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Issue 15

Hamed Eweis:  
A Key Figure among Egypt's Contemporary Artists  
The Diffusion of Alexandrian Cults  
in the Mediterranean and Europe  
Alexandria Comiche  
L'École Egypt and Sea Power  
philosophique  
d'Alexandrie  
Jack Debney's  
Alexandrian Charlie Chaplin  
and Other Characters  
Keubben R  
إيراثوسثينيس القوريني



# Hamed Eweis: A Key Figure among Egypt's Contemporary Artists

Carole Escoffey



A former dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Alexandria University, Hamed Eweis has influenced numerous contemporary Egyptian artists, many of whom were also his students. Today, he is considered a pioneer of the socialist movement in Egyptian painting: by placing simple Egyptian peasants and workers in the foreground of his paintings, Eweis has always strived to portray the heart and soul of the Egyptian people both in their daily lives and faced by historical events.

Hamed Eweis was born in a small village near the capital of Bani Souef Governorate. His education began in the village *kuttab*, or Koranic school, and then



he went to primary school in Bani Souef, 12 kilometers away. As a child in his native village, Eweis would often make clay models of animals using the Nile mud, then, at school he learnt to draw. As a youngster he would often visit the workshop of a local *naqash*, or plasterer, with whom he soon became friends. This decided the young Eweis to go to a technical school to learn such skills. This dream however, was quickly crushed by the artist's father who wanted his son to become a police officer<sup>1</sup>. As the oldest child and an only son, with three younger sisters, Eweis was able to put pressure on his family and so his father finally agreed to enter his son in a technical college at Bani Souef. On the first day, the young Eweis was entered in the Ironwork Department because of his strong build. Upon discovering this, he immediately withdrew from the school and his father sent him to secondary school instead. It was there that he met one of his first mentors, a teacher whom he greatly admired and who was graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts. It was through his influence that the young Eweis began to nurture the dream of also studying fine arts, an ambition he dared not tell his family who were proudly planning for their son to become a police officer.



When he graduated from secondary school, his father entered him for the Police Academy in Abbaseya district in Cairo. During the week while his application papers for the Police Academy were being processed, Hamed Eweis was staying with his uncle in Boulac district. Not far from there were Zamalek and Guezira Island, where the Faculty of Fine Arts was located. Each day, the young Eweis would wander over to this faculty and admire the beautiful villa with sculptures in its garden. So, when his application to the Police Academy was turned down, due to lack of contacts, he immediately retrieved his papers and submitted them to the Faculty of Fine Arts instead. He had just one week to prepare for the entrance exam. When the professor who coached him for the exam gave him a piece of charcoal for the first time, the charcoal crumbled in his hands! On the day of the actual exam, there were 200 candidates, many of whom seemed strange to Eweis, the young man from a Bani Souef village. They even spoke strange words which he did not understand. The exam lasted three days. On the first day, the candidates were asked to draw something with charcoal, on the second with colors, and on the third they had to make something from clay. This final task, Eweis completed very successfully by making a camel as he used to do in his village. On the first day, he was requested to draw an *abajoura* (a table lamp), but he did not even know what the word meant. Seeing his predicament, someone nearby told him to "draw an oil lamp with a hat". Finally Hamed Eweis did pass the entrance exam: he was one of only 14 candidates who succeeded out of the 200.

After completing the foundation year at the Fine Arts Faculty, he entered the Painting Department where there were 5 students. His professors included Ahmed Sabry, Hossam Bikar and Youssef Kamel. In the beginning, he would copy the style of his professors. In an interview, Eweis has explained how as a young student he had no general knowledge. As the Faculty of Fine Arts demanded little theoretical study, he began to read avidly on his own, reading 3-4 hours each day, conscious that as an artist he needed to be cultured. His student days began in 1939–1940 during the outbreak of the Second World War. The streets of Cairo were full of soldiers from the Allied Forces. With a fellow student, Eweis opened a small studio to make portraits of the officers. After graduating, he decided to stay in the capital and entered the *Mahad el Terbiya el Aali* (the Institute for Higher Education) to learn how to become an art teacher. During the two years he spent at that institute, he and a group of fellow artists began to think of creating a society of artists so that they could exhibit their own work. At that time, there was a society for established artists, *Gam'iyat Mohibi el-Funūn al-Gamila*, and another society specifically for art teachers, *Gam'iyat Azātidhat al-Rasm*. So Eweis and his friends founded the *Gamā'at Sawt al-Fanān*, the Society for the Voice of the Artist. With the revenue from membership fees, they hoped to hire premises in which to exhibit their works. However, when they held their first exhibition at the end of the year, they discovered that it had been a mistake not to ask for entry requirements for membership. As a result the society now became the *Itihad Kharegeen el-Funūn al-Gamila*: the Union of Fine Arts Graduates. In time however, it became

evident that not all graduates from the Fine Arts Faculty were necessarily artists, and so then the society became the *Gamā'at el-Fan el-Hadith*, the Society for Modern Artists, accepting both art graduates and practicing artists. The society's ten founding members included Gamal El Seguin, Zein Hamouda, Gazbia Sirry and Zeinab Abdel Hamid among others.... Their main objective was to produce art which expressed their philosophical ideas, and this new society began to hold exhibitions in both Cairo and Alexandria.

Later, Eweis moved to Alexandria, his wife's native city. At first he began teaching at a secondary school there, but when the Faculty of Fine Arts of Alexandria University opened, he began to work there, and was to become one of its most eminent professors, and finally the dean of the faculty.

Eweis has often stated that his countryside origins are at his core and that for him, the *fellah* is the basis of Egyptian society. Thus, the main character or hero in his paintings is the Egyptian *fellah* or the Egyptian laborer. He has depicted them at their daily work and activities. However, in addition to subject matter, Eweis' pictorial technique soon developed and he began to experiment with the use of color especially. At times, he would even use the paint tube directly on the canvas to apply color, rather than the paintbrush. He wanted to use the "language of color". For example in 1951, he painted a group of *bowabs* sitting reading the newspaper together. One was wearing a green *gallabeyah*, another a purple one and so on. These colors gave the painting a slightly fantastical quality. The following year, in 1952, Eweis traveled to Italy where he participated in the Venice Biennale along with 50 other Egyptian artists such as Seif Wanly and Adham Wanly. There, he remembers being impressed by the Italian artists in particular, by their use of color and technique to portray simple people, as he had tried to do himself. Upon his return to Egypt, Eweis began to limit himself to 3 or 4 colors: brown, yellow, blue and black. His paintings thus became much darker and more dramatic during this period.

However, when the great Egyptian artist Mahmoud Saïd visited Eweis and saw his new technique, the master advised him to return to his previous style. That was when Eweis decided to strike a balance between technique and subject matter in his paintings, so that neither should dominate the other. He began to look at the works of European artists such as Picasso and Braque and observe how they drew shapes especially. Always however, Eweis focused on the life of the average Egyptian or of the human being in general. He would portray people in one of two situations: either working or learning.

Then in 1967, events were to provoke another turning point: the 1967 War was felt as a disaster for the Arabs and changed their lives. At that time, Hamed Eweis began to introduce symbolism in his works, because he was no longer able to express what he wanted to say openly and directly in his paintings. Several of his symbolic paintings during that period represented Palestine and the situation in Egypt.



*"I painted this picture during my symbolic period. It represents the Palestinian problem. Because great strength is needed to face this problem, I painted the main figure as a robot, as a figure of strength. So that it would not be a mere robot, however, I added living organs such as a heart and those expressive eyes. Then, to show that this being belonged to the land, I painted it springing forth from the ground, rather*

*than simply standing. The robot's red headscarf represents the Arab nation. I then painted the child in its belly—a nervous, stressed child symbolizing the fact that Palestine gives birth to children who are not normal, carefree children. Little did I know that years later in 1985, the stone-throwing Palestinian child would come to symbolize the Palestinian resistance, or intifada."*

In his first painting completed after the 1967 defeat, Hamed Eweis portrays the deception and disappointed hopes of the Egyptian people. The message of the painting is to urge the Egyptians to defend themselves. The strength of the people is shown through the main character, the simple *fellah* with a sad face. He is carrying an old rifle with which he is protecting the people. Below, in the foreground is a multitude of figures, each one representing an Egyptian: children playing, simple peasants (*fallaheen*), young children going to school, a man with his wife and children, a bride and bridegroom, lovers, students and so on.... Behind the huge figure of the *fellah* holding his rifle, is a town in the background

on the right of the painting. The *fellah* is protecting this town also, with its white houses and factories. And in the background on the left of the painting is the Aswan High Dam, still under construction.



Another subject with appeared in his art during this period is the United States of America. In 1970, Eweis created a symbolic painting in which a giant robotic horse represents America, the power behind the 1967 War. On the left of the painting, the Statue of Liberty and the grass and flowers, are meant to indicate the happy American lifestyle. Whereas in the background on the right, remnants of ancient columns are meant to show that such ancient civilizations are of no importance to America.



Hamed Eweis also painted several works inspired by the nationalization of the Suez Canal. One in particular shows about 80 characters, representing the Egyptian people, all gazing joyfully at the main character in the painting, General Nasser.

Hamed's attitude to his art can perhaps be summed up by his insistence to paint only characters which strive and contribute to society in some way. He refuses to paint beggars for example, or nudes which merely represent the inactive human body without achieving anything. Eweis's characters are all creatures of action, contributing to society.

In addition to participating in numerous exhibitions, in 1997 Hamed Eweis was awarded a prize at the Alexandria Biennale, in 2000 he was awarded the State Prize and in 2005, the Mubarak Prize for the Arts. But perhaps his greatest recognition is from the generation of young Egyptian artists for whom he is a role model and inspiration.

#### Endnotes

- 1 The information concerning Hamed Eweis's childhood and education is based on an interview made with the painter by the Alexandrian artist Guirguis Lotfy for Alex Med in August 2004. In it, Eweis also explains the meaning of some of his paintings.
- 2 Translated from an interview given by Hamed Eweis for Alex Med in August 2004. (See previous endnote).

## The Diffusion of Alexandrian Cults in the Mediterranean and Europe

Kyriakos Savvopoulos

Since the beginning of the Ptolemaic period, several Egyptian deities such as Isis, Osiris and Horus interacted with representatives of the Greek religious pantheon both in terms of content and form, resulting in what we can describe as Alexandrian cults, essentially Sarapis, Isis (the Hellenized), Harpocrates and Hermanubis. These gods were intended to fulfill the religious needs of the multicultural society of the Egyptian capital as well as to express the ideology of the Alexandrian authorities.

Yet, what is striking is that the ongoing popularity of these cults from the Hellenistic period onwards was not confined to Egypt, but spread to the Mediterranean and Europe. There are multiple reasons for this phenomenon, but all of them are linked to the role of Alexandria in the ancient world. Alexandria was the main port of Egypt and one of the major ports of the “known world”. Through Alexandria, the products of the Land of the Nile spread to different areas of the Mediterranean. Yet, it was not only the agricultural products but also culture that followed that route. Alexandrian cults, which represented important values and benign capacities such as motherhood, life-giving, salvation, protection and healing, originally deriving from the Egyptian world, acquired a universal image that could be received not only in Egypt, as occurred before Alexander the Great, but also in the rest of the world. In view of this, it would be interesting to discuss the reasons for the diffusion of the cult of Isis and Sarapis in hundreds of places, from Greece to London. Why was Sarapis accompanied by the name Memphites in Thessaloniki? Why were the Romans so keen to promote Alexandrian cults all over their empire? Are there still unanswered questions, and consequently, should we reconsider the contribution of Alexandria to the development of world culture?

### The Alexandrian Cults: The Ambassadors of the Ptolemies in the Hellenistic World

Since the third century CE, Alexandrian cults were already gradually being introduced in several areas of Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean, which were either under Ptolemaic protection or sphere of influence, such as Macedonia, Thessaly, Attica, the Aegean, Thrace, Asia Minor and North Africa. The spread of these cults continued during the decline of the Ptolemaic Empire, indicating that it was not exclusively an issue of political propaganda. Isis, Sarapis, but also Harpocrates and Anubis greatly appealed in those places by being linked to and interacting with local gods.

Hundreds of shrines, statues and inscriptions have been found in Greece: among others in Rhodes (where a Greek-style Sarapeion was recently discovered with statuary of the Ptolemies in the Egyptian style, similar to those found offshore near the site of the Pharos in Alexandria), in Amorgos, Samos, Kos, Sparta, Argos, Maroneia, Thessaloniki, Dion, Athens, Veroia and Ambracia<sup>1</sup>.

