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*“I sit in my tower to ideas moving around inside,
aqueous and dim like fishes”.*

The presence of Italian Architects in Mediterranean Countries: An International Conference

Gordon Smith

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina was the venue for an important two day international conference on 15–16 November 2007, about the presence of Italian architects in Mediterranean countries. This event was organized by the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center under the direction of Dr. Mohamed Awad. An interesting point was the cover of the program, illustrated by an old photograph from the Awad Collection of the inner courtyard of the Menasce Gallery in Manshieh, Alexandria: a late nineteenth century building with all the glorious classical architectural details of a grand seventeenth century Italian masterpiece. This building, designed by Italian architect Antonio Lasciac, is still standing today, complete with bold window pediments, lintels, Doric pilasters, floral swags and a massive Venetian portico opening to each of its four street entrances. The original wall coloring of red and ochre struggles to survive amid dirt and grime, sadly caused by years of neglect.

Various institutions were represented at the conference, by leading professionals from Europe and the Mediterranean. Countries where Italian architects and styles were prominent included Albania, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey, in addition to the Greek Island of Rhodes and the city of Thessaloniki, and, in Egypt, Heliopolis and of course Alexandria, covering extensive work from the nineteenth century.

The proceedings were opened by Dr. Mohamed Awad, who thanked the Consul General of Italy, Mr. Gianni Martini, for his presence and welcomed the distinguished speakers and guests, including those from Italy who were visiting Alexandria for the first time. Dr. Awad then continued to explain plans for future restoration projects in Alexandria: in the Canopic Way and Kom el Dikka district. Other plans for the city included the recreation of the Stock Exchange on its original site which is now vacant. Opening speeches were then given by Ezio Godoli from the University of Florence, and by Mr. Gianni Martini.

Because of the complexity of this conference however, which was held predominantly in Italian, I have noted here a selection of subjects to give the reader an idea of some of the material covered during the two days.

In her presentation, Maria Carla Cigolini, from the University of Genoa, described how the touristic waterfront in the Greek city of Rhodes was transformed by Italian architects between 1920–1940. She particularly evoked the construction of the Club Nautico in 1929–1931, and the stabilization of the dome of the Ronda carried out during 1935–37. Then, Vassilis Kolonas, from the University of Thessaly in Greece, explained how the city of Thessaloniki was reconstructed by Italian architects after the great fire of 1917. The design of the new buildings ranged from Pharaonic façades to traditional Italian style and many of the new designs were "mirrored in Alexandria".

Dr. George Arbid, from the Department of Architecture and Design of the American University of Beirut, gave a fascinating account of the Italian contribution to modern architecture in Lebanon. He began by saying that "there is a myth in Lebanon that behind



Cairo Station designed by Antonio Lasciac



Montaza Palace designed by Ernesto Verrucci



The Menasce Gallery was designed by Italian architect Antonio Lasciac.

every building there is always a talented architect, but that no-one knows who they are". He explained that according to hearsay specific prominent buildings are attributed to Italian architects but that no proof has been found. An exception was the work of Aldo and Francesco Piccaluga, which is recognized. These two architects were the sons of a diplomat at the Italian Embassy in Lebanon. In 1963 they designed a villa in an orange orchard for a Beirut businessman. This was of a unique design consisting of various cantilever style levels, providing plenty of light. Access to light was the main theme along with sophisticated furnishing and styling for the stairs. Later, I spoke to Dr. Arbid and asked him whether neighboring military hostilities had caused damage to any historic buildings in and around Beirut. He said no, because air strikes mainly targeted infrastructure in an area south of the city.

There were many other absorbing subjects raised during the conference but it would be difficult to include them all here. To illustrate the geographical scope covered, I can cite a few examples. Maria Concetta Migliaccio spoke about the work of Florestano Di Fausto in North Africa between 1923–1930, whereas Benedetto Gravagnuolo, of the University of Naples, gave Di Fausto's Libya Pavilion as an example of the Italian style overseas. The scope of Italian architecture from Egypt to Libya was covered by Milva Giacomelli, from the University of Florence. Eliana Mauro, from Palermo in Sicily, and Iness Overtani of Manouba University in Tunis, both gave examples of noted Italian architects working in Tunisia. Twentieth century Italian architects working in Casablanca during 1920–1970 was the subject of Christophe Giudice's contribution, whilst the education and professional profiles of the Italian architects in the Balkans (1848–1945) was the subject of a presentation by Vilma Fasoli, Paolo Tomasella and Francesco Krecic from the University of Trieste. Gerardo Bosio's urban plans for Albania were the topic of Gabriele Corsani's talk, while Cenik Berkant spoke about Italian architects in Izmir.

Because the conference was held in Alexandria, I considered it appropriate to conclude this account by references made to Italian architecture in Egypt. Christina Pallini of the Polytechnic of Milan spoke about Franco Albini's project for the Greco-Roman

Museum in Alexandria. From the Helwan University in Cairo, Zeinab Nour illustrated style in Italian architecture, whereas Mercedes Volait explained the role played by Italian architects in Heliopolis. Clementina Banicci, from Reggio University in Calabria, talked about architect Gennaro Scognamiglio's activity in Egypt.

The Director of the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center, Dr. Mohamed Awad, gave a presentation on the role played by Italian architects in Alexandria. His talk included an account of the historical development of the city from the Ptolemaic period to the present day, which he has recorded in a book awaiting publication. This account covered topics such as the relationship between Alexandria and Rome, Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, and the burning of the famous Library. Dr. Awad noted that evidence of the Roman era is still visible today at sites such as Pompey's Pillar and Kom el Dikka. The power of Alexandria declined throughout the Roman period and eventually the classical city was partly destroyed by earthquake.

Centuries later the city shrank during the Islamic era and by 1798, the Turkish town had developed outside the original boundaries of the classical city. However, Alexandria continued to suffer from neglect until the early nineteenth century when Italian architects were commissioned to build residences for the pashas. They then began to develop a municipal district which resulted in a new European city, the centerpiece of which was the impressive Place des Consuls. Following the 1882 riots and bombardment, Alexandria was rebuilt in a different style, with Italian architect Antonio Lasciac responsible for many properties in the former Place des Consuls, later renamed Mohamed Ali Square. By the mid 1920s there was a revival in Islamic styles which played a key role in developing the city. Mario Rossi (1897–1961), in particular, designed important churches and mosques including Morsi Abou El Abbas Mosque along the Corniche. But perhaps the most important legacy is the 'Alexandria Style'—a generic name commonly used to describe a baroque style of architecture that was to have a wide influence on many other cities.



Mohamed Awad, Director of the Alex-Med Center, and Ezio Godoli from the University of Florence

And so, after two demanding days this successful conference, covering a wide range of architectural subjects, came to a close. Some of the participants took the opportunity of their remaining time in Alexandria to visit the sites, whilst others exchanged views over a well deserved lunch.



Morsi Abou El Abbas Mosque designed by Italian architect Mario Rossi

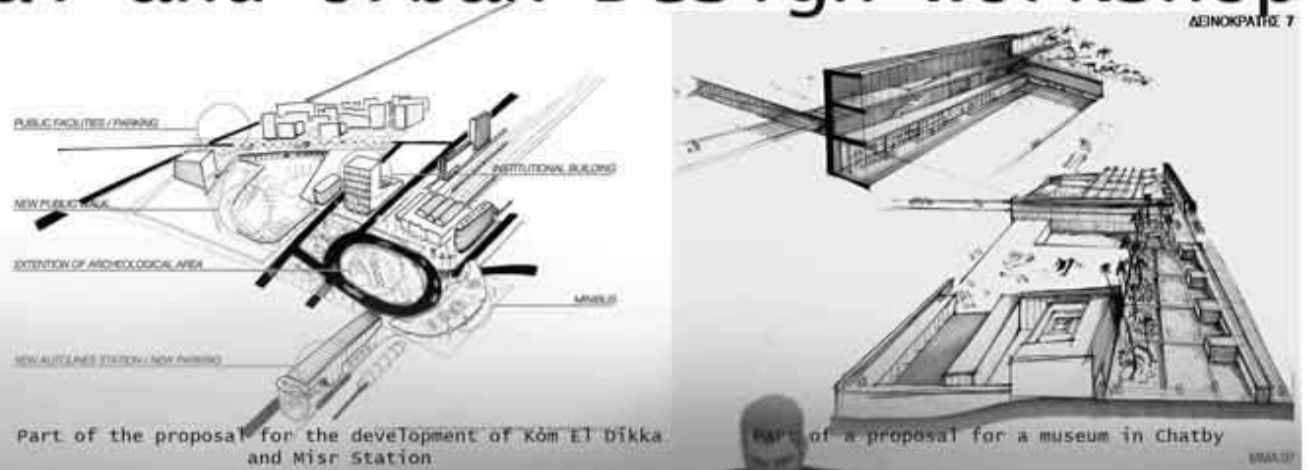
Alexandria: what future for its heritage? An Architectural and Urban Design Workshop

Carole Escoffey

As part of its mission to preserve heritage and develop the urban fabric of Alexandria, and its aim to promote dialogue and exchange within the Mediterranean, Alex-Med organized a two week workshop on architectural and urban design from 11–25 November 2007. The participants included student architects from the Facoltà di Architettura Civile and the Dipartimento di Progettazione architettonica of the Politecnico di Milano in Italy, and from the Department of Architecture of Alexandria University. The workshop's partners were Alex-Med, the Politecnico di Milano, the Department of Architecture of Alexandria University and the Centre d'Études Alexandrines.

This workshop's main objective was to "design with the aid of History", while promoting cultural exchange: an exchange of knowledge and experience between the two universities' undergraduates, postgraduates, young researchers and university professors of different backgrounds. The workshop was project based: the final product being three projects presented by the Italian and Egyptian students, assisted by their supervisors. These projects were development proposals for three key areas of the city: Tahrir Square (originally called the Place des Consuls and commonly known as Manshieh Square), Fouad Street (the ancient Canopic Way) and the site around the Temple of Ras el Soda in Chatby district.

In addition to the work sessions themselves, the two week program included activities focusing on the threat to Alexandria's heritage. Jean-Yves Empereur, the Director of the Centre d'Études Alexandrines, gave an opening lecture entitled *Delenda est Alexandria: The Never-Ending Destruction of the City*. In addition, two documentaries by Alexandrian film director Asma El Bakry were projected: one on the Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria and the other on the discovery of the Temple of Ras el Soda on its original site. On a different note, Sahar Hamouda, gave a lecture on *The Legend of Alexandria through Literature*, illustrating how the ancient city has inspired poets and playwrights through the ages.



Architect Ahmed Abdel Moneim, from the Alex-Med team, with students from the workshop

In addition to Alexandria's past, the city's future development plans were evoked when Yasser Aref spoke about *Future Developments Around the Eastern Harbor*. During the two weeks, reference was made to other case studies: A. Torrecelli gave a lecture entitled *Archeology and Project: the Milan Case-Study*, whereas G. Del Bene gave a talk on the Campi Flegrei Archeological Park in Naples.

The student architects were organized into three groups working with the relevant cartographic material and documentation, both on site and at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Yasser Aref, head of the Architecture Unit at Alex-Med, commented that the workshop provided an interesting opportunity for exchange between students and tutors, and that each of the groups was able to observe and learn from the others' approach.



