Alexandria

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35 Cameo with the city goddess of Alexandria

Egypt. 1st century BC
Plasma. 1.7 × 1.4 × 0.3 cm
Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Berlin State Museums. Inv. ÄM 9781

On twisted columns rests a tympanum in the middle of which there is a star or cross. Both the pediment and the capitals are decorated with vegetal motifs, most likely palm branches. The centre is filled by a female bust seen in left-side profile; the figure is wearing a richly pleated gown. The headgear can be interpreted as an elephant hood whose skin is indicated by lozenge shapes. If this interpretation is correct, this is a relatively rare depiction of the goddess of the city of Alexandria whose attributes include two ears of corn. [JHD]

ALEXANDRIA was the greatest city of the eastern Mediterranean, second in the Roman empire only to Rome itself. With an urban core of about 10 square kilometers and a population at its peak of perhaps a half million, it was by ancient standards huge; only Antioch in Syria came close to rivaling it. Because it is buried so deep under the modern city, we know much less about it from archaeology than we do about its rivals, with even the location of some of its most famous monuments still hotly debated. Some of ancient Alexandria now lies under the waves of its harbour, thanks to the subsidence of the land. Compared to Rome, it has given us only a small number of inscriptions on stone.[1] But energetic and opportunistic archaeological exploration in recent decades has given new life to its study,[2] and the growth of Late Antiquity as a field of study has brought into view much more of its rich literary and theological production.

The city was laid out from its foundation by Alexander the Great in 331 BC on a grid, with the longer dimension running east-west parallel to the sea. Its larger harbour was bounded by the promontory of Cape Lochias on the east and the artificial dike of the Heptastadion on the west, connecting the mainland with the island of Pharos – on which Ptolemy II built the great lighthouse that was reckoned to be one of the wonders of the world (Fig. 38). To the west was a smaller, but still sizable, harbour. Together these gave Alexandria one of the finest harbours in the ancient world, drawing the commerce that was a major contributor to Alexandrian cosmopolitanism. The population was exceptionally diverse for an ancient city. Alexandria was not only the hub of eastern Mediterranean trade but the capital of Egypt under the Ptolemies and the Romans. The Ptolemies had attracted or simply imported many settlers from all over the Greek world but also the Levant, including a large Jewish population from early in the Ptolemaic period.[3] Roman commerce with East Africa, Arabia and India largely passed through the city on its way up the Nile and across the desert. Of Alexandria's five quarters, one and part of a second were occupied by the Jewish population. But we know next to nothing of these quarters and what they were like, thanks to the poverty of the archaeological record. Only a handful of Hellenistic houses have been even partly excavated, and no temples or synagogues of the period have been located; things are hardly better in the Roman period.[4]

Governing a population of this diversity was no simple matter. The Alexandrians were famous for their unruliness and, on occasion, mob violence. Although Ptolemaic

36 Mosaic depicting Alexandria

Mosaic from the Church of St John the Baptist at Jerash, Jordan, depicting the city of Alexandria c.531.

37 Furniture fittings depicting the cities of Constantinopole, Antioch, Rome and Alexandria

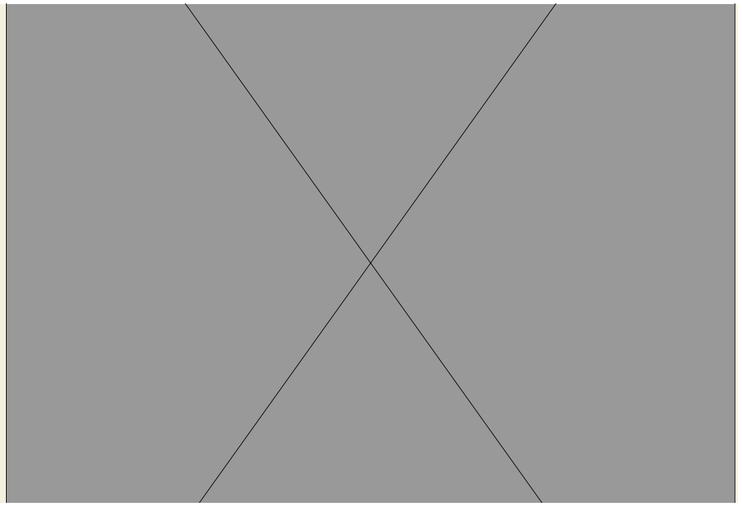
Rome, Esquiline Hill; part of the Esquiline Treasure.
330–70
Silver and gold. 17.9 × 6.4 × 19.5 × 9.3 cm; 18.5 x 6.9 cm; 18.8 x 5.3 cm
British Museum, London. BM BEP 1866,1229.21-24