One of the most interesting cases is the cult of Isis in Dion, the sacred city of Macedonians. Situated at the foot of Mount Olympus, the city hosted some of the most important cults in Macedonia, such as Zeus, Demeter, Artemis and Aphrodite. At the same time, Dion was a city of great political importance. It was in this city that Alexander the Great announced to his army his expedition to Asia, followed by a great



FIG.1

celebration. Thus, the possible establishment of an Isis cult in this area during the Hellenistic period can be explained for several reasons. The role of a Ptolemaic representative such as Isis could indicate the vital role that the Ptolemies desired to play in the Hellenistic world ruled by Macedonian kings. Of course it is not a coincidence that Demeter, the Greek goddess of agriculture, was a popular cult in Dion, at least since the sixth century CE. Hence, in one of the wall reliefs that possibly date from the Hellenistic period, Isis is depicted as protector of agriculture and provider of fertility while preserving her Egyptian identity. The latter is clear by the solar disk on Isis' head behind her agricultural hat and the Egyptian scepter (FIG.1). Furthermore, Isis

obtained the epithet Lochias (protector of motherhood), replacing the goddess Artemis, who was venerated in such a role in Dion before the establishment of the Isis cult. Finally, in the second century CE sanctuary, Isis was identified with Tyche (fortune), as indicated by



FIG.2

the cult statue of Isis-Tyche and several inscriptions discovered on the site (FIG.2). The cult of Isis in Dion survived until the fourth century CE<sup>2</sup>.

It seems clear from this example that the Egyptian Isis, after having undergone a process of “Alexandrianisation”, acquired a universal image which allowed the spread of her cult outside Egypt by resembling the identities and acquiring the capacities of local gods. Yet, Alexandrian gods were always considered as Egyptians (in origin), a fact which is indicated by the epithet “Egyptian”, found in several inscriptions, while Sarapis in Thessaloniki is identified as *Μεμφίτης* (from Memphis) (FIG.3).

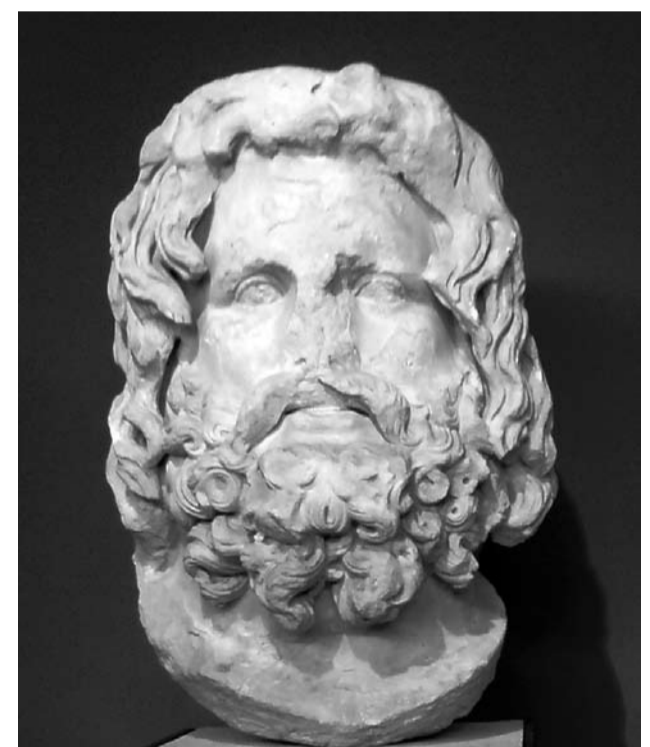


FIG.3

In 185 BCE, in Delos, the sacred island in the heart of the Cyclades, Athenians dedicated a small Doric temple to Isis, Sarapis and Anubis (FIG.4). Yet, no dedication to the Ptolemies was found on the site



FIG.4

indicating that this temple was for the devotion of Athenians to Alexandrian cults rather than Ptolemaic propaganda. Indeed Athenians had been familiar with Isis since the fourth century BCE when the first sanctuary of the goddess was established in the port of Piraeus. Moreover during the Hellenistic period, Athens obtained one of the earliest Sarapeia outside Egypt.



FIG.5

The ongoing popularity of Alexandrian cults was not affected by the demise of the Hellenistic world, but generally increased during the Roman era. This is the case of another distinguished example from the

Greek world, the so-called "sanctuary of the Egyptian deities" in Gortyna, Crete. This site was excavated by the Italian archeologist Olivier Gasparo, who discovered an impressive sanctuary with three

statues of Sarapis, Isis and Hermanubis, all dating from the second century CE (FIG.5). Yet the earliest evidence for Alexandrian cults in Gortyna dates from the second century BCE, implying a continuation from the Hellenistic period.



FIG.6



FIG.7

Isis Pelagia, the protector of sailors and ships, known also as Isis Pharia, was another popular manifestation of the Alexandrian goddess. The image of Isis Pharia often figures Roman coinage from Alexandria, while hundreds of terracotta lamps in the shape of Pharos were used by Isis' initiates during their rituals (FIG.6). Yet



FIG.8

the image of Isis Pelagia remains quite rare, especially on monumental sculpture. Recent excavations in Messene, Peloponnese, have revealed some very interesting finds. In the Roman theater of the city, two statues of Isis were found: one in the form of Isis Pelagia (FIG.7), almost identical to the images of Isis Pharia on Alexandrian coinage, and a second one in the form of Isis Lactans (suckling Harpocrates) (FIG.8). The latter was related to the role of goddess as protector and manifestation of motherhood and provider of fertility, known in Egypt since the Pharaonic period. Yet, it was the Hellenized image acquired in Alexandria during the Hellenistic period, which allowed Isis Lactans to spread outside Egypt.

**The Alexandrian Cults: The "Conquerors" of Rome**

But what of Rome? Why did the Romans become such keen promoters of Alexandrian cults?

It seems that the contact between Alexandria and Rome had already begun in the third century BCE. According to ancient sources, in 270 BCE Ptolemy II initiated the exchange of formal envoys with Rome<sup>3</sup>. He had to preserve good relations with Rome, the major power in the Mediterranean, while the Romans were in need of the Egyptian granaries. The first sanctuary of Sarapis must have been in Ostia, the port of Rome, which received the Egyptian agricultural products from the port of Alexandria<sup>4</sup>. Thus, already since the third and second centuries BCE Romans venerated Alexandrian divinities for offering those products as well as for their safe transport from Alexandria to their capital. The continuous contact with Egypt through Alexandria resulted in an actual Roman Egyptomania. By the establishment of the Roman Empire, Alexandrian

religion had such a strong influence on Roman society that no political pressure could prevent it.

In 58 BCE, altars of Isis on the Capitol were destroyed, while in 28 BCE, Augustus refused to allow Egyptian shrines within the sacred precinct of Rome, known as the Poerium. But this policy was soon to change. Caligula first gave state recognition to Isis, and then built a palace dedicated to her, known as Aula Isisaca. Otho is recorded to have taken part openly in rites of Isis fifty years after the death of Augustus. Vespasian visited Alexandria and the Sarapeion, where the god performed miracles. His son Tito also visited the Alexandrian Sarapeion and the temple of Ptah in Memphis. The stoic philosopher Chaeremon, who was librarian at the Alexandrian Sarapeion, became the tutor of Nero, while his pupil, Dionysius, became the tutor of Trajan, often discussing Alexandrian religion with his pupil. The triumphal arch of Trajan, dedicated to his victory against the Parthians, shows the emperor in front Isis and Harpocrates. His successor, Hadrian further supported the expansion of the Alexandrian religion. He built a temple to Isis in the holy Mount of Samaria in Palestine and another one in Petra. His Villa Hadriana was decorated with copies of many famous places, including Canopus, where Isis and Sarapis were held in great honor, and with statues of Egyptian gods, whether in Egyptian, Egyptianized or Hellenized style (FIG.9).



FIG.9

In addition, several Egyptian monuments, notably obelisks, were transferred from Egypt to Rome and other Italian cities to decorate public structures or temples. One such was the Isis in Beneventum, where, during the renovation of the temple by Domitian in 88 CE, an obelisk of Ramses II was transferred and re-erected (FIG.10). Commodus



FIG.10

was so attached to Isiaca that he shaved his head, carried an Anubis dummy in a procession and stopped at specific points to sing Isis' praises. Finally, Septimius Severus, iconographically assimilated to Sarapis, is said to have visited the Sarapeion in

Alexandria as well as Memphis, and to have sought to gain whatever hidden knowledge books and temples in Egypt afforded<sup>5</sup>.

Numerous shrines and temples were built all over the Italian peninsula. As during the Hellenistic period, the most common way for Isis and Sarapis to penetrate in a new place was to be associated with local gods. Hence in Italy, Isis was identified with Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture, and then with Venus (Aphrodite), Diana (Artemis), until she became the "Goddess of a Thousand Names"<sup>6</sup>. Among the several temples of Isis in Italy we should mention two cases: the Isea of Rome and Pompeii. The case of the Iseum of Rome clearly indicates that Isis and Sarapis acquired state recognition and support by the Roman emperors. In a relief found in the ruins of the temple, figures of Sarapis and Isis stand on the wings of an eagle, the symbol of the Roman Empire, while Juno, the Roman goddess-protector of the Roman state and wife of Jupiter, is presented next to the Alexandrian couple (FIG. 11).



FIG.11

Even more impressive is the case of the Iseum in Pompeii, which was covered by the ash of Vesuvius in 74 CE (FIG.12). The temple was decorated with



FIG.12

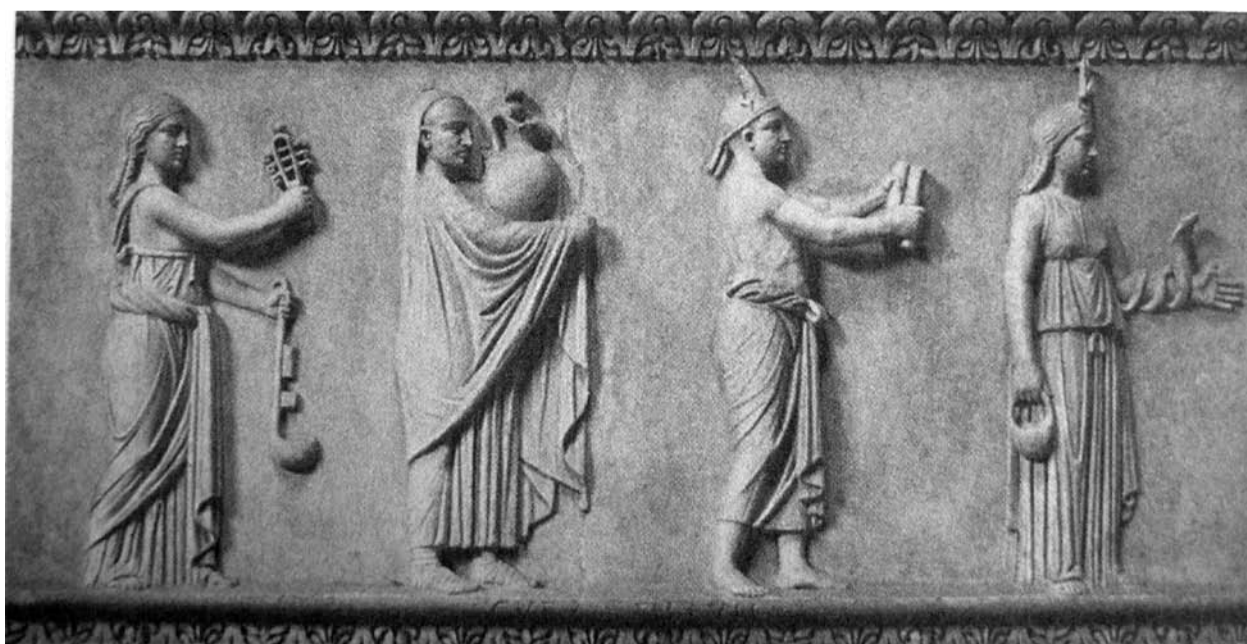


FIG.13

Isis' statues, colorful paintings and wall reliefs, which are preserved to this day, presenting Isis as a powerful goddess with multiple characteristics, while her initiates are performing the Isiacs (FIG.13).

Nevertheless, the greatest surprise was the discovery of actual meals, composed of grain, eggs and other products related to the cult of Isis, discovered under the ash, as they were left by Isiaistai (FIG.14).

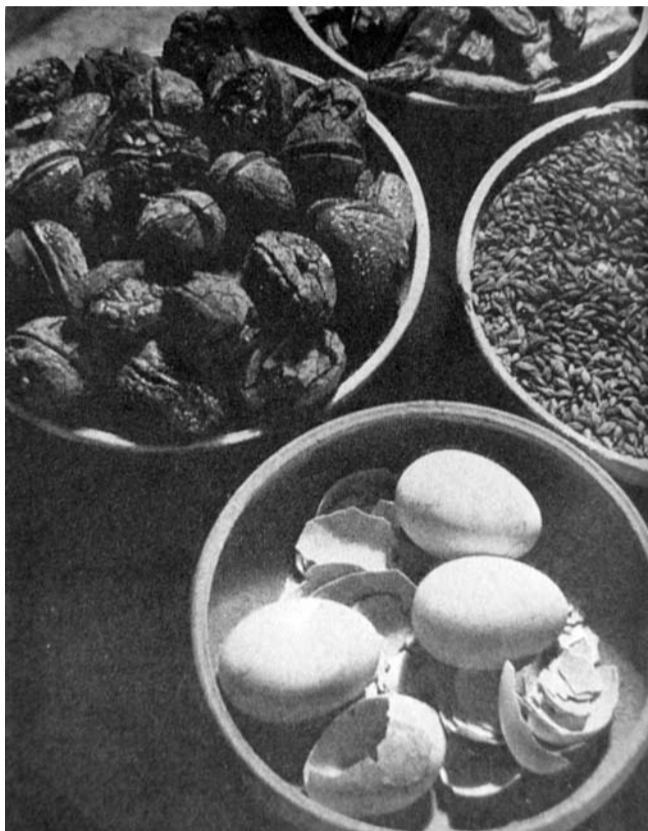


FIG.14

Romans Emperors were further responsible for the diffusion of Alexandrian cults in Europe, in areas where hardly any Egyptian or Greek cult existed before. Thus, France, Germany (FIG.15), Spain, and even England

(FIG.16) obtained shrines dedicated to Sarapis, Isis and Harpocrates. Yet we should always remember that these cults were Alexandrian in a universal manner, combining the ancient knowledge of Egypt with the Greek cultural mentality and flexibility. The great popularity of Alexandrian cults all over the known world is the ultimate proof that Alexandria was a successful micro-model for the Romans, since it had become what was culturally desirable for the whole Roman Empire: a multiethnic and multicultural assemblage, where different people shared common values.



