassing a vast square, baths, odium and finally a set of what looks like municipal lecture halls—should be considered perhaps as the centre proper of social life in Alexandria of Late Antiquity, taking over the role of the Ptolemaic Gymnasium.[31]

The existence and activities of Late Antique institutions of higher education are quite well recorded in historical sources, although it must be stressed that there was no one binding model of organization and the schools in particular regions and even cities differed considerably.[32]

A famous school of law in Beirut, theological and philosophical schools in Gaza and Edessa, not to mention the Neo-Platonian Academy in Athens, are only a few known examples to validate such a view. Cities in both the eastern and western part of the empire were constantly competing for academic prestige, aspiring to attract the best teachers for their municipal schools.

An educational function is willingly attributed to a number of known residential buildings. Houses discovered in Athens, near the Agora and the Areopagus, especially the so-called 'House of Proclus,' are supposed to be archaeological evidence for private teaching as mentioned above.[33] Several big rooms ending in apses found in these structures are interpreted as lecture halls existing in connection with the Neo-Platonian Academy. A house with an exedera decorated with portraits of philosophers, and interpreted as a teaching venue was also discovered in Aphrodisias.[34] However, one should keep in mind, after all, that apsed halls for official ceremonious use (*oecus*) are rather a typical feature of house and residence plans in Late Antiquity, in the East, as well as in the West.[35]

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[30] John Moschus *Pratum Spirituale* 207. On urban gardens, cf. also Haas, "John Moschus and Late Antique Alexandria," 47–60.

[31] For a recent study on the Alexandrian Gymnasium, cf. Burkhalter, "Gymnase d'Alexandrie," 345–373.

[32] Vössing, "Staat und schule in der spätantike," 243–262.

[33] Frantz, *Late Antiquity, A.D. 267–700*, 42–44.

[34] Smith, "Late Roman Philosopher Portraits from Aphrodisias," 127–155.

[35] Cf. Duval, "Maisons d'Apamée et l'architecture 'palatiale' de l'antiquité tardive," 468; Sodini, «Habitat urbain en Grèce à la veille des invasions," 344–397.

On the other hand, it was common pratice to make use of public buildings for lectures and oratorical performances.[36] At Antioch, for example, this function was served by the Mouseion, which was situated near the Agora.[37] The imperial university at Constantinople, established by Theodosius II, sported a similar location '*in Capitolio*,' that is again in public space.[38] A large body of extant normative texts provides excellent grounds for understanding structure and operating rules of ancient schools. The education was based largely on private tutoring with only a handful of lecturers attaining the position of municipal teachers. The Codex of Theodosius preserves quite a number of edicts and rulings concerning the status of teachers and students alike.[39] A decree, dated to A.D. 425, is particularly interesting for understanding the functioning of the Alexandrian complex. Besides giving the number of Greek and Latin chairs of rhetoric, grammar, philosophy and law established at the time, it also informs that each teacher should have a separate lecture hall for his didactic purposes.

Unfortunately, the relative wealth of extant historical sources does not balance nearly total archaeological ignorance. So far, no physical traces of any of these renowned, already mentioned institutions have been discovered. Could our complex be anything like an academy of this sort? Quite possibly, although further excavations are essential before more specific and univocal conclusions are drawn.

The intellectual and academic life of Late Antique Alexandria is surprisingly well documented in the written sources.[40] Perhaps the most vivid description can be found in the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus. Although his somewhat exaggerated, nonetheless valuable account apparently anticipates the revival of Alexandrian scholarship that was to come at least one century later, it is still often quoted as the best evidence of the continuity of learning in the Late Antique City.[41]

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[36] Libanius gave lectures even in the town bath, while public performances by orators were often given also in the bouleuteria, cf. Libanius. *Autobiography and Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Norman, 1:117, 135, 153.

[37] Ibid., 1:169; Downey, *History of Antioch in Syria*, 622.

[38] *Codex Theodosianus* 14.9.3.

[39] *Cod. Theod.* 13.3.1–19, 14. 9.1.

[40] Roques, "Alexandrie tardive et protobyzantine (IV^{e}–VII^{e} s.)," 203–236; Gascou, «La vie intellectuelle alexandrine à l'époque byzantine (IV^{e}–VII^{e} siècles)," 41–48; Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*.

[41] Ammianus Marcellinus *Res Gestae* 22.16.17–18; cf. for the critical view cf. Bowersock, "Late Antique Alexandria," 263–270.

