

Bibliotheca Alexandrina

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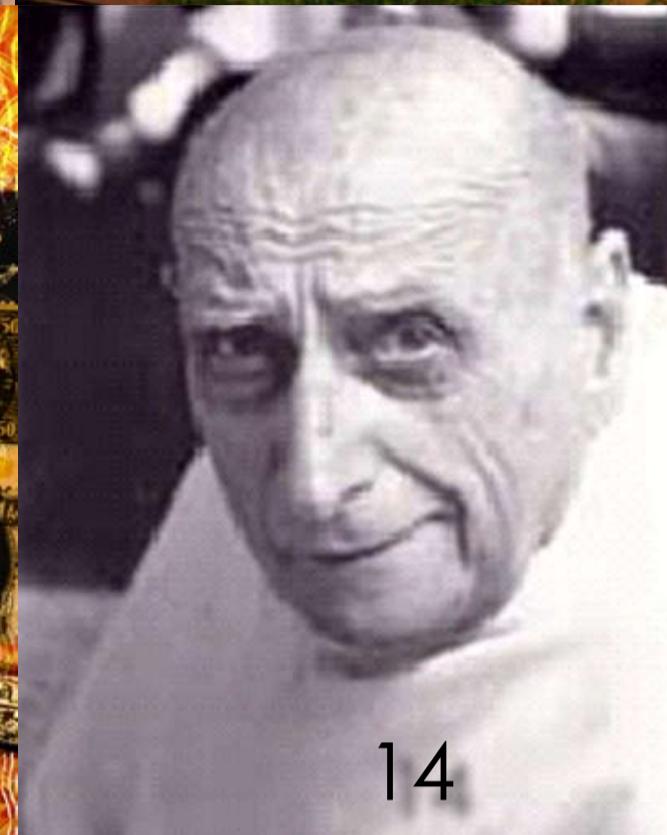
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Honoring the Past... Promoting the Future

This newsletter hopes to reach a wide public, both locally and internationally. It brings to you news about Alex Med and Alexandria. If you would like to send your views, comments or contribute topics related to Alexandria and the Mediterranean please use the contact details. Regular features include an article on an Alexandrian personage, another on an Alexandrian building or neighborhood, a page of photography that captures scenes from the life and sites of the city, and a gastronomical section on Mediterranean cuisine. 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.

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Front cover illustration: The Statue of Nubar Pasha in Sayed Darwish Theater. Photographed by Abdallah Dawestashy.

Turning Back the Hands of Time...

The Launch of the *Diaries of an Egyptian Princess*

Jaidaa Gawad Hamada



If one could turn back the hands of time!" was a phrase that invariably reverberated on the evening of 26 June 2010 at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the evening which witnessed the launch of Princess Nevine Abbas Halim's *Diaries of an Egyptian Princess* published by Zeitouna Publishing House.

A member of the Egyptian royal family, Princess Nevine Abbas Halim is the great great granddaughter of Mohamed Ali Pasha on her father's side. Having left Egypt in 1961, she now lives between Alexandria and Lausanne. Drawing on her own memories, as well as on those recorded by her mother and grandmother in their respective diaries, Princess Nevine charts her life story giving numerous personal anecdotes against a world teeming with political change and intrigue, as well as decisive historical events. In an ambiance charged with nostalgia, reminiscences and bittersweet memories, the event brought together a host of distinguished guests and attendees, some of whom would also have once known the lifestyle which the princess recounts in her diaries.

Organized by the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the book launch attracted a large audience. Though more than half a century has passed since monarchic rule came to an end in Egypt, this bygone era still retains its glamorous appeal. Having welcomed the audience, Dr. Mohamed Awad, Director of the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center, expressed his pleasure to have Her Royal Highness publish her own



memoirs and be present at their book launch. Dr. Sahar Hamouda, Deputy Director of the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center, subsequently welcomed Princess Nevine and all the guests, highlighting the historical dimension of the book. The author then took the floor herself, to read extracts from her *Diaries*.

Though it begins with the conventional autobiographical phrase "I was born on June 30th, 1930 in Alexandria", *Diaries of an Egyptian Princess* moves beyond being



Princess Nevine Abbas Halim signing the audience's copies of her book.

merely a personal account of the life of an Egyptian princess. Reconstructing the past, Princess Nevine offers a portrait of an instrumental period in Egyptian history. More importantly, her account refutes deeply-entrenched allegations about members of the Egyptian royal family who had long been stereotyped as corrupt, frivolous and



Dr. Sahar Hamouda welcoming Princess Nevine Halim and the guests.

oblivious to the plight of the downtrodden classes of society. "The public... considered the rich princes must have stolen everything they possessed. They cannot be blamed because that was the norm for many of the pashas and beys," Princess Nevine recalls in her *Diaries*. The book thus redresses this charge, since a notable exception to



Princess Nevine reading out extracts from her book.

the stereotype was Princess Nevine's own father, Prince Abbas Halim, or "the Rebel Prince" as his daughter describes him, who championed the cause of the poor and was accordingly at odds with the king. "But Daddy was really interested in Egypt and the poor", she states. "He had the right ideas, but they were difficult to implement in the



Dr. Mohamed Awad speaking at the book launch.

existing political conditions". A retrospective, nostalgic tone is employed by Princess Nevine particularly in her account of her life in Alexandria, her cherished birthplace. "Alexandria was a clean, well-run town, more so than Cairo because of the huge foreign communities, mainly Greek, Italian and Jews of various nationalities", she reminisces. Feeling strongly anchored to Alexandria, she vividly recalls the serenity of her childhood and adolescence in the city: "They were carefree summers and we did enjoy them".

The book also features a collection of rare photos of the royal family, some of which were shown at the launch, contributing further to the atmosphere of nostalgia. The event came to a close with Princess Nevine signing the audience's copies of her *Diaries*.



A Midsummer's Artistic Month: The Ninth International Summer Festival and The Fifth Symposium for Sculpture Organized by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Arts Center

Jaidaa Gawad Hamada



For the ninth consecutive year, the Arts Center at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina held its annual International Summer Festival. Each year the center chooses a particular theme around which it organizes its events. It also divides its events along the lines of four major domains: music, theater, plastic art and cinema. This year's festival, opening on 1 July, 2010 and ending on 1 August, 2010, was entitled "Nostalgia". This may account for the unparalleled popularity of this year's events among people of all ages. Held in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Open Air Theater, the attendees listened to their favorite songs, enjoyed different artistic performances, danced the night away and indulged their nostalgia for the past, while enjoying the night breeze. Participants in the festival included

artists from Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Japan, Sweden and Turkey.