FIG.15

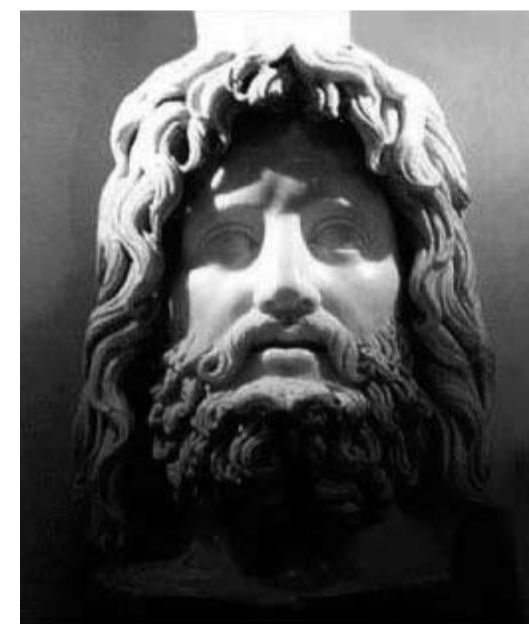


FIG.16

#### Endnotes

- 1 For the spread of Alexandrian cults in the Greece see Marangou, A. *Ἴσις και Σαραπις στο Αιγαίο*. In *Κρήνη Αίγυπτος. Πολιτισμικοί δεσμοί τριών Χιλιετιών*. Athens: 2000. See also Bricault, L. *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques*. Paris: Brill. 2000.
- 2 See Pantermalis D., *Dion*. Thessaloniki. 1994.
- 3 Hölbl, G. *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*. London: p.54 Routledge. 2001.
- 4 Witt, R.E. *Isis in the Ancient World*. London: p. 70 John Hopkins. 1971.
- 5 Concerning the support of Alexandrian religion by the Roman Emperors, see, Witt R.E., "The Goddess Darling of the Roman Emperors" (chapter XII), in *Isis in Ancient World*. London:1971.
- 6 Concerning the spread of Alexandrian cults in Italy, see *Ibid*, "To the shores of Italy" and "The one whose names cannot be numbered": (chapters VI and IX respectively).

## Egypt and Sea Power

Admiral Ashraf Refaat<sup>1</sup>

Egypt, with its extensive coastline on the Mediterranean Sea, the Gulf of Suez, the Gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea, has always maintained an interest in sea power. The history of Egyptian sea power can be traced back as far as the Pharaonic era. Recent excavations have revealed the existence of the post of "Commander of the Fleet" in ancient Egyptian times, over four thousand years ago. A glance through Egypt's long history shows that Mahan's theory of the influence of naval power on history is valid. Egypt's influence as an important Middle Eastern country has always been closely connected to sea power, and whenever Egypt had a powerful fleet her prestige grew and her presence was felt. For example during the reign of Mohamed Ali (1805-1848), the Viceroy achieved Egyptian supremacy in the Red Sea, thus projecting the country's influence into Arabia, Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean, constituting a threat to Turkish influence.

On 20 October 1827, the European Powers of the time tried to put an end to Egyptian sea power in the Battle of Navarino. An Egyptian Ottoman naval formation anchored in Navarino Bay was attacked by an Allied Naval Squadron made up of British, French and Russian battleships under the command of British Admiral Sir Edward Cardigan who had previously served under Admiral Nelson. The allied fleet consisted of nine battleships, while the Egyptian Ottoman formation had only three. In the ensuing battle, the Egyptians fought bravely against uneven odds. The Egyptian ships were at anchor, unable to maneuver whereas the allied battleships were successfully engaged and nearly all severely damaged. Many Egyptian escort units were destroyed. It is interesting to note that the Egyptian naval units were under the command of Moharrem Bey, after whom a district in Alexandria was named.

Later during the reign of the Khedive Ismail, an attempt was made to modernize and rebuild the Egyptian navy. However the occupation of Egypt by

British forces in 1882 resulted in the break up of the Egyptian army and the disbanding of the navy. There followed a period of stagnation, which continued until 1946, following the rise of Arab nationalism and the beginning of the Palestinian problem.

On 30 June 1946, a royal decree proclaiming the formation of a new Egyptian navy was issued. Naval and technical



The official badge of the Egyptian Navy

missions were sent to Great Britain for training. At the same time contacts were made with Great Britain for the procurement of a small number of naval vessels of various types from readily available war surplus. This was the start of the new Egyptian navy.

### The Revival of Egyptian Sea Power

In more recent times following the 1952 revolution, President Nasser was able to form a considerable navy and hence the influence of Egypt became paramount in the Arab world. One of the main aims of the 1952 revolution was the creation of a strong national army capable of wiping out the stigma of the 1948 defeat in Palestine. Sea power would enable him to extend his strategic grasp from the Atlantic to the Arabian Gulf: a fact which he often stressed in his speeches with the saying, "From the ocean to the gulf..."

This new policy of Arab nationalism resulted in a new relationship with the Soviet Union which included the signing of arms deals, the dispatch of various military missions, and the accompanying flow of Soviet experts. Rebuilding the Egyptian navy proceeded according to set programs greatly increasing the combat power of the Egyptian navy. It is true however, that while Nasser had in mind the creation of a strong navy to support his plans for Arab nationalism, the Soviet Union had other objectives mainly envisaging the creation of a defensive naval force to assist the Soviet Mediterranean fleet when necessary.

### Becoming a Substantial Sea Power

Certain factors are needed to make a country a substantial sea power.

Firstly, the geographical situation is a key factor. Egypt lies on the Mediterranean: with the Gulf of Suez to the east and the Red Sea stretching south, the country has an extensive coastline with numerous ports. The Suez Canal runs through Egyptian territory joining the Mediterranean to the Red Sea thus creating one of the most vital waterways in the world. One must also note Egypt's controlling position over the entrances to both the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba.

Egypt's population is another major factor: with nearly eighty million inhabitants it has by far the largest population in the Arab world with quite a large proportion living in coastal towns, with a natural leaning towards the sea and maritime activities. At the same time, the number of graduates from universities, higher education institutes and technical colleges is increasing rapidly ensuring the constant flow of graduates in all fields, thus providing the skilled manpower that would be required for building a naval force and a maritime industry.

Egypt's shipbuilding facilities are another important issue: Egypt has a substantial commercial shipbuilding potential with well defined capabilities in Alexandria, Port Said, Suez and even on the Nile. Only limited attempts have been made to build naval warships, but the resources and capabilities are there and can be expanded quite easily. So far the only attempts at building warships have been confined to light forces such as seaward defense patrol boats. Another example is the October Class light missile boat built in Alexandria, based on the Soviet Komar design, which was developed in cooperation with Vosper and Marconi of the UK. In preparation for the 1973 October War, a number of torpedo boats of Soviet



The visit of Admiral Sir Terence Lewin, the First Sea Lord, to Field Marshal Abd El-Ghani El Gamassy, the Egyptian Minister of Defense

origin were converted locally into unguided rocket launching attack craft which were used successfully for fire assaults against coastal targets.

The country's financial resources are also to be considered. The Suez Canal, the tourism industry, and the steadily increasing oil and natural gas output, besides cotton and other agricultural products, all bring in a considerable income. On the other hand, expenses due to the very large population and the pressing requirements to renew the infrastructure of the country, place a strain on the economy. The president has been granted the right to allocate funds for defense needs by the National Assembly and when Egypt was preparing for the 1973 October War, financial assistance was received from most Arab countries.

As far as industrialization is concerned, great progress has been made ever since the 1952 Revolution. At the moment, iron and steelworks exist in Helwan near Cairo, and soon these will be modernized and new works established, especially since substantial new iron ore resources have been discovered near Aswan. At the same time, Egypt has well established electrical and electronic industries operating in cooperation with international firms. It must also be noted that Egypt has a well founded military industry already producing and selling military equipment such as guns of various calibers, armored personnel carriers and tanks, besides various electronic equipment and light aircraft.

#### The Need for Sea Power

It is evident the every maritime country requires sea power. In the case of Egypt this requirement is pronounced taking into consideration the country's strategic position, its political weight in the Arab world, its maritime interests and offshore assets, besides its dependence on maritime transport and a need for a large fishing fleet.

Egypt's need for sea power is greatly affected by a number of factors. Firstly, one of the major factors predominant in the Middle East has been the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. War has broken out four times between Egypt and Israel during the last fifty years, not to mention a period of violent hostilities



President Sadat accompanied by Vice President Hosni Mubarak, attending naval maneuvers

following the 1967 debacle of the Egyptian army.

Arab nationalism is another factor. The forces drawing together Arab countries are immense. They are drawn together by religion, language, common borders, and a closely related culture. In the 1950s and 1960s, during the period of President Nasser, the Egyptian Navy played a considerable role in maintaining a strong inter-Arab relationship. Frequent naval visits to the Syrian port of Latakia were a prelude to unity between Egypt and Syria. Assistance to Algeria in its struggle against France for independence (1954–1962) and also during its troubles with Morocco are another example. In 1962, when the revolt against the Imam of Yemen started, Egyptian destroyers were quickly on the scene in Hodeida to support the new republic.

Egypt also plays a substantial part in African affairs and has very close historical relations with many African countries, especially those through which the Nile flows. To safeguard her interests, Egypt needs to achieve an effective naval presence in the Red Sea, a strategic advantage which was demonstrated in the October War. It is an advantage which enabled Egypt to exercise full control over the Bab El Mandab Straits, and thus together with the mining of the entrance to

the gulf of Suez, managed to deprive Israel of all oil supplies.

#### Naval procurements

The size and composition of a country's naval forces are decisive factors in determining its sea power. In the case of Egypt, this depended on naval procurements which underwent three main stages:

The initial stage was when armaments were controlled and provided by the United Kingdom. Thus procurements were restricted to Britain and ex Royal Navy units, and proceeded from small minesweepers, torpedo boats, fleet mine sweepers, frigates and destroyers.

The next stage included the period during which President Nasser made an arms deal with the Soviet Union, after which the Egyptian Navy was reinforced and increased its combat capability impressively, having obtained Skori class destroyers, submarines, landing ships, mine sweepers, subchasers and, most importantly, missile boats. The growing power and superiority of the Egyptian Navy was amply demonstrated on 21 October 1967 when Egyptian missile boats of the Kumar class sank the Israeli destroyer Eilat off Port Saïd. This was the first combat employment of surface to surface guided missiles, an incident which started a whole new trend in naval warfare.

Lastly, following the 1973 October War, which eventually led to a total withdrawal of Israeli troops from Sinai, and consequently the signing of a peace treaty, the situation changed sharply, with more recognition of the importance of sea power. Relations between Egypt and the United States improved steadily, leading to mutual cooperation and understanding, a relationship which resulted in the United States becoming the main armament supplier for Egypt. During the last decade, the Egyptian Navy was able to diversify its sources of naval units and weapons, and had corvettes from Spain, frigates from China, various units from the old Soviet fleet, missile boats from the United Kingdom, and more recently obtained Knox and Perry class U.S. destroyers and other units. Helicopter carrying vessels were introduced, a much needed improvement, and modern submarines are likely to follow.



The Ambassador of the U.S.A., Herman Ellts, accompanied by Admiral Hollowany, Chief of Naval Operations of the U.S. Navy at a reception held by Admiral Refaat (the author)





Sultan Qaboos of Oman visiting the Egyptian Naval Headquarters accompanied by the President and the Minister of Defense



President Anwar Sadat reviewing the Guard of Honor on arrival to visit the Naval College

### Combat Experience

Combat experience is a very important factor in assessing the fighting capacity of any naval force. In the case of Egypt, a state of tension or of war has existed for nearly fifty years and this has reflected positively on the high level of combat efficiency now present. In the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956, the newly formed navy had to face overwhelming forces from both the United Kingdom and France. In spite of heavy odds, the Egyptian Navy managed to achieve a number of heroic deeds that showed an outstanding dedication to duty and marked bravery. Notably the action between the frigate *Domiat* and the HMS cruiser *New Foundland*, and in the way the destroyer *El Nasser* managed to beat off repeated carrier-borne air attacks. Also to be recalled is the Galal Desouky engagement of a torpedo boat against a French naval attachment.