A sketch of a proposal for a street in Kom El Dikka District

During the work sessions, Mohamed Awad, the director of the Alex-Med Center, and Nasser Rabat, professor of architecture at MIT, gave the young student architects their expertise and advice. At the end of the two weeks, the three final projects were presented. The first focused on the development of a site in Chatby near to two important monuments: the Temple of Ras El Soda and the Alabaster Tomb. The project centered on the building of a museum to house the important collection of mosaics discovered during different excavations in the city. The second project focused on the upgrading of Fouad Street and the development of the area on either side. Focal areas included the archeological site of Kom El Dikka, Misr Station Square, Saint Catherine Square and Shalalat Gardens. This development plan included revitalizing the whole area along Fouad Street and redirecting traffic, as well as creating a new parking system. The final project was devoted to the redevelopment of Tahrir Square in Manshieh district, and to the design of a new stock exchange on the site of Alexandria's original stock exchange, the Bourse, which is now a parking lot in Tahrir Square (also known as Manshieh Square).

At the closing session, were also present Dr Ibrahim Darwish, Director of the Alexandria National Museum, as well as Ahmed Abdel Fattah, Director of the Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria, both key figures in Alexandria's heritage preservation. These projects have provided exciting new ideas and approaches to Alexandria's preservation and development. The Alex-Med center will present them to decision makers and the relevant authorities such as the Governorate of Alexandria, as well as make them available to academic institutions.



Students at the workshop discussing a proposal with their professor

Durrell's Alexandria Past and Present: celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Justine*, the first volume of the Alexandria Quartet

Edward Lewis

Alexandria welcomed some familiar faces during the Alex-Med and British Council event "Durrell's Alexandria Past and Present: Celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Justine* the first volume of the *Alexandria Quartet*". Held 29-30 November 2007, the event gathered renowned writers and experts on Durrell alongside members of his family, and not only highlighted areas of his life that had previously been relatively unknown but challenged many established views regarding his life and work in Egypt.



Lawrence Durrell's daughter, Penelope Durrell Hope, with her husband, gave a touching account of her father, accompanied by family photographs.

The event highlighted the contribution of Lawrence Durrell to Alexandria's literary history exploring themes such as Durrell's Mediterranean poetry, his journey to Alexandria and the city in which he lived. Before the opening session entitled "Durrell's Alexandria" began, Paul Smith, director of the British Council Egypt, opened the proceedings by addressing Alexandria's role in the Mediterranean and why artists and writers gravitated to its shores from the classical period onwards. Michael Haag initiated the session, giving a very insightful lecture on Durrell's journey to Alexandria from Greece in 1941, accompanied by old slides of war torn Alexandria and extracts from Durrell's correspondence with friends and family. As author of books including *Alexandria: City of Memory* and *Alexandria Illustrated*, Haag's knowledge of the city, especially during the period of Durrell's placement, is extensive and he thus gave the audience an engaging and fascinating talk.

Distinguished Australian poet Peter Porter then delivered his lecture, "The Mediterranean Poetry of Lawrence Durrell", reciting works of Durrell's that were inspired by and written both in Egypt and elsewhere, most notably Greece, Durrell's second home. The award winning poet, who edited and wrote the introduction to *Selected Poems by Lawrence Durrell*, described him as "one of the best of the past hundred years and one of the most enjoyable", adding that his poetry is "always beautiful as sound and syntax. Its innovation lies in its refusal to be more high minded than the things it records, together with its handling of the whole lexicon of language".



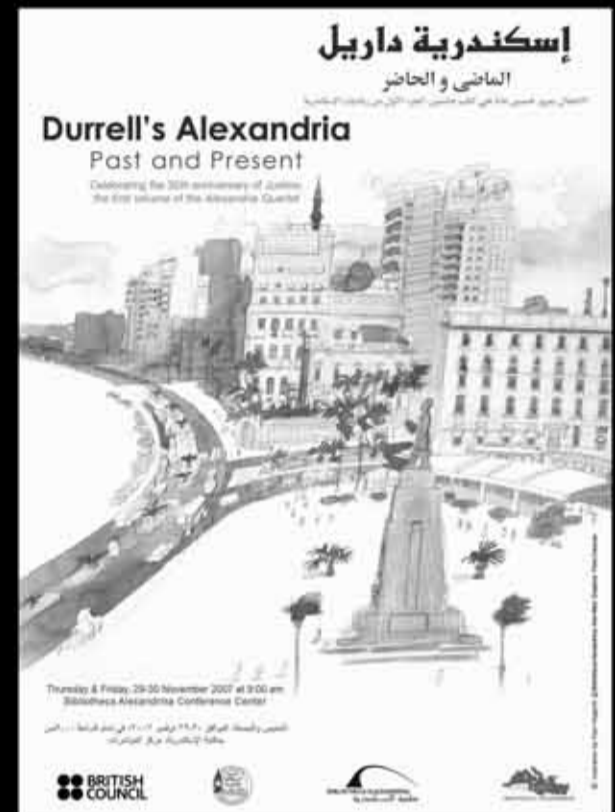
The Lawrence Durrell roundtable: (from left to right) Dr. Mohamed Awad (chair), and panelists Hala el Badry, Ibrahim Abdel Maguid and Michael Haag.

Contemporary writers of Alexandria were given a chance to express their views on Durrell's work and how it is perceived in today's literary circles. Alexandrian born Harry Tzalas, author of *Farewell to Alexandria*, challenged the common misconception of Durrell's attitude to Egypt and Egyptians. Another renowned Alexandrian writer, Ibrahim Abdel Maguid, whose novels include *Birds of Amber*, *No one Sleeps in Alexandria* and *The Other Place*, spoke of his admiration for Durrell's writing ability and use of language. The second session focused on "Durrell the Man" and included a touching and highly personal account given by Durrell's daughter, Penelope Durrell Hope. Having been born in 1940, Penelope was just 10 months old when she disembarked the Australian transport boat in the city's western harbor, yet her father's letters, photographs, scribbles and notes provided a vivid picture of their time in Egypt, more than making up for the lack of real memories.

The final lecture given on the first day was an illustrated talk by Michael Haag entitled *the Alexandria of Lawrence Durrell's time*. Using his vast array of photographs Michael Haag brought the city to life showing old landmarks including streets, boutiques, offices, patisseries and hotels that Durrell would have been familiar with and more than likely frequented.



Paul Smith, Director of the British Council in Egypt, addressing the public at the beginning of the two day conference.



The second day started with the highly successful walking tour of Durrell's Alexandria that provided an opportunity for participants to literally follow in Durrell's footsteps as his work places, houses and haunts were retraced by local expert Gordon Smith aided by a specially designed map.

Among the destinations were Durrell's old flat on Fouad Street, his office on Salah Salem Street (previously Sherif Pasha), Manshieh district and the Ambron Villa.

The afternoon's focus was a roundtable chaired by Dr. Awad focusing on the future of the Ambron Villa, an Alexandrian landmark that once housed Durrell but has since fallen into disrepair (see adjacent article). On the panel were journalist Hala el Badry, Ibrahim Abdel Maguid and Michael Haag. The conference closed with a short documentary, *Spirit of Place: Egypt*, screening interviews with Durrell exploring aspects of his life in Egypt and the Mediterranean.



A Tour of Durrell's Alexandria

Gordon Smith

It was over a drink at the bar of the Café Royal that I was asked by Sahar Hamouda and Mohamed Awad to organize a walking tour of Alexandria as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of Lawrence Durrell's novel, *Justine*, published in 1957. The tour included not only places mentioned in *Justine* but also locations where Durrell had lived and worked during his stay in the city. It consisted of three stages—two coach rides with a walking tour in the middle—and took about three hours in all.

Working with the Alex-Med team, a tour map was specially designed to assist every participant on the tour. This was accompanied by a listing of some appropriate and amusing quotations illustrating Durrell's wit and literary skills. In my introduction, I said that from personal observation, I felt obliged to recommend reading about Alexandria, before reading *Justine*, or other novels from the *Quartet*. Better still, I observed, visit the city and understand its layout and various quarters, identify the cafés, hotels and districts. Only then will you get the feel of life in Durrell's Alexandria of the 1950s.

However, so oversubscribed and unexpectedly popular was the Lawrence Durrell Tour held on 30 November 2007, that a further two tours had to be arranged in the following weeks to accommodate all interested parties. Even then, sufficient seats were not available for all of the Alex-Med team or the staff of the British Council which had sponsored the event.

On leaving the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the coach tour first passed by the cemeteries in Chatby. These cemeteries emerged during the nineteenth century, beyond the confines of the European city and overlapping with the territories of the historical necropoli. Cemeteries of many denominations are to be found there. They reflect the diverse communities of a city where, according to Durrell, one could hear "Fragments of every language—Armenian, Greek, Amharic, Moroccan Arabic...." Then, passing the Shalalat Gardens we drove down Fouad Street—the ancient Canopic Way. Along here, once elegant private villas were pointed out as well as the apartment where Lawrence and Eve Durrell first set up home together. Turning into Nebi Daniel Street, the tour continued around Cairo Station gardens and forecourt. It was explained that the Cairo Station, with its classical façade and vast iron and glass platform canopy, was designed by Italian architect A. Lasciac and Greek engineer L. Leonomopoulos. The castings are dated 1926 and the station became operational in 1927.



Myself with Edward Lewis

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The group in Manshieh

Then, following the tramlines, we headed for Karmuz district, pointing out some fascinating architecture on the way. In Karmuz, where the cobbled streets still exist, we rattled past Pompey's Pillar and the meeting place of the Cabal cited in *Justine*, before heading towards the Mahmoudieh Canal. In the novel, Durrell writes, "Cabal—a science and a religion. Of Cabal itself, what is there to be said? Alexandria is a town of sects and gospels. [...] The Cabal met at a disused curator's wooden hut near Pompey's Pillar." The view of this landmark from nearby Bab Sidra shows how the Italian architects used that monument as a vista point in creating this long boulevard punctuated by piazzas of various shapes. This is the district which Mohamed Ali allocated to the Italians in the nineteenth century, whereas the area beyond, he gave to the Egyptians. It has been said in historical reference that here is where the "Italians rubbed shoulders with the Arabs."

Next, taking the eastern course alongside the Mahmoudieh Canal, the tour headed for the Ambron Villa in Moharram Bey district, where Durrell lived for a time. Mohamed Ali ordered the construction of this canal, completed in 1820. It linked the city to the Nile and enabled cotton to be transported quickly to the Western Harbor and thence directly to Europe. Originally flanked by grand landscaped villas, by a century later, it had become an industrial area of factories and warehouses. Today this canal seems to be starved of a sufficient water supply. A short break from the coach journey provided the tour group an opportunity to walk to the villa to find a once fine building in a sorry state of dereliction and, it seems to me, not long for this world. The Ambron Villa was built and owned by an Italian-Jewish family of that name. Lawrence Durrell rented the top floor of this turreted villa in 1943 and began to write notes for his *Alexandria Quartet* there. The garden atelier was added in the early 1920s, designed by Alessandro Loria, the celebrated Italian Alexandrian architect of the Cecil Hotel. It was in that atelier that Clea Badaro, the model for Clea in Durrell's *Quartet*, painted.

