

THE LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA: PAST AND FUTURE

Papyrus rolls, hundreds of thousands of rolls, carefully stacked in niches or in precious containers, also men, learned librarians or their erudite hosts, men who read books in order to write others, hardly paying heed to the vile rumblings of Alexandria, the unruly city, dreaming rather of tomorrow's lesson with the crown prince, their pupil, or even admiring from afar, protected by the shade of a portico, the silhouette of some queen, Cleopatra or Arsinoe or a Berenice counting her locks... it is now a little over two thousand years since then, men and books, the Library of Alexandria. It did not even lack a dramatic conflagration in 48 B.C. when it found itself on fire by the wind that blew from the burning fleet set ablaze by the foot soldiers of Julius Caesar, general, scholar and old beau of political love. But probably, the Library soon recovered.¹

Translated by Azza Karrarah.

¹ The sources at our disposal are not explicit enough for us to know the extent of destruction done to the Library. In any case, there existed a sister-library in the great sanctuary of Serapis which may have facilitated the restitution of a considerable part of the original fund. On the other hand, the tradition according to which Antony presented Cleopatra with the 200,000 volumes of the rival library of Pergamum (Asia minor) is to be taken with caution.

Twenty centuries later, the ambitious and generous project of resuscitating the Library of Alexandria takes shape and, with it, the desire to see the new institution fulfill, in our own time, with its universality and methods of research, the role that, in the Hellenistic period, the Library of Alexandria played in the advancement of the Greek Orient and, without its being suspected then, in the formation of the ancient and the modern world. For the Alexandrina was much more than a myth or a mirage. We would like to put it back within the perspective of the Greek culture it helped to save, within the Alexandrian world wherein it acted on the intellectual and scientific spheres, within the larger perspective of the development of Mediterranean cultures, cultures which to this very day mark with their seal more than four continents.

There is a double standard of references, to which I shall come back later on, that illustrates the importance of this phenomenon, both at the relative level and the absolute level. First of all we should remember that the Library of Alexandria was not an isolated phenomenon in the Hellenistic world: several royal cities, towns or Greek cities had their own library.² But, with the exception, maybe, of the younger royal Library of Pergamum or that still remaining centre of books that was Athens, none, in the long run, attained a similar effulgence, and neither Pergamum nor Athens seem to have afforded the same universality of the intellectual atmosphere. With reservation, we shall see that the Library of Alexandria was but one part (the most important one,

² A palace library that has recently been located is that of Ai-Khanum, site of the Hellenistic Kingdom of Bactria excavated by the French archaeological mission in Afghanistan. In 1977, in a hall attached to the treasury were discovered the remains or rather the ghosts of two books. In either case, whether papyrus or parchment the support of the writing had left but a pulverized trace. Yet the ink of the writing appeared in transfer on the agglomerated clay that had hardened parts of the manuscripts. Thus one could identify the remains of a papyrus roll of the middle of the 3rd century B.C. with a philosophical dialogue. This could have been brought from Greece or Alexandria by the philosopher Clearchus of Soli, disciple of Aristotle, who, we know from an inscription, had resided in that royal city and who could even maybe have been the author of this treatise. Deplorably mutilated, the remains of the writing of the other manuscript, a slightly more recent roll of parchment, reveal that it dealt with a tragedy or a comedy. Besides this, a theatre of a remarkable size has been excavated near the palace. On this Library, see Claude Rapin *Les textes littéraires de la Trésorerie d'Aikhanoum*. Bulletin de correspondance hellénique 111 (1987), pp. 225-266.

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it is true) of the Museum of Alexandria, the actual creation of Ptolemy I. It is to the Museum, the *Mouseion* or sanctuary of the Muses, that the praise, perhaps, should go which we bestow upon its library. No doubt, the Mouseion has become a victim of its name, vulgarized by losing its original meaning of Centre for Culture.

The other standard of reference, on the absolute level, can be disclosed when we set up a balance sheet of the direct and indirect effect the Alexandrina had on the pre-Christian world and subsequent religious movements, on Latin literature as well as on Arabic science, on the establishment of grammatical and logical rules for literary debates, scientific discourses and theological discussion—and we can continue this enumeration for a long time.