In the 1967 June war, while most of the Egyptian armed forces suffered massive destruction, the Egyptian Navy managed to preserve its integrity, and actually suffered no losses, but there was only limited offensive initiative. In the war of attrition which followed, the Egyptian Navy managed to achieve several successes, including the bombardment of Israel's logistic concentrations in Romana and Balouza, east of Port Saïd, as well as the repeated frogmen attacks on the Israeli port of Eilat in the Gulf

of Aqaba which yielded results with the sinking of the Israeli landing ship *Bet-Sheva*. In the 1973 October War, the Egyptian Navy achieved spectacular results in spite of the fact that it had lost its superiority over the Israeli Navy and was using obsolete surface to surface missiles, besides the lack of sufficient air support. In fact, this was the first time that proper operational planning was practiced in Naval Head Quarters and that the Egyptian Armed Forces took the offensive. Mines previously not employed were used extensively in this conflict, successfully blocking the entrance to the Gulf of Suez, and preventing Israel from carrying out any distracting landing operations on the Western side of the gulf, at the same time, cutting off vital oil supplies from Egyptian wells captured in the Gulf of Suez and Sinai following the 1967 War. Egyptian submarines were employed extensively in the Mediterranean and Red Sea, and for the first time, the theater of operations was extended over a thousand miles southwards in the Red Sea and westwards in the Mediterranean. In the Mediterranean traffic to Israeli ports was reduced to 25% of its normal level.

### Outlook

Political events represent one of the major factors that affect the growth and development of a navy. In order to preserve her security and maintain peace and stability, Egypt needs and strong and effective armed

forces, capable of securing national interests and maintaining Egypt's leading role in the Arab World.



President Mubarak hoisting the flag on the new frigate *Suez* with General Abu Ghazala, the Minister of Defense, attending the ceremony. Also present was Admiral Refaat, the Commanding Officer of the original Russian destroyer *Suez*.



The Egyptian guided missile boat that attacked and sank the Israeli destroyer *Eilat* on 21 October 1967



The author

<sup>1</sup> Former Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Naval Forces and Chief of Naval Operations in the October 1973 War.

# ***Alexandria Corniche***



***Eastern Harbor***



***Fishermen's Marina ( Eastern Harbor )***



***Stanley Beach***



**Sidi Bishr Beach**



**Montaza Beach**



**Asafra Beach**

## إيراتوستينيس القوريني

٢٧٥ - ١٩٤ ق.م. - التواريخ تقريبية

شيماء الشريف



الملك بطليموس الثالث يورجيتيس

وقد بدأ إيراتوستينيس حياته العلمية الحقيقية في مصر التي مكث بها حوالي خمسين عامًا حتى وفاته، وبدأت مسيرته العلمية في الموسيقى من عالم وباحث مقيم إلى أن أصبح الباحث المقيم الأول، ثم، بعد أبولونيوس الرودسي المدير الثاني للمكتبة، صار إيراتوستينيس مديرًا لمكتبة الإسكندرية القديمة ليصبح رسميًا ثالث مدير لها في تاريخها الطويل. وقد كان لهذا المنصب المرموق الكثير من الفضل على التشكيل العلمي والأكاديمي لإيراتوستينيس الذي وجد تحت يده كل كنوز العلم التي كانت معروفة في العالم القديم في هذا الزمان والتي اجتمعت كلها للمرة الأولى في التاريخ بفضل البطالمة في مكان واحد هو مكتبة الإسكندرية القديمة.

وقد أطلق رفاق إيراتوستينيس في المكتبة القديمة لقبين عليه تأكيدًا لعزير علمه وتنوع اختصاصاته: اللقب الأول هو «بنتالوس» وهو لقب له دلالة في مدح شخص متعدد المواهب والاختصاصات، وكان يطلق في هذا العصر في الأساس على الرياضيين الذين يجيدون ممارسة جميع أنواع الرياضات التي كانت معروفة آنذاك مثل رمي الرمح والمصارعة وغيرها. أما اللقب الثاني فهو «بيتا» وهو اللقب الأكثر شهرة حيث كانوا يلقبونه «المعلم بيتا»، وبيتا هو الحرف الثاني من الحروف الهجائية اليونانية وهو يعني أن من يحمله يحتل المرتبة الثانية في كل العلوم، إلا أن الحقيقة كما بيناها أن إيراتوستينيس كان الأول في العديد من فروع العلم.



الملك بطليموس الرابع فيلوباتور

وقد عُرف عن إيراتوستينيس أنه كان معارضًا للفكر الخرافي والأسطوري، مما دعاه إلى معارضة كل ما كتبه هوميروس - الشاعر الإغريقي الكبير صاحب ملحمتي الإلياذة والأوديسا - مع تأكيده على كون كتابات هوميروس لا تصلح لأن تكون مرجعًا علميًا في الجغرافيا أو في سواها، وقد هاجمه الكثيرون بسبب هذا الموقف، إلا أنه لم يابأه إلا أن يعلن مناصرته للمنهج العلمي.



صورة افتراضية لمكتبة الإسكندرية القديمة (٢٨٨ ق.م. - ٣٩١ ق.م.)



عملة ترمز إلى ميناء قورينة كيوابة إلى معبد آمون، وتظهر على العملة صورة للإله زيوس- آمون

ولد إيراتوستينيس بن أجلاوس في قورينة بلبيا حوالي عام ٢٧٥ ق.م.، ومن مسقط رأسه اكتسب لقبه الذي لازمه حتى الآن بعد وفاته بأكثر من ألفي عام، وقد كانت هذه المدينة إحدى المدن الثقافية في العالم القديم وإحدى البوابات إلى العالم الهلينيستي، فتعلم فيها إيراتوستينيس في طفولته المبكرة وصباه ومطلع شبابه، ثم غادرها بعد فترة لأسباب نرجح أنها لتحصيل العلم، فقد توجه إلى مدينة أثينا التي كانت مركزًا تعليميًا وثقافيًا كبيرًا، وقد تركت دراسته بها على الفلسفة، هذا إلى جانب الرياضيات والعلوم اللتين كانتا تُدرَّسان في أكاديمية أفلاطون وفي ليسيوم أرسطو، مركزي التعليم الرئيسيين في المدينة والذين تلقى إيراتوستينيس تعليمه فيهما. وقد أدى تشكيله الفلسفي إلى تأليفه بعض الكتب الأدبية والفلسفية التي لفتت الأنظار إليه، وذاعت شهرته، فاستدعاه الملك بطليموس الثالث يورجيتيس للحضور إلى مصر ليكون معلمًا لابن الملك وليحصل على منحة دراسة وإقامة في الموسيقى (معهد ربات العلوم والفنون الذي كان مركزًا علميًا بحثيًا ضخماً على أعلى مستوى في هذا العصر)، وقد كان كل من الأمرين - وظيفة معلم ابن الملك وعالم مقيم في الموسيقى - مرتبطًا غالبًا بالآخر.



إيراتوستينيس القوريني

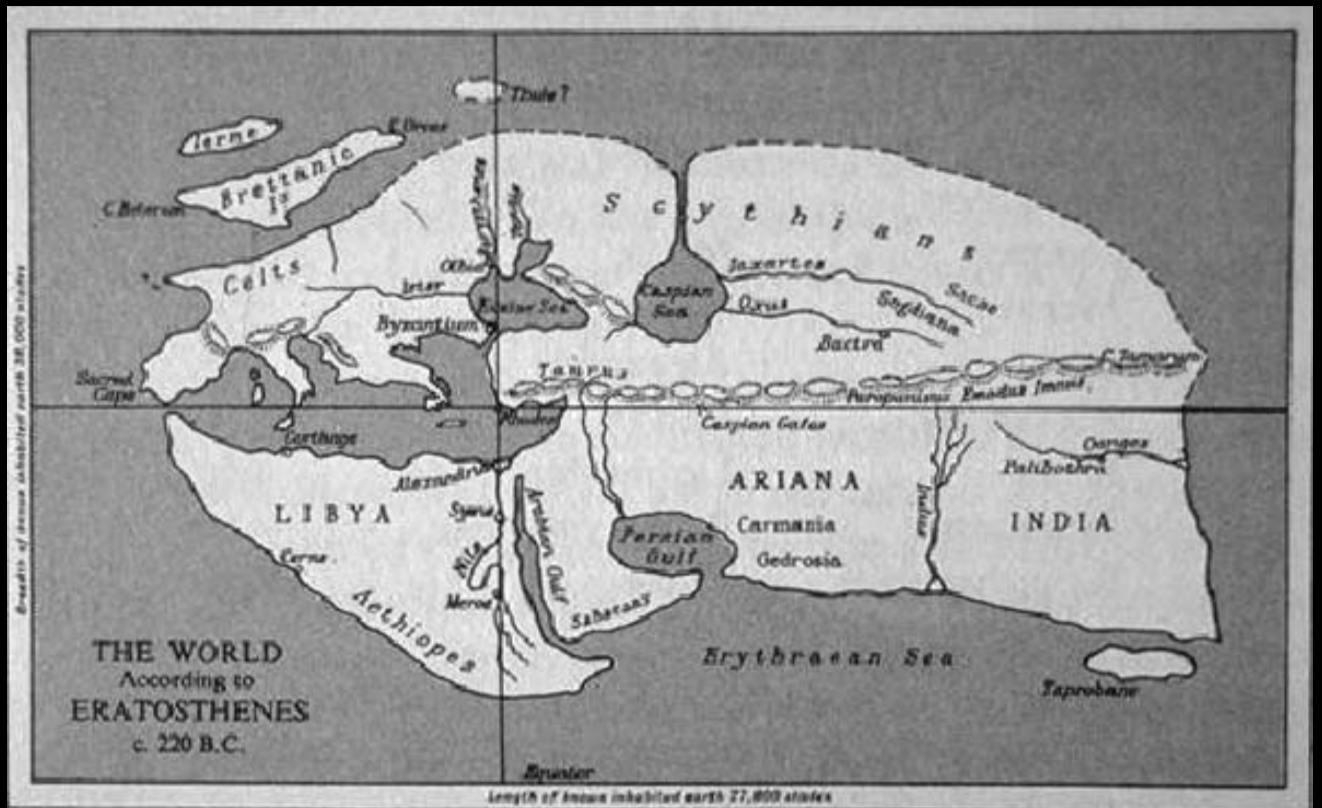
ربما لا يعرف الكثيرون صاحب هذا الاسم اليوناني، بل ربما يظنونه أجنبيًا، لكنهم لو ارتحلوا مع كاتبة هذا المقال، فإنهم سيُعرفون أن هذا الاسم لم يلمع إلا على أرض مصر، فهو ثالث مدير لمكتبة الإسكندرية القديمة وهو معلم ولي عهد الملك بطليموس الثالث يورجيتيس، وهو أول من قام بجمع المعلومات المتفرقة السابقة عليه وأضاف عليها لوضع أسس العلم الذي نعرفه الآن باسم الجغرافيا وأيضًا أسس العلم الذي نعرفه باسم الكارتوجرافيا (علم رسم الخرائط)، وهو أول من كتب تاريخ الإغريق مستندًا إلى الترتيب التاريخي للأحداث ومنقحًا التاريخ من الأساطير فيما عُرف باسم الكرونولوجيا (مراعاة الترتيب الزمني للأحداث)، وهو أول من رسم خريطة الأرض على كرة وأول من أثبت كرويتها بتجربة عملية لا تحتمل الشك، وهو أول عالم في تاريخ الإنسانية ينجح في قياس محيط الكرة الأرضية بهامش خطأ لا يتجاوز ١٪ عن أحدث القياسات، وهو أحد علماء الفلك المعدودين في تاريخ المكتبة القديمة، كما أنه كان عالمًا في الهندسة وفي الرياضيات، فهو صاحب ما يسمى «غريبال إيراتوستينيس» للتعرف على الأرقام الأولية (التي لا تقبل القسمة إلا على نفسها وعلى رقم ١) والمعروف حتى الآن، كما أن له كتابات أدبية ولغوية.

وربما لا يصدق البعض أن يجمع فرد واحد كل هذه العلوم التي تفككت في عصرنا الحالي إلى عشرات الفروع والاختصاصات الدقيقة، ولكنها طبيعة العصر الذي كان يعيشه إيراتوستينيس، هذا العصر الذي لم يكن يعرف التخصص لكن كان له في الوقت نفسه الفضل الكبير على الإنسانية في وضع أسس العلم التجريبي القائم على قواعد المنهج العلمي.



لقد كان إيراتوستينيس يتعلم لأخر لحظات حياته، وكان يواصل الليل بالنهار في ارتشاف رحيق العلم والبحث، إلا أنه للأسف أصيب بالعمى وهو شيخ في حوالي الثمانين من عمره، وترك على إثر ذلك منصبه كمدير للمكتبة، وقد تضاربت الأقوال حول سبب إصابته هذه، فمنها ما يؤكد إصابته بمرض في عينيه، ومنها ما يرجح فقدانه البصر نتيجة الإجهاد الشديد في البحث والقراءة خاصة أثناء الليل على الضوء الخافت للمصابيح. على أي حال، يبدو أن عينيه كانتا الحياة بالنسبة له، فهاتان العينان هما من كانتا تساعداه على الاستزادة من العلم وعلى الملاحظة العلمية وعلى النظر إلى الكون بتمعن، فما كان منه إلا أن قرر الانتحار بأسا وانتحر بالفعل بالامتناع عن الطعام، فمات جوعاً.