From this corner of Moharram Bey district, the coach then continued towards the Stadium, passing Kom el

Dikka about which Durrell wrote "So it was with a sense of familiarity that I walked beside *Justine* through the twisted warren streets which crown the fort of Kom El Dikk, trying with one half of my mind to visualize how it must have looked when it was a park sacred to Pan..." Turning left at the fire station, we glimpsed the art deco façade of Pastroudis, the café regularly frequented by Durrell and where in *Justine*, he "ordered a double whiskey, which I drank slowly and thoughtfully".

Back into Fouad Street, of which Durrell says that the shops "seemed to have all the glitter and novelty of Paris", the journey took us along Rue Sherif Pasha (now Salah Salem Street), pointing out a building in Rue Toussoun Pasha where Durrell had an office during his early days in Alexandria when he worked for the British Information Office.



Touring the streets in the old Turkish Quarter



Touring Durrell's Alexandria

At the lower end of Rue Sherif Pasha, we passed the site where the Bourse and the Brokers' Club used to be. The Bourse, the Cotton and the Stock Exchange, originally dominated this eastern end of the square. The nationalization of the Suez Canal was announced by Nasser from the balcony of the Bourse on 26 July 1956. The building was subsequently burnt down during the 1977 bread riots and a parking lot now stands in its place. The Brokers' Club, on the other hand, is where Clapodistria would sit all day on the terrace and watch women pass "with the restless eye of someone endlessly shuffling through an old soiled pack of cards."

The Polish Consulate Office was noted as having occupied a building in front of the Anglican Church of Saint Mark, located on the north side of the former Place des Consuls. On passing the former French Gardens, the Majestic Hotel was pointed out as the

place where E. M. Forster stayed during his first assignment to Alexandria with the Red Cross. On entering the former Place des Consuls, the group waved respectfully at the statue of Mohamed Ali on his sturdy horse, then proceeded on foot to explore the area around Fransa Street: cutting through narrow passages, walking through the souk in the old Turkish quarter, then along the end of El Nasr Street to reach the wide El Bab el Akhdar Street. Various architectural features were pointed out, but the best came after crossing over into Madame Naima Street (Zawiyat El Set Naima). This narrow street is an absolute gem and contains examples of nearly every architectural style from Egypt, Turkey and Italy which Alexandria has to offer. Onwards through Rue d'Anastasia, into the Rue des Soeurs famous for the 1882 riots, along Teristet El Hemlawi Street and into Saint Catherine's Square. From there the coach was waiting to continue a tour of the outer city areas. On reaching the Rue des Soeurs, one of the longest streets in Alexandria and which features in *Justine*, its history was explained. Named after the Roman Catholic convent and school near its entrance, it witnessed a dramatic episode of the city's history. On 11 June 1882, two donkey boys, one Egyptian and the other Maltese, began a fight in a café in the Rue des Soeurs. Eventually this turned into a riot. Mobs from the square and neighboring quarters joined in. Property was set alight and by the end of the day hundreds of Egyptians and Europeans had been killed.

Turning left, we passed by Napoleon's Fort (otherwise known as Kom el Nadoura). This hill supports an observatory and was fortified in 1798 by one of Bonaparte's generals, Caffarelli. Then, the tour joined the tramline route along the Western Harbor passing the districts of El Gomrouk, Ras El Tin and Anfoushi, described by Durrell as "streets that run back from the docks with their tattered rotten supercargo of houses, breathing into each other's mouths, kneeling over shuttered balconies swarming with rats and old women whose hair is full of blood of ticks."

We then visited the site of the ancient Pharos at Qaitbey Fort, passing on the way the entrance to Tatwig Street, cited in the *Alexandria Quartet* as an area known years ago for child prostitution. Durrell wrote of Nessim that "he swung the little sports car through the heavy gates into Rue Fouad and began to

weave his way down to the sea through the network of streets which slide down towards Ras El Tin. Though it was not late there were four people about and we raced away along the curving flanks of the Esplanade towards the Yacht-Club grimly overtaking the few horse-drawn cabs (carriages of love) which dawdled up and down by the sea. At the fort we doubled back and entered the huddled slums which lie behind Tatwig Street."



Looking at architecture in the Turkish Quarter

At Qaitbey Fort we stayed a while then returned along the Corniche where various buildings of social and political prominence were noted. For example, the French Consulate where "the French Consul-General was impassioned by Justine [and] all attempts to meet her had failed so far." The Cecil Hotel where, in the novel, Durrell writes "I have described how we met—in the long mirror of the Cecil, before the open door of the ballroom, on a night of carnival. She was there with a man who resembled a cuttlefish." Continuing our journey, we passed Saad Zagloul Square, described by the novelist as a place of "silverware and caged doves" and we noted the Italian Consulate and Greek salon, Atheneous, before finally returning to our point of departure, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

In conclusion, it was a successful tour. Some Alexandrians even admitted that they had never been in the area of the old city experienced during the walk. Later, one couple from Cairo said to me: "This tour has seduced us to return to Alexandria and discover more."



Visiting Qaitbey Fort, once the site of the ancient Pharos

The villa Ambron Too little too late?

Edward Lewis

You either need a detailed map or a great deal of luck if you are going to locate the villa that housed Lawrence Durrell, one of Alexandria's most celebrated writers and poets. Buried in the recently developed district of Moharrem Bey and looked down upon from the roof tops of the encircling high-rise residential blocks, the villa is a sad reminder of Alexandria's neglected heritage of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Using a little imagination you can make out the villa as it once was in the first half of the twentieth century: green grass instead of plastic bags and rubbish, smooth rounded columns instead of crumbling stumps, and a panoramic view of the city from the lion-faced tower rather than the washing lines and red bricks of adjacent buildings of today. Looking at the current state of this now pathetic looking edifice, it is clear that its days are numbered and, along with other historic buildings, it will soon join the already long list of vanished Alexandrian landmarks.

The villa is best known for hosting Durrell during his World War II posting but it was a well known establishment long before Alexandria's most renowned British writer moved in. The owners, an Italian Jewish family headed by Aldo and Amelia Ambron, were members of the well-to-do Alexandrian elite and their house "was always open to society entertainment". One can imagine the scale and extravagance of such parties since Aldo's business partners in his construction firm included bankers, cotton merchants, real estate tycoons and the cream of Alexandrian society, including Prince Youssef Kamal. Prior to Durrell's arrival, the second floor of the villa had been rented to a Syro-Lebanese family, the Debbanes. In between the fabulous parties that were held in the grounds, Max and Nelly Debbane transformed aspects of the villa adding, among other assets, an extensive library that became the envy of the city and was later acquired by the



The staircase of the Ambron Villa leading into what was once a garden scattered with marble statues, granite columns and exotic flora, but which today has become nothing more than a refuse dump for the neighbors.



The Ambron Villa in 2007

American University in Cairo Press' rare books library in 1993. Other additions to the villa included an atelier at the bottom of the garden designed by none other than Alessandro Loria, the celebrated Italian architect responsible for important Alexandrian landmarks including the Cecil Hotel.

As one of the wealthiest families in Alexandria as well as keen and accomplished artists themselves, the Ambron family was sympathetic to visiting artists and, therefore, more than happy to offer the entire top floor of the villa to Durrell once they discovered he was in need of residence. In October 1943, Lawrence Durrell and Eve Cohen, along with Paul and Billy Gotch with their daughter Linnet, moved into their new dwellings at the then address, 17 Rue Maamoun, in Moharrem Bey. Included in their apartment was an octagonal tower that Durrell made his own. It was whilst sitting in this private space and overlooking the exquisite garden scattered with bright marble statues, granite columns and exotic flora that he wrote *Prospero's Cell* (1945) and poems included in his collection *Personal Landscape* (1946) as well as notes for the first volume of his most famous work, the *Alexandria Quartet*. He would later acknowledge the tower's role in his writing, "I sit in my tower to ideas moving around inside, aqueous and dim like fishes".²

Whilst Durrell's time in Alexandria was not always blissful, the months he spent in the Villa Ambron appeared to be a source of happiness as he later recalled in Michael Haag's *Alexandria: City of Memory*:

"[I] lived out two and one half years of great, extravagant and colourful life in wartime Alexandria. It was a good writing period in a sense, though of course the war was an exhausting moment to think about writing because there was no future attached to anything one did."³

In 1945 the villa lost its wartime inhabitants: the Gotch family moving to Thessaloniki and Durrell and Eve to Rhodes. The abolition of Mussolini's anti-Semitic laws enabled Aldo and Amelia to return to their native Italy. Not long after their departure the villa hosted the exiled Italian King, Victor Emmanuel III, who died



The octagonal tower where Lawrence Durrell wrote *Prospero's Cell* (1945), poems for *Personal Landscape* (1946), and notes for the first volume of the *Alexandria Quartet*, 2007



The remains of the atelier at the bottom of the villa's garden, designed by Alessandro Loria, better known as the architect of the Cecil Hotel, Alexandria.

there in December 1947⁴ and was buried in St Catherine's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Alexandria. The artistic influence that had graced the house during the Durrell years and before continued under the renowned Alexandrian artist Effat Nagui and her husband Saad Elkhadim. Colorful artifacts, textiles, folkloric trinkets, mosaics and paintings filled the villa, whilst the atelier continued to provide inspiration for a circle of Alexandrian artists until the latest, and most likely last, chapter of the villa's history began shortly after Effat Nagui's death in 1995. With no willing tenants and the building needing some considerable renovation, the Ambron heirs sold the property to a construction company for an unknown amount sparking the all too common cat and mouse game of illegal demolition. Despite the issue of a conservation decree, looking at the villa today one wonders if it is too late for anything to be done despite Dr. Awad's optimistic comment during the roundtable at the *Durrell's Alexandria Past and Present* Conference that "anything can be restored". The atelier, minus its top floor, crouches in the shadows of imposing modern apartment blocks, leaving no trace of its value in Alexandria's contemporary cultural landscape. The exterior of the building, flaking and miserable, acts as nothing more than a shell for the decay within that has slowly destroyed the ornate balustrades, sweeping staircases and marble floors. The garden surrounding the villa, once famous for its blooming violets, ginger lilies, frangipani and banyan trees, has become nothing more than a refuse dump for the neighbors. Safeguarding such heritage is not as simple as raising money. Cooperation between the private and public sectors, an efficient project management plan and general commitment are required at the very least before even tackling the political, social and economic obstacles that will no doubt arise. Is it too late for this and similar buildings and is there really enough desire, interest and resources from the Alexandrian

public and cultural sectors to see such a project through? Eve Cohen, speaking after the war, summed up the sad reality, equally applicable in today's context:

"That world we had known at the Ambron villa had already become unreal."⁵

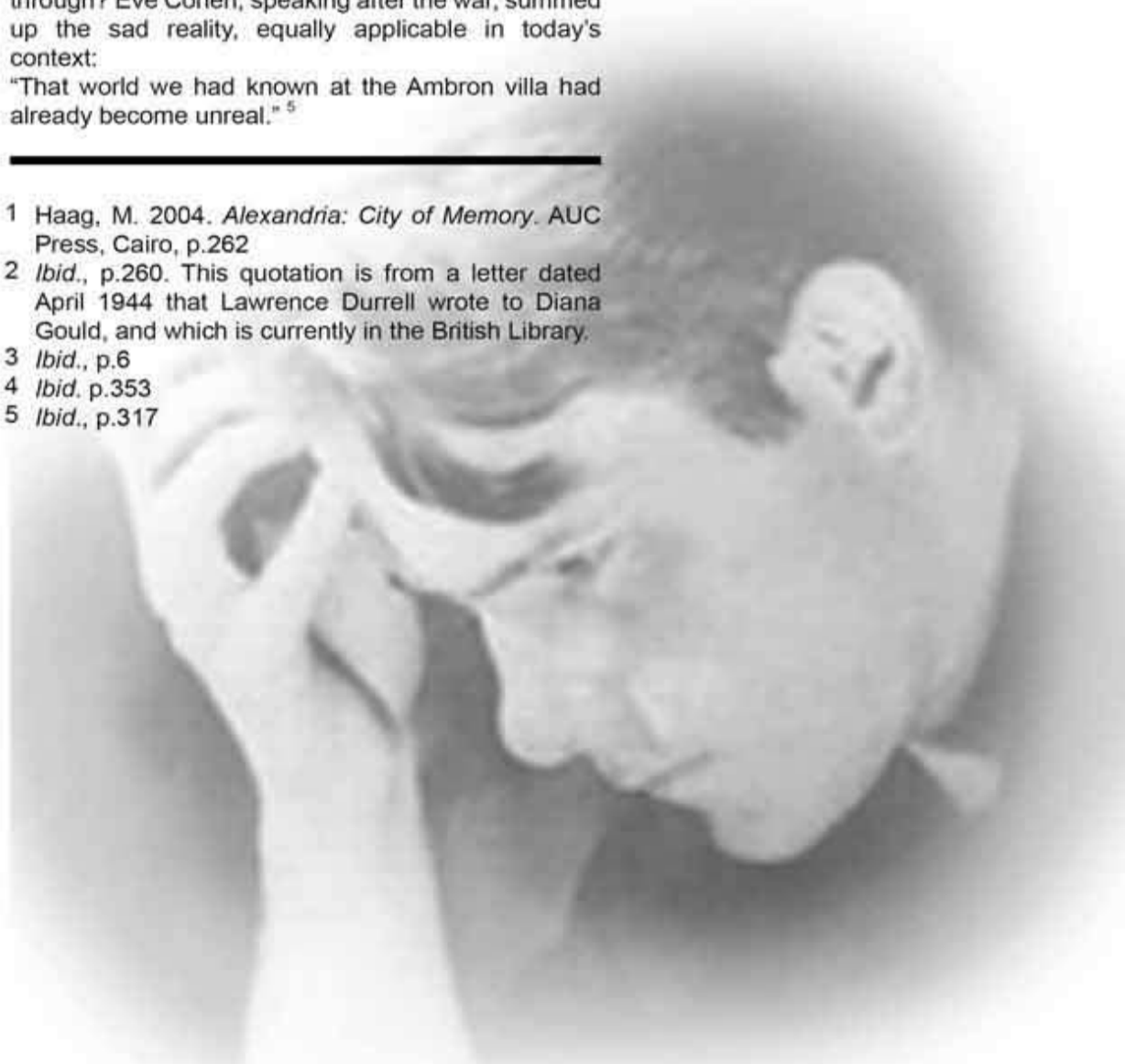
1 Haag, M. 2004. *Alexandria: City of Memory*. AUC Press, Cairo, p.262

2 *Ibid.*, p.260. This quotation is from a letter dated April 1944 that Lawrence Durrell wrote to Diana Gould, and which is currently in the British Library.

3 *Ibid.*, p.6

4 *Ibid.* p.353

5 *Ibid.*, p.317





Alexandria





by Night



Les souvenirs d'un officier de l'armée de Bonaparte (suite)

Carole Escoffey

Louis Thurman (1775–1806), jeune lieutenant dans l'armée française, participa à la prise d'Alexandrie en juillet 1798. Les extraits de sa correspondance publiés ici montrent les conditions dans lesquelles se trouvaient les soldats des bataillons postés à Aboukir et à Alexandrie, après le départ de Bonaparte et de l'armée française pour le Caire et la Syrie. À Aboukir, Thurman découvrit un paysage de ruines antiques : les vestiges de la ville de Canope, d'un ancien camp romain, d'une nécropole ...

Cependant, un nouveau danger surgit qui se révéla plus redoutable encore que la flotte britannique ou que les attaques par les Bédouins : une épidémie de peste. Le capitaine Thurman, en voyant tomber un par un nombreux de ses compagnons pestiférés, aurait préféré « cent fois la guerre à ce repos de mort ». Thurman décrit en détail les nombreuses précautions sanitaires prises pour tenter d'empêcher la contamination : les cordons sanitaires, la quarantaine, les documents « passés au vinaigre », les effets brûlés, le bain de mer, les maisons barricadées... tandis qu'à Alexandrie « toutes les mosquées sont transformées en lazarets ». L'épidémie de peste bubonique de 1798–9 fit autant de ravages chez la population locale que parmi les soldats français. Selon Thurman, le bilan des morts parmi les français fut 2 400, mais il ignorait alors que la peste poursuivait l'armée française jusqu'en Syrie où l'épidémie se propagea à une rapidité foudroyante. En fait, c'est à Saint-Jean-d'Acre et à Jaffa que ce fléau fit les plus grands ravages, donnant lieu à un épisode devenu célèbre : la visite de Bonaparte à l'hôpital des pestiférés de Jaffa, le 11 mars 1799. Là, pour tenter de remonter le moral de ses troupes décimées par la peste, Bonaparte s'attarda près de chaque malade, et fit même le geste de prendre dans ses bras un malade à demi nu : geste rendu légendaire par le célèbre tableau d'Antoine-Jean Gros.

Un paysage de ruines antiques...

« ... j'ai pu faire avec tranquillité le trajet d'Aboukir ici. J'y ai vu bien des choses intéressantes sous le rapport historique. La côte est garnie de monticules sablonneux et de pointes de rochers. À une petite demi-lieue du dernier village d'Aboukir, on rencontre une anse très vaste remplie de brisants. Les mamelons du rivage sont couverts de débris ; on y voit des tronçons de colonnes de marbre ou de granit, des vouîtes crevées, des statues mutilées, des bains en ruines et taillés dans le roc offrant des chapiteaux bien sculptés, un sphinx de marbre blanc à moitié recouvert par les eaux.... Ces débris se soutiennent disséminés sur près de trois quarts de lieue : ce sont ceux de l'ancienne Canope. De cette rive au bord du lac Madiéh s'étend un pays de collines sablonneuses avec palmiers clairsemés, puis des bas-fonds qui sont cultivés en vignes, pastèques et figuiers [...] Un peu plus loin, on trouve un autre puits et, sur la côte, une vaste ruine carrée à murs très épais et



Bonaparte visitant les pestiférés de Jaffa, par Antoine-Jean Gros, 1804.
Musée du Louvre, Paris

flanquée de tourelles qu'on dit appartenir à un ancien camp retranché romain. Elle est entourée de beaucoup d'autres ruines que quelques-uns regardent comme les restes de Nécropolis, autre faubourg d'Alexandrie ; on est cependant encore à trois quarts de lieue de cette ville. Ici le terrain devient plus uni, plus nu, la vue se dégage de tous côtés, et bientôt on marche sur les ruines rougeâtres des anciens quartiers. On arrive à la porte dite de Rosette que par des espèces de sentiers circulant entre des monticules de ruines. »

La peste surgit à Alexandrie — la vie de camp à Aboukir

« Me voici de nouveau établi à Aboukir, où je suis chargé de la construction d'une Redoute. Dans l'état de désolation où se trouve Alexandrie, j'ai reçu comme une faveur l'ordre qui m'a amené ici où l'on espère encore échapper à ce fléau. Malheureusement le cordon sanitaire qui doit entourer Alexandrie n'est pas encore formé. J'ai quitté cette ville à la hâte. Depuis la mort de mon domestique, mes effets, hardes, vêtements, papiers, en un mot tous les objets qu'il a pu toucher dans mon appartement, me sont devenus suspects. Je les y ai abandonnés, me bornant à emporter le plus strict nécessaire. Cependant, l'inquiétude fort légitime que j'ai eue pour moi et mes amis se dissipe avec le temps.

J'ai retrouvé ici le général Dumay avec son aide de camp A— et environ cent cinquante hommes de garnison. Leur situation ne s'est pas améliorée. Le général habite la même baraque. Les soldats sont campés sur le revers de la hauteur où j'ai commencé la Redoute, abrités uniquement par des branches de palmiers entrelacées, et n'ayant pour lit que la terre couverte d'herbes marines. Je me fais construire une autre baraque en bois de palmier, recouverte en planches et en terre, et enfoncée de trois pieds dans le sol. Les meubles manquent complètement, de même que les plus simples ustensiles.

Une brouette est ma table, et un seul poêlon sert à toute la garnison. Du biscuit, du riz, rarement quelques œufs, le tout assaisonné de l'huile de zirig [SIC], voilà toute la nourriture. Le tabac est commun mais très mauvais.

Je me rends à mes travaux dès la pointe du jour.... Heureusement je suis fort occupé.... Les pluies se font sentir et la mer devient très orageuse. Une seule frégate anglaise mouille encore dans la Rade. Les vaisseaux sont rares. Nous sommes entièrement abandonnés à nous-mêmes, et, dans notre isolement, c'est presque un plaisir d'apercevoir un ennemi. Quoiqu'en nivôse, il fait encore très chaud, et je me baigne journellement. Nous n'avons pas la peste et nous sommes relativement heureux. Nous attendons un renfort de troupes maltaises ; Dieu veuille qu'elles ne nous apportent pas la contagion. »

La peste atteint Aboukir

Aboukir, 10 pluviôse, an 7.

« Comme je le craignais, le cordon est venu trop tard. La peste est ici. Le détachement, composé de Maltais et de soldats de la légion nautique, est arrivé et a été mis aussitôt en garnison au Fort. Le lendemain, un homme de garde tomba, puis bientôt un autre ; ils se succèdent maintenant sans relâche. Le corps-de-garde est surtout le siège du fléau. Sur douze hommes de garde, quatre ou cinq tombent chaque jour.

La Redoute est encore saine. Nous venons d'établir une espèce d'ordre sanitaire, et d'empêcher les communications entre la Redoute et le Fort. Quant à moi, qui dois journellement passer quelques heures au Fort, à cause de divers travaux, je n'y entre qu'avec des précautions particulières : il y a ordre de ne pas m'approcher. »



La peste (par H. Bellangé).

« J'occupe mon temps aux travaux et à la comptabilité. Je n'ai pas un seul livre. J'ai bien de la peine à avoir du papier, et me sers de poudre en guise d'encre. Je fais des promenades solitaires sur la plage, en me livrant à mes pensées, qui ne sont pas toujours fort gaies [...]

Rosette vient d'être infectée par l'arrivée de la légion nautique... Les cordons sont maintenant bien inutiles, et ne font qu'augmenter la consternation... Si le fléau parvient au Caire, l'armée aura à subir une terrible épreuve. Bonaparte vient de partir pour la conquête de la Syrie à la tête de 15 000 hommes. Je viens d'écrire au général Caffarelli pour demander de faire partie de cette expédition.