Heralding the festival was a piano concert given by the legendary pianist Omar Khairat, accompanied by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Orchestra and conducted by Sherif Mohie El Din. A music and song competition for Western Popular Styles was also organized during the festival, in which twenty Egyptian bands participated, wherein each band performed songs of a different decade. Monetary awards were granted to the winners. In the first week of the festival, a selection of the most celebrated Egyptian and Western songs of the 50s was performed by Massar Egbari Band فرقة مسار اجباري such as Elvis Presley's "Love me Tender", Paul Anka's "You are my Destiny", in addition to many of Abdel Halim Hafez's

and Faiza Ahmed's songs. The Jokers Band performed a selection of songs of the 60s' most celebrated bands; namely, The Beatles, Equals, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, The Doors, among many others. In the second week of the festival, Salalem Band فرقة سلام performed a collection of songs taken from old movies and famous songs of the 90s. In the same week Belal El Sheikh enchanted the audience with an Egyptian Traditional Music Night, performing a selection of songs by Sayed Darwish, Mohamed Abdel Wahab, Om Kalthoum, Mohamed Fawzy and Sayed Mekkawy, in addition to some Alexandrian folkloric songs and children's songs of the 80s. A night of El Sheikh Emam's songs was performed by Baraka Band فرقة بركة The Bibliotheca Alexandrina Orchestra, conducted by Mohamed Saad Basha, accompanied Azraq Samawy Band



فرقة أزرق سماوي in three performances under the title "Old is Gold". Each performance was dedicated to a particular decade and presenting a selection of the most celebrated Egyptian and Western songs of the 60s, 70s and 80s. A collection of the 80s' and 90s' songs was afterwards performed by Sot Fel Zahma Band. فرقة صوت في الزحمة What really distinguished this year's festival were the varied kinds of music that appealed to the audience's different musical tastes.

A night of Rai Music was presented by Sahara Band فرقة صحارى, while Habayabna Troupe فرقة حبابنا presented a collection of sketches and monologues of two of the most cherished artists: Ismail Yassin and Shokooko. Jazz lovers enjoyed a selection of traditional jazz music and songs presented by Pyramids Jazz Band. Likewise, Pink Floyd fans had a great time watching Andromeda Band paying tribute to their favorite band, just as The Beatles' lovers enjoyed The Glass Onion Band's presentation of some of the Beatles' timeless songs. A tribute to The Scorpions was also presented by Scorpionism Band. A totally different mood was created by the contribution of two bands from Greece and Turkey, En Chordais and Ahenk, respectively, under the title of "A Voyage in

the Musical Heritage of Istanbul, Alexandria and Thessaloniki". In addition to these different musical performances, the festival presented some movies that are generally hailed as landmarks in the history of Egyptian cinema, such as *Gharam we Intekam* (*Love and Revenge*, غرام وانتقام), *Le'bet el Set* (*The Woman's Game*) لعبة السست and *Naharak Said* (*Have a Good Morning*, نهارك سعيد), in addition to the Egyptian/Japanese experimental film *One Eye Open*. A spectacular performance of *El-Leilah el Kebirah* الليلة الكبيرة was presented by the Cairo Puppet Theater. Finally, the festival came to a close with a breathtaking night presented by one of the most popular bands of the 80s: El Masryeen Group فرقة المصريين, headed by Hany Shinouda and the vocalist Iman Younes, accompanied by the Biblioteca Alexandrina Orchestra and conducted by Sherif Mohie El Din.

Running parallel to the musical and theatrical performances of this year's festival were the exhibitions of the Alexandria International Symposium for Sculpture in Natural Materials, held for the fifth time in the

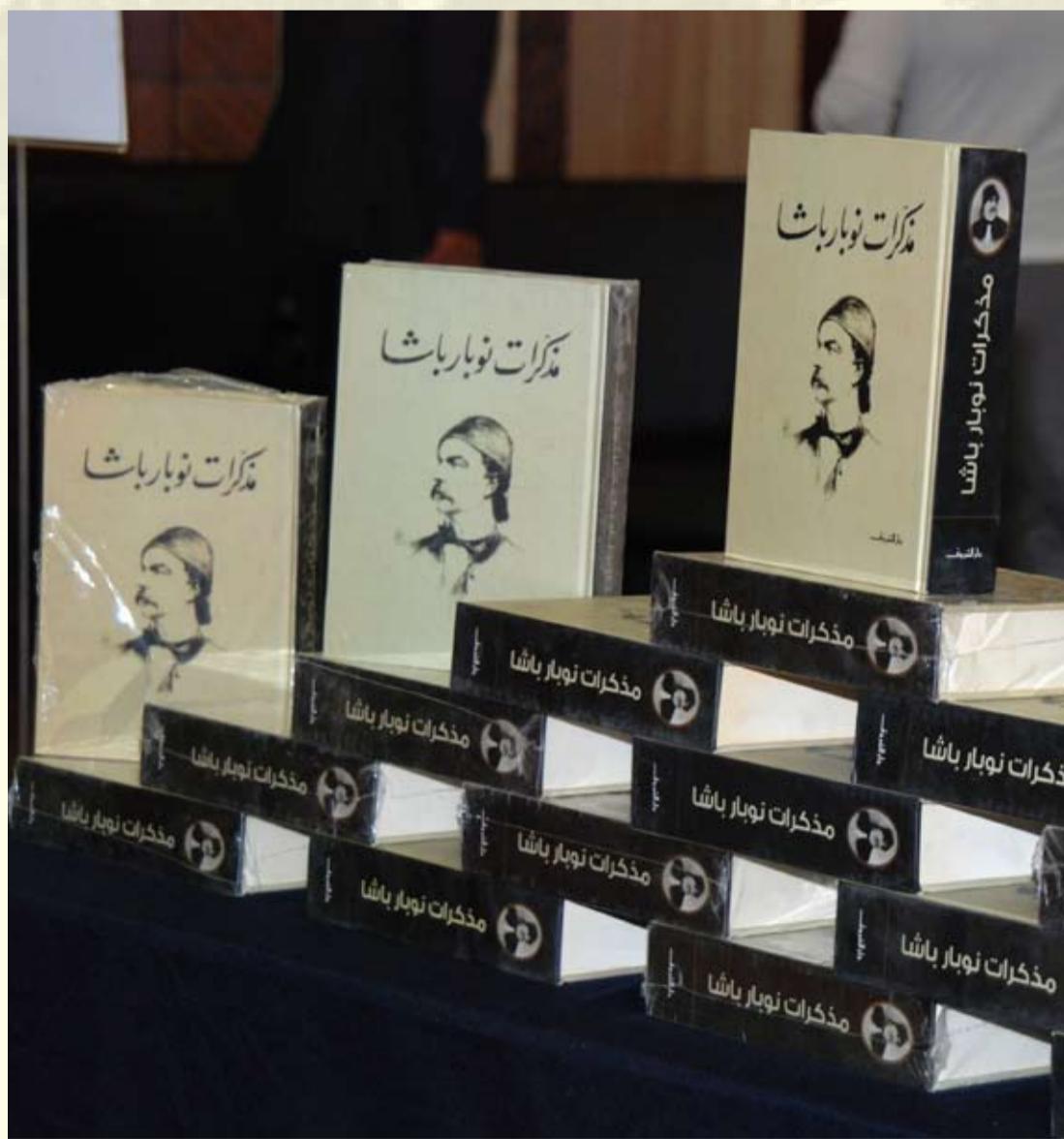
Bibliotheca Alexandrina. The Symposium comprised three exhibitions: "First Time", "The Resident Artist" and "The Three-dimensional Glass Creations Symposium". Adopted by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Arts Center, the "First Time" project aims at discovering future artists by giving them the support needed to foster their creative sensibilities, thus enabling them to pursue an artistic career. As for "The Resident Artist" project, it provides a one-month opportunity for a group of foreign artists, one after the other, to experience the city and delve deep into its artistic heritage, as a means of initiating artistic dialogue and interaction between different cultures. Finally, sixteen artists from Egypt, Cyprus, Italy, Greece and the Czech Republic participated in the Symposium for Sculpture in Natural Materials, which is the first of its kind where artists meet in a creative workshop, bound by ties of artistic creativity and friendship.

