

May-July 2007

Issue 7

Alexandria... birthplace of the Septuagint

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AlexCinema

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At a huge gala held on 31 July 2007, the AlexCinema project was celebrated with great fanfare in the presence of His Excellency General Adel Labib, Governor of Alexandria, Dr. Ismail Serageldin, Librarian of Alexandria, and Mr. Nicola Bellomo, the representative of the Deligation of the European Commission in Cairo (which had funded the project), as well as celebrities from Egyptian cinema and many members of the general public.

The evening began with the inauguration of the exhibition, which included panels retracing the beginnings of the cinema industry in Alexandria, vintage film posters, the screen projection of selected footage from early movies, display cases of rare documents and memorabilia pertaining to early cinematographers, as well as props from cinema sets and cinematic equipment. Some of these had been generously provided by Studio Misr, by local cinemas such as Metro, Odeon and Plaza, and by Dawlat Bayoumi, daughter of the founder of the Egyptian cinema, Mohamed Bayoumi. The exhibition focused on a number of key themes including why Egyptian cinema began in Alexandria, the relationship between Alexandrian cosmopolitanism and the seventh art, the role played by the amateur, and the cinema projection halls.



From left to right: Mohamed Awad, Ismail Serageldin, General Adel Labib, Nicola Bellomo, Samir Sabri, Mahmoud Abdelaziz, Dawlat Bayoumi, Salah Marei, Asma El Bakri, Mahmoud Qabil, Passant (the daughter of Hind Rustom) and Sahar Hamouda.

Following the inauguration of the exhibition, the audience proceeded to the Great Hall, where a triumphant march was played — the same march which had once upon a time been played in cinema Metro as the public would arrive and then again when it departed after the film show. A festive spirit ruled as the birth of the seventh art in Alexandria was celebrated, with the Egyptian movie star Samir Sabry presiding as master of ceremonies. Speeches were given by General Adel Labib, Dr. Ismail Serageldin, Mr. Nicola Bellomo, and Dr. Mohamed Awad, Director of the Alex-Med Center which had organized the event, interspersed with brief scenes from old movies such as *Ibn Hamidou*. Prizes were awarded to members of the audience who could answer quiz questions on the scenes shown. Another clip projected was from the first film ever shot by Alexandrian director Youssef Chahine — a film shot when he was still a mere schoolboy at Victoria College in Alexandria! Mohamed Awad also described the main features of the Alexcinema website which can be visited at www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/ and contains a fund of information about all aspects of the cinema industry in Alexandria as well as a wealth of rare photos, posters and documents.

The author of *El shakhseya el sakandareya fil cinema el Misreya (The Alexandrian Character in Egyptian Cinema)*, Sami Helmy, was then invited to say a few words about his newly published book.

Then it was time to hand out awards to a certain number of Alexandrians for their life-long achievement in the field of cinema. These included, in alphabetical order, the following: Mahmoud Abdelaziz, Shadi Abdel Salam, Behna Brothers, Asma El Bakri, Dawlat and Mohamed Bayoumi, Youssef Chahine, Togo Mizrahi, Mahmoud Qabil, Hind Rustom, Samir Sabri, Tawfik Saleh and Omar Sharif.

While some were not able to attend owing to health reasons, or because they were filming the Ramadan *mosalsalat*, the festive mood reached an emotional pitch as Samir Sabri called one star after the other to the stage, amid immense applause from the audience. As Alexandrian-born star Hind Rustom did not, out of principle, attend such public events, her daughter Passant went on stage to receive the award. When Samir Sabri dialed Hind Rustom on the mobile and held it to the microphone for her to say a few words to her adoring audience, the applause thundered through the Great Hall as Alexandrians declared their feelings to their beloved star.



El shakhseya el sakandareya fil cinema el Misreya (The Alexandrian Character in Egyptian Cinema) by Sami Helmy



The AlexCinema Project Exhibition

Following the award-giving ceremony, the joyous mood gave way to a more serious one as cinema historian Ahmed El Hadari gave a talk about the beginnings of cinema in Alexandria, and Mona Ghandour spoke about the role of Alexandrian women in Egyptian cinema, focusing especially on the exceptional contribution of Bahiga Hafez, Aziza Amir and Fatma Rushdi.

Next, the audience listened to an informative talk by Salah Marei on Shadi Abdel Salam's unfinished work, including the film *Ikhnaton*. Marei explained that film producer Karim Gamal El Din had bought the film rights to *Ikhnaton*, but that in spite of investing heavily in the project, including the set and décor, items of which were among the exhibits of the Alexcinema exhibition, he had so far been unable to complete the project. Gamal El Din himself then explained that he bought Studio Misr, as well as the film rights to *Ikhnaton*, in the hope of producing Shadi Abdel Salam's unfinished masterpiece. He added however, that for an epic movie like *Ikhnaton* to be successful, it would need worldwide distribution which could only be achieved with both European and American participation, for example amongst the members of the cast, yet at the same time it should be an essentially Egyptian made movie.

The difficulties facing film production in Egypt today were then evoked by the next guest speaker, Manal Barakat, who spoke about Studio Iskandareya located in Borg El Arab: a studio which has been plagued with problems for almost 10 years. This studio was intended not only for film making, but also as a training ground for new talent, so that students from Mersa Matrouh, Tanta, Kafr el Sheikh and elsewhere in the provinces, need not travel as far as Cairo to learn the art. The plan to build Studio Iskandareya was begun in 1998 by a number of figures from Egyptian cinema, including Nour el Sherif, director Ali Badr Khan, Ahmed Metwalli and Karim Gamal el Din. One problem cited was the fact that during negotiations to purchase the plot of land in Borg El Arab, the agreed price was 20 EGP per square meter, then, without warning, the purchasers were told that the price had gone up to 91 EGP per meter. . . . And then, it shot right up to 175 EGP! At that point, a number of foreign investors, finding the cost of the project 5 to 6 times higher than originally planned, withdrew. Manal Barakat briefly summarized some of the legal and bureaucratic hurdles yet to be overcome, and pleaded that General Adel Labib, Governor of Alexandria, help support the project.



The audience included many celebrities and dignitaries, amongst them Mahmoud Qabil, Mahmoud Abdelaziz, Nicola Bellomo from the European Commission, General Adel Labib, the Governor of Alexandria and Ismail Serageldin, the Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. All clapped enthusiastically as a certificate for life time achievement was awarded posthumously to the Alexandrian director Togo Mizrahi.

The final guest speakers of the evening were from the Jesuit Cultural Center of Alexandria: a center which, as Mohamed Awad remarked, had taken a mere garage and turned it into a vibrant cultural center. He invited the participants in a recent film workshop, organized by the late Frère Fayez at the Jesuit Center, to come on stage and talk about their experience. Well known scriptwriter and film critic, Rafik el Sabban, then commented on the films made by these young Alexandrians during the workshop. He noted that they had new innovative ideas not found in Cairo made films, and thus, just as the New York Film Academy had brought something different to American filmmaking not present in Hollywood films, so young Alexandrians might contribute something new to Egyptian filmmaking. In his final words, Rafik el Sabban concluded optimistically that such young talent should be



An Ememann II Projector, courtesy of Jean and Maude Chamas, Cinema Plaza



Exhibits from the film set of Shadi Abdel Salam's *Ikhnaton*, courtesy of Studio Misr

given freedom of expression, freedom from censorship, and that their future was full of promise. The AlexCinema project had considered the similarities between the Jesuit film makers and the early cinematographers of the beginning of the twentieth century in Alexandria, drawing parallels between the birth of the seventh art in Alexandria at the hands of amateurs and beginners, and the attempt of these young film makers to revive the industry in Alexandria once more.



Panels from the AlexCinema Exhibition

AN ALEXANDRIAN QUEST

Gerry Harrison

It was a strange series of events which brought me to Alexandria in March 2007. So many writers deserve a far more robust track-record than I can claim, but I am also an author attracted to this city by those who have gone before me.

Other British writers have followed the international reputations of Forster, Cavafy and Durrell. I proudly own up to being half-Irish, but I pursued a British writer and lecturer called "Reggie" (or R. D.) Smith, to this city which is now so very different from that he would have known sixty years ago. I am currently writing the biography of Reggie Smith for a major publisher, and my visit here was to research further the few clues that he had left behind him.

This article is an appeal for assistance from anyone whose current interests or memories of old Alexandria can fill in the gaps in my knowledge. I am most grateful to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina for publishing it.

You might justifiably ask "Who is Reggie Smith?" Reggie Smith was born in Birmingham, in the English midlands, where he also attended university, and after graduation obtained a job with the British Council which gave him a posting in 1938 to Bucharest in Romania. In 1940 he and his wife, the novelist Olivia Manning, escaped from the German advance into Romania and then the subsequent German invasion of Greece. With another British lecturer, Robert Liddell, they managed to board the last ship, a rusty, rat-infested tramp steamer, from Piraeus to Alexandria. They landed here on 21 April 1941.

As refugees, they arrived a month before Durrell, another British Council employee, who had escaped from Crete. They entered a city which was visibly cratered from bombing by Italian and German aircraft, and which now was nervous of the Afrika Corps pushing closer towards it along the western coast.

After the allied victory at the end of the Second World War, during which Reggie had also held a senior position in the Palestine Broadcasting Service in Jerusalem, he returned to Britain to the BBC. Here he became a successful radio producer, working with colleagues such as Louis MacNeice and Dylan Thomas. Some years later Olivia Manning described their adventures in the Balkans and the Levant in fiction, which she thinly disguised. These six books are known as *The Balkan Trilogy* and *The Levant Trilogy*.



Courtesy of BBC Archives

The events that brought me to Alexandria last March in Reggie's footsteps are worth recounting. My fares to Egypt were kindly paid by the British Council. In return I had offered to give a couple of lectures. I had sent the director in Cairo my CV, which in my case is quite eclectic, and was not surprised to learn later that the students much preferred to hear about my time as a film-maker in



Reggie Smith when he was working for the Palestinian Broadcasting Service in 1944. © Chatto and Windus

the 1960s with the Beatles and others, rather than later years as a local politician in a tough part of inner London. Very fortunately, my timing was uncanny, because the Council decided that it could not fit my lectures into its schedule. And I was not too disappointed!

Reggie Smith had been a good friend of the British politician Michael Foot, who was on the left of the Labour Party and became its leader in the 1970s. Reggie himself was a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain for much of his life, and while in Egypt he kept in touch with certain underground communist activities. In the 1960s Michael Foot and Reggie Smith and their wives enjoyed holidays together for a number of years, in places such as Venice and Rome.

I have since had the privilege of interviewing Michael Foot for my book, when he told me of an Irish poet who had met them in Rome. Michael, who is now a venerable 93 years of age, could not remember the name of the poet. However, after some exhausting and exhaustive detective work, I discovered that this man was called Desmond O'Grady. As a fellow Irishman it did not take me long to track him down to an Irish seaside town in County Cork called Kinsale. In a telephone conversation with Desmond I learned from him that he was also due to fly to Egypt, and the day before me. We joked that we could almost wave to each other from our respective aeroplanes. We also joked that it would be a pleasure to meet at the St Patrick's Day celebrations at the residence of the Irish Ambassador in Cairo, to which we had both been invited.