On ne s'accoste ici qu'avec défiance, en évitant soigneusement de se toucher, et même de se placer sous le vent les uns des autres. Quand on se rassemble, ce qui n'a lieu qu'en cas d'urgence, on se place en cercle, éloignés les uns des autres de quelques pieds. Les billets, ordres, lettres, se passent au vinaigre, en les prenant avec une pince en bois... Les ordonnances portent leurs dépêches au bout du fusil, entre la bayonnette [SIC] et le canon... Ceux qui négligent ces précautions sont ordinairement victimes [...] Je reçois la réponse du général Cafarelli. Il me refuse net, vu la contagion. Notre armée de la haute Égypte nous craint plus que l'ennemi. [...] La peste a continué ses ravages parmi nous : cependant elle paraît en déclin. Nous vivons ici comme abandonnés de la terre entière. [...] Notre cœur est serré par la vue de nos rangs que la peste éclaircit... Je vous assure, cher père, que la position est déplorable, et que tous nous préférions cent fois la guerre à ce repos de mort. »

Le retour à Alexandrie

Aboukir, germinal, an 7.

« Je suis de retour d'un séjour à Alexandrie. [...] J'ai retrouvé tous mes camarades bien portants, allant à leurs travaux avec certaines précautions, mais du reste rigoureusement enfermés chez eux et ne communiquant avec aucun étranger. Depuis le commencement de la peste, tous les domestiques sont étroitement consignés, et aucun ne dépasse le seuil des maisons.

On reçoit des vivres avec les pincettes en usage. Grâce à ces précautions, la plupart de mes amis ont échappé au fléau, au milieu des maisons voisines qui en sont désolées....

J'allais entrer en quarantaine lorsque le bombardement m'en a empêché. Cette ville n'était pas encore assez malheureuse. Il a duré huit jours. La plupart des habitants se sont réfugiés dans les tours et dans les villages. Les bombes ont écrasé plusieurs bâtiments du Port-Vieux, des maisons de Turcs, et sont parvenues dans l'ancienne ville arabe jusqu'à l'hôpital des pestiférés. [...]

Je suis entré en quarantaine dans le village de la Porte-de-Rosette. Quel séjour, quel ennui profond, quelles souffrances ! Le tout pour satisfaire à des précautions ridicules par le peu d'exactitude avec laquelle elles sont observées....

Enfin, après avoir végété pendant quarante jours, serré entre quatre murs d'un petit jardin, dans une misérable baraque, mangeant des oignons [SIC] et du biscuit, j'ai pu reprendre la clef des champs, plus heureux de retourner à mon poste que je n'avais été d'en partir....

J'oubliais de vous dire que je n'ai retrouvé qu'une minime partie de mes effets : le reste a été volé, gaspillé, perdu, mangé des rats.... Je n'ai rien acheté pour les remplacer, excepté une bonne paire de babouches rouges, ce qui est beaucoup.... Avant mon départ, la peste avait déjà gagné l'Osiris qui, en huit jours, a perdu tout son équipage, sauf trois hommes parmi lesquels le capitaine. [...]

La peste a beaucoup diminué à Aboukir ; elle doit, dit-on, cesser à la Saint-Jean. »

De nouvelles mesures sanitaires à Aboukir

Aboukir, 25 floréal, an 7.

« Voici la mesure sanitaire à laquelle, sur ma proposition faite au commandant Godard, nous avons procédé ici, il y a une quinzaine de jours. [...] Tout le monde arriva avec ses armes et bagage ; les derniers malades avaient été envoyés la veille à Alexandrie. Tambour battant, on se rendit au bord de la mer, sur la plage, où nous fîmes ranger en simple ligne.

Là, après avoir donné ordre de faire comme nous, le commandant et moi nous entrâmes bravement tout habillés dans la mer, à peu près jusqu'à la poitrine. Les soldats nous suivirent avec tout leur fourniment, sans aucune exception, y compris fusils, gibernes, sacs, etc. Les canons avec leurs attelages, écouvillons, cordages, etc., en firent autant. La lessive commença, et dura deux heures. Tout fut lavé, mouillé et trempé, pièce par pièce, jusqu'aux papiers.

LA PESTE
(par H. Bellangé)

En même temps que ceci se passait sur la grève, des ouvriers rassemblaient avec des pincettes et des râteliers tout ce qui restait de vieille paille, chiffons, effets même, dans les baraques, le Fort et la Redoute, et en faisaient un tas auquel on mettait le feu. Les chambres, corps-de-gardes, escaliers, etc., étaient lavés, puis les murs crépis partout au lait de chaux. Les portes de certaines pièces et maisons du village étaient barricadées ou murées. Les infirmiers de la quarantaine étaient conduits au bain d'un autre côté. Enfin les ouvriers eux-mêmes terminèrent cette laborieuse journée par un bain pareil... Cela fait, on rentra en bon ordre... À dater de cette opération, la peste a disparu.... Je ne vous ai jamais dit, je crois, qu'elle avait entièrement respecté les indigènes d'Aboukir...

Cette mesure sanitaire est-elle la cause de la cessation totale ? Je le pense : car la peste, bien qu'en déclin à Alexandrie, y est encore intense, et toutes les mosquées sont transformées en lazarets. La même mesure a pleinement réussi sur des bâtiments. Elle pourrait être, jusqu'à un certain point, généralisée dans les moments où le fléau se déclare. »

Alexandrie, messidor, an 7

« La Saint-Jean, avec ses rosées tant désirées, est enfin venue. On lui attribue la propriété de faire cesser la peste. Cette rosée, appelée dans le pays goutte-sereine par les Francs, est plus forte encore dans cette saison que de coutume. Les murs, les pavés, les vêtements et jusqu'au linge dans l'intérieure des maisons, en sont couverts et pénétrés. [...]

Nous sommes au 13 messidor, et nous avons, par conséquent, dépassé de quelques jours le terme assigné par l'opinion populaire. En effet, tout nouveau cas de peste a disparu, et à part quelques victimes qui se trouvent encore à l'hôpital, la ville est saine ! La joie, les rassemblements recommencent ; on traverse les bazars avec confiance ; on se heurte, on se touche sans danger, et les amis peuvent se serrer la main ; les barricades tombent, les maisons s'ouvrent ; quelques vaisseaux seulement sont encore en contumace.

Nous avons perdu près de 2 400 Français. Un seul homme a échappé de notre cavalerie. Presque tous les officiers de santé ont péri. Les canonnières ont aussi été maltraitées. Le chiffre de mort de la population sédentaire est très difficile à apprécier, à cause de l'absence de déclarations et du secret que gardent les habitants pour éviter le lazaret. On brûle partout les effets des maisons en contumace et ceux des hôpitaux ; on mure les lazarets et l'on remercie le ciel. »

1 Bonaparte en Égypte. Souvenirs du capitaine Thurman, avec préface et appendices par le Comte Maurice de Fleury, publié par les éditions Emile Paul, Paris, 1902.

2 Ibid. pp.65-67.

3 Il s'agit de l'épidémie de peste qui se répandit d'abord à Alexandrie, avant d'atteindre Aboukir, puis Rosette.

4 Le calendrier républicain fut utilisé de 1798 à 1805. Le mois de Nivôse correspond à la période du 21 décembre au 19 janvier.

5 Op. Cit. pp.71-73.

6 Ibid. p.74.

7 Ibid. pp.75-77.

8 Ibid. pp.70-82.

9 Ibid. pp.83-85.

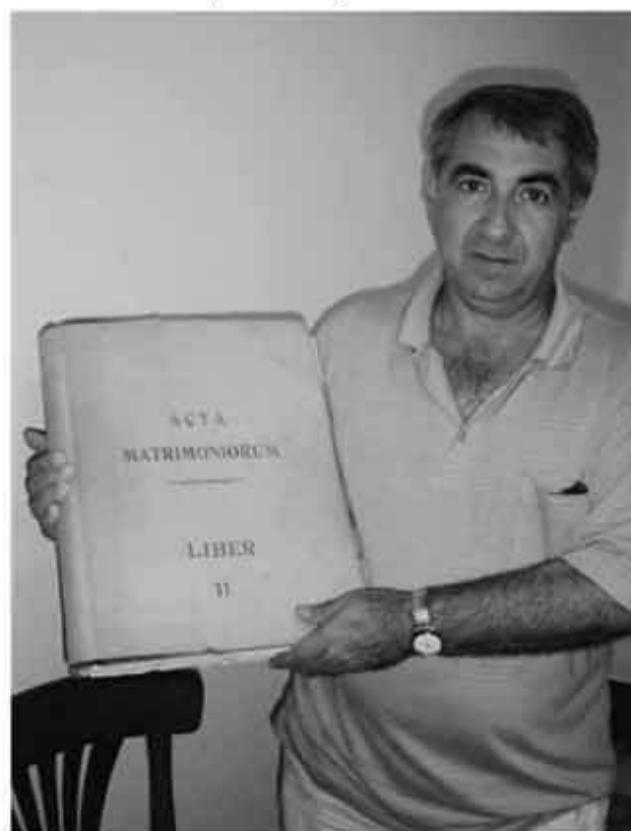
10 Ibid. pp.93-94.

Return to Alexandria

Joe Carbone

During early May 2005, I revisited the city of my birth, Alexandria, with my wife Joy. Whereas it was the first time my wife had been to Egypt, I had previously visited in 1966, staying in Bulkeley with my father's brother, Gennaro Carbone and his wife, Jolanda. My uncle and aunt were the only relatives who had remained in Alexandria as my aunt apparently suffered from agoraphobia and was too afraid to move from her home. They had no children of their own and as this uncle was the brother most like my own father, I felt very much at home with them and was treated like their own son. Although I may have only stayed with them for one month, in my memory it seems as though I stayed with them for much longer. They took me sightseeing around various areas of the city and I was fascinated by such a different way of life to the one I knew in Australia.

But first, let me say a few words about my family background. I was born in Alexandria in 1946. My parents also were also both born there. My father was born in 1919 to Giuseppe Carbone and Benedetta Ferrara, being the fifth of their eight children. His parents had moved to Port Said in 1896 from Trani in Italy, later moving to Alexandria. My mother was born in 1927 to Francesco and Giuseppina Buffo, being the fourth of their five children. Her parents had also moved to Alexandria from Regio, Italy. Being Italian, my father was interned during the Second World War at the Fayed Internment Camp between 1942 and 1944. Due to the political upheaval in Egypt at the time, most of my father's relatives returned to live in Italy in the 1940s, while my mother's family decided to immigrate, post war, to Australia. My parents, my sister and myself followed my mother's family, immigrating to Australia in 1951. They took with them a large knowledge of languages, a variety of culinary skills and multicultural customs. I grew up hearing wonderful stories about the cosmopolitan way of life in Alexandria.



Myself holding the church records, where I was able to search for my family's registrations of marriages and births.