By organizing this annual festival, the Arts Center at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina plays an important role in not only providing a means of entertainment, but more importantly in fostering the ties of artistic dialogue and creativity, thereby emphasizing the role Alexandria has always played in disseminating knowledge, culture and arts.

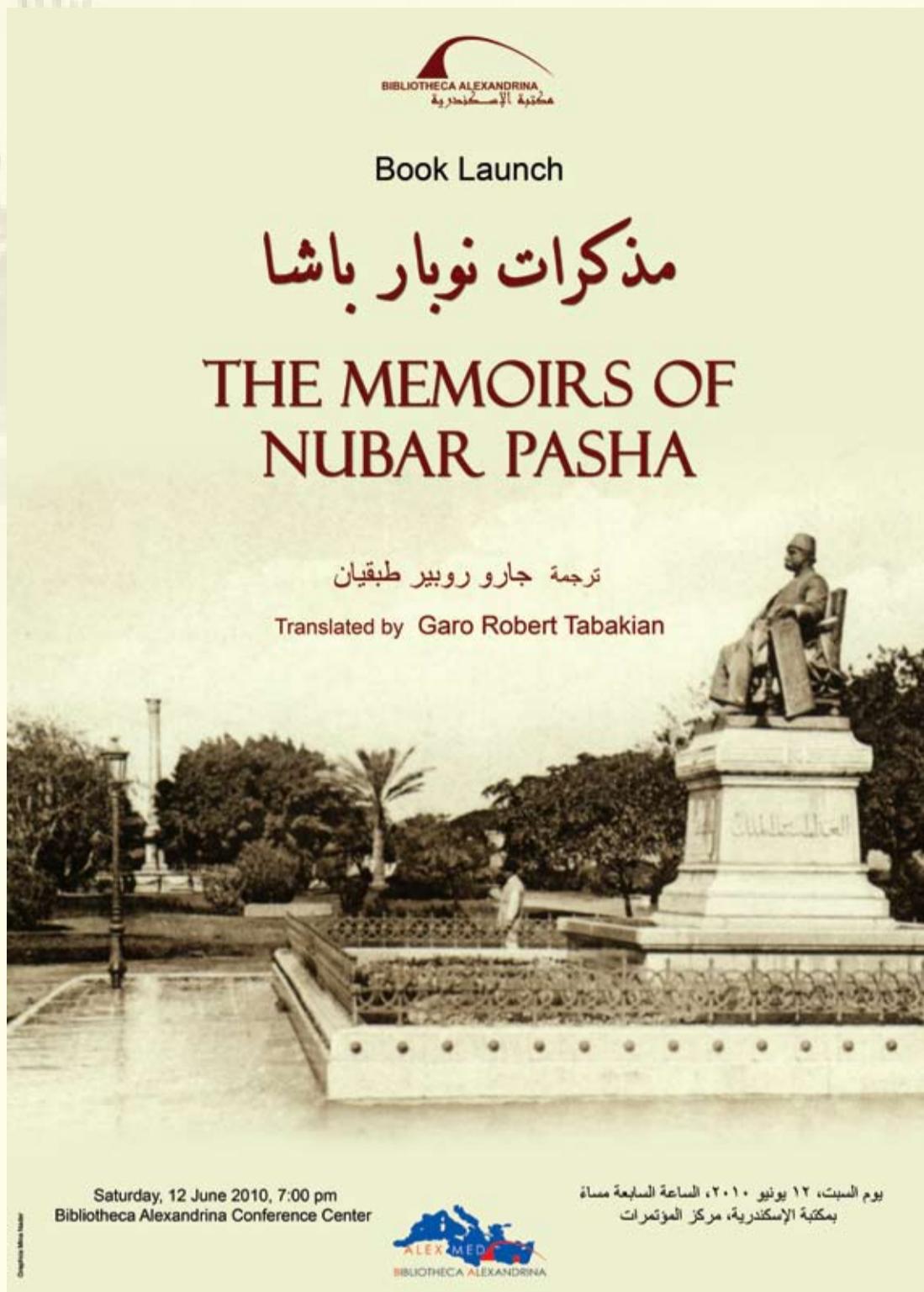


NUBAR PASHA: AN ARMENIAN MAKING HISTORY IN EGYPT

Jaidaa Gawad Hamada



Nubar Pasha—a familiar name and a memorable figure who is best remembered as the first Prime Minister of Egypt. Having served in this position for three terms between 1878 and 1895, Nubar Pasha (1825-1899) rose to great heights as a politician and legal reformer who understood people well, no matter how culturally different they were. Educated in France and Switzerland, Nubar was brought to Egypt by his uncle, Boghos Bey Yusufian, who was himself an influential minister and translator for Mohamed Ali. Like his uncle, Nubar became a translator for Mohamed Ali at the age of seventeen. On account of his mastering eleven languages, and having spent his youth in Europe, Nubar knew how to diplomatically deal with Europeans and often mediated with them on Egypt's behalf. A notable achievement in this regard was the way he successfully negotiated, at the age of fifty, with the European powers to gain their consent to establish the Mixed Courts in 1875, which would try cases between Egyptians and foreigners; an act which is hailed by historians as a milestone in judiciary reform in Egypt. Equally important was his contribution to establishing the Egyptian national railways; a project that was first envisioned by Mohamed Ali in 1833 and implemented in 1854 during the reign



From left to right: Dr. Mohamed Awad, Mr. Garo Robert Tabakian, Dr. Latifa Salem and Dr. Mohamed Refaat.

of Abbas I, thus making Egypt the second country after England to have trains.

On 12 June 2010, more about his instrumental contributions was brought to light by launching the Arabic translation of his memoirs: *مذكرات نubar باشا* (*The Memoirs of Nubar Pasha*), published by Dar el Shorouk. The event, held at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and organized by the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center, included the distinguished speakers, Professor Latifa Salem and Professor Mohamed Refaat, both specialized in modern and contemporary Egyptian history, as well as Mr. Garo Robert Tabakian, who undertook the challenging task of translating Nubar Pasha's memoirs from French into Arabic. The speakers enlightened the attendees with invaluable information about Nubar Pasha and his chief accomplishments. Attending the book launch were members of the Armenian community, headed by Her Excellency the Armenian Minister of Diaspora Affairs Dr. Hranush Hakobyan, and His Excellency the Ambassador to Armenia in Cairo Dr. Armen Melkonian, alongside many Alexandrians from different walks of life. The event began with a welcoming speech given by Dr. Mohamed Awad, Director of the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center, who, having introduced the speakers and welcomed the attendees, gave a brief yet illuminating introduction about Nubar Pasha and the Armenian community that had long lived in Alexandria and intermingled with its people. "Enlightened", "educated", "well-behaved" and "always keeping a low profile", as Dr. Awad described them, the Armenians played a highly influential role in the modern history of Egypt. It is in this regard that the importance of *The Memoirs of Nubar Pasha* may be best understood, for not only do they shed light on him as a leading statesman and politician, but they also offer insight into this period in the history of the Ottoman Empire in general, and the history of Egypt in particular. It was a momentous period that laid the groundwork for Modern Egypt and witnessed the implementation of major projects and enterprises.