Let us, here and now, discard a few doubtful fictitious features, as the history of the Library of Alexandria depends neither on tales nor on hagiography; and let us, to begin with, draw attention to a series of cultural convergences and evolutions—in addition to a number of political incidents—that, at a specific moment in the evolution of the eastern Mediterranean, could render possible the influence which the Library of Alexandria, restricted cosmos as it was, could exercise long after its destruction. Men create institutions to suit their own time, but great institutions are those that are carried along with time and are directed in tracks which even the wisest could not have foreseen and which expand even when the creation of men is but a forgotten shade. We are aware, nowadays, of the last echoes of these convergences in quite dissimilar spheres. Let us consider for example—with the modernity of Alexandria in mind—the new connections that have been created between man and the memory of men that are books, or also, and here history turns cynical, the prestige of scholarship and science reduced, under the circumstances to serve less acceptable prestiges, that is, the King's prestige (still we must admit that we prefer this kind of perversion to that of an *auto-da-fê*, the placing on the index or enforced silence).

We should, at the onset, establish the location of Alexandria which was then a new site, where these convergences had the chance, more than anywhere else, of being fruitful. For the location of the library in the most prestigious capital produced by the

Greco-Macedonian diaspora, furnished the preliminary conditions necessary for an exceptional success.

In 331 B.C. Alexander III of Macedon founded, at a short distance from the muddy waters issuing from the Delta, the first of numerous Alexandrias which up to the Indus would brand the Orient with his name. By conquering Egypt or rather, in the eyes of the Egyptians, liberating the country from the yoke of the impious Achaemenides, he had transformed the incredible adventure of a *condottiere* into the conquest of an empire. The Macedonian had found there important Greek settlements struggling for survival along the edges of the Delta, at Memphis or probably higher up on the banks of the Nile. Was it inspired intuition, the art of paying due consideration to the advice of experts or a game of chance determinism released by the Great of this world in the face of the hazard of their decisions? By founding Alexandria on the seashore, Alexander reversed the gaze of the Greek settlers in Egypt from the Nile towards the Mediterranean. He offered to his new city destinies that were vast and manifold: beyond its maritime horizon, the harbour opened out onto Cyrenaica, Greece, Asia Minor and Syria, furthermore it was intermediary between the world overseas and the Nile valley and farther beyond, Nubia and the Red Sea with its outlets. These military or commercial routes were footpaths over which many a culture would seep in. They did not make Alexandria (though they gave her a certain cosmopolitan character) but they found in her the stepping stone that would open up for them the Roman world and later the West of Islam.

The empire of Alexander the Great survived with wraithlike successors to the throne and with a territorial system which was inspired, at least in the Orient, by the actual decentralization of Achaemenian organization. After Alexander, the satrapy of Egypt fell to the lot of Ptolemy, son of Lagos, of a lesser Macedonian aristocracy but companion of Alexander's youth and one of his best generals. Ptolemy had the good fortune to secure for himself, not without some mishaps, the corpse of Alexander and to entomb in his capital the founder hero of the city and the first Macedonian pharaoh of Egypt. Ptolemy was as wise in political as in military affairs, and he must have realized the prestige and authority that

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would be conferred upon him as custodian and promoter of a nascent mighty myth simply asking to be exploited. In Egypt, Greeks and Egyptians construed well enough the situation as it developed. A marriage contract of the year 311, the most ancient Greek papyrus to be carefully dated, expresses in legal terms the ambiguity of authority. The document is respectfully dated in the year 7 of Alexander's posthumous son, poor little Alexander IV, who was, soon afterwards, to be assassinated in Macedonia. But at the same time, there is a more effectual date attached to the document, the year 14 of the satrapy of the actual master; a reckoning which harmoniously binds the authority of Ptolemy to the reign of the founder of the Empire. In 305, following the bad example of some of his colleagues, Ptolemy cast his helmet over any scruples he may still have had and placed the royal diadem on his own head while the reckoning of the years of his reign continued as though it were he who had succeeded the great Alexander.

The first Ptolemy had no Theocritus or Callimachus, like his successors, to extol his reign, and yet more and more one begins to realize the importance of the role played by the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty in the organization of his kingdom and his capital.