A day or so later we met again at the launch of his book, *My Alexandria*, in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina at a discussion that was superbly chaired by Dr Mohamed Awad. During this session, Desmond gave the audience an account of his periods in the late 1970s as a writer and teacher at the University of Alexandria. He was clearly inspired by Cavafy, as was Durrell before him.

In my research I had already become astonished at the wealth of literary talent that incongruously came together in Egypt during the Second World War. The poets of the First World War have achieved recognition among English-speaking readers, but it seems that the western deserts of Egypt were fertile ground for a new generation. I was now following Reggie Smith, a fascinating man who was a teacher and writer, but with little published. He was a catalyst, however, for many other writers, and later encouraged new voices onto the BBC. In wartime Egypt there was a series of, almost "rival", literary publishing ventures: some were from the Salamanders, members of the armed forces, who published various anthologies under the generic title *Oasis*, others were the civilians who included Durrell who published *Personal Landscape* and there were also those who published *Citadel*, edited for the British Council for a time by Reggie Smith. Some opportunistic poets cleverly managed to get into all three.

After kicking his heels for a few months, in around September 1941 Reggie obtained a position at the young Farouk I University in Alexandria, teaching English. Robert Liddell, who had escaped on the same ship, did the same. This university had been established as an annexe to the Fuad I University in Cairo, whose English Department had been set up by Robert Graves twenty years before. I soon learned that this department in Alexandria, which had first been located in a capacious villa with a huge garden in Stanley Bay, had moved with the Faculty of Arts into the Abassia School buildings, near the Mahmoudieh Canal in Moharrem Bey, which became known as the Faculty of Commerce.

Reggie joined its staff in September 1942, and the university was formally inaugurated as Farouk I University during the next month. By June 1944, by which time Reggie was in Jerusalem, it had moved again into the Palace of Prince Omar Toussoun nearby.

It is my understanding that the administration of the university was then based at the attractive Italianate red-brick building on the Corniche almost next door to the Bibliotheca. The Faculty of Arts moved to this building some time later, although I am unsure of the date. I approached the Vice President of Community Affairs and Environment at the University of Alexandria, now in this building, to ask whether it could search its records of the time, if they survive, to discover the precise dates of Reggie's employment, what precisely he taught and how much he was paid. Unfortunately, the records do not exist or my enquiries fell on stony ground, for I have received no response. Perhaps this gentleman might read this, and sense my feeling.

Reggie also taught at the British Institute, which I understand was in a flat on the 2nd floor of a building in Toussoun Street, and was reached by an antique lift. This was close to Cherif Pasha Street or Salah Salem, and on the corner nearby was a very elegant shop called Old England.

Reggie's unknown address is of interest. During some of this time he, Olivia and Robert Liddell had shared a flat. Olivia then fled to Cairo, where she felt safer from the bombing. I would very much like to discover at what address they lived. I have letters from Liddell to Reggie in Jerusalem written two years later from 34 Sharia Saphia Zaghloul. Perhaps this was it. While he was in Alexandria, Reggie's talent for producing theater was demonstrated by ambitious radio broadcasts for Egyptian State Broadcasting. In Alexandria, with a largely amateur but English- (or Irish-) speaking cast he managed to mount Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*. He also produced a fortnightly variety programme. Records of these seem to have disappeared.

The pleasant task of writing a biography is often preceded by an almost forensic process of discovery. If anyone can shed any light on my questions and queries, or confirm buildings, dates and addresses, I will be extremely grateful. All information is most welcome. Contributors will be fully acknowledged in my book's publication next year. And, if I have the opportunity to launch it also in Alexandria, I look forward to meeting them.

I have received assistance from key figures at the Bibliotheca, in particular Drs Mohamed Awad and Sahar Hamouda. I would also like to thank Edward Lewis, who works with them as a researcher. Outside the immediate precincts of the Bibliotheca, Dr Azza Kararah and Professor Mostafa El Abbadi have kindly shared with me their time and considerable knowledge.

I can be contacted through alex.med@bibalex.org, or more directly on gerryharrison1@aol.com. Thank you.



Reggie Smith with his wife Olivia on the right of the photo, attending an open air concert in Cairo 1942. © Chatto and Windus

Les souvenirs d'un officier de l'armée de Bonaparte

Carole Escoffey

La présence française en Égypte date principalement de l'expédition d'Égypte (1798-1801). Comme tout le monde le sait, l'armée française fut accompagnée de plus de 165 savants dont les travaux ont permis l'élaboration de l'œuvre monumentale : *La Description de l'Égypte*. Moins connus par contre, sont les récits des officiers et des soldats de l'armée de Bonaparte et dont la correspondance constitue parfois un précieux témoignage de l'état de la ville d'Alexandrie et de ses environs, ainsi que de l'ambiance qui y régnait. Parmi ceux-ci, figurent les souvenirs d'un jeune Suisse, Louis Thurman (1775-1806). En tant que lieutenant du génie militaire, Thurman partit de Toulon avec la flotte française en mai 1798. Les lettres détaillées qu'il envoya à son père ainsi que les notes qu'il fit de ses observations pendant son séjour en Égypte constituent l'essentiel de ses souvenirs recueillis par son fils¹ après sa mort, et publiés un siècle plus tard par le Comte Maurice de Fleury². Thurman participa à la prise de Malte par Bonaparte en juin 1798, et au débarquement des troupes et à la prise d'Alexandrie en juillet de la même année. Ensuite, il participa à la fortification d'Alexandrie, puis, en août 1798, il assista à la bataille d'Aboukir.

Outre le débarquement dangereux, et la menace constante d'attaque soit par les Anglais, soit par les Bédouins, les Turcs ou les Alexandrins, Thurman évoque la chaleur suffocante et la soif atroce dont souffraient tous. Pour ce jeune officier, le paysage désertique nocturne autour d'Alexandrie a « l'aspect qu'offre chez nous une contrée couverte de neige ». Après la prise de la ville, les travaux de fortifications commencent et Thurman écrit qu'un « nouvel Alexandre » — le général Bonaparte — va faire sortir Alexandrie de ses ruines...

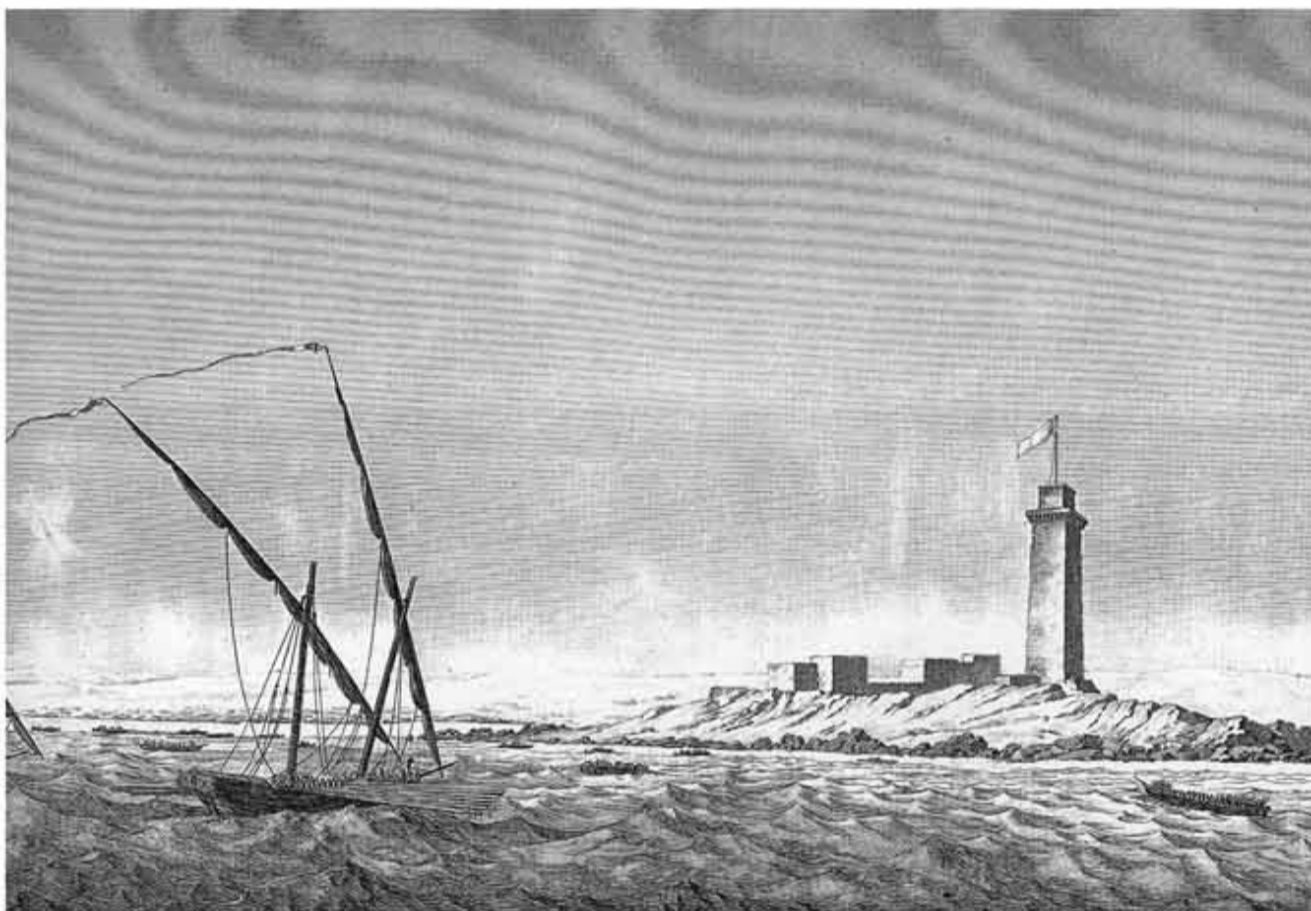


Le débarquement (dessin d'H. Billaud).

Un débarquement difficile

Le 11, nous aperçûmes distinctement la côte d'Afrique et le désert dessiné par des lignes de rochers comme inondés d'un torrent de feu. Le 12 au matin, nous découvrions la Tour-des-Arabs, et le soir nous étions à la hauteur de la Tour du Marabout, à cinq lieues d'Alexandrie. Ce fut pendant la nuit du 12 au 13 que se prépara le débarquement. Les chaloupes furent mises à la mer. Le branle-bas avait été exécuté dès la veille.

D'après les ordres de Bonaparte, une frégate nous avait précédés pour prendre à Alexandrie le consul de France, afin de le sortir de la position dangereuse où il allait se trouver, et obtenir divers renseignements tant sur l'escadre anglaise, que sur les Mamelouks. Il arriva le 13 à bord de l'amiral, après avoir couru de grands dangers pour se soustraire aux Turcs [...]