Somewhat later written sources, referring to the period of interest to our discussion, supply solid, even if scattered, evidence. A diligent reading of surviving biographies, such as *Life of Severus* written by Zacharias Scholasticus, or *Life of Isidorus* by Damascius, as well as numerous letters and other literary sources, provides us with an insider's view of the academic life of the epoch. The gallery of celebrities, both students and professors, referred to in those sources is quite extensive. It includes, among others, philosophers, men of letters and scholars, such as Olympiodorus, Boethius, Stephanus, Elias, and John Philoponus, as well as Paul of Aegina, author of medical treatises, to list only some of the most prominent figures.[42] The picture of academic and intellectual life revealed by this extensive corpus of sources leaves little doubt: Alexandria in Late Antiquity continued to be one of the great centres of education in the fields of philosophy, law and above all medicine, attracting students and professors from all over the ancient world.

Unfortunately, none of these records brings any direct topographical references helpful in identifying our complex, with perhaps one exception. In his commentary to the *Isagoge*, Elias in apparent reference to a school building uses the unexpected term *diatribe*, writing that the lecture rooms, "in similarity to theaters are often rounded in plan, so that the students can see one another, as well as the teacher."[43] It is a marginal nevertheless valuable note, because it is more than likely that the author was referring to obvious realities of the world around him. Thus, it is an appealing idea, even if unverifiable, to think that this sixth-century Alexandrian intellectual was actually describing one of the lecture halls on our site, where, in theory, he could even have been teaching.

The size of the complex discovered at Kom el-Dikka and its localization in public space leaves no doubt that it was an investment project of municipal importance. Even assuming it was not connected directly with a formal educational institution, it is proof of the importance attached by the city to cultivating the traditions of ancient *paideia* and at the same time the city's image as a centre of learning and education.

The newly excavated complex of lecture halls at Alexandria thus appears to be an astonishing piece of evidence for the continuation

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[42] The list of students and professors active in Late Antique Alexandria is much longer obviously, cf. *PLRE*, 1:217–223.

[43] I would like to thank Ms. Elżbieta Szabat for calling my attention to this important passage. Cf. Elias *In Porphyrii isagogen* 21.30.

and intellectual vitality of the tradition of Alexandrian learning, best symbolized by the great institutions of the Ptolemies. Quite obviously, Alexandrian academic life did not end with the destruction of the Library. It continued well into the seventh century, and acted as a vital '*bridge*' between the classical and the medieval worlds.

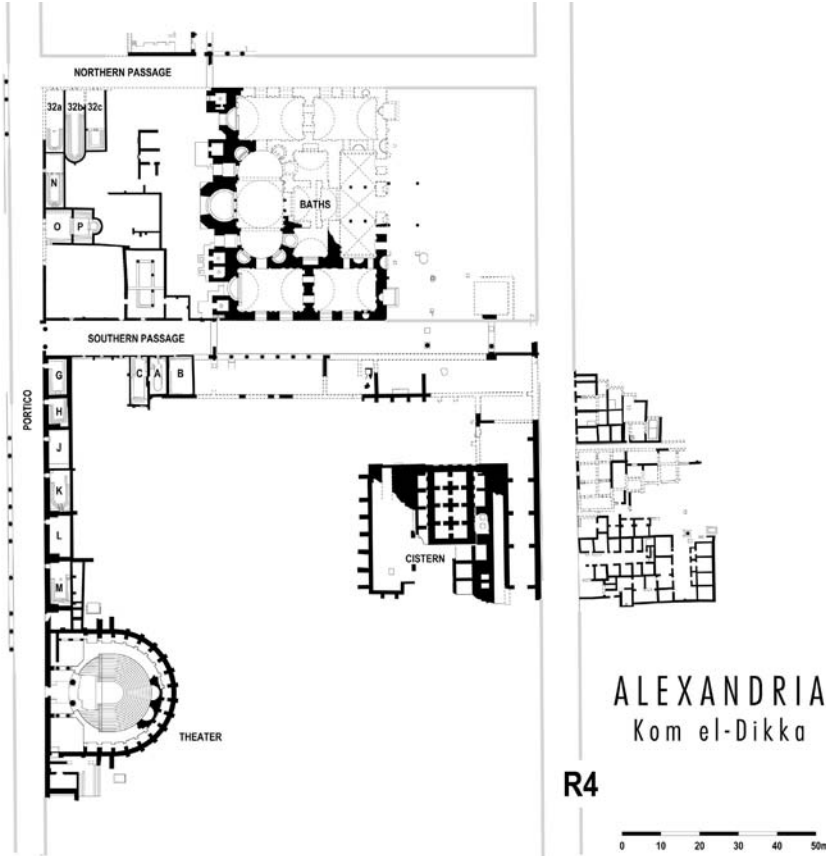

Figure 18. General plan of the Kom el-Dikka site. (Drawing by W. Kołątaj). Polish-Egyptian Mission at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo.

Figure 19. Auditorium H at Kom el-Dikka. Polish-Egyptian Mission at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo.

Figure 20. Auditorium N at Kom el-Dikka. Polish-Egyptian Mission at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo.

Figure 21. Auditorium P at Kom el-Dikka, looking north-east. Polish-Egyptian Mission at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo.