لقد رُوي الكثير عن هذا العالم الجليل، ولكن للأسف لم يتبق لنا من أعماله المكتوبة شيئاً، بل عرفناه عن طريق من جاءوا بعده والذين لم يكن أحد منهم يمل من الحديث عنه، فقد اعترف الجميع بفضلته حتى من اختلفوا معه، وظل الجميع يقرون بأنه كان حقاً «المعلم بيتاً». ولم نعرف أبداً ما الذي أصاب إنتاجه الفكري المكتوب، لكن المدهش في الأمر أن تختفي أعماله بالكامل ويظل هو موجوداً بأفكاره وإسهاماته واعتراف العلماء بمكانته العظيمة في تاريخ الإنسانية.



خريطة العالم كما رسمها إيراتوستينيس



بئر الأرض كما يسميها الحراس في جزيرة إيفاننتين وهي البئر العميقة القديمة المرجح ذكرها في المصادر التاريخية التي تتحدث عن قياس محيط الأرض

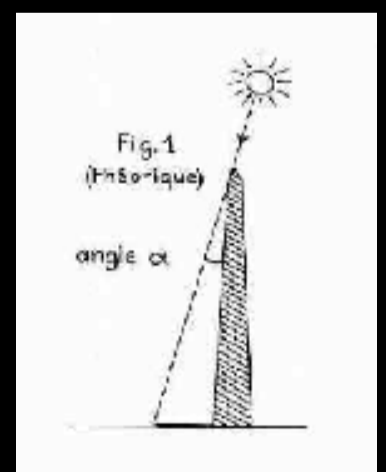
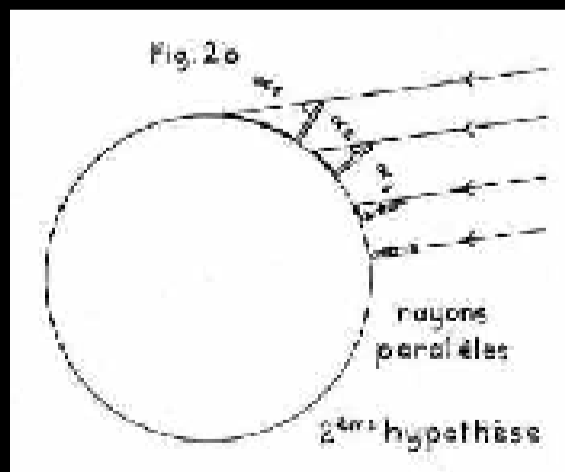
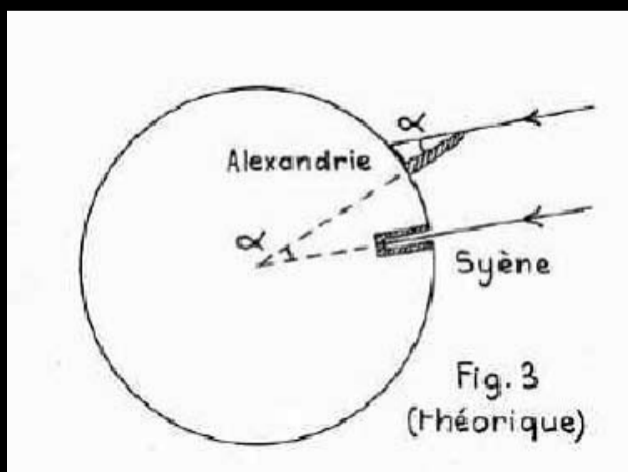


جزيرة إيفاننتين بأسوان

كما اكتشف إيراتوستينيس أن الإسكندرية وأسوان تقعان على نفس خط الطول، وترجح الكثير من المصادر التاريخية أنه ترأس حملة لقياس المسافة بين الإسكندرية وأسوان عن طريق الاستعانة بشخص محترف في السير بشكل منضبط يمكن من قياس خطواته، وكانت هذه مهنة موجودة في هذا العصر حيث يتم الاستعانة بهؤلاء المشائين (إذا جاز التعبير دون أن يختلط المعنى مع مدرسة أرسطو الشهيرة) لقياس المسافات الطويلة التي كان يتعدى قياسها بأدوات القياس المتاحة، وكان هو يتابع هذا المشاء عبر سفينة مجهزة في النيل ارتحلت حتى أسوان لإنجاز هذه المهمة، وكان من نتيجة كل ذلك قياس المسافة بين المدينتين والتي تقدر بحوالي ٨٠٠ كيلومتر. ولاستكمال منهجه العلمي وبحسبة بسيطة، تمكن إيراتوستينيس من قياس محيط الأرض (٢٧,٢/٨٠٠ كم × ٣٦٠°) لتكون النتيجة حوالي ٤٠,٠٠٠ كيلومتر وهو قياس لا يختلف إلا بأقل من ١٪ عن أحدث القياسات التي تتم بأحدث الأجهزة. وهكذا قيس محيط الكرة الأرضية قبل مائتي عام من الميلاد وبأبسط الأدوات، والأهم أن وراء هذه الأدوات البسيطة عقل يفكر ومنهج علمي يتحرى قواعد التجريب والملاحظة والمقارنة.

وقد ظل إيراتوستينيس يترأس مكتبة الإسكندرية حوالي أربعين عاماً، وهي أطول فترة قضاها مدير على رأس المكتبة القديمة، وطوال هذه الفترة، لم يكن إيراتوستينيس موظفاً معيناً من الملك ينتظر راتبه الشهري، بل كان عالماً بالمعنى الحرقي للكلمة، يتفاعل مع مكان عمله ويجعل منه سبيلاً للإنجاز والإبداع، وفي عهد إيراتوستينيس تم إنشاء المكتبة الابنة في معبد السيرابيوم في الحي المصري في المدينة (أطلال المعبد موجودة حتى الآن في منطقة كوم الشقافة بالإسكندرية)، والتي تم تأسيسها لكي تستوعب الأعداد الهائلة من البرديات التي لم يتسع لها المبنى الرئيسي للمكتبة الموجود في الحي الملكي المطل على البحر.

وكان العمل الأشهر لإيراتوستينيس هو قياس محيط الكرة الأرضية، وترجح بعض المصادر التاريخية أن هذا الإنجاز قد تم بناء على تكليف من الملك بطليموس الثالث يورجيتيس، في حين ترجح مصادر أخرى أنه كان نتيجة مباشرة لملاحظة علمية سجلها العالم الكبير. وسواء أن تم الأمر للسبب الأول أو للسبب الثاني فقد مات الملك بطليموس الثالث يورجيتيس قبل معرفة النتيجة العلمية الخالدة لهذا الإنجاز الكبير، فأكمل ابنه الملك بطليموس الرابع فيلوباتور وتلميذ إيراتوستينيس المسيرة وقام بتقديم تمويل كامل من الخزانة الملكية لهذه المهمة التي انتهت بنتيجة تاريخية. وكان إيراتوستينيس قد قرأ في إحدى لفائف البردي في المكتبة أن الشمس تتعامد في ظهر يوم ٢١ يونية (يوم الانقلاب الصيفي وأطول يوم في العام) على مدينة سيين (أسوان حالياً) لدرجة تجعل من الممكن رؤية أشعة الشمس تخترق أحد الأبار (يرجح أنها البئر العميقة الموجودة في جزيرة إيفاننتين) لتضيء المياه في الأعماق المظلمة، كما أنه لا يكون للمسلات ظل في هذا التوقيت. وقد لفت هذا الأمر نظر إيراتوستينيس بشدة، فقرر اختبار الأمر بوضع عصارأسية في الإسكندرية في التوقيت ذاته، فوجد أن لها ظلاً، وقد أثار ذلك دهشته، وذلك لأن أشعة الشمس تسقط متوازية على الأرض، فإذا كانت الأرض مسطحة فإن هذه الأشعة المتوازية لا بد أن تكون لها نفس الزاوية في كل مكان عندما تنتران وذلك وفقاً للهندسة الإقليدية، إما أن يكون الأمر غير ذلك، فإن هذا أكبر دليل على كروية الأرض. وبناء على ذلك، قام بقياس زاوية سقوط الشمس على العصا الرأسية في الإسكندرية فوجدها ٧,٢ درجة، ثم مد في افتراض رياضي الخط الرأسية للعصا في الإسكندرية والخط الرأسية للعصا في أسوان وأثبت أنهما سيلتقيان في مركز الأرض بزاوية تعادل ٧,٢ درجة وهي نفسها الزاوية بين أشعة الشمس والعصا في الإسكندرية.



رسوم توضيحية للطريقة التي فكر بها إيراتوستينيس لقياس محيط الأرض

# L'École philosophique d'Alexandrie

Yasmine Hussein

L'originalité de l'École d'Alexandrie résulta du principe de « conciliation » entre différents courants philosophiques et disciplines scientifiques d'une part, et une influence grandissante de la pensée orientale d'autre part. En fait, le principe de conciliation entre les différents courants philosophiques, spirituels et religieux fit la singularité de cette école de philosophie qui vit le jour à Alexandrie à l'interface entre les mondes grec et oriental.

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C'est au commencement de l'époque Lagide, sous le règne de Ptolémée I Sôter (323–283 av. J.-C.), que furent posés les fondements du développement de l'École d'Alexandrie. Soucieux de faire de sa capitale une référence dans les arts, la pensée et les sciences, le roi fit bâtir en 288 av. J.-C. le Museion, ou Musée, et la Bibliothèque. Le Museion ou « sanctuaire des Muses » était un centre de recherche et d'enseignement qui accueillait alors les savants les plus illustres dans tous les domaines de la connaissance. Peu de sources nous sont parvenues sur cette institution: la description la plus complète est celle de Strabon vers 27–26 av. J.-C. dans sa *Géographie*: « Le Museion fait lui aussi partie des bâtiments royaux et comprend un péripate<sup>1</sup>, un excède avec des sièges, et un grand édifice où se trouve la salle commune dans laquelle les savants, membres du Museion, prennent leurs repas. Cette communauté d'érudits possède des biens en commun; ils ont aussi un prêtre directeur du Museion, autrefois désigné par les rois, maintenant par César »<sup>2</sup>.

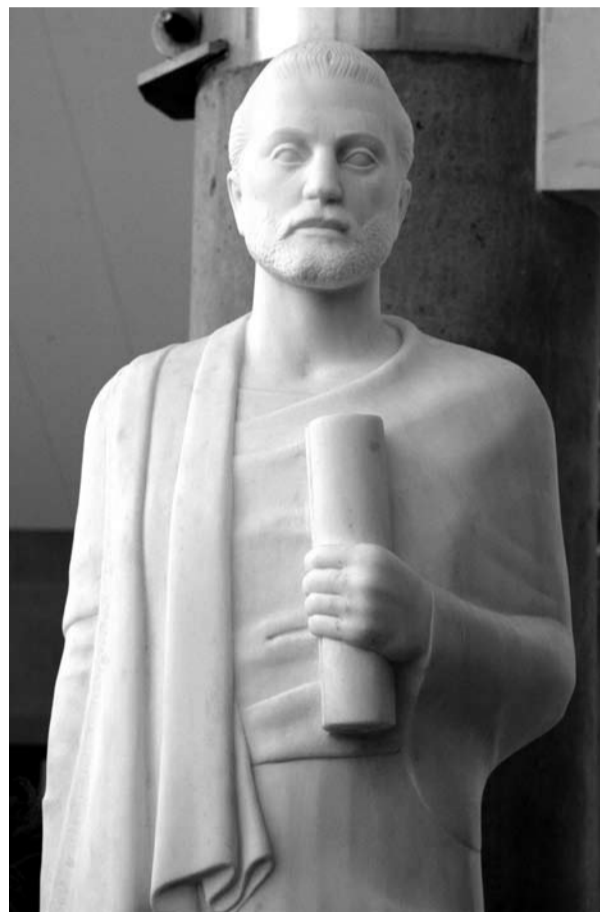


Ptolémée I Sôter Satrap d'Égypte, 323-305;  
Roi d'Égypte, 305-282 B.C.E

À l'origine, ce qui devint ensuite la célèbre Bibliothèque n'était qu'une annexe du Musée pour le besoin des érudits et des savants. Les Lagides voulaient que la Bibliothèque contiennent tous les savoirs du monde et l'ordre fut donné de rechercher dans tout le monde méditerranéen les ouvrages précieux. Ainsi les Ptolémées demandèrent-ils aux autres souverains de leur envoyer tout ouvrage écrit digne d'intérêt, et tout bateau arrivant à Alexandrie se vit confisquer ses rouleaux et manuscrits qui furent ensuite copiés pour la Bibliothèque.

Deux hommes jouèrent un rôle essentiel dans la fondation du Musée et de la Bibliothèque, ainsi que dans l'orientation des recherches et des enseignements. Le premier, Démétrios de Phalère était un orateur athénien, élève d'Aristote, ayant gouverné la ville d'Athènes entre 317 et 307 av. J.-C., puis, chassé par Démétrios Poliorcète, il se réfugia en Égypte. C'est lui qui, encouragé par Ptolémée I Sôter, fonda le Musée et la Bibliothèque. La plupart

de ses livres ont été écrits à Alexandrie. Au sein de la Bibliothèque il institua notamment l'étude des « sciences humaines » et de la philosophie. Le second, Straton de Lampsaque, également élève d'Aristote, fut invité à Alexandrie par Ptolémée I Sôter vers 300 av. J.-C. pour enseigner au fils du souverain. Il fut appelé « le physicien » en raison de ses nombreuses recherches sur la nature. Il retourna ensuite à Athènes pour diriger l'école péripatéticienne, fondée par Aristote.