My visit to St Catherine's Cathedral where my maternal grandparents were married

Arriving in May 2005 was a very different experience to the one 40 years earlier. I wanted to revisit my birthplace, to show my wife where I spent my first five years, and to visit the significant places connected to my family and personal history. At first, the obvious physical changes included the burgeoning and almost exclusive Muslim population, the replacement of many of the old European style villas with high-rise apartments and the development along the Corniche with the wide dual carriageway eating into what I recalled was once beach. I was also instantly impressed by the friendliness of contemporary Alexandrians. The warmth of the people and my familiarity with the city made me feel instantly 'at home'. From the moment Joy and I disembarked from the train at Misr Station we were made to feel welcome by everyone we encountered. We must have been readily identified as tourists or visitors from afar as we quickly became accustomed to being stopped in the street with wide smiles and "Welcome to Egypt! Where are you from?" When we replied "Australia", people of all ages would respond with any English words they could or the few things they knew about Australia such as 'Melbourne', 'Sydney' or 'kangaroos'. On the weekend we were invited to join family picnics on the beach and of an evening we were invited to attend weddings and concerts. We stayed at the Union Hotel on the Corniche only a few doors away from the grand Cecil Hotel where one of my relatives had worked in the 1930s. The magnificent view from our seventh floor balcony captured the Mediterranean seaside from Fort Qaitbey to beyond Sporting, as well as the constant movement of people and traffic along the Corniche.

The Italian Consulate was our first destination, as I needed confirmation of family history details and contacts at the cemetery and the Casa di Riposo. The initial cool reception at the consulate's front security gate was later transformed into valued assistance by one of the officials. As our visit coincided with consulate officials not receiving visitors on Thursday afternoons nor on Fridays we were extremely lucky to be given time.

A tram ride down to Chatby took us to the Casa Di Riposo where my aunt Jolanda had spent her final years, dying at the age of 99. Directions given by the consulate unfortunately were not clear. Inaccurate directions given to us by a helpful resident of European decent, who had befriended us while we traveled on the tram, further confused us. Instead of walking immediately across the road at the designated tram stop we roamed for over an hour in the university precinct searching for a place that appeared to be unknown by all locals. When we finally came across the Rest Home, almost by accident, the caretaker, Michele Patruno and his spouse, received us with a warm hug. They had been waiting for our arrival from the time the consular official telephoned them. We were taken into the room where Jolanda had lived, read, slept and dreamed. It was an emotional experience as I recalled my time spent with her as a 20 year old, and thought of all the intervening years she had lived alone in this home after my uncle's death. The Latino cemetery where my aunt Jolanda, my uncle Gennaro and maternal great grandfather Camillo Buffo were buried was a brief walk across from the Casa di Riposo. With only half an hour before closing time we were able to search the archives for registrations of deaths and burial locations. Unfortunately the grave of Camillo Buffo could not be found amongst the thousands of graves, now largely in disrepair, of Europeans who had been buried since the late 1800s.

The next day we journeyed to Sidi Gaber where we found the apartment where I lived with my parents, and later my sister, from the time I was born until my family left Alexandria. The building had undergone renovations and the number of floors had doubled. The ground floor apartment where my family had lived had now become a business for restoring furniture. It was dark, untidy and had no resemblance of what was once my home. I took a photograph of the window shutters as they reminded me of the fear I had during the riots of 1951 when stones were hurled against the shutters.



The baptismal font where I was baptized in Sacred Heart Church



My uncle and aunt's tombstone in the Latin cemetery

The last place that I wished to visit to complete my Alexandrian journey was the Catholic Cathedral of St Catherine's where my maternal grandparents, Francesco and Giuseppina Buffo had been married. The only Catholic priests remaining in Alexandria welcomed us. A helpful priest was able to search the archives and locate my grandparents' marriage registration, once again handwritten in a beautiful copper plate Latin script. We requested a copy for our family history files.

The remainder of our time in Alexandria was spent visiting landmarks such as Montazah, Fort Qaitbey, and St Mark's, walking down the Corniche and roaming the old city streets during day and night. We enjoyed the people, the buildings, the restaurants, the markets, the narrow lanes and views. We will never forget the warm "Welcome to Egypt" greetings and the friendliness of the people.

For me, returning to Alexandria was an emotional journey of loss and longing but also one of putting the past to rest and gaining new experiences and memories. One major motivation to travel to Egypt was to see what I had not experienced previously, that being the city of Cairo and the antiquities along the Nile. Sadly, I devoted only two nights and the best of three days to Alexandria in order to revisit my birthplace and search out my family history, yet it will remain a highlight for as long as I have the capacity for memory. These new, fresh memories are of the smells, sights and sounds of the city where I spent my first five years of life. I have seen the altar where my parents stood trembling as they were pronounced man and wife and the font where they later held me as I was baptized. I have seen the grave site of the aunt and uncle who loved me as a son and my grandparents came alive again in the archival record of their marriage. I have walked happily down narrow lanes and streets where my parents and relatives once strolled as children and teenagers and later were too afraid to walk due to fear. I have seen the Mediterranean lap against the skirt of the city, watched the sun set behind tall minarets and eaten the best falafel ever tasted at Mohamed Ahmed's restaurant. I left Alexandria feeling complete and thinking it would not matter if I never returned. However, it is now three years later, and I am once again longing to return.

We then went to the grand, beautiful Sacred Heart Church near Sporting where my parents were married and I was baptized. The Italian Catholic priests had long since departed and African clergy ran the church for the small Coptic community. They were very welcoming and willing to search the archives for evidence of my family's connection with this church. The huge old leather bound books finally revealed family registrations of marriage and baptisms, handwritten in beautiful copper plate Latin script. We were given a copy of the registration of each event. My wife Joy was really touched to see the baptismal font where I was christened as an infant.

My next destination was the home of my aunt and uncle with whom I had stayed in 1966. We journeyed to No 8, Sameh Cassen (formally known as Rue Lane), Bulkeley, only to find that the original dwelling where they had lived had been replaced five years ago by a high-rise apartment block. We were delighted however to find neighbors and shopkeepers who remembered my relatives with fondness.



Finding my grandparents' marriage registration in the register of St Catherine's Church with a help of a priest



الشكل (١) سقف الطابق الأول للقصر

وأعمال التخريب التي قد تحل به وخاصة أن المحال التجارية بدأت وقتها في إخفاء معالم القصر... كما اقترح من خلال هذا الكتاب أن يحول القصر إلى متحف للفنون الجميلة... حيث أنه تتوفر به جميع العوامل الفنية والتراثية التي تعبر عن الفترة الزمنية التي بنى فيها، ولكن للأسف تحققت مخاوفه بالفعل واندثرت وسرقت ونهبت الأعمال الفنية والقيم التراثية التي زخر بها في يوم من الأيام هذا القصر...

والمعماري الذي صمم القصر يدعى جورون Gouron وهو فرنسي الجنسية تتلمذ على يد المعماري الشهير شارل جارنييه Charles Garnier... وتميز القصر بطراز عصر النهضة الفرنسي المستحدث Neo-French Renaissance وهو يعتبر مثلاً لقوانين الفنون الكلاسيكية، وأضاف مصطفى باشا فهمي في هذا الكتاب أن باختفاء هذا القصر سوف يختفي المكان الأوحى الذي يعتبر مثلاً للجمع بين الفنون البسيطة والنحت والتصوير بالمدينة وعلى هذا المستوى الراقى... حيث زخر بالتماثيل البرونزية والرخامية لفنانين فرنسيين قد ذاع صيتهم في أوروبا والمنحوتات الخشبية وأعمال التصوير الجداري الذي انتشر في أغلب الحجرات بالقصر والزجاج الملون والأعمدة الرخامية الكورنثية والعقود الإغريقية... إلى جانب تصميم القاعات الواسعة التي جهزت جدرانها للاستماع الموسيقي...

وفي نهاية الزيارة لم أستطع أن أعلم إن كان هناك المزيد من الحجرات والقاعات التي ما زالت تحتفظ ببعض الأعمال الفنية (طبعاً المثبتة في الجدران فقط)... أم أن العوض على الله؟... فلقد رافقتني الست الناظرة إلى البوابة.

ولا نستطيع هنا إلا أن نتساءل (ودون أية تعليقات) ... هل يجوز أن تدفن بالحياة مثل هذه الأسطورة الجميلة ثم تتحول إلى مدرسة توشكي الإعدادية أو حتى.. الثانوية؟ وهل تعامل مثل هذه الآثار العزيرة بهذا الأسلوب في بلدان أخرى؟ ولكن الإجابة على هذا التساؤل يجب أن تكون واضحة (ودون أية تبريرات)... فكل ما هو مطلوب أن يتحرك ساكن وأن ترحموا يا من بيدكم الرحمة عزيز فن ذل.

التي بنى عليها هذا القصر في السبعينيات من القرن التاسع عشر، ويقع القصر بشارع فؤاد (طريق الحرية حالياً) بمدينة الإسكندرية حيث أنه كان محاطاً بمساحات واسعة من الحدائق والملاعب التابعة له... واشتهرت هذه الحدائق بالتنوع والثراء في الفصائل النباتية النادرة والزهور... وكانت واجهته المبهرة تقع على مرمى البصر من المار بشارع فؤاد... إلا أنه الآن ومنذ الأربعينيات من القرن العشرين قد اختفى خلف مجموعة من المحال التجارية بالشارع... حيث أصبحت واجهته تطل على ممر ضيق جداً ملئ بالنفايات والأعمال الحرفية... وكان هذه المحال كان من المقصود تركها للتضخم والانتشار لتخفي وراءها الكارثة التي حدثت لهذا القصر الأسطورة.

ولشدة جمال هذا القصر معمارياً وتشكيلياً كتب عنه الكونت دي زغيب ليصف الأعمال الفنية التي نفذت به... وقدم هذه المذكرات للمجتمع المهندس مصطفى باشا فهمي (المهندس المسنول عن القصور الملكية عام ١٩٢١م) من خلال كتاب تم طبعه عام ١٩٤٩م، تمنى فيه أنذاك المهندس مصطفى فهمي أن تشتري المحافظة هذا القصر من ملاكها الجدد لإنقاذه من الإهمال

التصريح... كما أعلمتها بأنني قد التقطت صورة بالفعل، فما كان منها إلا أن رفضت التصوير من أساسه...، فحاولت أن أطمئنها وأعرض عليها صوراً لأماكن أخرى كانت في حقيقتي... وأؤكد لها أن هذا البحث لأغراض أكاديمية وليس موجهاً لأي جهة أخرى... ولأنها سيدة طيبة سمحت لي فقط بتصوير الحجرة التي نحن بها... وهو ما يعنى أنها الغرفة الوحيدة بالقصر التي لا تزال على قيد الحياة... أو بالأصح بها رمق من الحياة.

وإلى من يهمه الأمر... أقدم السطور التالية... لوصف بعض ما كان هذا القصر عليه قبل خمسين عاماً تقريباً...