Figure 22. Auditorium M at Kom el-Dikka. Polish-Egyptian Mission at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo.

Figure 23. Auditorium K at Kom el-Dikka. View from the north. Polish-Egyptian Mission at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo.

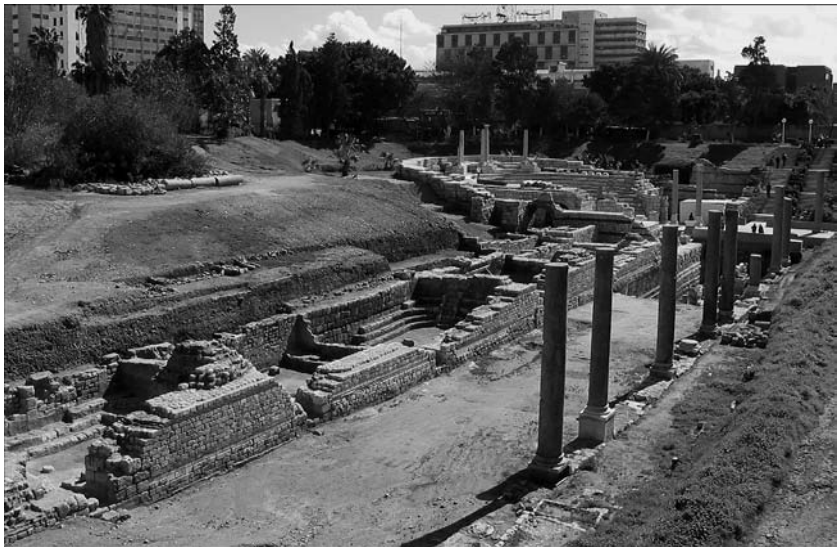

Figure 24. The great portico in front of the Theatre at Kom el-Dikka. View from the north-west. Polish-Egyptian Mission at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo.

THE ARAB STORY OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ANCIENT LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA

Qassem Abdou Qassem

The Ancient Library of Alexandria, built by the Ptolemies in the third century B.C., played a very important role in the development of scientific and intellectual activities of the Mediterranean world over several centuries. In some ways, this Library with its annexations can be considered a kind of continuation of the temple libraries of ancient Egypt,[1] but undoubtedly, it was by far the most important and renowned Library in the ancient world.

Since Edward Gibbon first started the debate about the fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria in the eighteenth century, this subject has aroused vehement controversies among historians during the last two centuries. The revival of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, a few years ago, has stimulated the debate once more and this paper deals with the Arab version of the story of the fate of the Ancient Library.

Notably enough, the Arabic story did not appear until the last decade of the sixth century A.H./twelfth A.D. The earliest Arabic source was by the Muslim physician and traveler, ʿAbd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī who visited Egypt in 595 A.H./1200 A.D.; he mentioned that he saw some of the monuments in Alexandria, including what he believed to have been the Library, "set up by Alexander when he founded his city," and that it was the place where "Aristotle and his successors taught." He continues to mention in a brief statement that it was, "the book-store which was burnt by ʿAmr, by order of Caliph ʿUmar." This report cannot be taken seriously as it is undocumented, besides stating inaccurate historical facts.[2]

More important with regard to the story of the destruction of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, is the account given by Jamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Qiftī who lived during the Ayyubid era and died in the year 646

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[1] Cf. Haikal, "Private Collections and Temple Libraries in Ancient Egypt," see chap. 2 in the present volume.

[2] ʿAbd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī *al-Ifādah wa-al-iʿtibār fī al-umūr al-mushāhadah wa-al-ḥawādith al-muʿāyanah bi-arḍ Miṣr* [Journey to Egypt] 42.

A.H./1248 A.D. He came from a family of *Qadis* (judges), his father was appointed judge for Jerusalem and Jamāl al-Dīn himself, was at one time, judge in Aleppo; he is also the author of an alphabetically arranged biographical lexicon.

In his lexicon, *History of Wise Men*, (Ikhbār al-ʿulamāʾ bi-akhbār al-ḥukamāʾ) Ibn al-Qiftī mentions the end of the old Library when he presents the biography of John the Grammarian (Yahia al-Nahwī) who was identified as John Philoponus. He mentions that Yahia was a Jacobite, Coptic priest and a disciple of Severus (Shawary) but that he was deprived of his office owing to his rejection of the dogma of the Trinity. He lived and saw the capture of Alexandria by ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs. Ibn al-Qiftī goes on to narrate how ʿAmr was impressed by the erudition and intellect of Yahia and listened with admiration to his logical arguments concerning the Trinity, as well as his other philosophical opinions that were as yet unknown to the Arabs. Emboldened by ʿAmr's favor, Yahia one day remarked, "You have examined the whole city and have set your seal on every object of value. I make no claim for aught that is useful to you, but things of no use to you, may be of service to us." He then mentioned the "books of wisdom" in the Royal treasuries which the Arabs had no use for, while he could make use of. He then described how they had been collected by Ptolemy Philadelphus from far and wide and that he had spared no cost in acquiring them. He had appointed Zomeira (Demetrius of Phaleron) to be in charge, and the collection grew till it reached the number of 54,120 books. Still, the King's hunger for more books was not abated and he ordered that books should continue to be gathered from India, Persia, Georgia, Armenia, Babylonia, Mosul and Greece.