The four most important cities of the Roman world in the 4th century are here represented as female personifications or goddesses known as Tychai. These four cities also became, by the end of the 4th century, the most important seats of Christian bishops, with Constantinople supplanting Jerusalem by virtue of the former's imperial status as the New Rome. Alexandria wears a crown depicting the city walls complete with turrets and gates; she carries fruit and sheaves of wheat symbolizing the bounty shipped up the Nile and exported through the city's great harbour (represented by the ship's prow upon which she rests her foot). [ERO]
Bib: Cat. New York 1979, no. 55 (pp. 176–77)

Alexandria had laws modelled on those of Athens, it did not import Athenian democratic institutions. The Ptolemies preferred to control their capital more directly. The evolution of civic institutions is poorly known, but the Romans were no fonder than the Ptolemies of giving free rein to a fractious populace, and it was not until the third century AD that Alexandria even got a city council. Alexandrian citizenship was limited to Greeks, and tightly restricted under the empire, but it was highly prized for, among other things, the exemption from the poll tax, paid by Egyptians, that it brought.[5] The question whether Jews were, or could be, full Alexandrian citizens proved a perennial source of conflict under the early emperors.[6]

As the seat of Roman power in Egypt, Alexandria housed the offices of the prefect (an equestrian official), along with the other high officials who supported him in running a highly centralized power structure.[7] It was also the centre for the imperial cult in Egypt, based in the Caesareum temple located near the sea at a spot not yet securely identified (see focus 4).[8] Just outside the city, at Nicopolis, was the most important Roman garrison post in Egypt. It is hardly surprising that the imperial government kept Alexandrian government limited and relatively powerless for more than two centuries. Septimius Severus, at the beginning of the third century, permitted Alexandria to have a council, at the time that he allowed the same privilege to the fifty or so capitals of the Egyptian administrative districts called nomes. But it should not be supposed that he intended this to weaken the power of the central government over this critical city.

38 Plan of the city of Alexandria in Late Antiquity



39 Drachma of Hadrian

Mint of Alexandria. 130–31
Bronze. Diameter 33 mm; weight 30.61 g; die axis 12 h
Numismatic Collection, National Museums in Berlin.
Object. no. 18245941

This drachma of Hadrian dates from the 15th [Greek IE] year of the emperor's reign. The use of bronze embossing, still widespread in the 2nd century, with the nominal value of the drachma, is equivalent to six *obols* (silver coins), i.e. small values. A drachma corresponded roughly to the daily wage of a worker. The image on the reverse of the coin here alludes to the demonstrative solidarity between the province and the emperor. On the left is a personalized depiction of Alexandria with an elephant hood, and on the right is Emperor Hadrian in his toga and bearing his sceptre: he is being greeted by Alexandria with a kiss to the hand. The historical background to this numismatic design was a visit made by the emperor to Egypt between summer 130 and spring 131. [KD]

40 Drachma of Antoninus Pius

Mint of Alexandria. 148–49
Bronze. Diameter 35 mm; weight 29.20 g; die axis 12 h
Numismatic Collection, National Museums in Berlin.
Object. no. 18200455

The important Roman province of Alexandria, under imperial supervision, was supplied with coins embossed with the name of the capital; these circulated only in the province. Inscriptions are in Greek and, on the obverse of this coin, indicate the portrait of the reigning emperor. The reverses often include Egyptian or local references. The coins often bear the name of the regnal year of the emperor. Here, the reverse refers to the 12th [Greek IB] year of the reign of Antoninus Pius. The famous Pharos, the 3rd-century BC lighthouse of Alexandria, is shown with the goddess Isis Pharia/Pelagia in characteristic headdress, sistrum, and cloak blowing in the wind. This also alludes to the great feast of the goddess as protector of seafaring on 5 March. [KD]

41 Drachma of Hadrian

Mint of Alexandria. 127–28
Bronze. Diameter 35 mm; weight 26.43 g; die axis 1 h
Numismatic Collection, National Museums in Berlin.
Object no. 18245942