Ptolemy I was the founder of the Library of Alexandria or rather, as we mentioned before, of the Mouseion. Anyway our sources only recognize the latter as an urban entity in the complex of the royal palaces. In a lighter manner of speaking one could consider it as being a combined cultural as well as research centre, but this would be using rather erroneous modern terminology. A cultural centre, in our time, suggests introducing masses of amateurs to art and exposing or initiating the multitude to culture, whereas a centre of research assumes a specialized effort in the large universal sphere of science. The Mouseion was quite a different thing; primarily an annex of the royal palace, the King established it to satisfy his own pleasure as a royal collector but mainly to enhance his prestige as a royal patron of the arts and sciences. King by the grace of himself and "*nouveau riche*", Ptolemy, like his successors, was most anxious to establish the legitimacy of a rule which he had at first justified by securing it at the point of the lance against his Macedonian

rivals. It was found out that he was related to the family of the Argeads as was the great Alexander himself and his ancestors, and that he was also descended, among others, from Heracles! On a more intellectual plane, the Mouseion and its library could equally assure him of a double legitimacy by placing him at one and the same time within a royal Macedonian tradition as well as within a Greek cultural tradition. As early as the fifth century, king Archelaus of Macedon had attracted to the court of Pella a few writers of renown such as the old Euripides, upholder of the "new" theatre. Philip II had surrounded himself with Greek thinkers and had summoned Aristotle to Pella in order to entrust him with the education of the young Alexander. This piece of information has its significance, for Ptolemy in this respect followed their example and entrusted the education of his son to one of the foremost Greek philologists, Philitas of Cos, a collector of difficult words but already prominent as philologist poet, as will become, later on, Apollonius Rhodius, Callimachus and many more illustrious masters of the Mouseion. The education of the royal children would henceforth remain one of the tasks of the chief librarians.

In founding the Mouseion and its library, Ptolemy also enrolled himself in a young but vigorous Greek tradition, that of the early teaching and debating libraries which had appeared, in Athens at least, during the fourth century, such as the library of Plato's Academy and above all the first large encyclopedic library of the Lyceum. In it, Aristotle had amassed the large bibliographic basis on which he had founded his work as well as the first taxonomy the living world has known, of thought and political corpora. The investigations conducted by his disciples greatly contributed to enrich his ground work. It was in the atmosphere emanating from the Lyceum and formed by the teachings of Aristotle and Theophrastus, that Ptolemy would find the guiding inspiration for his foundation and the man who would organize the Museum and its Library. The Athenian, Demetrius of Phaleron was among the numerous poets and philosophers drawn, very early on, to Alexandria and the court of Ptolemy. In fact this pupil of Theophrastus was even a refugee in the city. The exile had cut short a career of philosopher-politician which had led to a sort of mongrel tyranny of pro-Macedonian sentiments, hardly less

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bearable to the Athenians than his disdain for democracy. Having tried in vain to attract the great Theophrastus, Ptolemy accordingly took his disciple as advisor. Demetrius of Phaleron was, incidentally, largely responsible for the adoption of Attic law as a basis for the Alexandrian civil code.

Asked to establish a prestigious centre of learning, he transposed the idea of Aristotle's Lyceum to Alexandria, an ideal framework for a peripatetic institution: a place of worship, a place for team work and a library. Officially, a sanctuary for the Muses, the Mouseion became a haven where a few of the Greek scholars, the most representative of their time, philologists or scientists, usually both at the same time, as well as poets, could enjoy a respectable career. Undoubtedly this privileged system aroused the envy of many. The satiric poet Timon of Phlius, who had a bitter tongue and most probably also an empty stomach, represented the Museum and its library as a mass breeding place for scribbling birds when he wrote:

In the Muses aviary
In populous Egypt
Scribblers of books
Are crammed together

However, shrewd organizer and true disciple of Aristotle as he was, Demetrius seems to have fathomed what one of the major prerequisites of the problem was: in order to create a great intellectual centre, it is essential to find men, the very best, before finding them books or allotting them tasks. This policy remained for long the rule at the court of Alexandria. The task was furthermore rendered much easier, as there was no comparison between the means at the disposal of Aristotle in Athens and the resources of the early Ptolemies who dazzled their age with their wealth, mobilizing it to make of the Mouseion and its library "the Best in the World". Royal prestige was at stake; the passion of a collector and a certain poor taste typical of the upstart, did the rest. Gold attracted ancient manuscripts, authentic as well as fake (in a way, as the dollar would, with Impressionist paintings). The main book marts were explored, Athens, Rhodes and Ionia. Better still,

old editions were borrowed far and wide or confiscated from passing vessels, a new copy would generously and condescendingly be given in restitution while endowing the royal Library, at the same time, with yet another precious volume. But be it to the credit of the Alexandrian dynasty that the first Ptolemy and his two successors assembled in their library the whole of literary heritage, the main currents of philosophical thought and the entire knowledge of the Greek world, and that they entrusted it to men who were worthy of managing such a library, while welcoming others who were capable of using it.

Only those who make of philology a craft can truly appreciate the list of great directors who succeeded one another at the head of the Alexandrina. To begin with, there was Zenodotus of Ephesus, pupil of Philitas of Cos. I would like to call him Zenodotus the Magnificent, for, as the first, he created erudite philology and little does he deserve the criticism, sometimes astringent, which his successors, matured by the systems he had explored, were prepared to direct against the pioneer in gratitude for what he had set in motion. For better or worse, Zenodotus tried to put some order and give some coherence to the medley of discordant Iliads and Odysseys that had poured in from all the corners of the Greek world. There he had in front of him most marvellous texts, soul of the Greek soul, and it was with the literary style which can so easily conceal the idea in the author's text, that he exerted himself in the most profound asceticism of philology, the compelling quest after the authentic text, the only text that could be authentic. For long have the poems ascribed to Homer been the object of study and interpretation and commentaries—even of philosophical speculation. But by adopting a rigorous course that aimed at establishing an authorized text, Zenodotus not only launched the great school of Alexandrian philology but also enabled modern philology to take a decisive step forward that would only find its equivalent much later in the textual criticism of the New Testament and later still in the more recent outburst of linguistics.

After Apollonius Rhodius, the poet of the *Argonautica*, the office of director of the Alexandrina fell to a Greek from Africa, Eratosthenes of Cyrene who was working in Athens when Ptolemy

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III summoned him to the Mouseion. By himself, he represents all the dimensions which new scholarship, born under the aegis of the royal palace, had achieved within half a century. His *Chronographies*, which relieved Greek history of its mythical burden, continued the earlier works on antique chronology started by the two Hippias, by Aristotle and by Timaeus, and based it definitely, among other things, on the Olympiad system which he perfected. With this work, Eratosthenes is already the father of synchronous history by collecting parallel references where even Rome seems to have had its place. Occasional philosopher, he was an erudite philologist whose work on ancient comedy, for example, was epoch-making and still forms the basis for the studies of modern literary historians. His work as geographer was considerable. Need one call to mind that he calculated the circumference of the earth with an approximation sufficient to make us applaud his method? The error in his calculations, very slight in fact, was due to the imprecise means, at his time, of gauging large distances of land, and this directly affected the accuracy of his results.

I cannot undertake to present a list of the directors of the Library of Alexandria. But, let us evoke, in passing, the image of the philologist, Aristophanes of Byzantium who has set the pattern for our editions of the Greek poets probably for all time, or that of Aristarchus to whom one doubtlessly owes the critical statement of a first century of Alexandrian philology.

But there were not only librarians. The Mouseion, by the conditions under which it existed and under which research was conducted, as well as by the prestige of Ptolemaic royal patronage, had a unifying effect on Hellenistic literature, scholarship and science, that far exceeded the institutional framework of its library. Euclid, who saw the beginnings of the Museum, established therein a tradition of geometry; the mathematician, Aristarchus of Samos conceived in it the heliocentric system of the universe; Archimedes of Syracuse undoubtedly spent there a long time and endowed Egypt with the water-raising screw. The mathematician Apollonius of Perge developed there at least part of his work; while Herophilus the anatomist and maybe Erasistratus the physiologist, two eminent landmarks in the history of ancient medicine, represent