Démétrios de Phalère

Ces deux hommes ont initié deux axes au sein des ces nouvelles institutions alexandrines. D'une part, la Bibliothèque est devenue un centre d'études et de recherches dans la littérature et les sciences humaines, grâce notamment à la présence de nombreuses œuvres traduites en grec. L'autre orientation, initiée par Straton de Lampsaque, et qui caractérisait le Musée, était les recherches expérimentales et scientifiques dans la médecine, l'astrologie et les mathématiques.



Fragment de papyrus grâce auquel on connaît la liste des premiers bibliothécaires d'Alexandrie

Or, la particularité de ces deux institutions, aux orientations pourtant différentes, était d'accueillir chacune l'étude de la philosophie. En effet, pour Démétrios de Phalère et Straton de Lampsaque, tous

deux anciens élèves d'Aristote, la philosophie venait en complément aussi bien dans les disciplines scientifiques du Musée que dans les études littéraires et humaines de la Bibliothèque. La différence entre ces institutions d'une part, mais surtout leur complémentarité d'autre part, attirèrent de nombreux savants et chercheurs, permettant la création et le développement de l'École d'Alexandrie.

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L'origine et le sens de la désignation même d'École d'Alexandrie a été l'objet de plusieurs interprétations. Les historiens s'accordent sur les interactions entre l'école philosophique d'Alexandrie et la philosophie grecque ainsi que la pensée orientale<sup>3</sup>. Mais il est plus délicat de décrypter les raisons faisant de la ville un centre intellectuel à part entière, avec sa propre inclination intellectuelle et distincte des autres écoles de pensée du monde hellénistique.

Une première interprétation vise à faire de l'École philosophique d'Alexandrie une école néo-platonicienne. L'historien Frederick Copleston<sup>4</sup>, dans son *Histoire de la philosophie*, a considéré l'École d'Alexandrie comme un centre de recherches dont les membres ont axé leurs travaux sur les commentaires des œuvres de Platon et d'Aristote. Selon Copleston, les écoles néo-platoniciennes étaient au nombre de cinq : l'école syrienne, celles de Pergame, d'Athènes, et d'Alexandrie et enfin, les penseurs néo-platoniciens du monde latin.

Une deuxième interprétation considère que ce que l'on étudiait au Musée et à la Bibliothèque ne représentait qu'une extension de la philosophie grecque et ne permettait donc pas de classer Alexandrie comme une école philosophique distincte de celle d'Athènes. Le néo-platonisme n'aurait été qu'une tendance parmi d'autres. D'autre part, la philosophie à Alexandrie n'aurait été qu'une des nombreuses disciplines telles que les mathématiques, l'astronomie, la géographie, l'histoire, la linguistique, la musique... Selon cette optique, le statut de la philosophie en tant que discipline serait ainsi resté dans ces proportions jusqu'au II<sup>ème</sup> siècle apr. J.-C., époque à laquelle Ammonios Saccas lui conféra une place plus essentielle.

Une autre interprétation du terme d'École d'Alexandrie se fonde sur des critères géographiques. Ce nom aurait été appliqué à l'École philosophique d'Alexandrie, et à la ville elle-même, dont les figures les plus importantes auraient été Philon (~12 av. J.-C.–~54 apr. J.-C.), Clément (150–220 av. J.-C.), Origène (185–253), Ammonius Saccas (1<sup>ère</sup> moitié III<sup>ème</sup> siècle), Plotin (205–270), Porphyre (234–305?), et Hypatie (370–415). La pensée originale établie par ces philosophes comprend des influences orientales, judaïques et gnostiques. Elle se développe à part du Musée qui continuait à perpétuer la culture grecque tout en attirant nombre de savants. Il y avait donc à Alexandrie de nombreux penseurs qui ne s'inscrivaient pas dans cette nouvelle tendance riche de ces nouvelles influences.

En fin de compte, l'origine et le sens de la dénomination de l'École d'Alexandrie est à chercher ni dans sa fonction néo-platonicienne ni en raison de son situation géographique. Nous ne pouvons pas la définir hors de ses structures fondatrices que furent le Musée et la Bibliothèque, ni hors de cette nouvelle pensée philosophique originale qui s'est développée à partir des références grecques de ces institutions. Ce terme d'École d'Alexandrie prend tout son sens avec le développement de la pensée des philosophes nommés ci-dessus, une pensée mise en œuvre au sein même du Musée mais se démarquant peu à peu d'une inflexion intellectuelle exclusivement grecque.

### Les caractéristiques de l'École d'Alexandrie

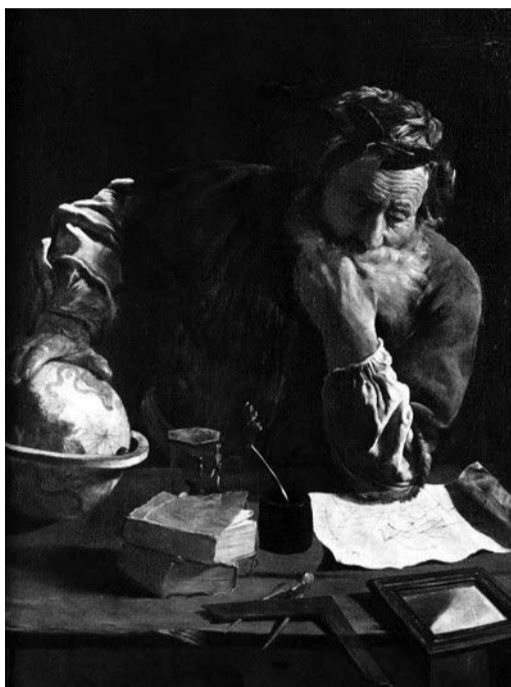
Une des particularités de l'École d'Alexandrie fut l'influence réciproque qui s'est progressivement effectuée entre les sciences et la philosophie et la métaphysique. Parmi les grands savants ayant œuvré à Alexandrie il y avait des mathématiciens illustres, tels qu'Euclide (~IV<sup>ème</sup>–~III<sup>ème</sup> siècle av. J.-C.), Archimède (~287–~212 av. J.-C.) ou encore Aristarque de Samos (~310–~230 av. J.-C.). Dans le domaine médical, l'anatomie s'est développée spectaculairement grâce à Hérophile de Chalcédoine (~340–~300 av. J.-C.) ou Eristrate de Céos (~320–~250 av. J.-C.). Cependant la médecine s'est vue de plus en plus influencée par la philosophie et le Stoïcisme en particulier. S'est développée alors une école de médecine alliant l'étude scientifique et la philosophie, avec l'introduction des principes spirituels de compréhension de l'Homme hérités des Stoïciens et de la pensée orientale. Cette tendance est apparue dans les autres domaines scientifiques de l'époque. Ce fut le cas de la chimie, dont l'étude empirique était fondée sur des principes métaphysiques, dérivant vers la magie.



Euclide 325 -265 BCE est le mathématicien qui a écrit le plus célèbre ouvrage de l'histoire des mathématiques

Or cette inspiration mystique dans l'étude des sciences semble avoir fortement influencé le courant philosophique se développant à Alexandrie. Ainsi, on a opéré un rapprochement entre les religions orientales comme le culte d'Isis, de Mithra et la religion grecque, entre le judaïsme ou le christianisme et la philosophie grecque. Par conséquent, ont été adoptés des principes d'équilibre entre l'ancien et le nouveau. D'où l'émergence notamment de la pensée néo-pythagoricienne, mélangeant les idées de Pythagore, de Platon, d'Aristote et celles des Stoïciens. Elle a forgé une nouvelle philosophie de respect et de conviction dans les préceptes anciens avec le principe de droiture morale s'inscrivant dans la vie spirituelle de l'époque.

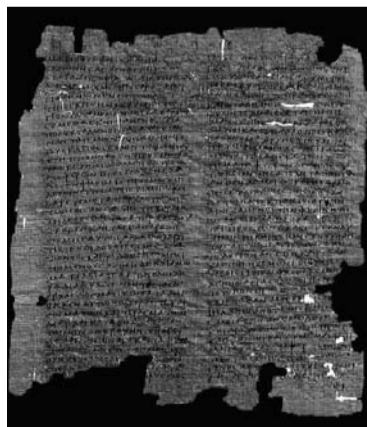
On remarque enfin que l'influence croissante de la mystique orientale a créé un nouveau paradigme intellectuel au sein de l'École d'Alexandrie. Après avoir atteint sa pleine maturité à travers Platon et Aristote, la pensée grecque s'est vue incapable d'innovation. Purement rationnelle et basée sur le raisonnement déductif et mathématique des œuvres d'Aristote et Archimède, elle s'est heurtée à la nécessité de recherche d'un nouvel accès au chemin de la connaissance. D'où la tendance nouvelle, au refuge dans la foi religieuse.



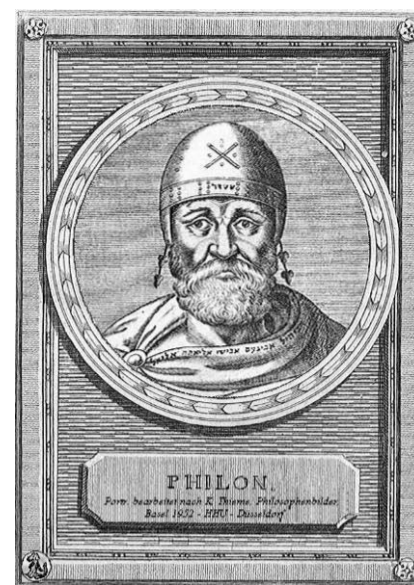
Archimède (~287–~212 av. J.-C.) par Domenico Fetti, 1620, Musée Alte Meister Dresde (Allemagne)

De même, les circonstances et événements historiques ont-ils joué un rôle: car de la division de l'Empire d'Alexandre jusqu'à l'arrivée de l'Empire romain, se sont succédées les guerres, les épidémies et les désordres politiques et sociaux. Par conséquent les philosophes commencèrent à douter de la capacité de l'esprit pour comprendre le monde et contrôler l'instinct humain. Est ainsi apparue chez eux, la recherche du moyen du salut personnel, un moyen que fut le retour à la religion. L'apparition du christianisme et l'épanouissement de la pensée juive à Alexandrie ont été ainsi parmi les caractéristiques de l'École d'Alexandrie. Philon en a jeté les bases en conciliant le dogme juif et la pensée grecque. De même, une tendance conciliatrice avec le christianisme apparaît plus tard par le biais de Clément et Origène.

Dans le même temps, une tendance philosophique pure s'est trouvée en concurrence avec ces deux courants religieux à Alexandrie. L'un de ses plus importants penseurs, Ammonios Saccas, avec son étudiant Plotin, mettent en œuvre une théorie philosophique explicative conciliante avec la mystique, présentant le moyen d'atteindre le salut personnel. Enfin on assiste parallèlement à la renaissance de la tendance hermétique, faisant revivre les textes de la foi de l'Égypte ancienne.



Manuscrit grec d'Égypte: ce codex est l'un des plus anciens contenant des œuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie. BNF Paris, France



Philon d'Alexandrie (~12 av. J.-C.–~54 apr. J.-C.)

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Fort de ce cadre distinctif, l'École d'Alexandrie se compose de trois principaux courants :

- L'École théologique d'Alexandrie
- L'hermétisme
- La philosophie des commentateurs (néo-platonisme)

Tout d'abord celui de la conciliation entre la philosophie et la religion: l'École théologique d'Alexandrie fut probablement instituée en 180 apr. J.-C. par Pantène le philosophe stoïcien, puis chrétien et maître de Clément d'Alexandrie (fin du II<sup>ème</sup> siècle). Ses successeurs à la tête de l'école furent son disciple Clément d'Alexandrie, puis Origène nommé à la direction de l'École théologique en 215 par le pape Démétrius I. L'école forma un grand nombre de théologiens et de pères de l'Église.



icône de Clément d'Alexandrie

L'hermétisme était le deuxième courant à Alexandrie. Appelé aussi « hermétisme gréco-égyptien » il fut fondé sur les révélations d'Hermès Trismégiste<sup>5</sup>, ou Hermès Thot, appartenant au panthéon des divinités égyptiennes. Entre 100 et 300 apr. J.-C., de nombreux textes philosophiques dont le très important *Corpus Hermeticum* sont apparus, écrits en grec et assimilés par la culture hellénistique d'Alexandrie.