His Excellency the Armenian Ambassador also underscored the importance of this era, hailing Nubar Pasha as a symbol of the strong ties of friendship and cooperation between Armenia and Egypt. In his view, the importance of these memoirs stems from their being recounted not only by somebody who had first-hand experience of this era, but, more importantly, by somebody who played a vital role in shaping many of its events. Her Excellency the Armenian Minister subsequently took the floor to elaborate on Egyptian-Armenian ties, which were, and still are, founded upon love, peace and friendship. The threefold importance of this

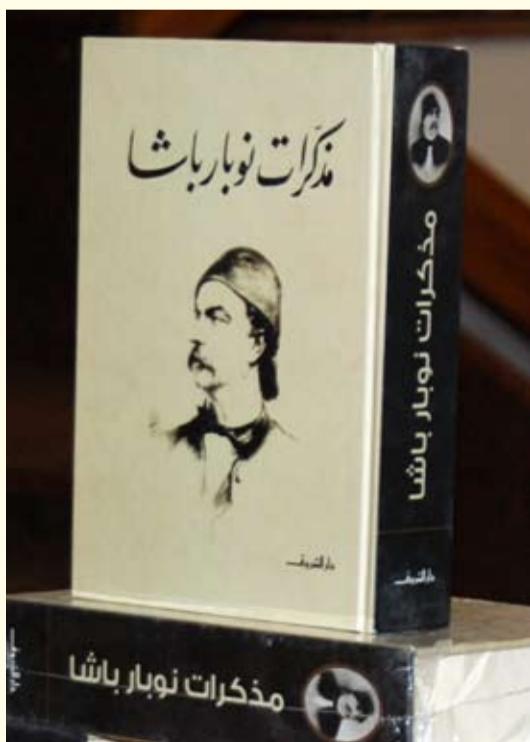


Her Excellency the Armenian Minister of Diaspora Affairs Dr. Hranush Hakobyan

event was highlighted by Her Excellency: firstly, it consolidated the Egyptian-Armenian relationship; secondly, the fact that the Bibliotheca Alexandrina was hosting the book launch heightened its importance; finally, the book itself was a much-needed reference on this period of history. In so acknowledging, she affirmed Professor Salem's view of the book as an indispensable source of history, written by both a witness of and a contributor to this historical era. Written by Nubar Pasha

when he was fifty-six, and focusing on the era between 1842 and 1879, the distinguishing features of this book were enumerated by Salem as follows: it was written in an objective tone and is thus noted for its honesty; its narrative technique is both accessible and engaging; it unfolds in the form of questions posed and answered by Nubar Pasha; and, most importantly, the book is imbued with Nubar Pasha's love for Egypt. In a similar vein, Professor Refaat paid tribute to Nubar

Pasha and his status as an indispensable chronicler of a crucial period in the history of Egypt. Mr. Tabakian afterwards took the floor to briefly describe his experience of translating the memoirs into Arabic. Finally, the event came to a close after a fifteen-minute question and answer session with the audience about this Armenian-born figure who made history in Egypt.



SUMMER IN ALEXANDRIA





Ibrahim and Ahmed El Masry's Arabic Calligraphy Shop: A Sanctuary for Saving an Endangered Species.

Jaidaa Gawad Hamada

How lamentable it is that Arabic calligraphy, an important aspect of our cultural and artistic heritage, is on the verge of perishing. In today's world of modern technology, postmodernist fads and computer graphics, the art of Arabic calligraphy has become an endangered species. This is what the Alexandrian calligraphers Ibrahim and Ahmed El Masry deploringly state. Situated in Abdel Fattah Yehia Street behind Metro Cinema, the two brothers' shop harks back to the year 1960. Having been standing in this place for more than half a century now, both the shop and its owners may be viewed as landmarks of the neighborhood. Unfortunately though, many of today's Alexandrians know nothing about this place. Small and crowded as it may appear to be, the shop is crammed full of the two brothers' unique works. Whether they are hung on the wall, piled over one another or simply scattered all over the place, they all bear witness to the talent that they both possess. Once one steps into the shop, which, surprisingly, does not even have a name, one is ushered into a world that emanates with skill, artistry and dexterity. The stacks of paint brushes and pencils, the piles of paper, the rolls of cloth and the varied bottles of ink that the shop abounds with, enhance the artistic ambiance that envelops the place.

Both Ibrahim and Ahmed El Masry were taught the art of Arabic calligraphy at the hands of their uncle Mohamed Ibrahim, founder and director of the School of Arabic Calligraphy in Alexandria. While El Sheikh

Mohamed Abdel Aziz El Refaay was the first to found a school for Arabic calligraphy in Cairo in 1928, in compliance with the orders issued by King Fouad, Mohamed Ibrahim, at his own expense and aided by his younger brother Kamel, founded its Alexandrian counterpart in 1936. In so doing, he may be said to have laid the "foundation stone" of Arabic calligraphy in Alexandria, as Ahmed El Masry states. To acknowledge its due importance, Taha Hussein decided in 1935 to make it part of the Ministry of Education, then known as the Ministry of Knowledge دار المعارف. Once established, the school earned worldwide fame and became a beacon of light for many generations to come. It was also visited by many celebrities and distinguished people of the time, such as Prince Mohamed Ali, the feminist activists Huda Shaarawy and Seza Nabarawy, King Abdel Aziz Ibn Saud, founder of Saudi Arabia and its first king, the Moroccan Prince Abdel Karim El Khattaby, the great singer Om Kalthoum, the Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba and his wife, among many others.

It was in the late thirties that Ibrahim El Masry followed in the footsteps of his uncle Mohamed Ibrahim and joined the school of calligraphy in Alexandria, having already received some training at the art studio owned by the two famous painters of the time Seif and Adham Wanly. His precocious talent enabled him to become the youngest student to earn the Diploma of Arabic Calligraphy in 1946 when he was not yet fourteen. "I was the youngest student in my class", says Ibrahim El Masry. "My colleagues were all distinguished figures from different walks of life: government inspectors, policemen, army officers, and respectable managers. Nagat El Saghira, who later became a famous singer, was also my classmate. I remember my very first day at school when everybody started pointing at me, wondering, 'Who is this little boy to join the school at this young age?' To everybody's surprise, however, "this little boy" outshone them all and has become ever since a pioneering figure in this domain, attracting many students and disciples and always assisted by his younger brother Ahmed El Masry.

