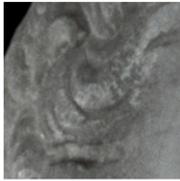
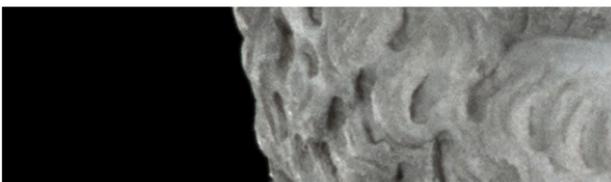
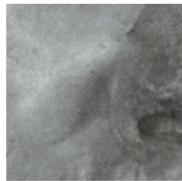


“At the beginning of the third century before our era, a great enterprise was conceived in ancient Alexandria.”



Masterpieces

from the
**Bibliotheca Alexandrina
Antiquities Museum**



“...transposing Alexander’s dreams of empire into a quest for universal knowledge.”



“On the site of the palace of the Ptolemies, the new Alexandrina will give modern expression to an ancient endeavour.”

Hussein Bassir
Ph.D.



Director
of the
**Bibliotheca Alexandrina
Antiquities Museum**



ASWAN DECLARATION ON THE BIBLIOTHECA
ALEXANDRINA, JULY 1990





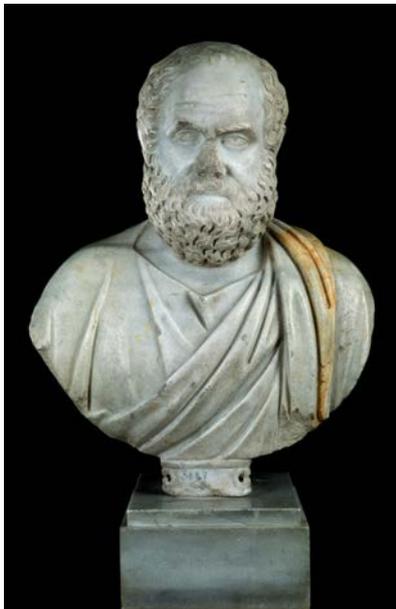
© REPINA VALERIYA

The history of writing. Made from grey Aswan granite, the outside wall of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina features letters from 120 different languages.

Standing tall near the entrance is a 13-metre-high statue of Ptolemy II, lifted from Alexandria Harbour in pieces throughout 1995 and 1996. It once stood in front of the

world famous Pharos of Alexandria.

It's fitting that Ptolemy II continues to cast a beneficent eye over the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, as while the original library was the brainchild of Ptolemy I, it is believed that his son, Ptolemy II (285–246 B.C.), was the driving force in seeing the dream come to fruition.



(OPPOSITE AND ABOVE) BUST OF SOCRATES
 ROMAN PERIOD (31 B.C.–A.D. 395)
 ANTONIADES GARDEN, ALEXANDRIA
 WHITE MARBLE
 H. 60cm
 © BA ANTIQUITIES MUSEUM
 PHOTO: CHRISTOPH GERICK
 BAAM 114

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum (BAAM) in Alexandria, is the world's first archeological museum to be built within a library. It even houses antiquities discovered in situ during the construction of the new Library of Alexandria.

The BAAM opened in 2002 and showcases the enormous diversity of Egyptian cultural heritage through the ages. Walking among its treasures is a journey of five millennia; from ancient Egypt to the Greco-Roman period, through the Coptic and Islamic periods, and finally to the printing press and Roman letters, brought to Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte.

Here I address some of my favourite pieces from the collection of the BAAM, from ancient and Greco-Roman Egypt.

In July 1990 a number of world leaders met in Aswan to discuss an ambitious new project: to revive the Library of Alexandria—the envy of libraries around the ancient world.

The *Aswan Declaration on the Bibliotheca Alexandrina* was issued to mark the occasion. Despite the rather dry title, it served as the formal launch of a major campaign that, just twelve

years later, saw the grand opening of the new Library of Alexandria, not far from where its famous ancient namesake once stood.

The new Bibliotheca Alexandrina describes itself as a place “where the arts, history, philosophy, and science come together.” It sounds exactly like the sort of place of which Socrates (left) would have loved to be a part.

Statue of Imhotep

Imhotep is generally considered to be the mastermind behind the world's first pyramid: Saqqara's Step Pyramid of Djoser (3rd Dynasty, ca. 2650 B.C.). By the time this Late Period votive statue was made (ca. 664–332 B.C.), the real Imhotep had been dead for some 2,000 years. In that time, his reputation had grown. A lot.

In life, Imhotep no doubt enjoyed a pampered existence, given his close association with the pharaoh and his

high-flying career. In death, however, things really took off.