In the lower part of the reverse of this drachma, the regnal year is this time written out in full, as 'dodek[atou]', i.e. the 12th year. Above the reclining river god of the Nile, another numeral appears (Ις , i.e. 16). This indicates the optimal level of the Nile, a height of 16 cubits. If the waters of the Nile were too low, the fields were left dry; any higher than 16 cubits and the river caused great damage to dikes and flood barriers. So a high tide of 16 cubits was ideal for agriculture. The person of the emperor, pictured on the obverse of the coin, was seen as a guarantor of the population's security. The importance of the Nile is emphasized here by the figure of the personified river-god, and the reference to the optimal high tide. [KD]

42–43 Statues of the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus

Egypt, Alexandria. c.176–80; c.193–200
Imported marble. 182 × c.192 cm
British Museum, London. BM G&R 1802,0710.1-2

Both imperial statues were reportedly found together in 1801 among ruins along the coast of the eastern harbour of Alexandria, identified by the Napoleonic expedition as the location of the Caesareum. They were part of the group of about 20 monumental sculptures – together with the Rosetta Stone and the Sarcophagus of Nectanebo II (see no. 105) – conceded by the French to the British according to the terms of the Treaty of Alexandria on 30 August 1801. King George III gave the group to the British Museum upon their arrival to London. The two statues represent different aspects of an emperor's public persona – Marcus Aurelius wears the formal and official civilian garment of a Roman citizen, while Septimius Severus wears full military costume. Their flat, minimally carved backs confirm that they were both produced to be displayed in an architectural setting. [ERO]
Bib: Tkaczow 1993, no. 185, cf. 186; Bierbrier 1999, no. 7 (pp. 111–12; pl. 30)

44 Painted panel with the family of emperor Lucius Septimius Severus

Egypt, acquired 1931/32.
Late 2nd / early 3rd century
Wooden panel painting. Diameter 30.5 cm
Collection of Classical Antiquities, National Museums in Berlin. Inv. ANT 31329

In the winter of 199/200, Emperor Septimius Severus travelled to Egypt with his family, and there implemented a comprehensive set of administrative reforms. During his reign conversion to Christianity was made a penal offence, and there were local persecutions of Christians in Egypt and other places. This unique circular painting – believed to have been painted during the trip to Egypt – shows the imperial family in official garb. To the right of the emperor his wife Julia Domna is seen, and in the front are their sons. The emperor and princes are holding sceptres and wearing jewelled gold wreaths. After the death of their father in 211, both the sons of Septimius Severus succeeded him, according to plan, but towards the end of the same year, Caracalla had his brother murdered. Images of Geta were subsequently destroyed, as on this painted panel. [CF]

If Septimius Severus thought that an Egypt endowed with more substantial civic institutions would be less turbulent, he would have been disappointed. Hostility to his son Caracalla triggered a destructive slaughter in 215. The Palmyrene occupation and Aurelian's recovery of Alexandria in 272 led to extensive damage, including perhaps to whatever remained of the city's famous library.[9] Before the third century ended, another slaughter followed the emperor Diocletian's capture of Alexandria at the end of the revolt of Domitius Domitianus in 298. From that point to the Persian invasion in the seventh century, Alexandria played no role on the world stage that would expose it to such harm.[10] The extensive damage to the city's fabric suffered in the third century took many decades to make good, and probably Alexandria never quite fully recovered the physical splendour of earlier times.

45 Tetradrachm of Diocletian

Mint of Alexandria. 290–91
Billon. Diameter 20 mm; weight 7.28 g; die axis 11 h
Numismatic Collection, National Museums in Berlin. Object no. 18245940

From 20–21 AD, coins worth four drachmas (tetradrachms) were issued in Egypt, made from an alloy with a small quantity of silver known as 'billon'. The noble metal content decreased further over the next two centuries, and at the end of the 3rd century fell to less than 1%. The emperor Diocletian, who set out to reform the state in the areas of management, currency, and military and economic affairs, decentralized the production of coinage. From the 12th year of his reign (295-96), the independent coinage of the province was discontinued. It was replaced by the production, in Alexandria, of money that was valid throughout the empire. The familiar Egyptian coinage would be issued once again in the reign of the soon-ousted usurper Domitius Domitianus, in 297–98.