La Description de l'Égypte, État Moderne II : Vue du débarquement de l'armée française en Égypte à la tour dite du Marabou (détail)

Il nous apprit que quatre vaisseaux de guerre anglais avaient paru, le 10 Messidor à une demi-lieue d'Alexandrie, et que l'amiral Nelson, après des efforts sans succès pour obtenir des renseignements sur notre escadre, avait fait voile vers le Nord Est. Il annonça en outre, qu'à Alexandrie, on se disposait à une défense par terre et par mer.

L'apparition d'une escadre anglaise était fort à redouter dans notre position. Elle eût trouvé nos vaisseaux surchargés de troupes et ayant des convois à défendre. Il importait de débarquer au plus vite et de prendre éventuellement position contre l'ennemi de terre.

Bonaparte ordonna donc le débarquement malgré le temps qui était très mauvais. Le point de débarquement devait être la Tour du Marabout. Mais l'ordre d'approcher de ce point de manière convenable ne put être exécuté, du moins complètement. Il y eut un instant de désordre. Deux vaisseaux s'abordèrent dans leurs manœuvres, et allèrent tomber sur l'amiral, ce qui força de mouiller sur-le-champ, à plus de trois lieues en mer. Le vent soufflait nord avec violence ; les vagues écumantes se brisaient fortement contre les récifs de la côte. Ce fut au milieu de ces conditions qu'on monta des chaloupes avec provisions.

Je me trouvais sur la grande chaloupe du Tonnant. Il fallut avoir recours à la rame pour se rendre maître des eaux. Vers le midi, toutes les chaloupes étaient réunies autour d'une galère maltaise que montait Bonaparte : il voulut être à la tête du débarquement. Cette journée fut cruelle. Au milieu d'une mer en fureur, un soleil ardent sur la tête, nos barques se heurtaient en tous sens, se précipitaient violemment les unes contre les autres. Nous ne pouvions réserver les distances qu'à l'aide d'un travail continu au moyen des perches.

Un mal de mer affreux s'empara de tout le monde jusqu'aux matelots et aux pilotes. C'est ainsi, horriblement ballotés autour de la galère de Bonaparte, que nous passâmes tout le jour ; le soir seulement les

chaloupes purent se réunir. [...] La galère de Bonaparte avait fixé le point de réunion tout près du banc de récifs où se trouve la passe qui mène à l'anse du Marabout. Ce banc ne peut être traversé que la nuit, et non sans grands dangers. Il y avait aussi à craindre que la terre ne fût occupée. Enfin nous abordâmes.

Le débarquement s'exécuta immédiatement sur la plage qui borde [sic] le désert. Personne ne parut. Du sable, quelques plantes épineuses et rabougries, voilà tout ce qu'offrait l'horizon. [...] Nous passâmes la première soirée sur le sable. Elle fut employée à un bon repas consistant en gigot, volailles et biscuit, arrosés de vin et d'eau.

Mais, il est une heure du matin et je remets ma lettre à demain. Je vais me jeter sur mon matelas de coton, où je tâcherai de dormir, si les moustiques et les puces me le permettent. Le silence de la nuit n'est interrompu que par le hurlement des chiens sauvages et par le bruit des vagues qui mugissent contre les tronçons de colonnes granites dont est formée la jetée au pied de notre maison.



LA SOIF
par H. Billaud.

La prise d'Alexandrie

Vers trois heures du matin, la lune éclaira le paysage et lui donna exactement l'aspect qu'offre chez nous une contrée couverte de neige. On s'y serait mépris si ce n'eût été la forte chaleur.

Bientôt le soleil s'éleva derrière les tours d'Alexandrie, et avec les approches de la soif, nous annonça une journée difficile. Les carrières que j'avais à reconnaître sont des rochers calcaires qui, partant du Marabout, s'étendent au loin vers le sud. [...]

Ma reconnaissance rapidement faite, je rejoignis le quartier du général Menou à travers les sables et des nuées de moucheron et de sauterelles. Dans cette petite expédition, les Arabes ne se montrèrent qu'une seule fois, et se retirèrent après avoir égorgé



La Description de l'Égypte État Moderne II : Vue du port neuf prise du rivage, du côté du sud-est (détail)

un poste d'éclaireurs de trente hommes avec son capitaine. Mais bientôt la cavalerie des Bédouins apparut de tous côtés en foule. Elle fut aisément repoussée par nos fantassins : nous n'avions pas encore de cavalerie.

Nos trois colonnes continuaient à s'avancer l'une le long de la mer, l'autre sur les hauteurs du sable, la troisième sur la droite dans le désert. L'ennemi la harcelait continuellement, s'avançant au galop jusqu'à portée, et tournant bride aussitôt après feu. Il était cinq heures du matin.

Je fus alors chargé avec le chef de brigade Poitevin et le chef du bataillon [...] de faire la reconnaissance d'Alexandrie. À cet effet, nous nous portâmes en avant des colonnes, seuls, à pied, sabre au côté, pistolets à la ceinture. Nous parvînmes ainsi jusque sous les murs de la ville.

Un coup d'œil nous apprit qu'ils étaient en très en mauvais état, et, de même que les tours à l'antique, dans un délabrement général ; en un mot Alexandrie était très mal fortifiée.

Nous étions occupés à cette exploration, lorsque se présentèrent subitement sept cavaliers arabes ; trois s'avancèrent sur nous à toute bride, tandis que deux nous tournaient. Notre position devenait difficile, lorsqu'une de nos colonnes avancées déboucha d'un pli de terrain et les intimida ; ils hésitèrent et bientôt tournèrent bride craignant apparemment d'être eux-mêmes enveloppés. Dans cette circonstance nous aurions pu être malmenés.

La matinée s'avançait, et la chaleur était suffocante. Après la pénible journée de la veille et la nuit passée à marcher, la lassitude était extrême et la soif horrible : c'est une souffrance que j'ignorais jusque-là. La soif par un soleil ardent et presque vertical, au milieu de ces sables brûlants, est un véritable supplice. J'aurais donné dix ans de ma vie pour un verre d'eau. Comme vous le pensez, je n'étais pas le seul. Presque tout le monde buvait de l'eau-de-vie à grandes gorgées pour se rafraîchir ; mais ce soulagement momentané augmentait le mal un instant après. La seule ressource était d'ouvrir la bouche au vent du nord qui néanmoins paraissait brûlant dans nos climats.

Du reste, le général Bonaparte n'était pas mieux servi que nous, et il fut impossible de lui trouver un verre d'eau. On lui découvrit cependant des oranges, qu'un officier avait apportées de Malte. À midi nous occupions les hauteurs situées vis-à-vis la célèbre colonne de Pompée.

Nous succombions presque à la fatigue. C'était là que l'ennemi nous attendait. On commença à le fusiller d'importance, et tambour battant, on le conduisit jusque sous les murs. Je fus dans ce moment envoyé porter à la division Lebon l'ordre de s'emparer des avenues et de la Porte-de-Rosette.

Chassant toujours l'ennemi devant nous, nous lui coupâmes le chemin de la ville, et le vîmes prendre à toute bride la route du Caire. Nous entendions le canon et une vive fusillade, ce qui annonçait l'assaut de la ville par les autres divisions.

Nous étions à une porte que l'on enfonça à coups de hache, faute de canon. La quatrième brigade se précipita par ce passage, et le restant de la division Lebon, dont je faisais partie, continua sa route sous le feu des tours et des murs.

Ce circuit nous conduisit du côté de la mer où nous escaladâmes les brèches malgré le feu de l'ennemi qui finit par nous jeter ses pièces du haut des tours. Mais c'est dans la ville que de plus grands dangers nous attendaient, car depuis les terrasses on tirait sur nous presque à bout portant, Kléber fut blessé à l'attaque de gauche, Lebon à celle de droite... mais l'ennemi perdit beaucoup de monde [...]

Bonaparte avait défendu le pillage : aussi n'y eut-il aucun désordre, et ce fut l'affaire de la journée que tout redevint calme. Le phare et quelques tours tirèrent jusqu'au soir, où le pavillon tricolore remplaça partout le drapeau rouge.

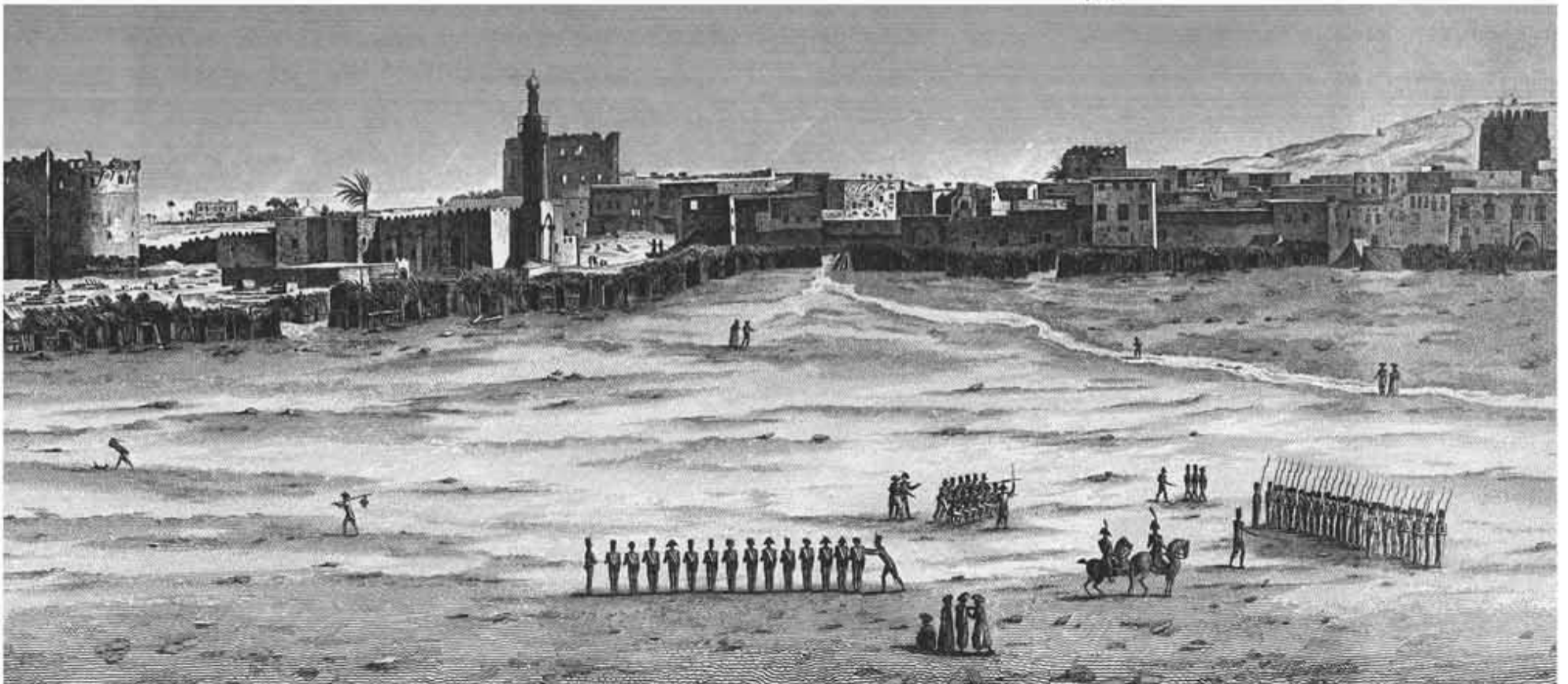
Mon premier soin fut de boire, ce que je fis chez le consul de France. Certes les Français sont braves... mais, entre nous, je puis vous assurer que la soif de nos soldats fut le premier mobile de la prise d'Alexandrie : au point où l'armée en était, il fallait trouver de l'eau, ou périr...