Without lifting a finger, Imhotep came to be considered as a god of wisdom, writing and medicine (which is why sculptures like the one below portray him seated with a papyrus scroll across his lap.)

Imhotep was even worshipped at temples across Egypt, including Deir el-Medina, Karnak and Philae. His cult centre at Saqqara became a pilgrimage

destination for people seeking healing. Curiously, the one thing that he wasn't famous for, was architecture.

For a long time, Egyptologists weren't even sure if Imhotep was a real person, as all references to him were made long after his death. Then, in 1920, a breakthrough. British archaeologist, Cecil Firth, discovered a statue pedestal (JE 49889) in the colonnade entrance hall to Djoser's pyramid complex. Although only the king's feet remained, it carried a hieroglyphic inscription along the pedestal's front. Not only was Djoser named, but also another man: Imhotep! This was a contemporary 3rd-Dynasty inscription that proved he was real—and it supplied some of Imhotep's proud titles:



“Chancellor (seal-bearer) of the King of Lower Egypt”



“First after the King of Upper Egypt”



“Administrator of the Great Palace”

Then, in the early 1950s, Egyptian archaeologist Zakaria Goneim, was excavating the unfinished step pyramid of Sekhemkhet, Djoser's successor. On the pyramid's enclosure wall he discovered some ancient builders' graffiti. It read, “Sealbearer of the King of Lower Egypt, Imhotep”.

Given that Imhotep was present during the construction of Sekhemkhet's pyramid (he had supposedly outlived his previous master), it is reasonable to assume that Imhotep was indeed the master builder of the Step Pyramid. There is, however, no real evidence to back that up.

The first proper credit that Imhotep gets for his architectural brilliance turns out to be wildly exaggerated. Writing in his *Aegyptiaca* (History of Egypt) in the 3rd century B.C. the Ptolemaic priest Manetho, stated that “he (Imhotep) was also the inventor of building with hewn stone.”

Did Imhotep devise and project manage the construction of Djoser's Step Pyramid at Saqqara? The best we can really say is “probably”.



STATUE OF IMHOTEP
LATE PERIOD (664–332 B.C.)
SAQQARA
BRONZE
H. 14.5cm
© BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA ANTIQUITIES MUSEUM
PHOTO: CHRISTOPH GERIGK
BAAM 591

Block statue of Djed-Khonsu-luef Ankh

Surviving early childhood in ancient Egypt could be an uncertain proposition, so parents often called upon the power of the gods to help the newest member of the family make it through. One way to achieve this was to give the child a name that could serve as a wish for protection.

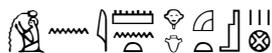
This block statue was made for a Theban priest at Karnak Temple. By calling him Djed-Khonsu-luf-Ankh , his parents hoped he would receive protection from the god Khonsu, son of Amun and Mut. His name means “Khonsu says he [will] live”—and it looks like he did.

Djed-khonsu-iuf-ankh worked at the Amun Temple complex at Karnak during the 26th-Dynasty reign of Psamtek I (ca. 664–610 B.C.). This is the king whose colossal statue is currently being retrieved (in thousands of fragments, great and small) from the ruins of the sacred precinct at ancient Heliopolis (modern Matariya).

Djed-khonsu-iuf-ankh's block statue shows him seated with his knees drawn up to his chest and his arms folded on top of his knees. He is wearing a wrap-around robe that covers his body and reduces it to a simple block-like shape. This had the double benefit of protecting the figure from breakage, as well as offering a handy flat surface for inscriptions.

The statue was discovered in May 1904; one of more than 350 unearthed in the Karnak Cache. This was an intentionally buried collection of statuary dating from pharaonic Egypt's earliest periods through to the Ptolemaic era (which is when it was buried).

Djed-khonsu-iuf-ankh dedicated two almost identical block statues of himself at Karnak, commemorating his priestly service to Amun and the god's consort, Amunet. The back pillar of the one shown here includes one of Djed-khonsu-iuf-ankh's proud titles:



“Wab priest of Amunet within Karnak”

Hopefully, by reading the words on Djed-khonsu-iuf-ankh's statue, we are all helping perpetuate his parents' greatest wish when he was born: that he will live.



BLOCK STATUE OF DJED-KHONSU-IUF-ANKH
26TH DYNASTY, REIGN OF PSAMTEK I (ca. 664–610 B.C.)
LUXOR, KARNAK TEMPLE
SCHIST
H. 44cm, W. 16.5cm, D. 21.5cm
© BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA ANTIQUITIES MUSEUM
PHOTO: E. OMAR
BAAM 597



HEAD OF A PHARAOH
DYNASTY 26, SAITE PERIOD (664–525 B.C.)
ABUKIR BAY, CANOPUS
DIORITE
H. 35cm, W. 30cm, D. 29cm
© BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA ANTIQUITIES MUSEUM
PHOTO: CHRISTOPH GERIGK
BAAM 845

This royal head was discovered during underwater excavations of the ancient (and mostly submerged) city of Canopus, not far from the eastern suburbs of modern Alexandria.