قصر زغيب... هذا القصر الذي يعتبر بمثابة التحفة الفنية والمعمارية والتراثية والتي - ولشديد الأسف - قد تحولت إلى مهزلة إنسانية... فهو يعد من أهم القصور التي قد ورثتها مدينة الإسكندرية عن الفترة الزمنية التي تدعى بالزمن الجميل أو La Belle Époque ويسمى بقصر زغيب نسبة إلى الكونت باتريس دي زغيب Patrice de Zogheb والذي قد كتب في مذكراته (Memories) أن جده الأكبر قد اشترى الأرض



الشكل (٢) مكتب ناظرة مدرسة توشكي

ارحموا عزيزاً فن ذل

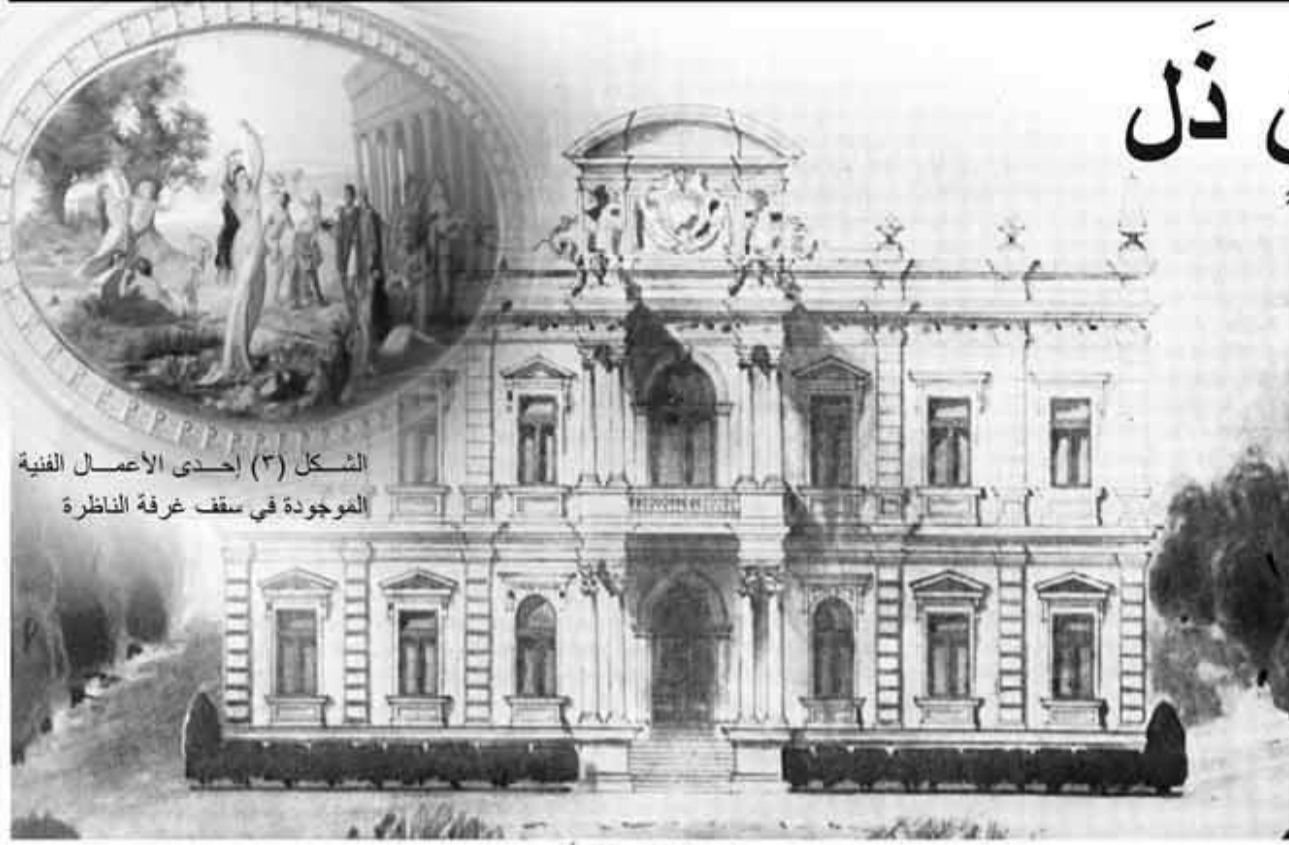
د. زينب نور

المكان: مدرسة توشكى الإعدادية بنين بالإسكندرية (قصر كونت دي زغيب سابقاً).
الزمان: ظهيرة أحد الأيام المشمسة - سنة ١٩٩٩.
دواعي زيارة المكان: بحث ميداني خاص برسالة الماجستير في مجال الفنون الجميلة.

كانت بوابة المدرسة الخارجية مغلقة... فقرعت عليها بقوة ثلاث مرات متتاليات، ففتح لى رجل عجوز عابس الوجه قائلاً: نعم.
قلت له: أريد أن أقابل السيدة الناظرة... فزاد عبوساً وقال: اتفضللى خُشى!
دخلت لأجد أمامى الواجهة الخارجية لقصر الكونت دي زغيب الذى طالما بحثت عنه فى شوارع الإسكندرية... والذى كان قد اختفى خلف سور المدرسة والغابات الخرسانية أمامه وعلى جوانبه.

ورغم حالته المنهكة إلا أنني وأنا أدخل استعدت سريعاً عقب الماضى الجميل الذى كانت المنطقة كلها تتمتع به قبل حوالي خمسين عاماً، وللأسف فور دخولي سمعت جرساً طويلاً... لم ألبث أن أدركت أنه جرس الفسحة... ولكنى لم أكن بعد قد عرفت أى الطرق أسلك... ولم يكن الحارس قد أغلق البوابة بعد... حيث كان لا يزال يراقبني وأنا أتطلع إلى أعلى الواجهة العجوز الجميلة.

وما هى إلا ثوان معدودة حتى أدركت أنى فى مشكلة كبيرة... فلقد غطى التراب مرمى الرؤية وتلبدت الأجواء بضباب غابر لم أستطع بكل أمانة أن أرى من خلاله كف يدي، فكانت الصدمة قوية... أدركت بعدها الحارس وأتى من خلفى إلى يميني قائلاً... "من هنا يا أنسة"... وأشار بذراعه إلى الناحية اليمنى التى حسب اعتقادى تؤدي إلى المدخل الخلفى للقصر... وبدأت عيناي فى التأقلم على التراب المتناثر والذى لم يكن سوى نتيجة الرمال التى تبعثرها أقدام الطلبة فى



الشكل (٣) إحدى الأعمال الفنية الموجودة في سقف غرفة الناظرة

قصر زغيب (قديم)

ترحيب أصلاً... وذلك نتيجة للخبرة التى كنت قد اكتسبتها من زيارات كثيرة لأماكن أخرى بالمدينة، فما شاهدته لن تستطيع الكلمات وصفه... فالجدران والأسقف تمثل بيوتاً آمنة للأثرية وشبكات العنكبوت... والأسلاك متساقطة من شتى الأركان... والأسقف التى كانت تتجمل بلوحات التصوير الجدارى البديعة... قد تساقطت بالكامل، والنوافذ القليلة الموجودة بالمكان لا تكاد ترى من خلفها شيئاً وقد غشيت بالتراب الأسود...، وقبل أن أصل إلى آخر درجات السلم شجعت نفسى وسحبت الكاميرا والتقطت صورة سريعة لأول سقف قابلته فى الطابق الأول (الشكل ١)، والذي فور صعودي إليه وجدت على يساره عدداً من المكاتب تشغله بعض الموظفات... فابتسمت إحداهن فى وجهي وقالت: "أيوه يا أنسة... أي خدمة"، فقلت لها: أنا معيدة بكلية الفنون الجميلة وعازبة استاذن السيدة الناظرة من أجل تصوير المكان وبعض الأعمال الفنية به".

قلت ذلك وأنا أكاد أضحك سخرية لأنى لم أكن قد رأيت بعد أية أعمال فنية... كما أنى كنت أحاول اختلاس النظر فى المكان... عندما رأيت السقف الذى يعلونى وقد حدث له نفس ما حدث للأسقف الأخرى.

المهم أيضاً أن فور انتهائى من كلماتى المعدودة... انتفضت الموظفة واقفة... وقالت: "اتفضللى فى مكتب الست الناظرة وأنا سوف أبلغها لأنها ليست بمكتبها"، وكانت قد أشارت إلى مدخل غرفة كبيرة... فتوجهت إلى الغرفة... لأجد مفاجئة جميلة تنتظرني... فالغرفة لا تزال تحتفظ بشيء من رونقها وكانت تتميز بالفخامة والأبهة (الشكل ٢)... وفى سقفها احتل أحد الأعمال الفنية الكبيرة مكاناً استراتيجياً... استخدمت فيه تقنية التصوير fresco secco وبه أحد المشاهد التى تمثل بعض الفتيات والفتيان الذين يتسامرون أمام حدائق أحد المعابد الإغريقية القديمة... واتسم أسلوب التصوير به بالكلاسيكية والبراعة فى تنفيذه... حيث أنه لم تمسه يد بدعوى الترميم ومع ذلك فهو مازال على درجة عالية من الثبات (الشكل ٣).

وعندما أتت الست الناظرة... قابلتني بابتسامة حذرة وعرفتني بنفسى وبهدفى من الزيارة وعرضت عليها

الفناء... والذين كانوا قد انطلقوا كما القنابل المسيلة للدموع. خضت طريقي بينهم فى حرص إلى أن وصلت إلى المدخل الخلفى... والذى ما أن دخلت إليه... حتى فقدت الرؤية مرة أخرى... فوقفت لبرهة أحاول أن أستكشف المكان الذى كان شبه مظلماً كيبوت الأشباح... ليس به أي إضاءات... ولكنى بسرعة أدركت أنني فى البهو الرئيسى للقصر... وشاهدت على بعد أمتار قليلة درج كبير يؤدي إلى الطوابق العليا، فالتفت ورانى ولم أجد أحداً... كنت وحدى تماماً. بدأت التوجه ناحية الدرج ببطء شديد أستطيع من خلاله التعرف على جنبات المكان والعثور على أى من الأعمال الفنية التى كنت قد قرأت عنها فى مرجع قديم ونادر جداً يتناول وصف هذا المكان الذى كان فى يوم من الأيام عظيماً عزيزاً.

المهم... أنني أدركت فى كل خطوة أخطوها أن السيدة الناظرة لن تسمح لى بتصوير أى شيء... بالرغم من حصولي على تصريح من الجامعة... كما أنني لن أكون موضع



صورة للقصر من الداخل (الآن)

An Invitation to join the Readers of Homer

Kathryn Hohlwein,
President and Founder
THE READERS OF HOMER

I would like to invite you, each and every one of you, to come and join us at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina on Tuesday 21 October 2008, to read great poetry aloud with others who perhaps have also never done this before. Together, we shall share a part of our great humanistic inheritance by reading allocated passages from the world famous time-honored poem, the Iliad of Homer. We shall read in English, Arabic, Greek, or any other language which you are the most comfortable with, so long as there is a translation of Homer to which you can gain access. We always try to honor the language of the country which hosts us, and for Alexandria, this is Arabic. Consequently, we expect that most registered

readers will choose Arabic, and each of you will be provided with your passage in Arabic or English. Everyone reads only for about 4-5 minutes, in a pre assigned passage which has a reader number. This sounds complicated but works... beautifully. Another thing which sounds difficult but works well is to include young people and even children in the line-up of registered readers. It is the fascination of hearing all kinds of people read a shared masterpiece that validates and makes interesting what the Readers of Homer does. Admittedly, it is a little scary to have even a small moment's worth of responsibility for carrying the value of a time-honored work of art. But this is why people enjoy our readings.