only part of the decisive contribution made by Alexandria towards the evolution in the art of healing, a contribution that paved the way for its revival in the imperial period. Alexandrian science was often abused during the squabbles of subsequent schools, but its successors, under the Empire, often fell short when compared with Alexandrian attainments. It is difficult to determine how far all these scholars were connected with the royal centre of research but it would be impossible to imagine that they did not make use of its library. In certain cases this is certain and the scholar is never far from the philologist. The Alexandrians were at pains to create a terminology that would fix their observations and their thoughts. With regard to medicine, one can take it for granted that with the flow of books and scholars from the Greek world, the library was well endowed with a solid medical foundation. It came, among other places, from Cos. But the gem of all was the Hippocratic Corpus which Herophilus, between two dissections, had commented upon and most probably actually edited according to the new standards of Alexandrian philology. But it is just as important to note that these same men embarked on their scientific research with more faith in experimentation and live observation than in the authority of books of learning as was still the prevailing practice among members of the school of Aristotle, and above all they were not prepared to hunt out for alibis in the traditions in order to maintain their own vision of the world. We would have to wait till modern times and Protestantism when such an attitude would no longer be fraught with heavy risks.

One of the guests of the Library of Alexandria who ended up by being a permanent guest, was Callimachus of Cyrene, scholar poet and poet scholar, magnificently present in our studies by his literary work, as was the librarian Apollonius Rhodius, his bosom enemy. However, in addition to epic hymns in honour of the Gods of Olympus or aetiological poems on myths and legends of the Greek world, a number of iambics, elegies and epigrams and a few astringent thrusts against the poetry of his rival, he still had the time to compile a monumental descriptive index of the Library, the *Pinakes*, of which unfortunately only a few fragments remain. Only a centre like the Mouseion and its Library could have thus shaped the strange destiny of this adolescent from Cyrene in whom

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the Apollonian inspiration grew with the down on his cheek and the ambition in his heart. Callimachus had gone out one day towards the rising sun seeking glory in the already legendary city of the Ptolemies. A tradition has it that his first appearance there was as a schoolmaster in the suburbs. Soon, undoubtedly, his growing erudition as well as a few poems written to the glory of the dynasty or to the Mighty at court, opened up for him the Library and the austere, though comfortable, delights of royal philology. At length came the twilight of his life as courtier poet, a twilight illuminated by the presence in Alexandria of a young queen who had also come from Cyrene, from Greek Africa. Caressing her hair with seemly melancholy, Berenice halts her tapering fingers at the amputated strands of a lock, of the Lock. As promised to the gods, she had placed it on the altar in front of the temple of Arsinoe Zephyritis in gratitude for having finally brought back her husband who had gone warring in the East. The day after, the light ex-voto had disappeared. Some over meticulous sexton had removed it or, what was more likely and held to be true, a breath of Zephyr had carried it hence at the instigation of Aphrodite. At that precise moment, in the Library, the mathematician Conon of Samos interrupted for an instant his calculation on the eclipses of the sun, and astutely discovered the royal Lock in the firmament within a small shining constellation of which he had opportunely just discovered the existence. One can be sure that, old courtier that he was, he carried the first tidings to the young Queen without telling Callimachus about it. Callimachus promptly abandoned for a while his descriptive catalogue of the Library in order to add to the 4th song of his *Aitia* a passage of erudite gallantry, charming and just the right thing to please sovereigns, the *Lock of Berenice* was perhaps his last fling as their majesties' poet. The Museum was also this kind of sport. Practically nothing has remained of the works of Conon, and we have found nothing but a few papyrus fragments with some distiches by Callimachus. Time, the pulverizer of books is also, alas, connected for us with the image of the Museum of Alexandria. But fortunately others have adopted the theories of Conon and have sometimes even cited his name while pilfering his treatises, meanwhile a young Latin poet translated the *Lock*. Catullus thus

permits us to fully savour a poem made up of erudition and the respectful fantasies of an old man deeply moved by the thought of the youthful body that had found once more its king. This survival of information in the works of others or the interpretations we give to them, that also, is Alexandria and her Library.