Je reste en garnison ici [...] Nous sommes occupés à lever, niveler et fortifier Alexandrie, ce qui, vu le peu de monde que nous avons à notre disposition, nous donne beaucoup de travail. Nous verrons cette ville, création d'Alexandre, jadis si puissante, maintenant si avilie, sortir de ses ruines à la voix d'un nouvel Alexandre, le général Bonaparte³.

1 Les notes et lettres de Louis Thurman furent triées puis amalgamées par son fils qui en fit une lecture le 1er janvier 1850 à la société jurassienne Émulation, sous le titre de *Fragments de la Relation du séjour en Égypte du capitaine Thurman*. Voir à ce sujet la préface du Comte de Fleury (*infra*), p.vii.

2 *Bonaparte en Égypte. Souvenirs du capitaine Thurman, avec préface et appendices par le Comte Maurice de Fleury*, publié par les éditions Emile Paul, Paris, 1902. Notons que d'après la correspondance d'un autre officier, Jaubert, le commissaire ordonnateur en chef de la marine, Alexandrie comptait alors dix mille habitants.

3 Ces extraits furent publiés dans le *Bulletin Hebdomadaire de la Colonie Suisse d'Alexandrie, Égypte*: 23 décembre 1925, pp.47-49 ; 6 janvier 1926, pp.4-5 ; 20 janvier 1926, p.20.



La Description de l'Égypte, État Moderne II : Vue de l'esplanade ou grande place du Port-Neuf et de l'enceinte des Arabes, seconde partie (détail)

Sociolinguistic Reflections

Borrowed Words from Italian in Alexandrian Arabic

Shadia El Soussi*

The phenomena of "borrowing" or the use of "loanwords" in socio-linguistic terms can be simply defined as the adoption of a word from one language or from one language variety into the lexicon of another — without translation — to serve a certain purpose: to provide a name for a new invention or product, for example. At the risk of stating the obvious, it should be pointed out that the words that are inherited from the dominant ancestral or native language are not borrowed words. Although borrowed or "loanwords" are typically far fewer than the native or ancestral words of most languages, they are often widely known and used as integral to the language they have been "loaned to" — with some or little variation, or deviation from the norm of the original language they have been borrowed or loaned from, especially, on the level of pronunciation.

The Alexandrian dialect exhibits a large number of such words borrowed from a number of ancient and modern languages — the languages of all the speech communities which have interacted in Alexandria over the ages. One can attempt a chronological list of only the most commonly agreed upon: ancient Egyptian, Coptic, Greek (ancient and modern), Latin, Arabic (the multiple varieties or dialects of Arabic extending from the Maghreb to the Shami), Turkish, French, Italian, Armenian, English and, undoubtedly, other languages, or language varieties and /or dialects to varying degrees.

As is clear to those of us who have been born and bred in the Alexandria of the fifties and sixties, (and no doubt to all those who came before us), and as is also seen and heard in the artistic "oral" productions of the last century — in popular songs and films — a number of borrowed or "loanwords" of Italian origin have come to form an integral part of the texture of the spoken Egyptian variety referred to as the Ammeya or "Masri" dialect, in general, and/or the Alexandrian variety of "Masri", in particular. Words such as: *battista* (kind of cotton textile or fabric),



This War Memorial was originally a gift from the Italian Community of Alexandria to the city. Today, the statue of the Khedive has been removed and in its place there is the tomb of an unknown soldier.
Photo courtesy of Mohamed Awad.

bicicletta, (bicycle), *bomba* (bomb, both literal and figurative meanings), *ciao* (informal farewell greeting), *medaglia* (medal), *p/bosta*, (both post office and mail), and *punto/bont* (point).

These words¹ have contributed to the making of the linguistic repertoire of the Alexandrian community and are still used by a large sector of the Alexandrian community today, though admittedly, to a decreasing degree. An interesting observation that should be made, in passing, is that the /v/ sound, though absent from the local variety of Alexandrian Arabic, is often pronounced with clarity, as a phoneme² with allophonic³ variations, when these words are used by Alexandrians. In rare instances, specifically, only when used by the lower socio-economic sectors, the /v/ sound is changed to the /b/ sound in words, such as: *vetrina* (shop window), *roba vecchia* (junk/old clothes), *veranda* (balcony), and *cob/verta* (blanket).

Understandably, the Italian speech community, like that of the other cosmopolitan speech communities in Alexandria, provided and enriched the local Alexandrian dialect with "loanwords" to cover a wide range of linguistic domains⁴, names of places, and descriptions of the domestic (household, food and beverage, clothing and accessories), the artistic (fine arts and craftsmanship), the legal, and in the workplace of two specific fields: that of architecture, building and construction and that of the "paper technicalities" of the port and customs, to give a selection of the domains and speech communities that most Alexandrians would be in agreement on. There are, of course, historical, social, political and economic reasons that explain why the Italian speech community has had such a strong influence and not any of the other speech communities who lived in Alexandria as their 'home-city'. A possible explanation for the adoption of Italian words (as opposed to English or French words) may be due to the fact that there were few middle-class Frenchmen (and practically no real Englishmen — most were either Cypriots or Maltese) who communicated with the locals. But this is not our present concern.

What I want to focus on is the amazing ease with which the Alexandrian speech community has embraced the sounds of Italian, with little variation from the norm or a marked "sound distortion", when compared to what has been done to other "loanwords" taken from other languages. My premise is that the sound variations or the deviation from the norm of the Italian original words, from which the "Alexandrian" dialect has borrowed, are minimal when compared to those exhibited in the use of other words taken from other languages.

Our mental lexicon which involves, among other things, knowing the rules of word formation and the other rules that enable speakers to recognize the potential possibilities of word formation in a given language, has a set of phonetic constraints which function as a filter allowing entry only to phonetically or phonologically "well-formed" words.



The Littorio Italian School, dates back to 1930. Today it houses part of the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Alexandria.
Photo courtesy of Mohamed Awad.

Before any borrowed or loanword can enter the lexicon, it must have a combination of sounds that is permissible in this language, the language that the borrowed words are loaned to. Foreign or borrowed words entering the language may be allowed to by-pass the phonetic filter. In that case, more often than not, they tend to be significantly modified so that they fit in the general sound patterns of the language, as is seen and heard in Egyptian Ammeya with borrowed words from French and English. On the other hand, it is interesting to notice that many of the Italian borrowed or "loanwords" used in the Alexandrian variety of Egyptian Arabic do not show inherent change, from the phonetic point of view, which may lead us to conclude that Italian words are phonetically eligible according to Egyptian Arabic phonetic constraints. In other words, the Alexandrian speech community seemed to have no "sound filter" through which the borrowed words have gone through before accommodating themselves comfortably in the Alexandrian variety of Egyptian Arabic. There seems to have been no sound barriers with the reception or production of Italian words.



The Italian Hospital, built in 1926 in Hadra district. The Italians, like other prominent foreign communities, founded their own institutions. Photo courtesy of Mohamed Awad.

A related and equally amazing sociolinguistic phenomena is that all the different socio-economic levels of the Alexandrian speech community seemed to accept and incorporate all things "Italian" from the "fresca", the "fino" and the "pasta-flora" to all the "arabised" words with suffixes that end in "-ione": a locally preferred suffix-sound to the French "-on" and the English "-ion", heard in the sound rendering of two commonly used loanwords — *televiz/sione* (television) and *occas/zione* (sales/discounts) in preference to their English and French counterparts.

The phonetic explanation of why Italian caught on (and not French, English or any of the other languages that the Alexandrian variety of Arabic had originally tended to borrow from) can be explained with reference to a phonological feature, technically known as "phonotactic⁵ probabilities and constraints". In more simple terms, a given language or language variety, allows certain sound combinations and not others. It seems that the sound combination probabilities of Italian are similar to the range of possibilities available to the speakers of the Egyptian variety of Arabic — thus supporting their ability to hear and, henceforth, produce the sound combinations of the borrowed words from Italian with little distortion.



The Casa di Riposo Vittorio Emanuele III, or Italian Old People's Home, in Chatby

A social factor that can also explain this interesting phenomena, would be that (in times gone by) the Italian community communicated with large sectors of the population either as co-workers or as "masters" with large numbers of apprentices, assistants and disciples, or as simply next-door neighbors. Though the number of borrowed words from Italian have been decreasing noticeably since the 1952 Revolution and its consequences, which resulted in the "Arabization" of all European or western influences, the present Alexandrian variety of Arabic, especially that of the educated, has dropped the "loanwords" from Italian altogether, replacing the Italian and other European "loanwords" by their equivalent in modern standard Arabic.

Currently, the borrowed words in the Egyptian variety of Arabic have tended to come from across the Eastern Egyptian borders, specifically, from the rich oil-states that exhibit influences of social and linguistic "Americanisation", which are, in turn, picked up to gradually become part of the "Masri" linguistic repertoire, as used by the large numbers of Egyptian expatriates, workers and their respective families who have lived in these neighboring lands for a considerable number of years. This is seen in the growing use of "loanwords" such as "sale", "promotion", "mall", and "security", to mention only four of the most commonly used borrowed words by the middle to upper socioeconomic class.

At this point a brief reference should also be made to the influences of globalization, the world of computers and the world-wide-web which have brought about a new surge of "loanwords" that have infiltrated to form, yet again, an integral part of the "Masri" linguistic repertoire.

I would like to round off my observations, by a recommendation for a future research project to be undertaken by the Alex-Med Research Center, which has, for some time now, been seriously contributing valuable research that has evoked and will continue to evoke interest in both the sights and sites of the city, the "visual" aspects of the city of *Alexandria ad Aegyptum*. I hope that my modest socio-linguistic reflections will give rise to an interest in the "sounds" that have echoed through time in Alexandria, as heard over time and place, both synchronically and diachronically, to whomever it may concern.

1 It should be pointed out that the word lists provided are by no means comprehensive. They are alphabetical and only serve as clarification of the claim proposed. The examples are presented in transliteration and the meaning in English is provided: *alla una, alla due, alla tre* (auction expressions), *av/bocato* (lawyer), *cabina* (cabin), *contratto* (contract), *concerto* (concert), *locanda* (hotel), *maestro* (conductor), *b/piano, p/brimo* (first class), *secondo* (second class), *terz/so* (third class), *tavola/tawla* (backgammon), *teatro* (theater).

2 A phoneme is the smallest phonetic (sound) unit in a language that is capable of conveying a distinction in meaning, as the m of mat and the b of bat in English.