ʿAmr's reply was that he could not dispose of the books without asking for permission from the Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb. A letter was dispatched, and the answer soon came, "Touching the books you mention, if what is written in them agrees with the Book of God, they are not required, but if it disagrees, they are not desired. Destroy them therefore." Accordingly, ʿAmr ordered the books to be distributed among the baths of Alexandria and used as fuel for heating. It took six months to consume them. "Listen and wonder" concludes the writer.[3]

Subsequent Arab writers like Abū al-Faraj, known as Ibn al-ʿIbrī (Barhebraeus), Abū al-Fidā and al-Maqrīzī, repeated the account of Ibn

[3] Ibn al-Qiftī *Ikhbār al-ʿulamāʾ bi-akhbār al-ḥukamāʾ* [History of Wise Men] 232–234.

al-Qiftī either in full or abridged. Therefore to get the full story of the burning of the Alexandria Library by ʿAmr, as related by the Arabs, one has to turn to Ibn al-Qiftī who was the first to relate it in full.

As mentioned above, the story first appeared in Ibn al-Qiftī's biographical lexicon. When compared with other biographies of the time written by Ibn Khallikān, al-Sāfādī, Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, al-Dhahabī and others, it is of second-rate value due to summarized material and inaccurate information. The story itself, as M. El-Abbadi has shown,[4] is a compound of at least three distinct parts. The first part relating to Yahia al-Nahwī, was mentioned earlier by Ibn al-Nadīm and it is possible that both of them were quoting a third source. The second part dealing with the number of books was mentioned literally in some Byzantine sources as El-Abbadi demonstrated. But these two parts of the story are irrelevant to the subject of the fate of the Library, even though Ibn al-Qiftī has made them an integral component of his account. The third part is the important one, as it attributes the destruction of the Ancient Library of Alexandria to the Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb and his governor in Egypt, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs. It is noteworthy that this part was written as a dialogue between Yahia and ʿAmr covering several days and this bears the marks of fiction rather than actual history. It is most probable that the author heard it as part of an oral tradition then prevalent.

Furthermore, the first appearance of the Arabic story of the fate of the Library occurred in the late sixth and early seventh centuries A.H. (twelfth & thirteenth centuries A.D.) whereas the Arab conquest of Egypt and Alexandria took place six centuries earlier. It is highly unlikely that such eminent historians as Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 253 A.H.), al-Balathurī (d. 279 A.H.), al-Tabarī (d. 310 A.H.) and al-Kīndī (d. 350 A.H.) should have ignored the existence of such a famous Library and its fate. These historians and their successors reported the details of the Arab conquest of Egypt and Alexandria; but no mention was made of what ʿAbd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, Ibn al-Qiftī and Ibn al-ʿIbrī reported about the destruction of the Library by ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs.

Moreover, the Coptic historian John, Bishop of Nikiu, who lived the greater part of his life in the second half of the seventh and the early eighth centuries A.D., was a near contemporary of the Arab conquest and recorded many of its events, but he did not mention or even hint

[4] El-Abbadi, *Life and Fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria*, 169ff.

at such an event happening, despite his obvious hostility towards the Muslims.[5] In fact, none of the contemporary Byzantine historians did that either.

What is most probable is that the Royal Library was destroyed during the war of Alexandria in the year 48 B.C., as El-Abbadi argued, when Julius Caesar burnt some fifty ships in the harbour of Alexandria and the flames spread to the shore and burnt down the Royal Library.[6] But the Daughter Library, a branch of the Royal Library that formed part of the Serapeum, survived until the year 391 A.D. when Emperor Theodosius the Great (379–95 A.D.) proclaimed Christianity the formal and sole religion of the Roman Empire. In fulfillment of the terms of the decree, Bishop Theophilus launched an onslaught on the Serapeum that completely destroyed it.[7] In view of these developments it becomes self-evident that when the Arab conquest took place, neither the Royal Library nor the Daughter Library, were there. It also explains the reason why early historians, Arab and non Arab, who dealt with the conquest of Egypt, made no mention what so ever of any events concerning a library.