The tetradrachm of Diocletian shows on the left side of its reverse the father of the gods, Zeus, carrying a bowl in the right hand. His left arm is resting on a sceptre. At his feet on the left is an eagle – this was the animal associated with him. This image, quite conventional for a coin, depicts not only the main deity of the Greco-Roman pantheon, but also the new imperial order of the Roman Empire under Diocletian, with two main and two sub-emperors. The father of the gods himself was seen as on a par with Diocletian as senior emperor, who also had himself referred to as 'Iovius'. [KD]

46 Stela of Diocletian offering to the Buchis bull

Egypt, Hermonthis, excavated at the Bucheum. 288
Sandstone. 68 × 39 × 11 cm
British Museum, London. EA 1696

In Egypt, Roman emperors were often depicted in the traditional roles of ancient Egyptian kings. Here, Diocletian offers to the mummified bull-god, Buchis, whose cult was practiced in the Upper Egyptian capital of Hermonthis. The hieroglyphic text records the year in which the bull died. The last recorded burial of a Buchis bull dates to year 57 of Diocletian, or 340, long after the emperor's death. (In fact it was during the reign of the Christian emperor Constans II, 337–61). The priests of the Buchis cult may thus have circumnavigated the traditional system of dating which would have required an inappropriate representation of a Christian emperor offering to an Egyptian deity. [ERO]
Bib: Mond and Myers 1934, vol. 2:18-19, 34, 52, pl. XLVI; Grenier 1983.

The absence of external political shocks should not make one think that Alexandria enjoyed more than three centuries of calm, however. Internal strife remained an endemic part of Alexandrian life as much as it had in previous centuries. In the early fourth century the last and greatest wave of imperial persecutions of Christians helps to give this period a flavour of Christian–pagan struggle. From Constantine onwards, with Christianity the religion of the emperors except for

47 'Pompey's Pillar' engraving by Luigi Mayer, 1804

By the medieval period this column had already been misidentified as 'Pompey's Pillar', recalling Julius Caesar's rival who died in Egypt in 48 BC. As the dedicatory inscription states, it is in fact a victory column erected after Diocletian's eight-month siege of Alexandria in 298 when he recovered the city from the usurper L. Domitius Domitianus. The column shaft is carved from a single piece of Aswan granite measuring 20.46m high with a diameter of 2.71m. Standing almost 27m high with its capital and base atop the already-high ground of the promontory occupied by the Temple of Serapis (Serapeum), the victory column was visible throughout the ancient city. [ERO]
Bib: McKenzie 2007, xx.

the brief interlude of Julian's reign (361–63), the dominant struggles are those within Christianity itself. Our sources for these contests for power are almost exclusively written by Christians and must be used with caution. They show how Christian leaders could use battles with Alexandria's pagans for their own advantage, most dramatically in the destruction of the temple of Serapis in 391 or 392 (see ch.7).

The central figures in these developments were the bishops. The office of bishop of Alexandria, although traced in legends recounted by the church historian Eusebius all the way back to St Mark the Evangelist, becomes securely attested only in the Severan period.[11] The supremacy of the Alexandrian bishop over all of Egypt was still hotly contested in the early fourth century, as we can see in the attempt of Meletius, bishop of Lykopolis (now Asyut), to challenge the sole right of the Alexandrian bishop to name other bishops in the province.[12] The long tenure of Athanasius (bishop 324–73), marked by constant struggles with the successors of Meletius as well as the Arians, and punctuated by confrontations with emperors and several exiles from Alexandria, did little to unify Egyptian Christendom – but it did establish the supremacy of the bishop of Alexandria. His power over the church is often compared to that of the prefect over the civil administration. This is an exaggeration, certainly, but it is suggestive of his central importance all the same. The bishops were able, with the support of the emperor Constantius II, to take over the old imperial cult temple of the Caesareum and convert it into an episcopal church.[13] In the dying days of Roman rule, in the decade before the Arab conquest of 640–42, the offices were even united in the same individual – Cyrus.