3 An allophone is a predictable phonetic (sound) variant of a phoneme that does not change meaning.

4 The following examples are listed according to the 'domain' they are used in:

Words related to the domestic domain: kitchen utensils, food and beverage: *balcona* (balcony), *bagno* (tub), *bottiglia* (bottles), *commodino* (bedside table), *fiasca* (container for alcoholic drinks), *gambari* (shrimps), *lamp/ba*, (lamp), *macarona fionka*, *p/benna*, *isbagetti* (different kinds of pasta), *mobilia* (furniture), *p/basta* (cakes), *salsa* (sauce), *sapone* (soap), *torta* (cake), *vasa* (vase), *v/bitello* (veal), *veranda* (balcony).

Transportation carts: *caretta*, *carro*, (the fiacre, or hantour), drivers used to shout "Warda, Warda" for people to get out of their way — an "arabized" Italian, *guarda* meaning "look out".

A large number of Italian words are used in the harbor (these however are commonly used in the harbors of the entire Mediterranean Basin): *vira*, *arrea*, *alesta* etc.

There are also many Italian words used in commerce: *bolisa* (insurance policy) was *polizze*, *kimbiaba* (cambiale) is an Italian word, manifesto is the Italian word for bill of lading, *fattura* (bill) etc.

There are also Italian words in Alexandrian place names: Mazarita (the European version), Azarita (the Arabic version) was originally an Italian word: lazaretto (meaning hospital). It was the quarantine station, outside the city walls, which were in the Shallalat Gardens.

5 The set of allowed arrangements or sequences of speech sounds in a given language. A word beginning with the consonant cluster (zv), for example, violates the phonotactics of English, but not of Russian.



Little Venice, designed by the Italian architect Giacomo A. Loria on the Corniche of Alexandria

⁵ Lecturer in Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University.



Alexander the Great



Mahmoud Mokhtar



The Guardian of Secrets

Sculpting the memory



Mohamed Ali



Saad Zaghloul



Nubar Pasha



The Renaissance of Science



Prometheus

of Alexandria



Khedive Ismail

Ptolemy II
This statue was discovered
in the Eastern Harbor having
laid on the seabed for
more than 2000 years.



The AlexCinema Project

Retracing the Birth of the Seventh Art in Alexandria

Carole Escoffey

The ALEXCINEMA project is a groundbreaking project on a vibrant aspect of Alexandria's modern history which had yet to be extensively documented. The first projection of a Lumière brothers' film in Egypt, indeed in Africa, took place in 1896 in Alexandria's Café Zawani (located in the Toussoun Bourse) and the following year, in 1897, saw the inauguration of the first Lumière cinematograph in the city. This emblematic event was but the beginning of what was to become a long lasting passion for a nascent art and industry... for, within a few years, Alexandrians would be producing their own films! Today however, as the Egyptian cinema industry has for decades been based in the capital, Cairo, the pioneering role which Alexandria played in the early twentieth century has been mostly forgotten, except for a few specialists and collectors who preserve the memories of a bygone era. It was to bring the memory back to life, and to pay homage to the forgotten founding fathers, that the idea of the ALEXCINEMA project was born.



The Birth of the Seventh Art in Alexandria, published by Alex-Med on the occasion of the centennial in July 2007



A Kiss in the Desert, (1928) directed by Ibrahim Lama who also wrote the script, and starring his brother Badr Lama, in the sultry tradition of Rudolph Valentino.

But why in Alexandria? Perhaps one of the most striking features of this Mediterranean city during the early twentieth century, and one which undoubtedly played a key role in the birth of the cinema industry there, was its cosmopolitan atmosphere, its openness to new and foreign ideas fostering innovation and entrepreneurship: two key ingredients for the birth of a new art and industry such as the cinema.

It was the city's very ambiance of tolerance and pluralism, values which enabled foreign and Egyptian cinematographers to interact successfully, values much needed today to promote dialogue in a world of globalization and confrontation, which attracted the European Union to sponsor the ALEXCINEMA project. One of the EU's prime objectives is to promote the dialogue between cultures, to foster tolerance and pluralism, especially in youth. A project such as this one, which was to shed light on a shared cinematographic heritage between Egyptian and foreign filmmakers, was seen as an ideal opportunity. Thus it was the Commission of the European Communities agreed to sponsor the Alexandrian and Mediterranean Research Center (Alex-Med) at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.



The letterhead of the Egyptian Cinematographic Institute, founded by Mohamed Bayoumi in Alexandria in 1932.

A work team comprised of scholars and volunteers and aided at the preliminary stage by two advisors, gradually assembled the documentation over months of painstaking research. As young volunteer, Sara Hegazi, commented, "The scattered information we gathered about the early days of the cinema

in Alexandria was very much like reconstructing history from intangible memories to more tangible evidence that took the form of names, places and dates. At times, I felt a bit like one of those Alexandrian history lovers, who keep looking for the tomb of Alexander the Great..."

Then finally, on 31 July 2007, the project culminated successfully at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina with the grand gala, attended by celebrities and film stars, to mark the launching of the ALEXCINEMA website and exhibition, CD and catalogue: *The Birth of the Seventh Art in Alexandria*. Whilst we cannot, of course, recount the story of cinema in Alexandria in these few lines, let us briefly evoke some significant aspects of its early stages which feature in the catalogue...



The Lumière brothers' cinematograph was inaugurated in Alexandria in 1897.

After the inauguration in 1897 of the Lumière brothers' cinematograph in Rue de la Gare du Caire (now Sharia Mehatet Misr), other venues soon began projecting films. Italian, Greek and French café owners especially, saw this as a lucrative business opportunity. As early as 1907, the photographers Aziz Bandarli and Umberto Dorès shot the first Alexandrian cinematic film: *The Visit of Khedive Abbas Helmi II to the Scientific Institute annexed to Sidi Morsi Abu el Abbas Mosque*. They went on to make many short silent films such as documentaries and newsreels. At that time, many Alexandrians spoke at least three languages, including Italian and French. By 1912 however, the growing demand for Arabic, prompted El Cinema el Misreyah to provide Arabic subtitles on a separate screen, an invention of Leopoldo Fiorello. This was an instant success.

It was also in 1906/1907 that Aziz and Dorès inaugurated a projection hall (cinephone) at the corner of Rue Mahatet el Raml (renamed Sharia Saad Zaghloul) and Rue Missalla (now Sharia Safia Zaghloul). In 1917, Aziz Bandarli, Paul Cornel and a number of Italian investors, with the support of the Banco di Roma, founded the first film production company in Egypt: the Italian Cinematographic

Society (SITCIA). And it was a young Italian boy working in Aziz and Dorès' studio, Alvisè Orfanelli, who would become one of Alexandria's foremost early cinematographers. He started out merely as an operator of the phonograph and discs: technology introduced by Aziz and Dorès to add commentary during the projection of films. Later, when SITCIA went bankrupt, Orfanelli bought its equipment and laboratories, enabling him to make his début as a director. He then turned to Egyptian theater actors such as Fawzi el Gazayerli and his troupe to make *Madame Loretta* in 1919. In 1928, Orfanelli founded the Egyptian Artistic Films Society with another Italian, Amadeo Puccini, and a Frenchman, Jacques Schulz. Moreover, it was in Orfanelli's studios that internationally acclaimed Alexandrian director, Youssef Chahine, began his own career.



An old film poster starring Bahiga Hafez in *Laila, Daughter of the Desert* (1937)

During the early period, specialization was yet to be developed and many of the pioneering cinematographers started out as amateurs who not only directed, but also wrote the scripts, were the photographers, edited the films, produced them, and even acted in their productions.



Togo Mizrahi with Ali El Kassar in Studio Bacos

One such was Togo Mizrahi, an Italian Jew who made a considerable contribution to Egyptian cinema. After completing his education in Europe, he returned to his native Alexandria and founded the Egyptian Films Company in 1928. Mizrahi's first film was *The Abyss (El hawiyah)* in 1930, which he produced, directed, edited, designed the set for, wrote the script for and even acted in. Mizrahi chose to act under a pseudonym Ahmed El Meshriqi. *The Abyss* was shot in Bacos Studios, a cinema projection hall which Mizrahi had bought and converted into an equipped film studio. It was there that Mizrahi would shoot all his films in Alexandria, until he moved his company to Cairo in 1939.

In addition to the Alexandrian born cinematographers of foreign origins such as Orfanelli and Mizrahi, were those who came to the city from elsewhere to play a pioneering role also. Two notable examples were the Lama brothers, Ibrahim and Badr, Palestinians who arrived in Alexandria in 1924 from their native Chile on their way to Palestine, and decided to stay. Originally photographers, they soon branched out into filmmaking and established their own production company, Condor Film. In 1928, Ibrahim Lama produced *A Kiss in the Desert (Qoublah fil sahra)* for which he wrote the script and which starred his brother, Badr. This desert tale of sword fighting and chivalry clearly showed the influence of Rudolf Valentino's films on the Lama brothers. It was to be the beginning of a long career of collaboration with Ibrahim directing, whilst handsome Badr played the leading roles.



Fatma Rushdi, whose acting style earned her the nickname "Sarah Bernhardt of the East".

However, amongst the pioneers were also Egyptians who made a key contribution. The first Egyptian actor in the entire history of Egyptian cinema was Mohamed Karim who starred in *The Honor of the Bedouin (Charaf el badawi)* in 1918. Karim travelled to Europe, notably Italy and Germany where he took part in Italian and German films, before returning to Alexandria where he turned his hand at directing. During his ensuing director's career, he made a number of films with Mohamed Abdel Wahab, he also introduced the

nine year old Faten Hamama to the screen, he made the first sound film in Egypt in 1932, *The Elite (Awlad el dhawat)*, and the first colored film in 1946, *I am not an Angel (Lastou malakan)*. Another key Egyptian figure was Mohamed Bayoumi, who, despite his crucial contribution, was to end his days without recognition and in poverty. Bayoumi studied in Germany under director Wilhelm Carol and the photographer Boehringer, who helped him obtain the equipment to set up a studio in Egypt. He later became the chairman of the Misr Company for Performance and Cinema, to which he agreed to sell his valuable cinematic equipment for a very low price. This company



Aziza Amir filming

was eventually to become Studio Misr in 1934-1935. Then, after a further period of study in Europe, Bayoumi returned to Egypt to find himself excluded from Misr Company, and without financial rights. This traumatic experience prompted Bayoumi to move to Alexandria where he established both his own studio, and in 1932 founded the Egyptian Cinematographic Institute, the first of its kind in Egypt.

Naturally, it is impossible to do any justice to the contribution of either foreigners or Egyptians in these few lines; nonetheless a few words should be added about the significant role played by women. In 1929, *Daughter of the Nile (Bint el Nil)* was directed by the first female director in Egypt, Aziza Amir. But Aziza Amir was not alone. Another significant female talent was Alexandrian born Fatma Rushdi. Forced to work very young after the death of her father, Rushdi was first discovered by Sayed Darwich who helped her career to develop. Once an established actress, Rushdi founded her own production company, Sherket Aflam el Negma el Misriyah, financed by Jewish businessman, Elie Derei. Later she also directed films, whilst her acting talent earned her the nickname "Sarah Bernhardt of the East".