The story as reported by Ibn al-Qiftī has repeatedly been criticized, but there is little doubt that A. J. Butler, himself an eminent Arabist, was the best qualified scholar to do so. One of his strongest arguments against the credibility of the story is that he was able to identify John the Grammarian (Yahia al-Nahwī) with John Philoponus who lived and wrote around 540 A.D. It would therefore be impossible that he should survive and be active one hundred years later at the time of the Arab conquest.[8]

One major question needs to be answered. Why should al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Qiftī make up the story about ʿAmr's burning of the Ancient Library of Alexandria at the order of Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb? El-Abbadi argued that after Saladin overthrew the rule of the Fatimids, he found himself in dire need of money to carry on his campaigns against the Crusaders and to pay off those who had co-operated with him and served him. He therefore donated as well as offered for sale many of the treasures he had confiscated; we know that among these treasures, were great public libraries of the Fatimids. Consequently,

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[5] John, Bishop of Nikiu, *Tarikh Yohana al Niqiousy*, trans. Saber (2003).
[6] El-Abbadi, *Life and Fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria*, 146–156.
[7] Ibid., 160–167.
[8] Butler, *Arab Conquest of Egypt* (1902), 400ff.

there was a widespread feeling of resentment and discontent at the loss of such priceless legacies of learning. Saladin was accordingly exposed to bitter criticism, especially by the survivors of the old Shiite regime whom he sought to suppress.

To defend such an action, Ibn al-Qiftī, who was a close associate of Saladin, wrote this fictitious story to show that selling when in need, is a lesser crime than the burning of pagan books as ʿUmar did.[9]

To conclude, the Arabic story of the destruction of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, whatever was the true motive behind it, is an obvious example of the abuse of history for political purposes; in the past as well as in the present.

[9] El-Abbadi, *Life and Fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria*, 176ff.

THE ARAB DESTRUCTION OF THE LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA: ANATOMY OF A MYTH

Bernard Lewis

Despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, some writers are still disposed to believe and even repeat the story of how the Great Library of Alexandria was destroyed by the Arabs after their conquest of the city in 642 A.D., by order of the Caliph ʿUmar. This story—its origins, purpose, acceptance and rejection—provides an interesting example of how such historical myths arise and, for a while at least, flourish.

This story first became known to Western scholarship in 1663, when Edward Pococke, the Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, published an edition of the Arabic text, with Latin translation, of part of the *Compendious History of the Dynasties* of the Syrian-Christian author Barhebraeus, also known as Abū al-Faraj.[1] According to this story, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs, the commander of the Arab conquerors, was inclined to accept the pleas of John the Grammarian and spare the library, but the Caliph decreed otherwise: "If these writings of the Greeks agree with the book of God, they are useless and need not be preserved; if they disagree, they are pernicious and ought to be destroyed."[2] The books in the library, the story continues, were accordingly distributed among the four thousand bathhouses of the city, and used to heat the furnaces, which they kept going for almost six months.

As early as 1713, Father Eusèbe Renaudot, the distinguished French orientalist, cast doubt on this story, remarking, in his history of the Patriarchs of Alexandria, published in that year, that it "had something untrustworthy about it."[3] Curiously, although Father Renaudot's text is in Latin, the word "untrustworthy" is in Greek—perhaps a security precaution. The great English historian Edward Gibbon, never one to miss a good story, relates it with gusto, and then proceeds: "For my own part, I am strongly tempted to deny both the facts and the

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[1] Barhebraeus, *Historia compendiosa dynastiarum*, trans. Pococke (Oxford, 1663).

[2] For text, see ibid., 180; translation, 114.

[3] Renaudot, *Historia patriarcharum Alexandrinorum Jacobitarum a.D. Marco usque ad finem sæculi XIII* (Paris, 1713), 170.

consequences."[4] To explain this denial, Gibbon gives the two principal arguments against authenticity—that the story first appears some six hundred years after the actions which it purports to describe, and that such action is in any case contrary to what we know of the teachings and practice of the Muslims. Both arguments are, to say the least, convincing, but the story still survives.

Since then, a succession of other Western scholars have analysed and demolished the story—Alfred J. Butler in 1902,[5] Victor Chauvin in 1911,[6] Paul Casanova[7] and Eugenio Griffini,[8] independently, in 1923. Some have attacked the inherent improbabilities of the story. Paper was not introduced to Egypt until centuries after the Arab conquest, and many if not most, of the books at that time would have been written on vellum, which does not burn. To keep that many bathhouse furnaces going for that length of time, a library of at least 14 million books would have been required. Another difficulty is that John the Grammarian who, according to the Barhebraeus story, pleaded with ʿAmr for his library probably lived and died in the previous century. In any case, there is good evidence that the Library itself was destroyed long before the Arabs arrived in Egypt.

Another curious detail: the fourteenth century historian Ibn Khaldūn tells an almost identical story concerning the destruction of a library of Persian, presumably Zoroastrian, books in Persia, also by order of the Caliph ʿUmar, with the very same words.[9] This again strongly suggests a mythic or folkloric origin.