48 Torso of an emperor

Egypt, Alexandria, found in the garden of the former German Consulate, acquired in 1909. 4th century
Porphyry. 96 × 45 × 36 cm
Sculpture Collection and Museum of Byzantine Art, Berlin State Museums. Inv. 6128

The almost life-size torso of the statue of an emperor, made from porphyry, is of the traditional Roman kind. Porphyry, a purple stone, was quarried from Mons Porphyrites near the Red Sea, and in Late Antiquity was reserved for imperial representations. Several statues of a related type, but executed in a more severe style, date from the time of Diocletian and his co-rulers in the late 3rd century. Apart from the material, the costume and attitude of the figure indicate that he was a member of the imperial family. The softer figure style is typical of the first half of the 4th century, the time of Constantine the Great and his sons. The figure is wearing a soldier's costume, consisting of a tunic, a short cloak pinned at the right shoulder by a studded brooch, and a wide belt. The right hand is reaching for a sword held by a strap. [CF]
Bib: Cat Hamm 1996; Tkaczow 1993, no. 273, p. 287

The Meletius controversy brought into high relief within the Christian sphere a central element of Alexandria's secular life – its role as capital of Egypt. The often-quoted name of the city, *Alexandria ad Aegyptum* (Alexandria by Egypt) is regularly misunderstood as a mark of separation. It is more nearly an indication of connection. 'Egypt' in this phrase means, as usually, the Nile valley; Alexandria was in fact 'by' and linked to the Nile valley rather than directly in it. It was Egypt's largest port (the port of Pelusium at the opposite side of the Delta was also very important). A complex administrative apparatus throughout Egypt reported to the administration in Alexandria. Even when Egypt was divided into multiple provinces from the time of Diocletian onwards, Alexandria remained the head of the whole. Grain for shipment to Rome or Constantinople was funnelled through Alexandria, money taxes were gathered there, and there was a constant flow of information and orders back and forth within the bureaucracy.

In private life as well, Alexandria was the hub of Egypt's activity. Wealthy Alexandrians owned land throughout the *chora* (the term used for the rest of Egypt's land). The upper classes of the *nome metropoleis* aspired to become Alexandrians, and certainly many of them had property in Alexandria and spent time there on all sorts of business. Particularly for legal business, such as registration of important documents or litigation before imperial officials, Alexandria was the indispensable centre. The culture of Alexandria was what the provincial cities and their elites aimed to take part in, and its styles were widely copied throughout the *chora*.

It is in this context that we must see the energetic attempts of the bishops of Alexandria to control the ecclesiastical life of Egypt. It is often remarked that the church of Egypt, which included the Cyrenaica (the eastern coastal region of today's Libya), had no regional bishops governing groups of cities on behalf of the archbishop, as many other provinces did. Instead, each of the dozens of bishops reported directly to Alexandria. The absence of these metropolitans is not an aberration. The relationship of the other Egyptian cities to Alexandria was not comparable to that of cities in other provinces to their regional heads.

Alexandria's economic role was equally central. The roughly quarter of a million metric tons of wheat exported each year for the public grain distribution of the imperial capital was only part of the vast commerce in grains, which included grain for Alexandria itself and a huge private market in exports. The internal trade to feed the city itself was obviously enormous, with every type of foodstuff along with large amounts of wine drawn into it from its vast extended hinterland. Better quality wine, however, mainly came from imports, along with much of the olive oil required for a large Greek city to feed and light itself. Even after the Arab conquest, when the wheat formerly sent to Constantinople was diverted to Arabia by way of the canal that began at Fustat (see ch.14), Alexandria's domestic demand remained substantial for many years. We have little evidence to trace its eventual decline in any detail.

49 Comb of Helladia

Egypt, probably Antinoopolis. Late 5th–early 6th century
Elephant ivory. 17.5 × 6.8×× 0.5 cm
Department of Egyptian Antiquities, Louvre, Paris.
Inv. E 11874

The central part of the comb depicts three people raising their hands in acclamation. They seem to be performing a mime or pantomime scene, a performance of the kind that was frequent in the hippodrome. Wearing a long tunic, a dancer stands in front of an arcade, brandishing a wreath. Two figures stand on either side: a man in a short tunic holding an object and playing a *scabellum* (sandal fitted with cymbals), and a young woman with her mouth open, perhaps a chorister. The Greek inscription at the base of the comb's teeth, 'Long live the Fortune of Helladia and the Blues. Amen' explains what is being depicted. It refers to the winner of the contest organized as part of the circus games where rival factions competed. [MD]
Bib: Cat. Paris 2009, no.114 (pp. 133–34)

50 Spherical censer

Egypt. 5th century
Silver. Height 16.2 cm; diameter 10.2 cm
Department of Egyptian Antiquities, Louvre, Paris.
Inv. E 11705