However, perhaps the most striking of these female pioneers was Bahiga Hafez. Born to an aristocratic Alexandrian family, Hafez spoke several languages and studied music. In 1930, she starred in the silent movie, *Zeinab*, based on Mohamed Hussein Heikal's eponymous novel. Later, she established the Fanar Film Company with her husband and went on to produce her own movies.

A woman of multiple talents, Hafez would produce, edit, act, compose the music and even design the costumes for her films. Sadly, this exceptional woman, after years in the limelight on Egyptian screens, was to die in 1982 all alone and in dire poverty.



Cinema Alhambra

And so it was, that during the early years of the twentieth century, men and women of different nationalities, different religious faiths and even social classes, found a nurturing and open ambiance in Alexandria enabling them to develop their passion for a nascent art form in new and innovative ways. *The Birth of the Seventh Art in Alexandria* retraces the numerous facets of this fascinating journey right up to the contemporary revival: the recent film workshops run by the Jesuit Cultural Center, as well as the building of Studio Iskandariya in Amriyah district. These studios however, still stand empty waiting for bureaucracy and red tape to grant them a new lease of life

The Birth of the Seventh Art in Alexandria not only retraces the achievements of these pioneers of Alexandrian cinema, it also devotes individual chapters to other vital aspects such as the actors, the films, the studios and the literally dozens of cinema projection halls which once existed throughout the Alexandria. The catalogue also includes a section of additional articles



Mohamed Bayoumi's studio at 16 Saad Zaghloul Street, Alexandria, opened in 1929

including one by the contemporary Alexandrian novelist, Ibrahim Abdel Meguid. In it the writer comments, "For me, cinema was an important factor contributing to my cultural make up... Nearly each movie had behind it a literary work that I sought and read. Cinema opened a door for me to world literature." And he concludes, "Such was the influence of cinema on me, and so it remains with multitudes the world over, every single day, as long as cinemas continue to exist...."

This catalogue, through its extensive data and wealth of illustrations including old photographs and rare documents from a bygone era, bears witness to just how strong that influence once was on the people of Alexandria.



STUDIO
I. & B. LAMA

Alexandria... birthplace of the Septuagint

Minas Khatchadourian

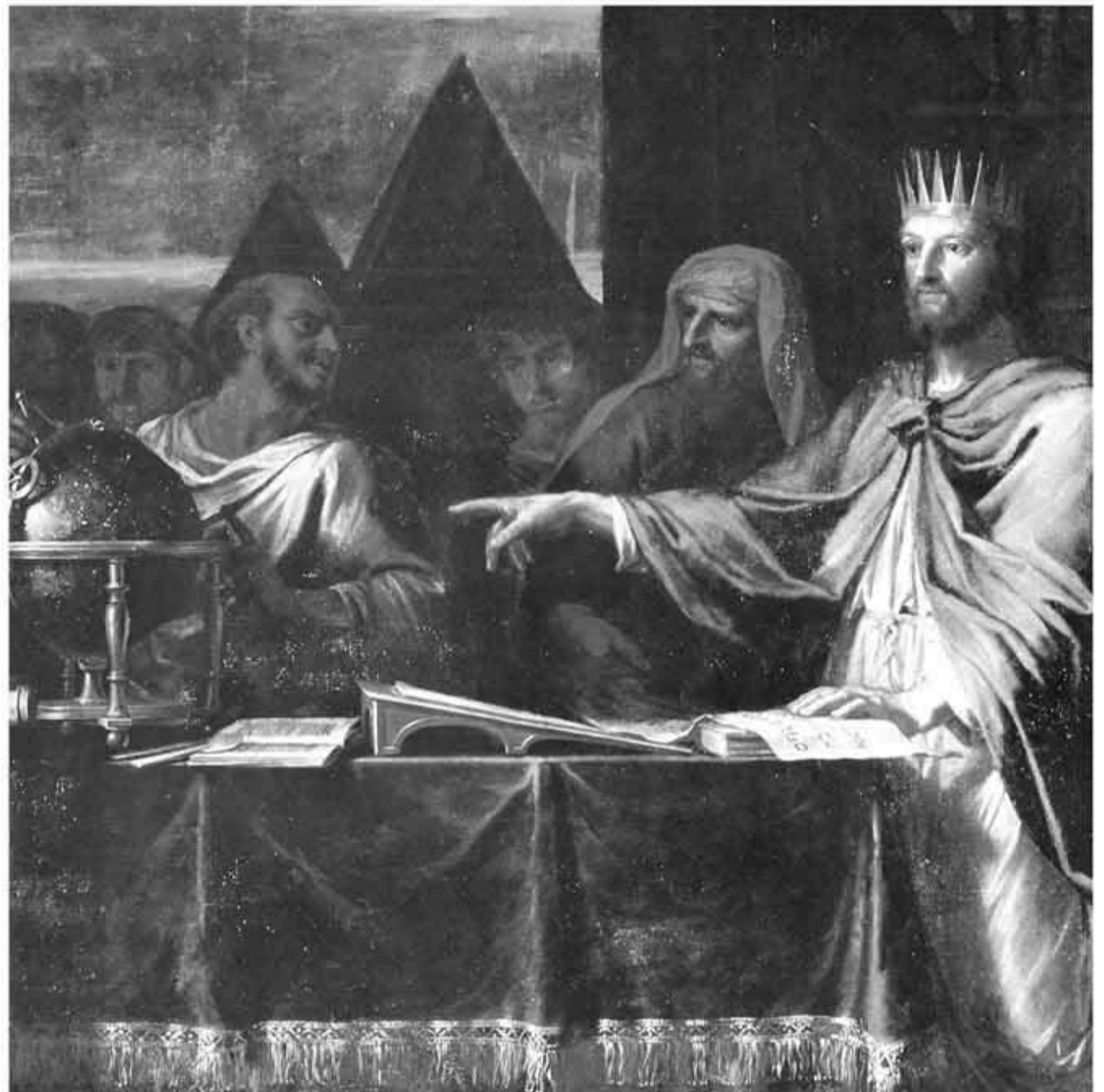
Some 2270 years ago, in Alexandria, capital of the Ptolemaic dynasty (323–30 BCE), 70 or 72 scholars were commissioned by King Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BCE) to translate the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. Since that time, this translation has been known as the Septuagint or simply the LXX in memory of those 70 translators. This was the first attempt to reproduce the Hebrew Scriptures in another language.

The traditional account of this translation is contained in the so-called *Letter of Aristeas*¹, who was a high official at the court of King Ptolemy. This document, believed to have been written in the mid second century BCE, explains the circumstances of the translation of the first five books of the Bible (known as the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). It recounts how Ptolemy II Philadelphus requested the high priest of Jerusalem, Eleazar, to send 70 elders² to Alexandria to translate the Hebrew Law. Addressing his brother Philocrates, Aristeas described an embassy to the city of Jerusalem on which he had recently been sent with the chief of the king's bodyguard, Andreas. According to Aristeas' narrative, the royal librarian of Alexandria, Demetrius of Phalerum, convinced King Ptolemy of the importance of securing a translation of the Pentateuch for the Ancient Library. The high priest of Jerusalem complied with Ptolemy's request and sent the translators to Alexandria where they were honorably received. These translators carried with them a copy of the Scriptures written in letters of gold on rolls of parchment and a special banquet was organized to celebrate their arrival in Alexandria. Three days later, Demetrius conducted them across the Heptastadion, the dyke recently built joining the Island of Pharos to the mainland. There on the island, the translators worked independently in individual cells for about ten weeks. All comfort and necessities were provided for their ease. Although each translator was kept in a separate chamber, they all produced identical versions of the Old Testament after a period of 70 days!



Codex Vaticanus

Several early accounts confirm this Alexandrian tradition. For example, the Alexandrian philosopher Philo (30 BCE–45 CE) repeats the story of the scholars on Pharos. He describes the miraculous coincidence of the translators' separate versions: "They prophesied like men possessed, not one in one way and one in another, but all producing." "They, like men inspired, prophesied, not one saying one thing and another saying another, but every one of them employing the self-same nouns and verbs, as if some unseen prompter had suggested all the words to them."³ Upon the accomplishment of the work, the complete version was read by Demetrius of Phalerum to the



Jewish Elders explaining the Septuagint to King Ptolemy II Philadelphus by Jean-Baptiste Champaigne, (detail) Château de Versailles

king who expressed his admiration and ordered to preserve the Septuagint with scrupulous care in the Library of Alexandria. In his account, Philo added that an annual festival was held on Pharos to celebrate the completion of the undertaking.

During the Christian era, other versions appeared. Some writers, such as Epiphanius (ca.320–403 CE) modified it by describing the translators as locked up in sky-lighted cells in pairs with attendants and scribes. Each pair of translators was entrusted with one book then the books were circulated and 36 identical versions of the Bible were produced.

Nowadays, scholars generally view the *Letter of Aristeas* and the later accounts as fictitious, but nevertheless, they are the reason why the Greek Bible has become known as the Septuagint. Moreover, it is regarded as an important source document for the history of that period. It is important to note that the Septuagint differs slightly from the Old Testament both in the order of the books (in total 39 books) and in the inclusion of certain apocryphal books.

The Septuagint found widespread use in the Hellenistic world, even in Jerusalem. Gradually, it became a source for the early Christians during the first centuries CE. Christians relied on it for most of their understanding of the Old Testament. Today, the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus are considered the oldest known copies of the Septuagint.

Finally, the Septuagint reflects the enormous importance of the city of Alexandria in ancient times. There is virtually no area of intellectual activity to which Alexandria did not make a major contribution. Diodorus of Sicily (ca.90–ca.30 BCE) described Alexandria as "the first city of the civilized world, certainly far ahead of all the rest in elegance and luxury. Culturally unrivalled by its intellectual traditions for more than a millennium, Alexandria was truly the queen of the Mediterranean."



1 An English translation of the *Letter of Aristeas* published by the Clarendon Press in 1913 can be found at: <http://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepigraph/aristeas.htm>
 2 According to tradition, the High Priest, Eleazar, chose six translators from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, thus 72 in all.
 3 An English translation of the account, from Philo's *Life of Moses*, volume II, can be found at: <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book25.html>

THE CRUMBLING FAÇADE OF OLD ALEXANDRIA

Gordon Smith

Going, going, gone! It could be an auctioneer's last call as he brings down his hammer. But in Alexandria the sound is not from an auctioneer but that of old Italian buildings simply falling down. Last winter's storms have claimed a few more old properties. Classically designed buildings of four and five stories built about 1840-1860 and the subject of years of structural neglect, repair, no proper maintenance and old age, are all at risk. Built during a time of quiet streets, the 20th century took its toll. Vibrations of the tram network and heavy traffic on black cobble-stone have all contributed towards a decline of these once elegant but now fragile structures. An added storey cluttered with satellite television dishes and a lack of proper roof drainage has meant that violent electric storms and prolonged periods of torrential rain have soaked into the already cracked and porous fabric and without warning the building, or a major part of it, blowing it apart as though it had exploded from within. During a terrific two and a half hour electric storm on the evening of 5 December 2006, near the Cairo Station at the junction of the road to Moharrem Bey, a wedge-shaped elegant building succumbed to such a fate. A gaping hole on the station side revealed collapsed floors and suspended rooms, some with good paneled door cases and pretty glazed fanlights.