"Being a calligrapher requires both talent and education", Ahmed El Masry remarks. "One has to channel the talent one is naturally endowed with into the right direction by formal training and consistent practice". For this reason, the now-closed school of

calligraphy in Manshieh used to play an indispensable role in producing generations of gifted calligraphers that are now gradually disappearing. Almost ten years ago, after the death of Kamel Ibrahim, and due to lack of funds, the school was closed down, thereby contributing to the waning of such an art. However, it is not only the closing down of the school and the way computer graphics have superseded it that Arabic calligraphy has dwindled, but also because of the general decline in people's artistic taste, as Ahmed El Masry observes: "There has emerged a moneyed social class that fails to appreciate the aesthetic value of Arabic calligraphy among so many other invaluable things". In fact, it is this lack of artistic taste that has facilitated the way computer graphics are encroaching upon calligraphy. "Although computer graphics can ostensibly give the same effect of calligraphy", he adds, "they are lacking in life and devoid of the artist's spirit". To further contribute to the diminishing of this art, schools no longer assign special classes for teaching Arabic calligraphy as was the case a few years ago. Given all these factors, the gradual fading of Arabic calligraphy becomes an inevitable outcome.

In tandem with the prevalent decline in people's interest in calligraphy is a general deterioration of the quality of tools that calligraphers employ; namely, ink, paints, paper, paint brushes of varied sizes, pens made of dried reed or bamboo أقلام بسط , textiles, and even the quality of gold needed for gold inscriptions. "Nowadays we rely on



Mohamed Ibrahim, founder and director of the School of Arabic Calligraphy in Alexandria.



The two brothers Ahmed and Ibrahim El Masry sitting in front of their shop.



The feminist activists Huda Shaarawy and Seza Nabarawy on one of their visits to the school.

local materials which are lacking in quality when compared to their imported counterparts which we used to employ in the good old days", both brothers regrettfully state. "High quality products that were imported from England, Germany and France were available in all stationeries. Bocelliti and Nichola Spiro were particularly famous for selling these products in Alexandria", Ibrahim El Masry adds.

As for the major types of Arabic script they use, they are mainly six: *kufi*, *naskh* نسخ, *thuluth*, *farsi* فارسی, *divani* دیوانی, and *Req'aa* رقعة. "Each script is characterized by a set of features that distinguishes it from the others and invests each artifact with an individualistic character", the Masry brothers state¹. "My favorite type of script is the *Thuluth*", Ibrahim El Masry explains. "In fact, the *Thuluth* is the one that entails the greatest skill and precision", Ahmed El Masry adds. "It has always enjoyed enormous popularity as an ornamental script for calligraphic inscriptions". As far as the time span that each artifact entails, it varies according to its size, the kind of script it features, how elaborate the script is and also according to the mood of the calligrapher. "When I set out to work, I'm never bound by a particular timeframe. My mood largely determines the speed of my work", Ibrahim El Masry explains.

Reminiscing about the past, the two brothers recall those bygone times when they had first founded their shop. At that time Alexandria was inhabited by different foreign communities that, together with the Alexandrians of the time, valued the artistry of their profession. "Our clients were of varied professions and nationalities, but they were all bound by their appreciation of Arabic calligraphy; something that is rarely found among people nowadays", Ibrahim El Masry nostalgically remembers. "The very few ones who can understand and appreciate this art nowadays, and accordingly save it

from perishing, remain helpless before a vast majority of a tasteless general public". To his great disappointment, the decline in people's aesthetic taste is beyond remedy: "Everything now is going downhill. The glory of bygone times can never be retrieved". He also remembers the general atmosphere of peace that prevailed in cosmopolitan Alexandria. "All nationalities peacefully coexisted", he nostalgically recalls. "I used to collaborate with many foreign calligraphers who lived in Alexandria, particularly when it came to public advertisements and names of cinemas. The one with whom I most frequently worked was an Italian calligrapher called Arkash". In addition to advertisements and announcements, both brothers' talent was exhibited in different works such as framed Qur'anic verses, calligrams featuring lines from poems or wise sayings, ornamental scripts; religious inscriptions on the walls and ceilings of mosques; inscriptions on gold-gilded furniture, inscriptions on glassware; jewelry, inscribed textiles; professional signs, public sign posts, and wedding invitations. "Our works were greatly revered in the past. Unfortunately very few people nowadays appreciate the dexterity that these works require", both brothers agree. This explains why Ibrahim El Masry prefers to hold his exhibitions abroad. "I do take part in exhibitions held under the auspices of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, but it's surprisingly sad that we attract a larger audience abroad", he explains. Not only does he participate in worldwide exhibitions, but he has also been internationally commemorated. The last exhibition he participated in was The Exhibition of Arabic Calligraphy held in Uzbekistan in 2010.



Having had a first-hand encounter with the avalanche of changes that has overrun the city, both Ibrahim and Ahmed El Masry may be regarded as two chroniclers of bygone times. The way past values and customs have been replaced by a whole new way of life is symbolized in the way Ibrahim El Masry describes how he went about changing the name of the then famous Kotzika Hospital into Gamal Abdel Nasser Hospital. "I can clearly recall the day when I was asked to change the name of Kotzika Hospital into Gamal Abdel Nasser Hospital", he remembers. "This change was one of a multitude of changes that befell the city. The art of Arabic calligraphy was greatly affected by those changes to the extent that it is almost dying out". In this regard, El Masry brothers' calligraphy shop may be viewed as a sanctuary by means of which we can save an age-old aspect of our artistic heritage from becoming extinct. Though both brothers do not have much faith in resurrecting this art, not a single effort should be spared to save it from perishing.



Ibrahim El Masry sitting on the floor next to Nagat El Saghira.



Ahmed and Ibrahim El Masry in their shop



Ibrahim El Masry working in his shop

Note:

1. *Kufi* script has specific proportional measurements and horizontal lines, characterized by angularity and squareness. *Naskh* is usually written with short horizontal lines, with almost equal vertical depth above and below the medial line and is used for writing the Holy Qur'an. *Thuluth* script is characterized by curved letters written with barbed heads. The letters are linked and sometimes intersecting. It is also known for its elaborate graphics. *Farsi* is a cursive script used extensively for copying Persian anthologies, epics, miniatures, and other literary works, but not for the Holy Qur'an. *Diwani* is excessively cursive and its letters are undotted and joined together. It uses no vowel marks, and is commonly used for decorative purposes. *Riq'a* is rounded and densely structured with short horizontal lines. The geometric forms of the letters are similar to those of *Thuluth* but are smaller with more curves. Today, *Riq'a* is the preferred script for handwriting throughout the Arab world.

L'ESPRIT ALEXANDRIN 1

Gaston Zananiri



Gaston Zananiri

On a beaucoup parlé de l'“esprit alexandrin”. Qu'est ce au juste cet esprit alexandrin? Quelles étaient la véritable portée et les caractéristiques de cet esprit?

Pour comprendre cet esprit il faut d'abord apprendre à le connaître à travers son atmosphère et ses individus. L'expérience acquise dans les livres, auprès des auteurs anciens et dans les études spécialisées n'est point suffisante à elle seule si elle n'est pas complétée par l'aspect pratique qui découle de l'expérience.