In the following century the scholar philologists of the Museum had the misfortune and the luck to be persecuted and dispersed, to the great loss of the Library and the benefit of philology. In Alexandria it had been for long very easy to know where the duty of a loyal subject of the Ptolemies lay. One had to labour for the king and this would justify the place each one, Greek or Macedonian, poet, minister, civil servant or soldier, occupied in the kingdom for the glory and gain of the king, the good order of things and, if possible, one's own glory and one's own gain (which also forms part of the good order of things). The dynastic quarrels of the second century complicated matters, so much the more as two foreign powers, Rome and Syria, took an active interest in the drift of the Ptolemaic empire. One had to choose one's prince, and Alexandria chose badly. Towards 145, Ptolemy VIII ended by taking over after bloody vicissitudes. He treated most brutally notable Alexandrians and members of the court who had favoured his rivals. The Librarian, Aristarchus, whose aggressive temperament had gained him many enemies, had been, according to tradition, the preceptor of several princes and particularly of the young Neos Philopator. Hardly had Neos Philopator been designated co-regent with Ptolemy VIII when the latter had him assassinated in the best Macedonian tradition. Aristarchus probably disapproved of this and in any case he felt endangered and fled to Cyprus. Other philologists followed suit. Some of them may have earlier anticipated the move to escape from the overbearing character of Aristarchus. Whatever the case may be, the aviary of the Muses was abandoned. Some did not hesitate to cross over to the "enemy" and go to Pergamum whose Library and scholarship were at their peak and where Alexandria, its Museum and its Librarian Aristarchus were vehemently criticized. The Alexandrian Dionysius of Thrace (descended from Thracian immigrants in Egypt and duly Hellenized) settled in Rhodes where he taught grammar and literature in the best tradition of the

Museum, not without submitting, in his new intellectual entourage, to the influence of the philological stoics of Pergamum. He left us an *Ars grammatica* which has remained a model for the teaching of grammar in Europe until quite recently. When, as children, we juggled rightly or wrongly with such surrealist words as “adverb”, “neutre”, “indicative” or “accusative”, we were using the Alexandrian terminology of Dionysius of Thrace, translated more or less fortuitously by Latin grammarians from the Hellenistic period onward, simply because Rhodes became, very early on, a relay station for Alexandrian philology on its way to Rome.

The dispersion of Alexandrian philologists likewise hastened the diffusion of methods perfected in Alexandria for the establishing of correct editions of authors. The vigor of commerce and of the circulation of books in the Hellenistic period, contrived to spread, far and wide, even before the events of 145, the Alexandrian techniques of editing especially in other centres where good philology was practiced. To facilitate and abridge the commentaries of texts (which always formed a separate book, as in our more scholarly modern editions of ancient authors), Zenodotus and his successors progressively perfected a system of critical symbols which connected different scrolls, such as the “small star” or *asteriskos* which, when placed before a verse, signified that it could be found elsewhere... and which can still be seen on the keyboard of our mini-computers. Thus it was in Rhodes, around 100 B.C. that the first good Latin philologist, Aelius Stilo learned to manipulate the Alexandrian symbols and to use them in Rome, thereby inaugurating the second channel by which they would reach the scribes of our medieval Greek and Latin manuscripts, and from them, our printers.

The Hellenistic book (exemplified more clearly in the work at the Alexandria by Alexandrian editions and treatises) is all the more remarkable on a wider scale. It represents what I would call the second generation of the “new book” born discretely in the fourth century when books ceased to be rare objects and became integrated in well established organizations as, for example, the libraries of philosophical schools.

Up to then, the book had been a depository, the mere graphic sustainer and memorizer of an intellectual creation. Socrates was

still at the oral stage of transmitting a thought which Plato attempted to reproduce in order to be able to criticise with more authority the books of the great sophists (Socrates may very well have been the pretext used by Plato to try his hand in the Dialogues at what was to become the new book). With the fourth century but mainly with Aristotle, followed by Hellenistic scholarship, the book no longer remained a mere support, but became at one and the same time the object and instrument of analysis and interpretation. In the Library of Alexandria, the majority of works registered, then trimmed by the philologists, was doubled by the output of the second generation, based sometimes on the critical treatment of the text and sometimes on the critical treatment of observation. Thus it was the forerunner of modern scientific literature and not only philological and philosophical studies. The enterprise was not without danger, as the written word is capable of creating an impression by its technicality that can lead to rigidity. After Hipparchus, came Ptolemy and a return to the geocentric theory and there were few spheres in which scholasticism, medicine, debated by citation thrusts, and a cosmology, respectful, above all, of texts were not fairly quickly represented.