By far the strongest argument against the story is the slight and late evidence on which it rests. Barhebraeus, the principal source used by Western historians, lived from 1226 to 1289. He had only two predecessors, from one of whom he simply copied the story, and both preceded him by no more than a few decades. The earliest source is a Baghdadi physician called ʿAbd al-Latīf, who was in Egypt in 1203, and in a brief account of his journey refers in passing to "the library which ʿAmr ibn

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[4] Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1911), 5:482.

[5] Butler, *Arab Conquest of Egypt*, ed. Fraser, 2nd ed. (1978), 401ff.

[6] Chauvin, *Le Livre dans le monde arabe*, 3–6.

[7] Casanova, "L'incendie de la bibliothèque d'Alexandrie par les Arabes," 163–171.

[8] Eugenio Griffini, "Fī sabīl al-haqq waʾt-taʾrīkh: al-haqīqa fī harīq maktabat al-Iskandariyya," *Al-Ahram*, January 21, 1925. Summarized in Furlani, "Sull'incendio della biblioteca di Alessandria," 205–212.

[9] Cf. Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 5:483 n. 141.

al-ʿĀs burnt with the permission of ʿUmar."[10] An Egyptian scholar, Ibn al-Qiftī, wrote a history of learned men in about 1227, and included a biography of John the Grammarian in the course of which he told the story on which the legend is based. His narrative ends: "I was told the number of bathhouses that existed at that time, but I have forgotten it. It is said that they were heated for six months. Listen to this story and wonder!"[11] Barhebraeus merely followed the text of Ibn al-Qiftī, omitting his final observation on the number of bathhouses. This number is provided by other Arabic sources, in quite different contexts.

To accept the story of the Arab destruction of the Library of Alexandria, one must explain how it is that so dramatic an event was unmentioned and unnoticed not only in the rich historical literature of medieval Islam, but even in the literatures of the Coptic and other Christian churches, of the Byzantines, of the Jews, or anyone else who might have thought the destruction of a Great Library worthy of comment. That the story still survives, and is repeated, despite all these objections, is testimony to the enduring power of a myth.

Such myths usually come into existence in one of two ways, and are used to serve one of two purposes. Some arise in what one might describe as a spontaneous manner—folklore, legend, even poetry; others are deliberately invented, and often supported with falsified or fabricated written evidence. Such fabrications sometimes have a surprisingly long life. Some serve a defensive purpose—to defend and justify a person, a cause or an action. Others serve an offensive purpose, to delegitimize and attack a perceived enemy. To use the modem term, such stories and fabrications might be described as propaganda. And for the propagandist, effectiveness and persuasiveness are what matter, not truth or accuracy.

Two examples of fabrication may suffice. A famous and for a long time very effective historical fabrication was the so-called Donations of Constantine, a document said to have been issued by Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor, to Sylvester, the Bishop of Rome. This was used as a basis for the temporal power of the pope in the city of Rome, as distinct from his ecclesiastical authority. This document purports to have been written in the fourth century, first appeared in

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[10] ʿAbd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-ifādah wa-al-iʿtibār*, ed. Sabānū (1983), 52. For earlier editions, see ibid., *Abdollatiphi historiæ ægypti compendium*, ed. White (1800), 114; ibid., *Relation de l'Egypte*, trans. Silvestre de Sacy (Paris, 1810), 183.

[11] Ibn al-Qiftī, *Tarīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, ed. Lippert (1903), 354.

the eighth century, and was finally demonstrated to be a forgery in the fifteenth century. A remarkable long run.

A more recent example, this time of offensive, not defensive forgery, is the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.[12] These were concocted in France in the late nineteenth century, on behalf of the Czarist Russian secret police. The forgers adapted them from a French propaganda tract against Napoleon III and a minor nineteenth century French novel, neither making any mention of Jews. With this weapon, the Czarist secret police were able to discredit their two favorite enemies at the same time, by attributing revolutionary designs to the Jews and Jewish inspiration to the revolutionaries. The so-called '*Protocols*' were extensively used in the propaganda campaigns of the Nazis in Germany and of their disciples and imitators elsewhere, to justify hatred and, where convenient, persecution. Though their falsity has been repeatedly demonstrated by historical analysis and even proved in courts of law in several countries, they remain a favorite of propagandists seeking to prove a point and not unduly concerned about the authenticity of their evidence.

The myth of the Arab destruction of the Library of Alexandria is not supported by even a fabricated document. One may wonder what purpose it served. One answer, often given and certainly in accord with a currently popular school of epistemology would see the story as anti-Islamic propaganda, designed by hostile elements to blacken the good name of Islam by showing the revered Caliph ʿUmar as a destroyer of libraries. But this explanation is as absurd as the myth itself. The original sources of the story are Muslim, the only exception being the Syrian-Christian Barhebraeus, who copied it from a Muslim author. Not the creation, but the demolition of the myth was the achievement of European orientalist scholarship, which from the eighteenth century to the present day has rejected the story as false and absurd, and thus exonerated the Caliph ʿUmar and the early Muslims from this libel.