A collapsed building in Moharrem Bey district



The neglected façades of an apartment building, on which an extra floor was built. The continual vibrations from the passing tram and heavy traffic have contributed to the deterioration of such buildings.

This was a truly elegant property in its hey-day, complete with classical motifs and strong stone platform balconies with good iron railings. Before this recent disaster it was obvious that its future was, in time, limited, but an Act of God and Nature sealed its fate on that dreadful stormy night and declared that its time was up and it must now go. So, by the time this article is published the building will have gone, several families have had to find somewhere else to live, and its lofty frame disappeared from the sky-line and lost forever remaining only in the image of photographs taken just in time before demolition of the upper floors. However sad this account may seem, it was all unavoidable. Some of these fine old buildings are, to coin a modern phrase, past their sell-by date, and unfortunately not sound enough to undergo restoration and repairs. Other buildings in the Labban and Manshieh districts of Alexandria have also suffered the same fate, though some with the most dramatic results by claiming the lives of occupants as the buildings collapse without warning.

So, gradually a large proportion of Italian buildings, erected during or after the time of Mohamed Ali Pasha will disappear. This is sad because such architectural styles, built by Italian engineers, are usually only visible in the side streets of Genoa, Naples and Rome. At least we can preserve the pictorial knowledge of our past by photography — a harmless occupation which recently attracted the attention of many Alexandrians who had not recognized or realized what interesting buildings existed around them until a man of obvious European origin was seen pointing a camera towards the sky-line of a building at risk. It was then that people took note, looked upward, took an interest and asked questions. Now that apartment building near the railway station has gone, it is what happens next that is of concern. We shall have to wait and see what happens. At present the ground floor has been kept, tidied up and is continuing its use as a coffee shop. However, judging from what has already taken place in that area the site will probably be replaced by some badly designed hideous building of disproportionate height to neighboring properties and of no set pattern of architectural style or classical order. Yet we should be optimistic and for now delay criticism; times may be changing for the better in Alexandria, so it is just a matter of 'Watch this Space'!



The Author

Written by Mr. Gordon Smith, an Englishman living in Alexandria, who has a natural affinity towards fine old buildings and is profoundly disturbed when he finds them abandoned, damaged, abused, neglected and purposely destroyed and demolished. Having lived through the "progressive years of the 1960s", he notes that more historic properties in provincial English towns were destroyed by unsympathetic planners to create shopping malls and urban motorways, than by air raid bombings during the Second World War. When asked recently how he looked upon Alexandria his reply was:

"For many years I played an active role in the recording, preservation and restoration of 18th century buildings in the north of England and in bringing the cause to the public's attention. As Charles Correa said at his Bibliotheca Alexandrina lecture 'The Language of Architecture' on 8 March, 2007, all architecture should take into account the local environment and feelings of the place. It should relate to the area and its people. Architects must spend time living in the place. What may be environmentally suitable and acceptable in other places abroad may not fit the local environment. Styles and colors are of utmost importance. The early 19th century Italian immigrants to Alexandria obviously thought that their homeland styles suited this side of the Mediterranean coast — and it worked. These buildings are pleasing to the eye and contemporary in fashion, proof that the theory is visible still in Alexandria. So, my advice to the city planners and residents here is: whenever possible, save and restore the architectural gems that you have. They are unique to Alexandria and if you let them go then the heart of the city will be lost forever."

The Date

Sahar Hamouda

I was fourteen, and to my young eyes my piano teacher Miss Pappo was ancient. She was probably in her fifties then, but when one is at the beginning of one's teens anyone over twenty-five seems to be already half dead. When I first started taking lessons with her she saw promise in my long fingers. Soon, however, it became evident to me that I was tone deaf and that daily practice would make of me only a mediocre pianist. I was never going to be a gifted one, nor was I interested or persevering enough to practice every day for so many hours. My lessons were doomed to failure.

Not so my interest in her. She was well read and we spent the lessons chatting. Every now and then her conscience would rebel and she would try to get me to make some sense out of the score sheet that obstinately refused to inspire me, and I would argue back that I was hopeless anyway and that my money would indeed be well-spent if it went towards educating me in life. That would soothe her and she would proceed to argue some issue or the other, or tell me stories about her past. Somehow my recollections of these "piano lessons" are of me and her seated at the untouched piano, the sun shining in softly through the slats of the wooden shutters, her intense voice holding me spellbound.

"My uncles were all wiped out in the holocaust," she told me. "All. My family had to escape the Nazis."

"Same here, only they were Palestinians," I could have told her, but didn't. "My family was devastated and displaced and killed too. Maybe it was your cousins who escaped the Nazis that did it." But I loved the gentle woman and, maybe, after all, it wasn't her cousins who had done it.

"I have never put a cigarette in my mouth," she told me emphatically on another occasion, after I had given up on my sol note as usual. "Never put a cigarette between my lips!" she reasserted. It was impressive that she had, for all those years, resisted the temptation to even try. Or maybe the temptation had never existed for her. I stared at her dry cracked lips, the hairy face, and wondered if life would have been different for her had she felt temptations and weakened.



She never got married. Once, when she was a teenager, her neighbor asked her out to the movies. "I asked my father for permission, but he said no. So I didn't go." She was still very emphatic, and I nodded approvingly, as I was expected to.



But by then I was two years older: I had started smoking and going to the movies. Once more I looked at her dry lips and grey hair and wondered how different her life might have been if that one time she had been naughty, if she had been defiant, if she had gone on that date. But then again, maybe she was content with her life, with teaching the young how to appreciate art and the beautiful things in the world around us,

with instilling morals and decency in the generations that sat next to her at the piano. Maybe she was spared the anguish of indecision of those of us who did smoke and go on dates. Perhaps her music and books gave her serenity and fulfillment and bypassed the anxieties born of temptations and weaknesses.

My piano teacher has been dead for some years now. The last time I saw her was years ago. She was tottering out of a concert, leaning on the arm of one of her ex-students. She did not remember me any more than I remembered any of those notes I had spent three fruitless years trying to recognize. I wondered, though, if any of her students had learned from her as much as I had, not the lessons of doh-ray-mi, but those of "what if", "maybe" and "after all" that she had unwittingly taught me. They probably thumped away quite successfully at their piano, then got on quite as successfully with their lives, forgetting the notes they had practiced as teenagers. They might have learned, too, to be as sure as she was about her convictions and the course she had chosen for herself. I came away from her music sessions with a different lesson: that the happy hours I had spent with her lasted far longer than the few pounds that were supposed to make of me a mediocre and short-lived pianist, and that what matters is not whether you go on the date or not, but that you live comfortably with the decision you have taken.



Photographs of Miss Pappo courtesy of the EGC



مآذن أبو العباس.. ومذبحة سان ستيفانو

بقلم/ أسامة أنور عكاشة

الأهرام الخميس 6 سبتمبر 2007



مسجد المرسي أبو العباس

كنت أشكو من الأيدي الغليظة التي شوهت وجه الإسكندرية ببنائيات الأسمنت والخرسانة القمينة التي انتشرت بطول الكورنيش فقضت قضاء مبرماً على أجمل كورنيش في حوض المتوسط.. وفي صرخة استنجد لإنقاذ ما بقي من ملامح الجمال والأصالة في مدينتنا المعشوقة كتبت دراما كاملة هي "الراية البيضاء" منذ ما يقرب من ثلاثين عاما كاملة.. وظننت - ربما لجهلي وسذاجتي - أن الصرخة لم تضع هباء ولا راحت سدي.. خصوصا حين بدأت جهود محافظ الإسكندرية السابق اللواء عبد السلام المحجوب تعيد لوجه المدينة مسحات من رونقها المفقود.. ولكن.. ها هو "الصرح" الذي وعدنا به...

لا شأن لي بداية بأشخاص من اشتروا الفندق القديم ولا بشركائهم.. وهل هم جميعا مصريون يحملون "القيمة" و



سان ستيفانو قديماً

"الحرمة" المصرية والوطنية في أعماقهم أم هم مجموعة من الأشتات الذين تشاركوا على غنيمة.. وكان هدفهم هو التهام الكعكة الموعودة بصرف النظر عن مراعاة قواعد الذوق والجمال في بناء يربض في صدر الإسكندرية..

شأنني وشأن كل من يحب الإسكندرية.. وكل من يردد "اللي بنى مصر كان في الأصل حلواني".. شأننا هو الاحتجاج - إذا كانت هناك جدوى من الصراخ - وإدانة هذا الجرم المشهود..

بناء ضخم يشبه فرس النهر (سيد قشطة)... أو الخريت أو وحيد القرن.. جائم بكل ثقل بنايته وتقل ظله وخلوه من أي ملمح لجمال من أي نوع... حتى على مستوى الفنادق الحديثة.. هو أقيح فندق يمكنك أن تراه في مصر كلها بلونه الترابي الكابي وواجهته الباردة الدميمة.. وتحس فور أن تشاهده بانعدام "الرؤية" الجمالية.. وانعدام حس التنوع.. واهدار تلك المساحات الهائلة على مبنى لا يختلف عن "قشلاقات" الجنود في زمن الاحتلال.. كان الإسكندرية.. لا تستحق أن يبنى على شاطئها في نفس المكان مبنى فائق الجمال وتحفة معمارية على الطراز الإيطالي أو الفرنسي الذي يتناغم مع تاريخ المدينة وطابعها... هل يمكن أن يصل العمى الحسي والجهل بمفردات الجمال والذوق إلى هذه الدرجة؟؟.. لا أصدق.. ولكني أرى القذى في عيني.. ولا أملك إلا أن أردد: اللهم لا حول ولا قوة إلا بك!

والدخيلة.. لم يكن هذا الزخم الإسكندري "المنفوع" في العمق الحضاري الموروث لدى المصريين ليتنافر مع القوس الآخر الذي أعطاه "الأخر" عاشق الإسكندرية وسليل بناتها الأوائل دليلاً أو تأسيساً لفكرة اتحاده مع بوابة النقاء الحضارة الهلينستية بالميتولوجي القديم لبناء صروح طيبة ومنف والشموخ الإمبراطوري لأبناء الأهرامات!.. بنيت بطول الشاطئ الساحر من الأزاريطة والسلسلة يعني القصور و"الفيلات" التي رصعت جيد المدينة وأعطتها أجمل شرفات ومطبات المتوسط.. وكان لا بد أن تبقى فخارا وزهوا وشهادة دائمة تحكي سر المدينة وتمس به لكل من تدله في هواها واستوحى البوح من فيضها... كان يجب أن تبقى عذرية الجمال الإسكندري لا تمس ولا تترك للتلتهك...