Even though I invite you as President and Founder of the Readers of Homer, I once knew as little about the two ancient Greek poems attributed to him as anyone else who was just mildly educated in the legacy of early Greek literature and art. I am not really a classicist or scholar, but I a devoted lover of great poetry, and Homer's art is great poetry. It was my amazement at the breathtaking and uncanny eloquence of Homer that brought me to this point of sharing the wisdom and beauty of the poems internationally. It is not I or my organization that is international. It is the assessment of generations of readers that we cannot lose these treasures, coming to us from so long ago, with so much relevance for our own times. Somehow Homer knew what endures.

The great English contemporary poet and translator Christopher Logue says of Achilles' helmet that it shone "with a light so bright it can be seen across three thousand years". And it is true. The light of these early works, whether created by an individual named Homer or by a series of rhapsodes inventing upon a given structure, elicits the energy and desire of translators in so many tongues across the centuries to "make them new", that some gleaming treasure must be captured within them. Indeed, for mysterious reasons, Homer is being translated now more than ever, brought into the idioms of our time, some translations more precise, others more radically re-invented.

The Readers of Homer prepares all-day or even all-night readings of one or the other of the two epics we think of when we hear the name Homer. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are two very different poems which touch us differently. For the 21 October event, we are doing only a 6 hour, much shortened version, of the *Iliad*. The *Odyssey* will have to wait. And wait it will, just as Penelope waited for her husband, as families whose fathers and husbands are given over to war must wait for their homecoming, which is never easy.

I am grateful to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina for hosting this reading. Even as an American child, the thought of the Great Library of Alexandria being destroyed haunted and hurt me. It made me wonder and wonder again at what was lost, at all the spiritual and intellectual energy collected there of which we can never know. Or know only very tangentially. Without that grand embodiment of human curiosity and acknowledgement of what excellence means, what

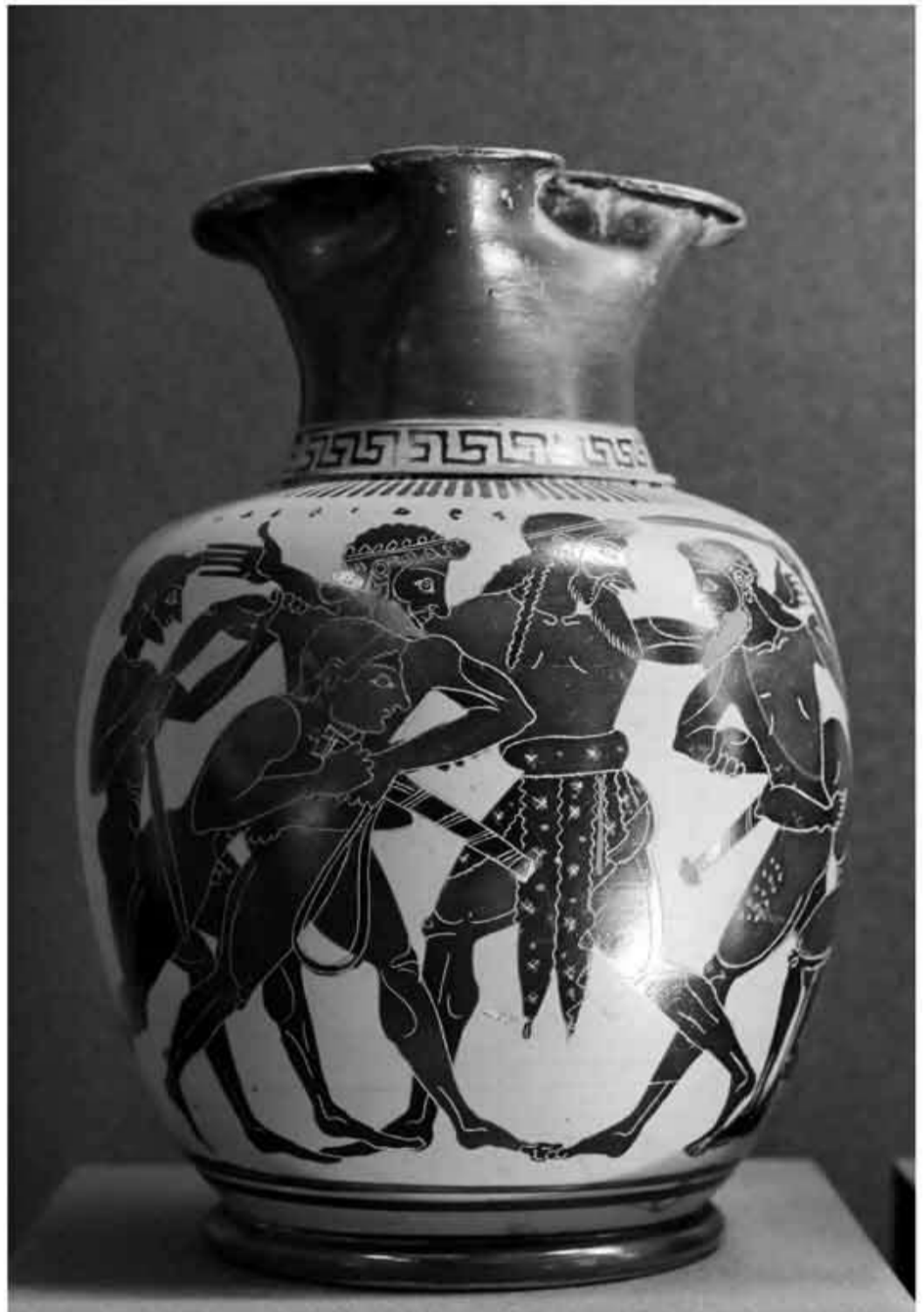
would we have left of the towering and subtle minds lost in antiquity? So I am as grateful to the old Library as I am to the New. I honor the second librarian, Zenodotus of Ephesus, "The Keeper of the Books", who helped decisively to protect and organize what papyri were blessedly preserved.

I am also indebted to an American physician and psychiatrist, Dr. Jonathan Shay of Boston, Massachusetts, for his two astonishing books on the relevance of Homer to soldiers of today, of any and every conflict, so universal is the understanding in the Homeric poems. He works with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome patients: soldiers who are having a hard time assimilating and living with the horrors of war which they witnessed and sometimes participated in. The titles of his two books insist upon the relevance of Homer's poems to the suffering war causes for everyone, on any side of any conflict. They are: *ACHILLES IN VIETNAM: Combat Trauma and the Unmaking of Character*, and *ODYSSEUS IN AMERICA: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*. His works gave me the courage to present my readings as my own personal activism in the cause of peace.

Thomas Hobbes, an English seventeenth century philosopher, asserted that "Homer's *Iliad* is the most just and impartial of all human inventions". It is not the Greeks only whom we care about, nor is it only the Trojans. It is not only Achilles who amazes us but the "shepherd of the people", the Trojan hero, Hector. The cause of the war is both slight and yet understandable, trivial but elusive. The woman for whom it was purportedly fought, Helen, is ambiguous, and she suffers, and she hates herself. Is she Helen of Troy or is she Helen of Sparta? The old men whose sons never come home again weep in the same way on either side. Women lose everything, on both sides, and their lives and those of their innocent children are ruined, and severely tested. Even the most glorious of able and courageous warriors comes to weep with those his actions have helped to defeat and he realizes the sorrows of The Other. Even terrifying Achilles comes this far! And nothing is sadder than a great city destroyed forever.

I have no procedure for exclusion. We are all in this together. I welcome those who are scholars and those who have barely heard of Homer, I welcome the finely educated and those who did not have that chance, men and women, old and young, and even children.

Please register for this large and free experience at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. You can register via the Readers of Homer website at: <http://www.thereadersofhomer.org>. Please come to read in whatever manner is natural to you on 21 October.



HARISSEH

حريسه

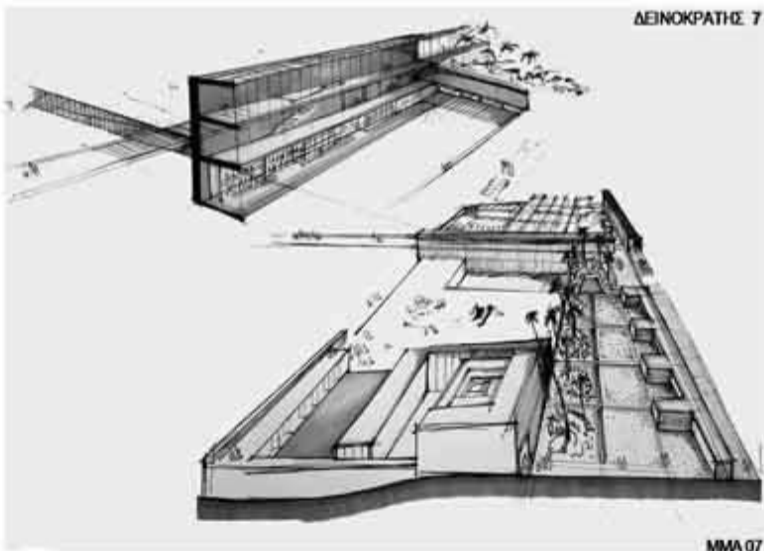
INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup semolina flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1/2 cup chopped almonds
- 1/2 cup plain yogurt
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon rose water
- 25 blanched almond halves for garnish
-
- 1 cup water
- 2 cups white sugar
- 1 teaspoon rose water
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Stir together semolina, baking powder, 2 cups of sugar, and chopped almonds until evenly blended. Stir in yogurt, vegetable oil, and rose water until a soft dough forms. Cover bowl with plastic wrap, and allow to rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.
- 2 Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Press the dough into a 9x9 inch square baking dish, and smooth the top. Score the top of the dough to create 25 squares, then top each square with an almond half.
- 3 Bake in preheated oven until the top has puffed and turned golden brown, about 20 minutes. The harisseh is done when the top is golden, and the center has firmed. When done, remove from the oven, and allow to cool in the pan for 20 minutes.
- 4 While the harisseh is cooling, pour water and 2 cups of sugar into a saucepan. Bring to a simmer, and cook for 5 minutes. Stir in 1 teaspoon of rose water, and lemon juice, then remove from the heat.
- 5 To serve, cut the warm harisseh into 25 squares, and place onto a large serving platter; pour the rose water syrup over, making sure all of the pieces are moist.



ALEX-MED NEWSLETTER

Bringing the Mediterranean Together

This newsletter hopes to reach a wide public, both locally and internationally. It brings to you news about Alex-Med and Alexandria, and encourages you to send your contributions. If you would like to send your views, comments or contribute to topics related to Alexandria and the Mediterranean please use the contact details below. Regular sections include an "Alexandrian Artists Corner" where young Alexandrian artists can publish their poetry or display their art; a gastronomical page to illustrate the diversity and similarity of the Mediterranean cuisine; a page on an Alexandrian personage and another on an Alexandrian building or neighborhood, and a page of photography that captures scenes from everyday life in Alexandria. Our mission is to involve you in our activities and in the making of a new Alexandria – one that honors the past, respects diversity and rises to the challenges of the 21st century.

Editor: Carole Escoffey
Graphics: Flora Cavoura
Photography: Abdallah Dawestashy

Contact us:

If you want to be added to our mailing list, please fill in the form and either mail or email it to us. If you would like to send a letter to the editor or to contribute to the newsletter (either an article in Arabic, English or French, or a poem) please send it to:
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