But if the myth was created and disseminated by Muslims and not by their enemies, what could possibly have been their motive? The answer is almost certainly provided in a comment of Paul Casanova. Since the earliest occurrence of the story is an allusion at the beginning of the thirteenth century, it must have become current in the late twelfth

[12] There is an extensive literature on the *Protocols*. An excellent recent book is Ben-Itto, *Lie that Wouldn't Die* (2005).

century—that is to say, in the time of the great Muslim hero Saladin, famous not only for his victories over the Crusaders, but also—and in a Muslim context perhaps more importantly—for having extinguished the heretical Fatimid Caliphate in Cairo, which, with its Ismāʿīlī doctrines, had for centuries threatened the unity of Islam. ʿAbd al-Latīf was an admirer of Saladin, whom he went to visit in Jerusalem. Ibn al-Qiftī's father was a follower of Saladin, who appointed him Qadi in the newly conquered city.

One of Saladin's first tasks after the restoration of Sunnism in Cairo was to break up the Fatimid collections and treasures and sell their contents at public auction. These included a very considerable library, presumably full of heretical Ismāʿīlī books. The break-up of a library, even one containing heretical books, might well have evoked disapproval in a civilized, literate society. The myth provided an obvious justification. It is unlikely that the story was fabricated from the whole cloth at this time. More probably, those who used it adopted and adapted folkloric material current at the time. According to this interpretation, the message of the narrative was not that the Caliph ʿUmar was a barbarian because he destroyed a library, but that destroying a library could be justified, because the revered Caliph ʿUmar had approved of it. Thus once again, as on so many occasions, the early heroes of Islam were mobilized by later Muslim propagandists to give posthumous sanction to actions and policies of which they had never heard and which they would probably not have condoned.[13]

It is surely time that the Caliph ʿUmar and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs were finally acquitted of this charge which their admirers and later their detractors conspired to bring against them.

[13] See for example "Historical Precedents of Imam's Ruling against Rushdie," *Tehran Times International Weekly*, February 23, 1989.

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Papyrus Salt
Pyramid Texts
Ramesseum Papyri
'Story of the Herdsman'
'Tale of Hay'
'Tale of Horus and Seth'
'Tale of Sinuhe'
'Tale of the Eloquent Peasant'
'Tale of the Princess of Bakhtan'
'Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor'

2. *Classical texts*

Ammianus Marcellinus *Res Gestae*
Aphthonius *Progymnasmata*
Apollonius of Perge *Conica*
Apostolic Constitution
Aristophanes *Acharnians*
Arrian *Anabasis*
Augustine *De civitate Dei*
—— *Confessiones*
—— *Retractationes*
Basil of Caesarea *Homiliae in Hexaemeron*
Callimachus *Pinakes*[1]
—— *Against Praxiphanes*
Caesar, *Bellum Civile*
Chaldean Oracles
Cicero *Epistulae ad Atticum*

[1] Callimachus' *Pinakes* is cited in the *Suda* according to Hesychius under the detailed title of: *Πίνακες τῶν ἐν πάσῃ παιδείᾳ διαλαμψάντων, καὶ ὧν συνέγραψαν* ('Tables of those who distinguished themselves in all branches of learning and their writings'), Blum, *Kallimachos*, 151, 161 n. 2; Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*, s.v. "Kallimachos," K 227, 3:19f.

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Codex Theodosianus
Damascius Commentary on the *Categories*
—— Commentary on the *Parmenides*
—— Commentary on the *Phaedo*
—— *Treatise on the First Principles*
—— *Vita Isidori*
Dio Cassius *Roman History*
Diodorus Siculus
Elias *In Porphyrii isagogen*[2]
Eunapius *Vita Aedesii*[3]
Florus *Epitoma de Tito Livio*[4]
Gellius *Noctes Atticae*
Gregory I, the Great *Epistulae*
Gregory of Nyssa *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*
—— *De opificio hominis*
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[2] [Commentary on the *Isagoge* of Porphyry], see *PLRE*, s.v. "Elias 6," 3:438. For the title of his work in Greek (*προλεγόμενε τῆς Πορφυρίου εἰσαγωγῆς ἀπὸ φωνῆς Ἡλίου φιλοσόφου*), See also Kroll, *RE*, s.v. "Elias 2," (5, 2), col. 2366.

[3] The title of Eunapius' work is *Vitae sophistarum* (Lives of the Sophists). *See* John F. Matthews, *OCD*[3], s.v. "Eunapius," 568.

[4] Florus' work is commonly known under the title of: *Epitome bellorum omnium annorum DCC* ('Abridgement of all the Wars over 700 Years'). Some manuscripts describe it as an epitome of Livy; but it is sometimes at variance with Livy. *See* Edward S. Forster, Gavin B. Townend, and Antony J. S. Spawforth, *OCD*[3], s.v. "Florus," 602.