While the sculpture is uninscribed, its features can suggest to us when it was made—and perhaps, even for who.

The head is wearing a royal nemes headdress, the brow of which features a cobra with its body twisted into two large loops. The eyebrows slope sharply down from the eyes, which have lost

their inlays. The nose has a prominent bridge in the middle and wide nostrils. The mouth is wide with pouty lips, and beneath them, the statue's false beard has broken off.

With all that in mind, this piece probably dates to the Late Period's 26th Dynasty; what is known as the "Saite Renaissance". This was a period of renewal, when Middle and Old Kingdom texts and art styles were revived after periods of occupation—firstly by the 25th Dynasty Nubian

kings, and then the Assyrian war machine. It was also when the Greek presence increased in the Delta region, as Greek trading posts were opened and Greek mercenaries were employed in the army.

Shown here is likely one of those 26th-Dynasty kings who made Sais (hence "Saite Renaissance") their royal residence. But which pharaoh is it?

The shape of the nose, the distinctive brow arches, and the prominent cheekbones have led archaeologists to recognise features that are typical of the 26th Dynasty's King Apries (ca. 589–570 B.C.). For greater confidence, however, we look at the subtly-slanting eyes and the rendering of that straight mouth with those pouty lips. These features are practically identical to a confirmed head of King Apries in the Bologna Museum in northern Italy.

It is often repeated that royal portraits are largely idealised and far from true likenesses of the people they represent. While there is a pharaonic artistic framework to work within, we can see here that there is plenty of room to individualise a portrait.

British Egyptologist Sally-Ann Ashton is an expert on identifying Egyptian royal sculpture. On her website *kemetexpert.com*, she explains that "life-size stone statues... were often placed at the entrances to temples or palaces with the intention of promoting the king. Inscriptions were not always visible on statues [and pretty much worthless to a largely illiterate population anyway], and so the iconography (symbols) and the facial features needed to also play a part in assisting with identifying who the statue represented."

While at first glance, much ancient Egyptian art looks much the same, this piece shows that, despite spending over a thousand years beneath the Mediterranean, the individualised features of (probably) King Apries can help us identify this otherwise anonymous head. As Sally-Ann Ashton muses, "I really do not understand why a portrait would look nothing remotely like the subject."

Head of Alexander the Great

The largest collection by era in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum dates to the Greco-Roman period. This makes a lot of sense, given that Alexandria was ruled by the Greek-speaking Ptolemies for three centuries, and then by the Romans for well over 600 years.

This Roman replica of a marble head of Alexander the Great was found in Alexandria's Kom El Dekka neighbourhood. In Greco-Roman times this was a well-off residential area, with spacious villas, bathhouses and a theatre. Today, it is an archaeological site and popular tourist attraction that includes the only Roman amphitheatre found in Egypt.

The marble head bears the familiar features of the official portraits of Alexander, with thick, wavy hair (often described as "leonine") brushed up and away from his face, deep-set eyes, and a round face. The head is inclined to the right, and the eyes are gazing meditatively into the distant horizon.

Alexander the Great was always portrayed as clean-shaven, which was an innovation for the time. All previous portraits of Greek rulers were bearded. Such was the length of Alexander's shadow that this fashion lasted for almost 500 years; nearly all of the Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors until Hadrian were depicted beardless.

Greek biographer Plutarch, writing in the 1st century A.D., recorded that on the night of Alexander's birth, the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus was set on fire. Plutarch's explanation was that the gods were too busy watching over Alexander to care for the temple. Perhaps it's no wonder then that British art historian Neil MacGregor, states that "Alexander came to the throne in 336 B.C. at the age of 20, with an almost limitless sense of self-belief." (*A History of the World in 100 Objects*, 2010, BBC Radio 4)

To celebrate his great victories (and they were always victories—Alexander never lost a battle), the king founded cities in his newly-conquered territories. These he invariably named "Alexandria" (there's that ego again).



HEAD OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT
GRECO-ROMAN PERIOD (332 B.C.– A.D. 395)
ALEXANDRIA, KOM EL-DEKKA
WHITE MARBLE
H. 17cm, W. 10cm
© BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA ANTIQUITIES MUSEUM
PHOTO: CHRISTOPH GERIGK
BAAM 223

While we are familiar with the Egyptian Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast, there are other Alexandrias in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan.