But we abandoned the Library too soon. In reality, the dispersion of its scholars was not the only cause of the decline that followed. Great intellectual movements can have but one age. Soon after came the era of setting in order and of effective mediocrity, when a number of compilers of the works of the masters were prodigiously active. Didymus, in the 1st century B.C. was the most brilliant among them. He is accredited to have edited more than 3000 books, including 3000 scrolls written in his own hand. Many of them were probably not much more than a copy of the original manuscript, as must have been the case with the majority of memoirs laid at the disposal of other philologists in the niches of the Alexandrina. But we should not belittle him or his emulators. They transmitted to following generations what they considered to be the most interesting or the most worthwhile controversies in the works of their predecessors. By being guilty of plagiarism, they saved them from total extinction. They did better still. Didymus, for example, worked on the Aristarchian tradition of Homer, on

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the Hippocratic Corpus, composed indexes of difficult or curious words, links in the uninterrupted chain of lexicons which, since old Philitas, were copied and transmitted from Alexandria and Rome to Byzantium, to be followed by Henri Estienne and the great modern Greek dictionaries, at least those just prior to the still very young age of the computerised thesaurus. During the Imperial epoch, the Museum was reorganized, philology was practised with less ardour, but scholarship survived. In philosophy, the city became an eminent centre of neoplatonism, but, before that, the school of Origen had brilliantly demonstrated that Alexandria, “teacher of the world,” could be the same for intellectual Christianity (as she had long been for Hellenized Judaism). But in all this, the role played by the Museum and the Library is not well established and quite often it is indirect. At the end of the fourth century when traditional culture roused the righteous fury of the new Faith,³ the Alexandrian rabble, in one of its customary outbursts of violence, lynched the beautiful and cultured Hypatia, daughter of Theon, the last great mathematician of the Museum; Hypatia, whom a Christian historian would shortly afterwards hail as the foremost philosopher of her time. Maybe the new Library of Alexandria can look forward to having a hall dedicated to its holy pagan martyr. For I should not forget that these remarks about the Alexandrina were requested of me within the framework of a synthesis that would help us justify the project of the New Library of Alexandria to the responsible organizations. In the great Mediterranean city, time and misfortune have progressively covered with their rubble the grid-patterned plan presented by the architect Deinocrates of Rhodes to Alexander the Great. But the city has nevertheless preserved its wide horizons and the footpaths of culture that meet there are as numerous and as rich as in antiquity. They would expand for the benefit of everyone if the city could once more have at its disposal a cultural instrument equal to that of the past, and regain, placed as it is at the heart of the

³ We do not wish to embark upon the insoluble problem of the eventual destruction of libraries in Alexandria, whether by the Christians at the end of the 4th century or later on by the Arabs at the time of the conquest of Egypt. At any rate, Greek culture survived in both cases and Alexandria seems to have played a not insignificant role in the transference of entire aspects of Greek philosophy, medicine and science into Arab culture.

Mediterranean world and the Near East, its role as treasure house of the culture of mankind. The University of Alexandria presented in 1985 the ambitious and well balanced programme for an encyclopaedic library, less universal it is true, but more specialized in certain fields: the Mediterranean and the Middle East, oriental cultures, the history of medicine and science, African studies with an optional theme, the intellectual development of Islam. The most recent modern equipment used in great libraries should be provided for.