Peu de gens comprennent la portée de cet esprit qui, de premier abord paraît complexe et malgré les intentions exprimées par les milieux universitaires,² il en est bien peu parmi ses professeurs ou lecteurs qui sauraient établir une base d'action intellectuelle en harmonie avec l'ancienne tradition oubliée peut-être, mais qui n'a pas en fait disparu. Il semble que la formule la plus efficace serait une collaboration des milieux universitaires avec les écrivains, les artistes et les hommes de sciences qui poursuivent depuis des années leurs activités respectives en dehors du cadre officiel. Les uns associés aux autres pourraient établir dans une certaine mesure une formule similaire à celle qui existait du temps des Lagides et qui a donné les preuves de sa force par sa longévité. Ce que Ptolémée Soter avait désiré avant toute chose, en acceptant les suggestions de Démétrius de Phalère, avait été la création, sous l'égide royale, d'un organisme composé d'esprits indépendants dans le but de s'adonner à l'étude de la philosophie, de la littérature, des sciences exactes, et de la géographie.

Dans l'enceinte du Muséum, précurseur des universités européennes du Moyen Âge, vivaient des hommes choisis pour leur talent scientifique ou littéraire et placés sous la direction d'un fonctionnaire sacerdotal désigné par le souverain. Ces hommes à ce qui devait se passer dans les universités d'Europe, furent à l'origine logés dans l'enceinte de cette institution afin de poursuivre leurs recherches et leurs travaux personnels, et non pas pour répandre et enseigner leurs propres connaissances. Cependant des jeunes gens se réunissant autour de ces savants et de ces écrivains, ceux-ci commencèrent à leur donner des cours et c'est ainsi que prit forme à Alexandrie la première université du monde.

La collaboration de l'individu avec le représentant de l'autorité est la formule qui peut donner des résultats tangibles; le dynamisme et l'initiative de l'un avec l'appui et la ténacité de l'autre serait la voie à suivre pourvu que chacun préserve son indépendance d'action et de sa pensée. Il ne suffit pas de vouloir faire revivre un passé historique et littéraire si l'on ne cherche pas, sur place, les éléments susceptibles de lui donner, par leur expérience, la vitalité indispensable sans laquelle toute tentative de renouvellement est vouée à l'échec. Des hommes de lettres et de sciences, imbus de l'esprit alexandrin, ont poursuivi leurs activités respectives depuis de nombreuses années, mais leurs efforts étant isolés sont par là même neutralisés. Il faudrait donc tenter une cohésion d'où sortira un ensemble homogène et utile.

L'exemple le plus frappant de cet état de choses est la vie de Cavafy. Ce poète a

passé toute sa vie à Alexandrie où il a su, mieux que tout autre, recueillir et transposer l'esprit alexandrin dans une œuvre qui tend à devenir aujourd'hui classique. Or, Cavafy fut un solitaire.

A Alexandrie les poètes étaient souvent des érudits; certains s'occupaient d'astronomie et de mathématiques, d'autres de médecine, d'autres de linguistique ou de grammaire, de philologie et d'histoire littéraire. Ils appartenaient aux milieux les plus divers; par leurs mœurs, leur caractère et leur genre de vie ils étaient en fait très loin les uns des autres. Certains vivaient volontiers en Cénacle, se réunissant dans les demeures des uns et des autres, souvent dans des bibliothèques. Ils fréquentaient aussi le Muséum, annexe du Palais des Lagides. Cette vie à l'ombre de la cour était un danger car elle assujettissait les écrivains aux caprices de cette cour volage et superficielle où les intrigues et les jouissances matérielles tenaient plus de place que les problèmes de l'esprit.

Certains éléments spécifiques prédominent dans l'esprit alexandrin qui, dès le III^e siècle, commence à donner le ton dans la Méditerranée orientale. C'est tout d'abord l'affaiblissement du sentiment patriotique si développé en Grèce et qui cède le pas à Alexandrie, à de la mièvrerie, des discours flatteurs et un langage dithyrambique. D'autre part le contact de l'Orient mystique avec les traditions de la mythologie grecque insufflent une crainte exagérée du surhumain. Par contre influencés par cette tendance à la recherche et à l'érudition qui nous a donné tant de découvertes dans le domaine scientifique, ces poètes laissent nettement deviner le désir d'apprendre et surtout celui d'étaler leurs connaissances; cette caractéristique est très évidente dans l'esprit alexandrin. A ce genre didactique il y a lieu d'ajouter la place prépondérante donnée à l'amour et aux sentiments qui en découlent: la jalousie, l'infidélité, l'amitié amoureuse, tant de sujets autour desquels les poètes reviennent à chaque instant en les situant dans des cadres divers, surtout en plein air. Ce goût de la campagne, joint à l'amour finit par devenir un des aspects les plus communs de cette littérature alexandrine où s'épanouirent toutes les variétés de la poésie. Epigrammes, odes idylles, hymnes, élégies qui ne nous sont pour la plupart parvenus qu'en fragments témoignent d'une floraison étonnante dont l'influence se fera dorénavant sentir dans toute la poésie méditerranéenne. Les formes les plus diverses, les sentiments les plus hétéroclites donnent lieu à des œuvres d'art où s'étale une société tour à tour raffinée et grossière, frivole et grave, indolente et hardie. Pâtres et bouviers, éphèbes et courtisans, prostituées et matrones, guerriers et déesses; c'est un

cortège chatoyant à certains moments, terne à certains autres, c'est toute cette imagination primesautière et superstitieuse où se mêlent tour à tour le réalisme, le romanesque, et la didactique; c'est tout l'esprit de cette Méditerranée orientale qui forme dans son ensemble un amalgame harmonieux de contradictions.

Tel est l'aspect de cet esprit alexandrin formé par des courants venant de Grèce et du Levant, de la Sicile et de la Lybie; vouloir créer une cloison entre ces courants est impossible car il existe entre eux un enchevêtrement dû aux influences réciproques qui agissent simultanément sur les divers groupes vivant en communauté. L'humanité n'a jamais vécu en foyers isolés, et c'est pourquoi on ne peut imposer aux théories une étiquette définie; c'est pourquoi aussi le terme "alexandrin", malgré sa nébulosité constitue un état de fait dont on ne saurait nier l'importance dans l'histoire de la civilisation méditerranéenne. La pensée comme l'être humain est par essence mobile; on ne peut la conserver sous verre à l'instar d'une culture de laboratoire: les théories exclusivistes sont vouées à l'échec car elles ne peuvent s'adapter en dehors de leur milieu, et finissent par s'user faute de sève nouvelle. Or, l'esprit alexandrin était trop divers et adaptable pour subir cette détérioration. Sa force résidait dans sa diversité.

Cette diversité se trouve dans les tableaux si vivants de Callimaque, les descriptions bucoliques de Théocrite, les considérations précieuses et érudites d'Apollonius, les conseils sur l'amour d'Asclépiade. "Tu ménages ta virginité ? Ce n'est pas quand tu seras chez Hadès que tu trouveras un amant" s'écrie Asclépiade à une Alexandrine farouche, tandis qu'un auteur anonyme murmure, avec une certaine mélancolie: "charmant est la beauté des jeunes garçons mais elle dure peu". Avec élan Moschus déclare: "... chérissez ceux qui vous aiment pour être aimé lorsque vous aimerez" et Philétas demande à Bitlis: "souviens-toi de moi lorsque je ne serai plus". De front avec ces pièces de vers qui, sous l'aspect de l'épigramme et de l'idylle, nous transportent dans les domaines les plus divers de l'amour paraissent les personnages réalistes d'Héronidas sous l'aspect de l'entremetteuse ou du cordonnier, les mondains alexandrins de Callimaque et les mimes de Théocrite tandis qu'Apollonius nous offre les récits des aventures épiques des Argonautes.