When Alexander seized Egypt from the Persians and annexed it to the Greek Empire, he was welcomed

in Egypt as a liberator, and was identified as a pharaoh and son of Amun at the Oracle of Amun at Siwa Oasis. Written below is Alexander's name as a king of Egypt, as recorded on his barque shrine at Luxor Temple:



Head of Queen Berenice II



HEAD OF QUEEN BERENICE II
PTOLEMAIC PERIOD (323–31 B.C.)
ALEXANDRIA, BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA SITE
LIMESTONE
H. 29cm, W. 17cm, D. 18cm
© BA ANTIQUITIES MUSEUM
PHOTO: CHRISTOPH GERIGK
BAAM 2

It seems fitting that while building the new Bibliotheca Alexandrina, a number of antiquities were discovered that became part of the collection! This is one of them: a limestone head of Berenice II, the wife of King Ptolemy III (246–221 B.C.).

In this portrait, her hair is styled in the form of a diadem surrounding her head. The queen's face seems full of sadness. Perhaps she was recalling the appalling events that unfolded

before her marriage to Ptolemy.

Berenice II was the daughter of Magas, king of the Greek colony of Cyrene (in modern-day Libya), and was betrothed to the Egyptian heir, the future Ptolemy III. When Magas died,

Berenice's mother, Apame, offered her instead to Demetrius the Fair, a Macedonian prince. Apame then proceeded to have a scandalous affair with her new son-in-law.

Horrified, Berenice II promptly had Demetrius murdered (while he was in bed with her mother!). Incredibly, however, she forgave her mother, and the engagement to Ptolemy III was back on. They were married on his accession in 246 B.C.

Head of Ptolemy III



HEAD OF PTOLEMY III
PTOLEMAIC PERIOD (323-31 B.C.)
ALEXANDRIA, BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA SITE
LIMESTONE
H. 25cm, W. 13cm, D. 12cm
© BA ANTIQUITIES MUSEUM
PHOTO: CHRISTOPH GERIGK
BAAM 4

And here is the happy groom: King Ptolemy III, the eldest of Ptolemy II's (legitimate) sons.

This limestone head was also unearthed during the construction of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, and now forms part of the BAAM's collection.

Ptolemy III enthusiastically continued his father's work on the Library of Alexandria. To help boost the library's budding collection, he is said to have written a letter "to all

the world's sovereigns", asking to borrow their books for copying.

In the 2nd century A.D., Greek scholar Galen recounted how Ptolemy III had devised an ingenious (and in-expensive) acquisitions policy:

"Ptolemy [III] the king of Egypt was so eager to collect books, that he ordered the books of everyone who sailed there to be brought to him. The books were then copied into new manuscripts. He gave the new copy to the owners, whose books had been brought to him after they sailed there, but he put the original copy in the library...."

Mosaic depicting a sitting dog



Perhaps the most charming piece uncovered during the construction of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is this mosaic with, as its centrepiece, a rather guilty-looking brown dog sitting next to an upturned Greek-style bronze jug.

This Ptolemaic mosaic once decorated a floor in the royal quarter of Alexandria, and is made up of thousands of tiny cubes of stone, ranging in size from four millimetres down to an incredible one millimetre across.

It is because of the tiny size of the blocks that the artist has been able to achieve such a naturalistic image, with incredible definition and sensitive use of light and shade.

The dog's portrait is shown at a three-quarter view, and the front part reflects light, while the rest of the body is in shade. The gradation of shading on the upturned jug shows light reflected on the central portion, while the sides are gradually darker. It's a testament to the sophistication of the mosaic workshops, and high level of

artistry (as well as patience) in Ptolemaic Alexandria.

The mosaic was revealed in 1993 and is the only mosaic motif of this kind discovered in Alexandria. Perhaps the theme on this floor is a scene from a theatrical story or literary work that was popular during the first three centuries B.C. On the other hand, it may simply recall a favourite (but trouble-making) family pet.

MOSAIC DEPICTING A SITTING DOG
PTOLEMAIC PERIOD, 2ND CENTURY B.C.
ALEXANDRIA, BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA SITE
MARBLE AND LIMESTONE
L. 325cm, W. 325cm
© BA ANTIQUITIES MUSEUM
PHOTO: M. NAFEA
BAAM 859

I hope that you have enjoyed this small tour of my beloved collection of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum, from ancient and Greco-Roman Egypt. I hope to see you at the Library of Alexandria and, of course, its Antiquities Museum.



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He is formerly the Director-General of the Giza Pyramids, the Grand Egyptian Museum, and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization at Fustat, for the Ministry of Antiquities.

Dr. Bassir's publishing credits include *Image and Voice in Saite Egypt* by the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition (2014), and *Pharaonic Queens: Drama of Love and Power*, in Arabic (2018), as well as editing *Living Forever: Self-Presentation in Ancient Egypt* (in press by the American University in Cairo Press).