Enfin, la philosophie des commentateurs fut le troisième courant. Il s'agit de la tendance purement philosophique que beaucoup d'historiens ont appelée « néo-platonisme ». Elle résulte d'une réinterprétation de la pensée d'Aristote et de Platon. Philon d'Alexandrie, au I<sup>er</sup> siècle apr. J.-C. peut être considéré comme un précurseur de cette tendance,



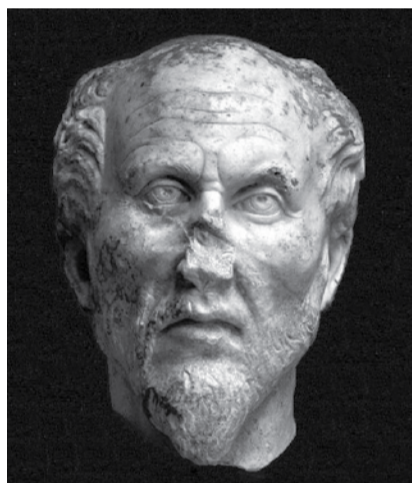
Thot est souvent représenté sous la forme d'un homme à tête d'ibis.

La matière est comme le néant, en soi, sans forme et laide. Elle se trouve à l'opposé de la lumière de l'Un. L'ascension vers l'Un est un processus de purification qui libère de la matière et mène à la contemplation de l'Un, à l'ultime: l'extase. L'enseignement de Plotin a été dicté à Porphyre, qui en 301, influencé sans doute par l'arithmétique pythagoricienne, regroupa les cinquante-quatre petits traités en six groupes de neuf, d'où le titre: les *Ennéades* (du grec *énnéa*, neuf). Ces six groupes correspondraient aux six étapes de la purification spirituelle. La première Ennéade traite de la morale (première étape de la purification), la seconde et la troisième de la physique et du monde et montrent la vanité des choses sensibles. La quatrième porte sur l'Âme du monde, la cinquième sur l'Esprit, et la sixième sur l'Un.

mais c'est Ammonios Saccas, à partir de 232, qui en a posé les fondements. Mort vers 241, quoiqu'il fût né dans la pauvreté et qu'il eût été d'abord forcé de faire le métier de portefaix pour vivre (d'où le nom de Saccas), il se livra avec ardeur à l'étude de la philosophie. Ammonios chercha à concilier les doctrines de Platon et d'Aristote, en y mêlant les doctrines orientales, et fut ainsi le fondateur de l'éclectisme-néoplatonicien. Il n'a laissé aucun écrit, suivant sur ce point l'attitude de certains philosophes de l'Antiquité. Il fut le maître de Plotin, et ce dernier, après avoir longtemps cherché en vain une philosophie qui lui plaise, s'est écrié: « *C'est celui que je cherchais !* »<sup>6</sup>. Toutefois, bien qu'il ait promis à Ammonios Saccas qu'il ne mettrait jamais sa doctrine par écrit, il rompit sa promesse.

Plotin fonda l'éclectisme en prenant pour base la doctrine de Platon et en s'efforçant de concilier avec elle les autres doctrines des philosophes aristotéliens et stoïciens. Le but de la philosophie, selon lui, c'était l'union intime, sans intermédiaire, de l'âme humaine avec l'être divin, ce qu'il appelait l'unification par le biais de la contemplation et l'extase. Il reconnaissait dans la divinité une sorte de trinité, distinguant en elle trois états ou hypostases: l'Un, sans attributs, l'Intelligence (Noûs), et l'Âme universelle (Psyché); la première de ces trois fut la plus parfaite: les deux autres en procèdent. L'Un, par sa providence, a tout ordonné et gouverne tout; L'Un est le Bien, il est l'unité absolue la plénitude. De lui provient tout être et toute beauté comme la lumière provient du soleil.

Porphyre a joué un rôle considérable dans l'évolution de la pensée, à la fin de l'Antiquité et pendant tout le Moyen Âge. La manière dont il a systématisé et expliqué la pensée de son maître, Plotin, a donné naissance à un spiritualisme qu'Augustin<sup>7</sup> a diffusé dans tout l'Occident latin.



Plotin 205-270

La dernière de cette ligne philosophique fut Hypatie, dont le père, Théon d'Alexandrie, fut le dernier directeur du Musée, et un éditeur et commentateur de textes mathématiques. Il éduqua sa fille en l'initiant aux mathématiques et à la philosophie. Hypatie dispensait un enseignement public à Alexandrie aux frais ou au service de l'État dans les années 390. Selon Damascios<sup>8</sup>, elle expliquait « Platon ou Aristote ou



Hypatie, la dernière des philosophes d'Alexandrie

tout autre philosophe ». L'assistance à ses cours fut libre. D'autre part, Hypatie donna sans doute des séances privées, en cénacles, et peut-être chez elle, auxquelles assistaient Synésios de Cyrène (370-414) et ses condisciples. La mort d'Hypatie, tuée en 415 par des fanatiques religieux, a porté un coup fatal au courant philosophique alexandrin par la conversion des derniers philosophes au christianisme, comme Synésios de Cyrène qui devint évêque de Ptolémaïs de Cyrénaïque en Libye.

#### Endnotes

- 1 C'est-à-dire une promenade.
- 2 Strabon, XVII, 1, 8.
- 3 Le terme «Orient» est pris ici au sens large, il désigne des Divers pays tels que l'Égypte, la Mésopotamie, la Perse et l'Inde au temps d'Alexandre.
- 4 Historien de la philosophie et prêtre jésuite britannique (1907-1994).
- 5 La première mention du nom «Trismégiste» figure chez Philon de Byblos et Athénagoras, au II<sup>ème</sup> s. C'est un nom qui signifie «Hermès trois fois très grand» en grec, et il était donné par les Grecs au dieu égyptien Thot.
- 6 E. Brehier, *La Philosophie de Plotin*, Vrin, Paris, 1999.
- 7 Augustin (Saint), Aurelius Augustinus, le plus grand des Pères de l'église latine (354-430), Saint Augustin se fit remarquer par sa vaste science et par son éloquence autant que par sa piété.
- 8 Damascios le Diadoque (458-538), est un philosophe néoplatonicien. Il fut le dernier diadoque ou scolarque (recteur) de l'Académie d'Athènes, fondée par Platon en 387 av. J.-C.



Les classes de l'École d'Alexandrie à l'époque romaine à Kom El Dikka, Alexandrie



# Jack Debney's Alexandrian Charlie Chaplin and Other Characters

Nur Sherif

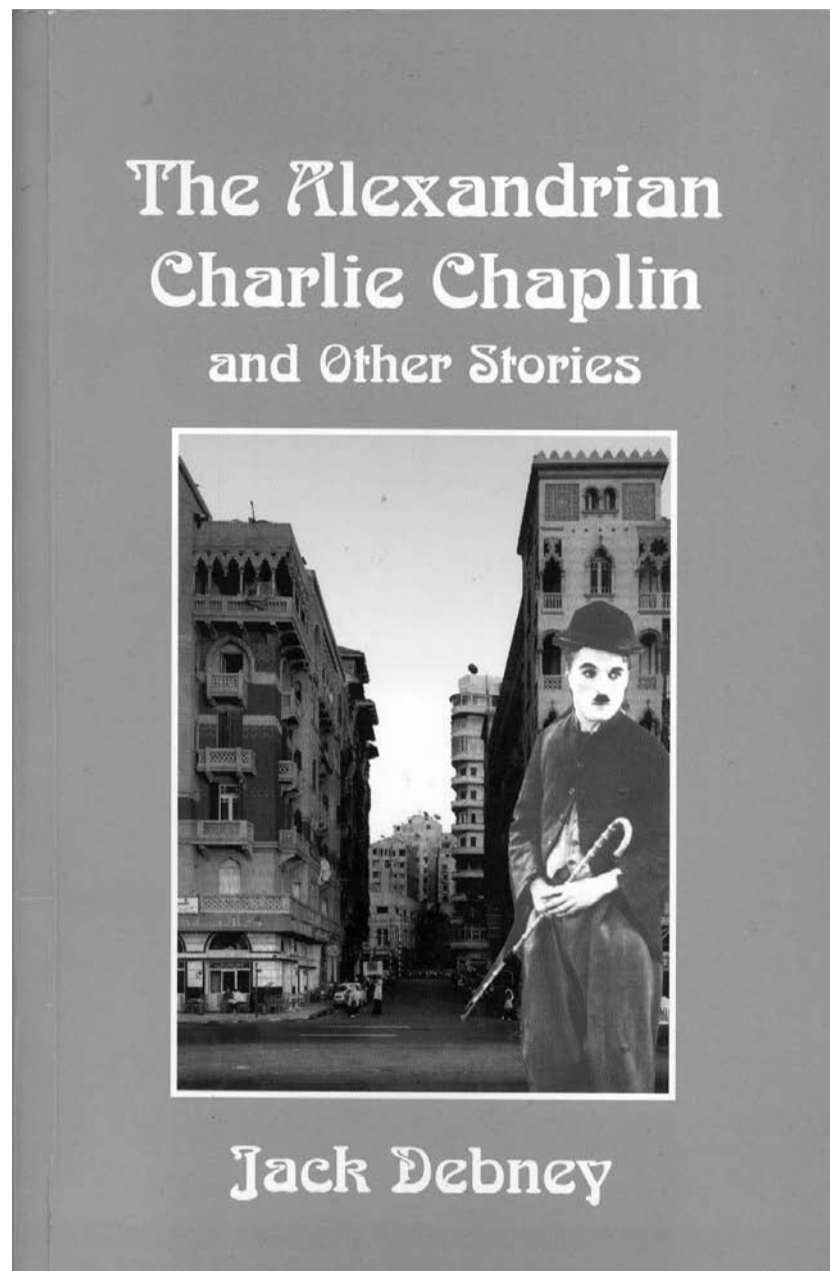
Inviting a creative writer to join the local teaching staff of the Department of English has its hazards. There is always the risk that the department will, at some point, serve as material for a work of fiction. D.J. Enright's entertaining novel *Academic Year* is a classic example of this, where to the amusement of some and the offence of others, the local staff surfaces as the "little brown gods".

In 1963, Jack Debney, a young Englishman from Yorkshire, was appointed lecturer in English at the University of Alexandria, a post he held till 1967. In the last few years, two collections of his short stories appeared: *The Crocodile's Head and Other Stories* in 2002 and *The Alexandrian Charlie Chaplin and Other Stories* in 2005 published by Redbeck Press. When these two volumes were first brought to my attention I rapidly leafed through their pages with a mixture of curiosity and trepidation in anticipation of detecting a former colleague's impressions of his Alexandrian experience.

Only less than half of these stories touch on Jack Debney's years in Alexandria. This experience is presented through the voice of the observant first person narrator openly identified as Skaife, the lecturer in English. The dominant note of the voice is that of the outsider who exists very much on the edge of an alien environment. This is clearly expressed in an anxiety dream narrated after Skaife has set foot in Alexandria. In "Becalmed" he dreams that he is back home passing by all the familiar landmarks of his childhood. He knows he is leaving the following day and he has to see these places one last time to store up in his mind as a "bulwark against Egypt". His subconscious reveals his doubts, even fears about his journey to Egypt. "It should have been north", his dream tells him; "to go south to Egypt was wrong. I could see that now". Overwhelmed by his unfamiliar surroundings, Skaife expresses his feelings of alienation more directly when he says, "I feel so lost here, shut out".

Skaife finds it difficult to connect with his students. Ill at ease at one of their parties, he finds himself sinking deep into a state of gloom as he listens to what sounds to his ears "the harsh Arabic they spoke". Even more discordant is the "Arabic-English patois the girls break into". The only attempt at connecting with a student is when he fantasizes about Zahra, an attractive Lebanese. But even that feeble tie is aborted when Skaife comes down to earth and begins to see Zahra as "banal" like the other "parasitical rich overprivileged women students" who flooded to the department in those days "as they would to a finishing school".

When in "Becalmed", Skaife widens his circle of contacts beyond that of the classroom, he appears no less alienated; he is not only unable to but undesirous of engaging with the frenzied acquaintances who draw him reluctantly into their riotous evenings of loud clapping and feverish "twisting". In this story the narrator is very much the detached observer ill-at-ease in this Alexandrian company as they discuss



the radical changes that have come over the city in this post-revolution era. Passing remarks about President Nasser and the impact of the new regime are made defining the temporal setting of the stories.

The years 1963–1967 in which the stories are set are a significant period in the modern history of Alexandria when the face of the city was changing radically. These are the culminating years of nationalization leading up to the disastrous 1967 war with Israel and the mass exodus of the cosmopolitan citizens of Alexandria who realized that there was no longer a future for them in their adopted city. Alexandria was losing its distinctive cosmopolitan feature and rapidly becoming predominantly Egyptian: there was no place for the members of the rootless community who had built for themselves a city within the city where they led distinctly Greek, Italian or Armenian lives, as the case might be, each with their own schools, cafes, restaurants, clubs and exclusive neighborhoods.