بين عشية وضحاها أزيل "البوريفاج" - من منكم يذكره؟ - وهم فندق سان ستيفانو! هل تذكرون يوم بدأت المحاولة على عهد الوزير فؤاد سلطان وقوبلت بالرفض العام والاستنكار فتم إرجاؤها لحين.. وجاء الحين بعد سنوات قلانس حين لم تعد "البيع" حرمة القديمة! وقيل لنا أنه في مكان الفندق القديم المتداعي - مع الاحترام لكل ما يرتبط به من ذكريات وتاريخ - حيث باتت ترتع في أرجائه الجردان.. سيبنى صرح معماري حديث تفخر به الإسكندرية ويقوم دليلاً على عبقرية وتفرد ورثة البنائين العظام.. وتفاءلنا خيراً.. وإن خالجنى طوال الفترة التي استغرقها البناء وكلمنا مررت عليه طائف من التوجس والقلق لم يلبث أن تحول إلى كابوس مرعب!



سان ستيفانو 2005

هاهنا تتجلى مظاهر المأساة.. على طرفين متقابلين بين القوسين الرابضين على بحر إسكندرية.. يمتد أحدهما من سفح قلعة قايتباي في "بحري" أمام ساحة مساجد المدينة الكبرى.. ليقابله شرقاً أبراج ما يسمى بسان ستيفانو جراند بلازا... في بداية منطقة البلاجات الإسكندرية الشهيرة.. وهذا التقابل.. وأفضل أن أسميه بالتنافر الجراح المؤلم، ربما يشير بفظاظة إلى ما أصيب به الذوق العام في مصر من انتكاسة محزنة!

هاهنا يأتي رمضان لتزدان المآذن بعقود الأنوار.. تطل على قباب سيدي المرسي أبي العباس والإمام البوصيري (سيدي الأباصري بمنطق الإسكندرية..).

تختلط روحانيات الصيام وإقامة شرع الله واتمام أركان الدين الحنيف باندماج المصريين مع أهاليج الصوفية وأناشيد الحضرة الزكية والتدله بهوى آل البيت والمتوسل بأعتاب الأولياء الصالحين.. وينتظم العقد بطول مصر وعرضها.

الاتصال والاندماج هو السر من ملاعب الطفولة والطواف بالفوانيس والتعلق بمواكب المنشدين والسير في ركب المسحراتي.. وصولاً إلى تضج السن وحمل رسالة الميراث العريق في حنايا الصدور... وإذ يحدث هذا التفرد المصري العبقري في كل أرجاء الكنانة.. إلا أن تجلياته في الثغر كان لها دائماً عقب خاص يتضوع عبيراً في أروان الزعفران.. وألق البقاع المريّة الهاجعة في أحضان المالح.. ذلك الأبيض المتوسط العجوز حامل الواح الحكمة والغاز العصور.

".. صلّي عالنبى... امدهح النبى... حصوة في عينك ياللى ما تصلى عالنبى..."

والكل يصلي على الرسول في الإسكندرية ويمد من حيال التواصل مع "الوافد" الآخر القادم عبر جسور المتوسط نسيجا كوز موبوليتانياً فريداً ونادر المثل... لم يكن هناك أبداً ما ينبو عن الذوق أو يجرح النظر أو يعكر صفو الروح وألفة المعشر وسلامة التعايش... فكان عمق الوجود الشعبي الإسكندري في الأحياء القديمة غرب الميناء الشرقي وفي ظهر القوس المرمرى الذي يضم تمثال الخديو الحالم إسماعيل باشا وخلفه تمثال محمد علي المؤسس.. أحياء المنشية والجمرى وكرمز والأنفوشي ورأس التين ومحرم بك والحضرة ومسائر امتدادات الغرب من مينا البصل والقباري والوردبان والمكس

Une Bagatelle...

Nadia Bassili

Attarin — un nom absolument magique qui attire touristes, collectionneurs et chineurs dans le dédale de ses ruelles, de ses cours et de ses passages. C'est à la fois un des symboles du passé glorieux et cosmopolite de cette ville méditerranéenne qu'est Alexandrie et le symbole du présent lorsque l'on observe l'ingéniosité des artisans, leur art à tout imiter, leur perspicacité de voyager, de faire les brocantes, afin d'obtenir des antiquités qui correspondent au goût actuel de l'Égypte. Les antiquaires ne connaissant aucun obstacle afin de satisfaire leurs clients.

Au fil de mes promenades alexandrines, j'ai appris à découvrir et aimer ce quartier à la fois nostalgique et vivant, découvrant d'abord son aspect nostalgique, ses anciens portails en fer forgé, ses portes en bois, ses anciens meubles Thonet, le tout aligné au long des murs dans la rue... un souvenir de la ville de mon enfance, des belles villas d'autrefois que j'ai eu le privilège de connaître et dont les portes étaient tout bêtement là puisque le reste a cédé la place à de grands immeubles. Ses meubles qui ont décoré les salons familiaux et ses bonbonnières en porcelaine de Sèvres m'ont fait réaliser que le passé et certaines de ses traditions restent encore très liés au présent... N'offrait-on pas du Sèvres aux fiançailles du temps de nos arrière-grands-parents ? Cela semble encore exister, de même que la tradition des salons Aubusson... Devenant de plus en plus curieuse et courageuse, je me suis hasardée dans les ruelles étroites et poussiéreuses, sentant la sciure, la colle et la peinture, où j'ai découvert le labeur des artisans, ainsi que leur gentillesse et l'art avec lequel ils arrivent à redonner une vie à tous les objets qu'on leur confie.



Un antiquaire d'Attarin

C'est donc là que j'ai eu l'idée de revenir lorsque j'ai commencé mon projet de faire des sacs du soir. Depuis le moment où j'ai dû vider les armoires de ma grand-mère — une des dames du passé riche et cosmopolite d'Alexandrie — je n'avais plus qu'une obsession : rendre aux femmes leur individualisme et leur élégance en leur permettant d'exprimer leur personnalité jusque dans le moindre accessoire ! Cette petite merveille en soie noire, un peu fanée par le temps, assortie à une robe de cocktail, n'avait plus quitté mon esprit. Quelle finesse. Je n'ai pas réussi à me séparer de ce petit bout de papier épinglé sur la robe qui nous donnait des informations sur la soirée où elle fut portée. Quel luxe d'avoir le temps de faire cela !



Ainsi, j'ai réalisé que chaque sac est aussi unique que la femme qui le porte et que reprendre cet esprit d'autrefois n'était qu'un atout dans l'époque de la globalisation dans laquelle nous vivons. Redonner aux anciens fermoirs une nouvelle vie en les habillant de façon moderne est donc devenu ma passion et la devise de mon projet. Mon credo est de parer la femme moderne et active en donnant à sa tenue un look très personnel.

Dans un premier temps, mon idée se faisait connaître par le bouche à oreille. Des dames alexandrines m'ont gentiment offert des anciens sacs leur ayant appartenu ou provenant des armoires de leur mère ou de leur grand-mère. J'étais si touchée et en même temps fascinée par le passé glorieux de la ville, de ses habitantes et de leurs sacs qui ont chacun leur histoire secrète et qu'ils ne nous dévoilent qu'en partie... D'autres dames m'ont demandé de refaire leurs sacs afin de pouvoir réutiliser les somptueux fermoirs en pierres précieuses qu'elles possédaient. Les anciens brocarts flétris et jaunis par le temps ont donc cédé la place à des tissus contemporains. J'ai aussi réalisé que nombreux étaient les sacs achetés à Alexandrie, bien que certains avaient un accent très parisien ; j'ai même réussi à retracer la provenance d'un grand nombre d'entre eux.

Depuis, le projet a pris de l'essor et « une Bagatelle » est née. Une bagatelle, c'est aussi bien le plaisir secret, la petite chose anodine qui ne vaut même pas la peine d'être mentionnée... En velours de soie, en taffetas, brocart, dentelles, et sertis de perles et de paillettes, superposant souvent divers tissus afin de donner encore plus de féerie aux mille et une nuits : je fais revivre les anciens fermoirs des dames élégantes de la vieille Alexandrie.

Depuis, Attarin est devenu mon lieu de prédilection pour chiner et acheter des sacs des années 1940 et 1950, que je fais défaire et dont les fermoirs seront restaurés si nécessaire.

Le passé somptueux d'Alexandrie a marqué une fois de plus le présent... un présent si fascinant qui s'adapte aux besoins et à l'évolution du temps. En Égypte, comme ailleurs ! Je le découvre avec curiosité et émerveillement au fil des promenades que je fais dans ma ville natale...

www.unebagatelle.com



BASIL PESTO

The two main ingredients for pesto — basil and olive oil — are widely used in Mediterranean cuisine. Italian pesto sauce is very versatile. It can be added to pasta, chicken or fish, or used as a spread, as a pizza topping, or in salads. It can be made light and creamy or thick and chunky depending on the amount of oil added. The original pesto recipe is green, but there is also a red variety to which sun-dried tomatoes or peppers have been added. Sometimes different nuts, such as walnuts or cashew nuts, are added instead of pine nuts.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups fresh basil
- ½ cup toasted pine nuts
- 1 cup grated parmesan cheese or Romano cheese
- 3 cloves crushed garlic
- ¼ to ½ cup olive oil (depending on how creamy you want it)

METHOD

1. Blend the basil, pine nuts, cheese and garlic in a food processor.
2. Slowly add the olive oil and blend into a smooth paste.
3. Keep refrigerated in a sealed glass jar.



LIME CHICKEN PASTA WITH PESTO AND PEPPERS

INGREDIENTS

- 4 chicken breasts
- 2-3 limes
- 2 large red peppers
- Pasta (enough for 4 persons)
- Pesto
- Olive oil (just enough for cooking)
- Grated parmesan or cheddar cheese
- Ground black pepper

METHOD

1. Cut the chicken breasts into bite-size pieces and place in a glass or ceramic dish.
2. Wash and grate the limes and set the zest aside.
3. Squeeze the lime juice and add to the chicken pieces. Cover with cling film and refrigerate for 4-8 hours.
4. Heat the olive oil in a wok or deep frying pan. When the oil is hot add the chicken pieces, without the juice. Stir to cook evenly.
5. Once the outside of the chicken is cooked, add the juice.
6. Wash and slice the peppers. Add them to the chicken and keep stirring for a few minutes over a high heat.
7. Cook the pasta according to the instructions on the packet. (Spaghetti, linguini, penne or bow tie pasta can be used).
8. Reduce the heat under the chicken, add the rind from the limes to it and stir.
9. Drain the cooked pasta and replace in the saucepan. Add pesto according to taste and stir gently to coat the pasta evenly.
10. Serve the pasta on plates or bowls and spoon the chicken on top.
11. Add a twist of black pepper and grated cheese and it is ready to eat!



An amphora from Vulci, c.520 BCE, with a scene of olive-gathering by young people. British Museum

THE ORIGIN OF PESTO

Pesto has existed in various forms since Roman times and probably originated in North Africa. The Romans made a similar paste called *moretum* using garlic, feta cheese and herbs. The first known documented source of *moretum* is in Virgil's poem *Moretum*, in which a simple farmer named Symilus is described gathering herbs from the garden and then preparing *moretum* using the herbs, cheese, garlic and olive oil. In Roman times, the herbs added to *moretum* were coriander, parsley and rue. It was only much later that basil became the main ingredient.

ALEX-MED NEWSLETTER

Bringing the Mediterranean Together

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

Editor: Carole Escoffey
Graphics: Flora Cavoura
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Contact us:

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

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