Mais de front avec cet esprit littéraire alexandrin, il a existé à Alexandrie deux éléments de prime importance: l'esprit scientifique et l'esprit mystique.

L'esprit scientifique se présente sous plusieurs aspects: la linguistique, les mathématiques, la géographie, l'astronomie, et la médecine. Le désir de rechercher, de

connaître et d'établir des lois nouvelles ont donné l'occasion aux savants alexandrins de faire des œuvres qui, dans ces différents domaines, permirent aux générations suivantes de puiser des inspirations pour de nouvelles découvertes. Si les grammairiens ont approfondi la syntaxe, les traducteurs du Pentateuque ont transmis à la société hellénique et au monde chrétien une œuvre qui fut, aux dires de Renan, "un événement des plus grave dans l'histoire" puisque c'est de cette version de la Bible que travaillèrent les Pères de l'Eglise. Les découvertes dans le domaine de la géométrie, de l'astronomie et de la chirurgie servent encore aujourd'hui de base à ces mêmes sciences.

Si les "Eléments" d'Euclide sont à la base de la géométrie, les connaissances d'Hérophile sur l'anatomie lui ont permis de développer à tel point les principes de la chirurgie qu'il peut être considéré comme le père de cette science au même titre qu'Hippocrate l'est pour la médecine. Hérophile ne fut pas autorisé à disséquer des corps humains mais il put même opérer la vive section sur les animaux de l'ordre inférieur et sur les criminels.

Dans le domaine de la géographie, si les cartes d'Eratosthène sont d'une exactitude rudimentaire, il n'en demeure pas moins qu'elles ont préparé la voie à des études plus scientifiques alors que ses calculs au sujet du diamètre de la terre n'avaient qu'un écart de 50 milles par rapport aux calculs similaires entrepris par les géographes modernes. Quant à Aristarque de Samothrace, contemporain d'Eratosthène, il avait vu plus juste que les géographes et astronomes qui se succédèrent jusqu'à Copernic lorsqu'il émit l'opinion qu'apparemment la Terre tournait autour du soleil.

Mais c'est dans le mysticisme, transformé plus tard par les écrivains païens et chrétiens d'Alexandrie en philosophie, que se retrouve plus vivant que jamais l'esprit alexandrin dont l'influence a été si grande sur l'évolution du christianisme primitif. Ce mysticisme prit naissance dans la colonie juive d'Alexandrie qui, tout en suivant avec attention l'évolution du judaïsme religieux et politique de Palestine, tendait à s'helléniser au cœur de la cité ptolémaïque.

De cet état de choses, jaillit une pensée aryenne imbue d'exactitude, de logique et de méthode à laquelle se joignaient les caractéristiques de l'esprit sémitique avec son mysticisme, son dialectisme et son exaltation. C'est ainsi que prirent naissance la plupart des Apocryphes — livres d'enseignement moral et religieux — tels que "La Sagesse de Jésus, fils de Sirach", "La Sagesse de Salomon", "Les Maccabées", "Suzanne", "Bel et le Dragon", "Judith" et "Baruch". Ainsi se forma un commerce spirituel entre

Alexandrie et Jérusalem qui prépara la voie à la pensée préchrétienne jusqu'au jour où parut Philon, l'Alexandrin par excellence, qui sut allier le raisonnement grec à l'esprit imaginatif juif. Influencé par l'étude du Pentateuque et la littérature prophétique, il ne demeure pas moins helléniste par sa formation philosophique inspirée non seulement de Platon et de Pythagore mais des principes stoïciens.

C'est ainsi qu'on arrive au mysticisme oriental uni à la logique d'Occident, à l'esprit alexandrin pur, l'esprit méditerranéen, qui synthétise l'harmonie des contraires, d'où jaillira l'université du christianisme. C'est sur ce terrain préparé de longue date que païens et chrétiens se dresseront en adversaires alors que, dans le fond, l'esprit sera le même: la tendance vers le spiritualisme pur, paganisé ou christianisé selon la circonstance. L'exaltation de Plotin et d'Hypatie à la même source que celle d'Athanase ou d'Arius: la différence réside dans l'interprétation, la transposition de l'idée, plutôt que dans son essence.

Si le mysticisme a trouvé à Alexandrie un sol propice pour se développer et prendre divers aspects (néo-platonisme, monophysisme, arianisme) il n'en demeure pas moins, essentiellement alexandrin: Plotin et ses disciples sont aussi alexandrins que Philon, Athanase et Arius.

Un autre aspect du mysticisme alexandrin, et qui se matérialisa au Moyen Âge sous la forme de la vie monastique, fut l'existence aux environs d'Alexandrie de la secte des Thérapeutes qui menèrent à l'époque préchrétienne une existence similaire à celle des premiers moines chrétiens. Chez les uns comme chez les autres, ce fut la contemplation, la discipline et la règle de la vie en communauté telles que les adopteront les ordres religieux dans les monastères du Proche Orient et ensuite en Europe. Cet aspect du mysticisme fut aussi alexandrin car il se développa aux confins de la cité dans une atmosphère qui, par sa douceur et sa simplicité, recevant les effluves de la Méditerranée, ne différait, en aucune façon de celle d'Alexandrie. Dans ce cas, il s'agissait d'un mysticisme différent de celui des citadins querelleurs et brillants, d'un mysticisme simple tangible pratique, mais qui portait cependant vers le même but, vers le même idéal.

Alexandrie eut une société brillante, hétéroclite. Les Alexandrins de jadis, comme ceux d'aujourd'hui, étaient des potiniers et des dilettantes, des humoristes et des mondains, des libertins et des sentimentaux; certains furent des raffinés, d'autres de vulgaires parvenus. Et dispersé dans cette société de races diverses et de contrastes, des savants et des philosophes, des artistes et des poètes;

apportaient à la civilisation méditerranéenne les fruits de leurs découvertes et de leurs créations.

A l'entrée de l'avenue canopique (le quartier actuel de Minet el Bassal) se dressait la porte de la lune avec ses quartiers populeux quartiers du port où se déroulèrent tant d'événements depuis les jeux d'enfant d'Athanase aux propositions amoureuses des courtisanes alexandrines, depuis les processions religieuses aux rixes qui de tout temps ameutèrent la grande cité.

En fait Alexandrie n'a pas varié depuis les Lagides et si les mots ou les étiquettes varient l'esprit est toujours le même, car les fluides de la terre et les effluves qui viennent du large ne changent pas avec les siècles; il en est de même de sa populace bruyante ou frondeuse de sa société superficielle ou raffinée. C'est toujours cette harmonie entre l'Orient et l'Occident, ce creuset de races, de religion et de coutumes diverses où se coudoient des individus de toutes sortes et tous les milieux.