Photius *Bibliotheca* Codex
Plato *Symposium*
—— *Timaeus*
Pliny *Naturalis historia*
Plotinus *Enneades*
Plutarch *Antonius*
—— *Caesar*
—— *De Iside et Osiride*
Polybius *Historiae*
Porphyry Commentary on the *Categories* of Aristotle
—— *Contra Christianos*
—— *Sententiae*
—— *Vita Plotini*
Proclus *Institutio theologica*
Rufinus *Historia ecclesiastica*[5]
Seneca *De tranquillitate animi*
Simplicius Commentary on the *De caelo* of Aristotle
—— Commentary on the *Physics* of Aristotle
Socrates *Historia ecclesiastica*[6]
Sozomen *Historia ecclesiastica*[7]
Strabo *Geographia*
Suetonius *De vita Caesarum*
Synesius *Cynegetica*
—— *De insomniis*
—— *De providentia*
—— *Dion*
—— *Epistulae*
—— *Homiliae*
—— *Hymni*
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Theodoret *Historia ecclesiastica*
Theon of Alexandria Commentary on the *Almagest* of Claudius Ptolemy
Velleius Paterculus
Zacharias Scholasticus *Vita Severi*
Zonaras

[5] Rufinus of Aquileia extended Eusebiues' *Historia ecclesiastica* ('Church History') to A.D. 395 by adding two extra books. *See* C. P. Bammel, *OCD*[3], s.v. " Rufinus," 1337.

[6] Socrates Scholasticus continued the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Eusebius from A.D. 305 to 439. *See* Jill D. Harries, *OCD*[3], s.v. "Socrates Scholasticus," 1337.

[7] Sozomen wrote a continuation of Eusebiues' *Historia ecclesiastica* to A.D. 439. *See* Jill D. Harries, *OCD*[3], s.v. "Sozomen (Salamanes Hermeias Sozomenus)," 1337.

[8] *PLRE*, s.v. "Synesius 1," 2:1050.

[9] Themistius' fourth oration (delivered in 357 A.D.), entitled: Εἰς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Κωνστάντιον. See *PLRE*, s.v. "Themistius 1," 1:893.

3. *The Bible*

Old Testament
Genesis
Numbers
Psalms

New Testament
John (Gospel)

4. *Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC)*[10]

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I,2 *Apocryphon of James*
I,3 *Gospel of Truth*
I,4 *Treatise on the Resurrection*
I,5 *Tripartite Tractate*
II,1 *Apocryphon of John*
II,2 *Gospel of Thomas*
II,3 *Gospel of Philip*
II,4 *Hypostasis of the Archons*
II,5 *On the Origin of the World*
II,6 *Exegesis on the Soul*
II,7 *Book of Thomas the Contender*
III,1 *Apocryphon of John*
III,2 *Gospel of the Egyptians*
III,3 *Eugnostos the Blessed*
III,4 *Sophia of Jesus Christ*
III,5 *Dialogue of the Savior*
IV,1 *Apocryphon of John*
IV,2 *Gospel of the Egyptians*
V,1 *Eugnostos the Blessed*
V,2 *Apocalypse of Paul*
V,3 *(First) Apocalypse of James*
V,4 *(Second) Apocalypse of James*
V,5 *Apocalypse of Adam*
VI,1 *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*
VI,2 *Thunder: Perfect Mind*
VI,3 *Authoritative Teaching*
VI,4 *Concept of our Great Power*
VI,5 *Plato, Republic, 588A–589B*
VI,6 *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*
VI,7 *Prayer of Thanksgiving*
VI,8 *Asclepius 21–29*
VII,1 *Paraphrase of Shem*
VII,2 *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*
VII,3 *Apocalypse of Peter*
VII,4 *Teachings of Silvanus*
VII,5 *Three Steles of Seth*
VIII,1 *Zostrianos*
VIII,2 *Letter of Peter to Philip*

[10] Including the Berlin Gnostic Codex (BG).

IX,1 *Melchizedek*
IX,2 *Thought of Norea*
IX,3 *Testimony of Truth*
X,1 *Marsanes*
XI,1 *Interpretation of Knowledge*
XI,2 *Valentinian Exposition*
XI,2a *On the Anointing*
XI,2b *On Baptism A*
XI,2c *On Baptism B*
XI,2d *On the Eucharist A*
XI,2e *On the Eucharist B*
XI,3 *Allogenes*
XI,4 *Hypsiphrone*
XII,1 *Sentences of Sextus*
XII,2 *Gospel of Truth*
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XIII,1 *Trimorphic Protennoia*
XIII,2 *On the Origin of the World*
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BG,2 *Apocryphon of John*
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