The Library, especially if, as we hope, it has finance and patronage that are exceptionally large, should be conceived in accordance with modern ways of thinking and study and with all the requirements that this entails. In fact, looking at the various programmes mapped out for it, I am not quite sure whether they are not thinking more of a Mouseion of the 21st century, than merely of a new Alexandrina, a sanctuary for computerized Muses at the feet of an Apollo with laser rays. Certainly, these up-to-date divinities must have their quarters there, but one should necessarily, especially if one wishes to go beyond the project of the University of Alexandria, ask oneself about the place basic human studies will hold in what hopes to be the new Library of Alexandria, their place and above all their quality, which primarily requires the freedom and stability of scholars. Will humanistic studies also occupy a prominent place in it? The question is not out of place in a meeting held under the auspices of the Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies.

It is far from my mind to disparage the exact sciences which, from the 17th century onward to our present day, by subjugating the instruments of observation and by creating their own terminology, a deontology and ways of argumentation and quantification unconceived of in antiquity, have extrapolated our perception of the world with regard to its maximum and minimum infinity. Neither will I object to a humanism that underlies the third and more recent pillar of the human intellect which is the creation of technology, technology that has inverted the connection between science and the instrument. Anyway, the conflict between two cultures attributed to Snow, or the infernal triangle of three cultures which the technical revolution seems to propose to us, are

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nothing but a rhetorical mirage. And, in any case, the function of science is certainly necessary to rid great human traditions of their burden of errors. But the fact remains that neither scientific thinking, which must be amoral, nor its triumphant parasite, technology, necessarily aim at the happiness and dignity of man, even though they alone have improved a number of conditions that are preliminaries to happiness and dignity. What we need more is a way of thinking that is political, philosophical, critical and fully aware of the rules of causality, we need an assiduous effort to rescue all components of culture and all strata of history and the will to guard them from any temptation to include them among ideological principles. This way of thinking, this effort and this desire will help man to settle permanently and quietly the only valid considerations basic to his destiny as progressive man: the history of the defective man of the past and the objective analysis of the failing human relations of the present. But I fear that if he is not supported by a general background very rich and open to the most varied inspirations of fundamental humanistic studies, the choice of a specialization, inevitably affected by local circumstances, would hardly be able to respond fully to the way of thinking, the effort and the desire that I have just evoked.

Meanwhile, humanistic studies are not all that harmless either. The Orator remains the master of the city. And the Orator can be corrupted and can corrupt. But, ultimately, only humanistic studies and philosophy, provided they are free, can create the man capable of confronting this corrupt Orator. In its time and by ways which seemed then to be the legitimate approaches to the process of thinking, the old Library of Alexandria had constituted the treasure house that equipped this process of thinking.

Other centres such as Pergamum did the same with an even sharper perception of the problem of man confronted with his destiny. It is true, the Alexandrina operated under the shadow of a palace and its intrigues, it was paralysed by a certain number of epistemological and socio-cultural obstacles. But it had garnered the sum total of Greek cultural experience, literary, scientific and technical and had tentatively created the first bridges with other cultures. The responsibility suggested for the New Alexandrina is that of the intellectual and moral experience of all mankind. The

programme is worthy to be proposed to the organizations that have a universal vocation and who alone have the means of transforming into hard bricks and solid men, the dream of our meeting.

May I give the final word to Eratosthenes of Cyrene, the African Greek whom I have already mentioned. It is difficult not to be reminded of a being so wholly devoted to the fraternity of cultures. For him, the reflections of the philologist, the historian and the geographer covering the entire universe and the course of history, could but lead to one conviction: the unity of the human race and the concept that between Greek and non-Greek there was neither moral difference nor intellectual difference the world over. Is it not often that we perceive in him a degree of admiration for foreigners, be they Egyptians, Romans, Carthaginians, Indians or Iranians? Undoubtedly, the remarks of our Librarian were isolated instances in his world and we know that in the study of man, the isolated phenomenon reveals, in fact, the refusal or rather the inability of the surrounding milieu to accept it. For Eratosthenes it was the end of a long journey. May it also be the starting point for the New Alexandrina provided one extends the words of the intellectual Greek to their new dimensions: respect due to all cultures and equality for all human beings. Let us find a Demetrius of Phaleron (but he will be democratic and quite modern), who, with the wisdom of his model, will envisage the New Library and recruit for it choice men fit for a seat of wisdom at the service of mankind, a treasure house of all past ages and for all, a laboratory for a future of dignity and maybe, of happiness.

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