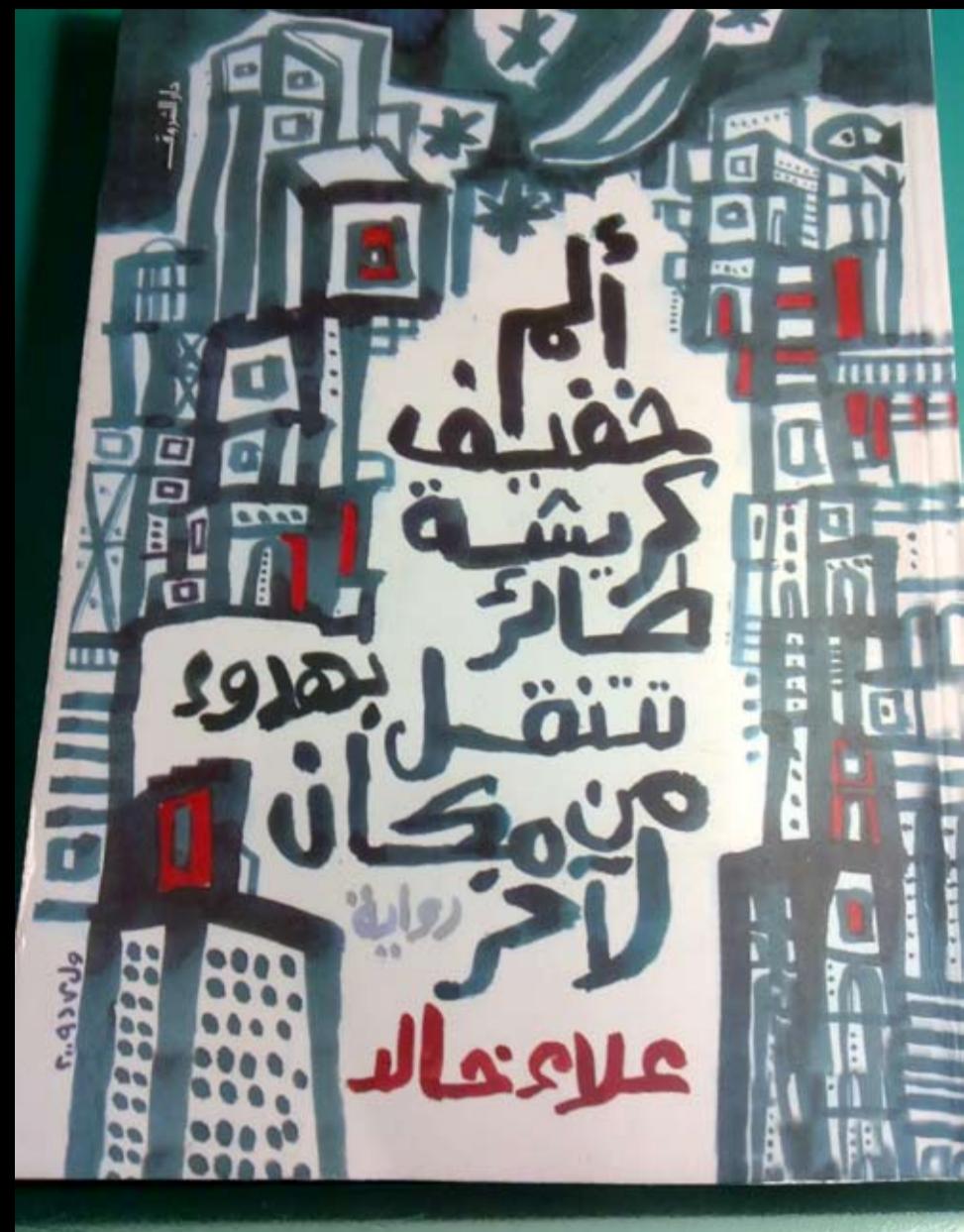
La synthèse la plus typique de cet esprit alexandrin fut l'initiative prise par Ptolémée Soter en adaptant le temple d'Osiris à la nécessité de sa politique lorsqu'il y plaça Sérapis dieu de son cru. Ce dieu, dont le nom avait une consonance gréco-égyptienne, était un mélange d'Osiris et d'Apis avec une teinte très nette de Zeus et d'Hadès. Ainsi conçu, Sérapis facilitait la fusion nécessaire pour l'évolution de la nouvelle cité où se mêlaient les traditions les plus contradictoires. Sérapis, dieu essentiellement alexandrin, présida donc aux destinées de cet hellénisme oriental et par son caractère cosmopolite finit par se répandre dans le monde méditerranéen où se sont toujours assimilées les influences venant de l'Orient et de l'Occident.

1 Cette étude entreprise en Août 1945 à l'occasion du cinquantenaire de la Réforme (Quotidien Alexandrin) aussi actuelle qu'elle ne l'était en 1945, pour définir ce que c'est que "l'esprit alexandrin". L'article a été publié par le Centre d'Etude d'Alexandrie en 1987.

2 L'Université Farouk 1^{er} devenue par la suite "Université d'Alexandrie" a été fondée en 1942. En 1945 elle avait donc juste à peine trois années d'existence.



علاء خالد وروايتها الأولى «ألم حفيف...»: عندما تصبح الذكرى الفردية فصلاً من تاريخ الإسكندرية.



fun book Õ

Fish Salad: Tasty and Slimming



Enough if your waistline is disturbing you these days this does not mean you should resort to a tormenting diet. Tasty and healthy dishes are not mutually exclusive. You can enjoy as many dishes as you like while keeping your waistline under control. Many Mediterranean dishes are tailored for those who are looking forward to shedding off those nightmarish layers of fat while still enjoying what they are eating. Fish is an excellent choice in this regard¹. This low-calorie fish salad will refute the myth that only fattening food is delicious.

Serves 6 – 190 calories per serving.

2 225g white fish fillets
2 medium onions
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce (optional)
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon mustard
4 tablespoons water
225g mixed pickled vegetables (cucumber, carrot, cauliflower, onion, etc)
2 tomatoes
3 tablespoons white vinegar
5 tablespoons oil

1. Place the fish fillets in a shallow dish.
2. Peel and finely chop the onions.
3. Mix the onions with the Worcestershire sauce, salt and mustard and pour over the fish.
4. Leave to marinate for one hour.
5. Place the fish in a saucepan and add the water.
6. Bring to a boil, cover and steam for 8-10 minutes until the fish is cooked and will flake easily.
7. Remove the fish from the pan and take off the skin.
8. Flake the fish and leave to cool.
9. Finely chop the mixed vegetables and quarter the tomatoes.
10. Add the vegetables and tomatoes to the fish with the vinegar, oil and fish marinade.
11. Mix well and place in a serving dish.
12. Chill before serving.

¹. Many Alexandrians used to believe that fish should not be eaten in the months of May, June, July and August, known collectively as the “r”-months, on the grounds that the “r” meant the hot months when fish could easily go bad. It could also be because fishing was restricted in those months, so there would be no depletion, and popular fancy changed it into something they could understand. However, this belief is now more commonly applied to seafood like shells, oysters, clams and mussels, rather than to fish.



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Newsletter