Mr. de Basra, in "At Vassilou's" is one of the formerly rich Jewish businessmen, who has lost his wealth under the new regime. He belongs to a dying community that bemoans its loss and the passing of the good old days. "This is not an easy time for an Englishman in Egypt", he remarks to Skaife, "but still", he goes on to say, "it's easier for you than for me ... my home's here and they are making it more and more difficult for me to live in it". Once in the ascendancy, but now "hungover" and

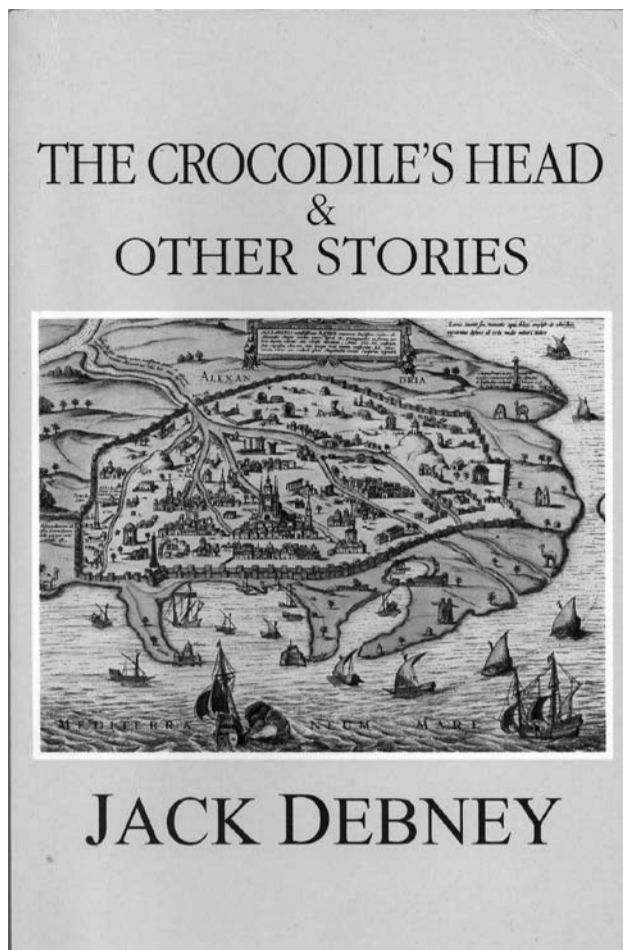
"spent" he clearly represents the end of an era.

In the same category of rootless Alexandrians, who belong to a dying species, are the two British expatriates, Mrs. Waguih and Mabel Fitzwilliams. The former is seen riding next to her husband, driving regally through the streets of Alexandria in their Rolls Royce, "Prince Abbass's ambiguous gift", with "the urchins gathering round the car peering and giggling, one even having the tenacity to stroke the bonnet". This character, who looks back with longing to her past, is a comic anomaly of those days. Light ridicule turns to a more critical note as Mabel Fitzwilliams is exposed in her snobbish attitude to the local Alexandrians. These are both character types of the period as well as easily identifiable individuals in contemporary Alexandrian circles, just as the Waguih Rolls Royce was a familiar sight in the streets of Alexandria in those days. The story in which they appear is appropriately given the title, "*I Remember Them, I Remember Them All*".

Brief as are the references to the underprivileged local Alexandrians, there are, nevertheless, two such, who are briefly mentioned with slightly warmer and more positive feelings. Skaife detects something genuine and worthy of respect, even of admiration, about the ordinary Alexandrians he sees every day in his comings and goings. There is the seventy-year-old caretaker of his building with a second young wife bringing up a large second new family, "a crop of kids on the roof" and there is a local neighbor whom Skaife sees from the balcony unashamedly breast-feeding her child in public. These are characters well-rooted in the earth, at ease with themselves and with their surroundings and unexposed to the changes overtaking the city. There is a reassuring permanence and authenticity about these two humans: the caretaker commands the respect of the narrator as he observes him prostrating himself at his prayers, and the woman evokes in him good natured, light-hearted humor as he remarks the Alexandrian Madonna in her "cartoon bustiness" yielding to the importunities of her infant tugging at her *galabeya* demanding to be breast-fed. There is a certain aura of dignity about these local specimens, such as Skaife's attributes to President Nasser himself when he says, defending him to his detractors, "Nasser has dignity".



Jack Debney with Professor Mahmoud Manzaloui and Dr Len Knight, 1965



In whatever light Jack Debney sees these characters, his narrator generally remains distant and detached from them; they are presented from the outside in a few words as brief sketches. The case is different with Labiba, the ten-year-old, downtrodden slavey from Upper Egypt, harshly treated on occasion by Mme Aglaia, her shrill Greek mistress and Skaife's landlady. With this fuller portrait of a character, the English teacher is shown, for almost the first time in these stories, to empathise with another human being. They share a common plight: both are exiles entrapped in alien surroundings.

Skaife's shows a readiness to communicate with Labiba, but even as each attempts to reach out to the other there is an uneasy wariness of the relationship. The child, so used to being scolded and shrilly spoken to, does not know what to make of this stranger who thanks her politely when she serves him with a cup of coffee. Skaife, on his part, does not know the appropriate distance to keep between him and the child; every step forward in the relationship is followed by two steps backward. Skaife has to be continually readjusting this distance to maintain the peace of the household with the Greek landlady. The three characters are uncomfortable with one another in this uneven situation, even though there are moments of laughter and fun as teacher and slavey interact and come closer as when they reverse roles: she, teaching him Arabic, and he showing her how to sweep. In these rare happy moments of playfulness, Skaife feels a "protectiveness" towards the child "that was as near love as he knew". But these are only fleeting moments of engagement followed once again by the urgent need to withdraw; "I decided I must try to keep the correct distance between Labiba and myself" is the conclusion he finally arrives at.

When Labiba eventually runs away for the second and last time from her mistress, Skaife is happy at her release and what he considers to be her victory and ultimate survival. Then suddenly, he says, "I was optimistic". The lighter note that prevails in the story, in spite of its darker aspects of child slavery, may be attributed, not only to the promise of freedom, but even more to the human contact established between the two characters, absent from the other Alexandrian stories. Furthermore, there is a completeness about the portrayal of the little slavey, "with a squint, both

ugly and pretty", who captivates the narrator with her liveliness, releasing in him a wealth of mixed feelings hitherto unexpressed.

The most memorable fully portrayed character in Debney's stories, however, is his Alexandrian Charlie Chaplin. This delightful mimic of the great comic mime of the silver screen dominates the scene of the story that gives its name to the more recent volume of short stories. He is the child of the city who makes his appearance at a typical *Alexandrian taverna* where late show cinema goers flock to spend the remaining hours of the night and early hours of the morning before turning in. Debney presents the elements that make for a miniature theater setting befitting the master of comedy and mime. There is the audience: the customers on the balcony, as well as those on the ground floor, and there is the crowd of spectators outside who "press against the windows and doorways to see him". As the scene is set, the character is brought into the spotlight focusing on the details of his appearance revealing him as a mimic of the famous comedian. Debney captures to perfection the Chaplinesque facial expressions, gestures and bodily movements, all of which take us back to the indelible image we retain of the great comic performer who engaged a universal audience with laughter at his antics.

This character is presented in a number of typical Chaplinesque short acts. The opening act is with the proprietor of the taverna offering him a glass of retsina which he first refuses with a lordly gesture implying he is beyond temptation. He then gazes longingly at the glass as the proprietor tries to persuade him to accept it. Gradually, he begins to give in to temptation, fluttering his eyelashes, grinning coyly and wriggling with embarrassment. Finally, his resistance breaks down and in one quick gulp, as though he feels it will be snatched away from him, he drinks the retsina. The scene ends up with a gesture of mock refinement, as he pats his mouth genteelly and mimes his thanks to the proprietor who stands behind the counter laughing.

Of all the gallery of Alexandrian portraits and sketches this is the one for whom Debney shows affection by referring to him in the term of endearment as "our Charlie Chaplin", and about whose private life he shows a certain curiosity and sufficient interest for him to try to get to the reality that lies behind the comic role he plays. Was he Greek, Egyptian or even Armenian? he wonders. The character had never spoken and no one could ever tell.

Debney imagines two different lives for his Charlie Chaplin: one for each of the two large photographs hanging on the taverna wall behind the counter. One of President Nasser "smiling slightly", the other of the Greek proprietor's dead father staring ahead of him "posing stiffly"; each looking "magisterial" and "dignified" in his own way. Chaplin is placed between these two who define the temporal setting of the story. Debney imagines his character possibly as an Egyptian with a wife and several children, living in a small flat somewhere in the crowded areas behind the western harbor; he is of meager means and supplements his spare livelihood as a clerk by performing his Charlie Chaplin act in and out of *seafront restaurants*. Or he might be a Greek whose father owns a small grocery, broken away from his family and Greek background to become a performing artist. In fact, he is neither Egyptian nor Greek; as he gazes blankly at the two photographs on the wall he shows no preference for either. He has lost all identity and is "entrapped in the role of the artist".

But even as an artist, he is not genuine. As the narrator looks closely at him he detects something about the mouth that is not quite right. At first he can find no fault with his imitation. It is as though he has "stepped directly out of the screen". Later, however, he notices that the replica is not as perfect as he had thought; the

silent laugh that had lessened to a grimace is "wrong". Maybe it is something to do with "the angle of the mouth against the teeth". He is merely a very good "forgery", the almost perfect mimic of the most perfect mime of his time; not the artist, only the replica of the artist. We never get any deeper than the tell-tale grimace and the enigmatic smile except to notice how "wrong" they are and how they "betray", never "reveal" the character. The Alexandrian Chaplin remains, to the end, a mystery to both narrator and reader.

Although we feel that through the character, Debney may be suggesting something more profound about the Alexandrian set up of the stories than is openly expressed, we cannot fathom what lies behind the dead-panned face that was perhaps, in Debney's viewpoint, the "best trick of all" and the most meaningful; this blankness seems a "subversive mask" into which we are left to read whatever we will, as we are free to interpret what is implied by the use of such words as "forgery", "flaw" and "wrong" and in what way, if at all, they may be applied to Debney's Alexandrian experience, characters and stories as a whole. Whatever the implication may be, and even where there is a lighter note to the stories when the narrator successfully reaches out to a character, there is nevertheless an uncomfortable nagging sense of detachment and disengagement on his part.

This might have been slightly alleviated had Debney come across one Alexandrian character whose familiar figure would have been worth noting. This is the disheveled, long-bearded gentleman of the road with saint-like features, dressed in tatters and with the manners of a true gentleman. He was the son of a wealthy Alexandrian, most likely Greek, family who chose to give up the whole of his fortune and live as a penniless vagrant depending on the charity of the underprivileged, and living in damp basements and dark stairwells. He was often seen of an evening, standing alone at the entrance of some restaurant where he would occasionally politely greet an elegantly dressed woman customer, as she was leaving, bow respectfully and offer her a beautiful rose. This is the counterpart of the *taverna scene* with the Alexandrian Charlie Chaplin acting the gallant gentleman gracefully presenting a lady customer with the flower in his buttonhole and receiving his reward in return from her escort, the difference being that the former is the genuine specimen whereas the latter is merely putting on an act.

One wonders if their paths had crossed, how Jack Debney would have "remembered" the authentic gentle human individual, how he would have empathized and engaged with him as with no other character in his stories, for this was no "replica" or "forgery", only the "real" thing. A full portrait of him would have spoken volumes, not only of his family and himself, but of Alexandria as well. Alas, they never did meet and he is now sadly forgotten.



Jack Debney, 2010

# Kebbeh



*Kebbeh* (or *kibbeh*) is a typical Levantine dish made of bulgur and minced meat (lamb or beef). The best known version is the torpedo-shaped croquettes, which are fried until brown. In another popular version, the *kebbeh* ingredients are mixed and pressed down flat into a baking pan and then scored with a knife into diamond-shaped wedges, topped with pine nuts or almonds and baked in the oven. This traditional dish is eaten in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt (where it is called *koubeiba*) but has also spread as far as South America for example due to Lebanese immigrants.

## Ingredients

- 1 cup bulgur
- 1 cup water for soaking
- ½ kilo minced meat (lamb or beef)
- 2 onions (one finely chopped, one coarsely chopped)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ tsp. allspice
- ¼ tsp. nutmeg
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
- Pinch of cumin (optional)
- ¼ cup toasted pine nuts (optional)
- Vegetable oil for frying

## Instructions

1. Soak the bulgur in the water for about 30 minutes. Drain excess water.
2. In a bowl add half of the minced meat to the soaked bulgur, coarsely chopped onion, salt and pepper. Combine well and blend in a food processor so that it forms a dough consistency. This dough will be used to form the outer shell of the *kebbeh*.
3. To prepare the stuffing, fry the finely chopped onion in a pan with the oil. Add the pine nuts if using them. Add the remaining minced meat, the allspice, nutmeg, cinnamon, cumin, salt and pepper. Mix well with a wooden spoon or spatula and stir until light brown. Cook for 10 minutes and remove from the heat. This will be used for the stuffing of the *kebbeh*.
4. To make the *kebbeh*, take an egg-sized amount of the shell mixture and form into a ball. With your finger poke a hole in the ball to make a space for the stuffing mixture. Add some stuffing and seal to make a ball. Shape the ball with pointed ends into the characteristic "torpedo" shape, or if preferred the *kebbeh* can be left as they are. Repeat the process until all the ingredients are used up.
5. When all the *kebbeh* are ready, deep fry them in oil for about 10 minutes or until golden brown. Drain on paper towels.



# 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 a gastronomical page to illustrate 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

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## Contents

Hamed Eweis: A Key Figure among Egypt's Contemporary Artists

The Diffusion of Alexandrian Cults in the Mediterranean and Europe

Egypt and Sea Power

Alexandria Corniche

إيراثوستينيس القوريني

L'École philosophique d'Alexandrie

Jack Debney's Alexandrian Charlie Chaplin and Other Characters

Kebbeh Recipe

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