Consisting of a cup with a tapered foot, the censer's shape is similar to that of a chalice. A hemispherical lid rests on the incense burner, in the shape of a sphere. At the top a wreath encircles the end of a chain with double links, giving the receptacle the appearance of a pomegranate. Four incised masks from the tragic theatre decorate the lid. Their expressive faces surmounted by a tall headdress have pierced eyes and mouths to allow the fragrant smoke to escape. This decoration combines aesthetic effect and apotropaic value, and is consistent with the function of the object, which was probably intended for censing the home. [MD]

In production as well, Alexandria was both workshop and way station. The Egyptian countryside and its cities produced textiles in quantity, particularly linen. The cotton for which Egypt is renowned in modern times is largely a nineteenth-century development, although modest amounts were produced, especially in the oases, in the Roman period. Alexandrian glass, despite its fragility, was widely exported and then imitated. Egypt was of course a monopoly provider of that most essential material: papyrus. It, too, largely passed through Alexandria. If we had more of Alexandria's living and producing quarters available for excavation, we would have a better sense of what was undoubtedly a much richer array of goods for export than we can now identify.[14]

But there is one area of Alexandrian trade that we know about entirely from external sources – its role as the transit point for the Indian Ocean trade. Enormous quantities of pepper, ivory, *nard* (an oil derived from plants), *malabathron* (aromatic plant leaves) and other exotic and valuable substances travelled each year from India to Egypt, passing mostly by way of the Red Sea port of Berenike (today Baranis), by camel caravan across the desert to Coptos (today Qift), and by boat to Alexandria.[15] The imperial treasury banked the taxes on this trade – a quarter of its value – and from there the goods were shipped to Rome and other centres of consumption. No doubt a fair amount stayed in Alexandria to be used there. Papyrus evidence for the value of these cargos makes it possible to realize that the taxes from this trade amounted to a substantial share of the imperial revenues.

Alexandria was thus at once producer, consumer and distributor of a wide variety of goods and services, public and private. Its administrative role in the economy was also central to the eastern part of the empire, not merely to Egypt itself. Although the Roman world was in many ways a market economy, the imperial government devoted substantial resources to creating and maintaining the infrastructure of that economy and to regulating and taxing it. All of this happened to a high degree in Alexandria.

Much of Alexandria's reputation came from its role as a centre of Greek culture. The Museum ('sanctuary of the Muses') turned traditional Macedonian patronage of artists and scholars into an institution for science and literature alike. The great library built as part of the Museum complex was legendary in its own time, with book collections as comprehensive as royal resources could make them.[16] Ptolemaic patronage turned Alexandria into a magnet for scholarly and scientific luminaries from around the Mediterranean world. This patronage disappeared with Roman rule, and indeed had been anemic in late Ptolemaic times. But its traditions survived the funding, and the wealthier classes of Alexandria and the other cities of Egypt proved a more durable support for research and education over the entire period, down to and beyond the end of Roman rule.

But Alexandria was not only a Greek city; it was an Egyptian one. It is hardly

51 Stela commemorating a Platonic philosopher

Antinoopolis, excavated 1913/14. Late 2nd century
Marble? 33 × 44 × 3 cm
British Museum, London. EA 1648

The stela honours Flavius Maecius Severus Dionysodorus, a Platonic philosopher and city council member of Antinoopolis. As 'one of those maintained by the Museum, exempt from taxes,' he received fiscal privileges granted to the intellectual elite affiliated with the 'Temple of the Muses', although it is not clear whether the famous Museum at Alexandria or a similar institution in Antinoopolis is meant here. The individual may be the same Severus whose work is quoted in Neo-Platonist authors Porphyry (3rd century) and Proclus (5th century), and Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (4th century). [ERO]
Bib: O'Connell 2014c, no. 41 (pp. 482–83)

surprising that its vital economy, needing large numbers of craftsmen, labourers and other service workers, drew many people from the countryside in search of a better livelihood than that of a farm labourer (Fig. 52). Roman governors and emperors disliked the large Egyptian presence in the capital, and periodically ordered the natives to return to their homes. These edicts had no lasting effect – Alexandria was the home of these workers, and without them the economy of the metropolis would have collapsed. While Alexandrian art and architecture, as we think of them today, were Greek, or eventually Graeco-Roman in character, the city also had its share of Egyptian-style art. Much of this was brought from old sanctuaries, like that of Heliopolis, by the Hellenistic and Roman rulers and used to decorate the capital. These statues have come to light in large numbers from underwater excavations in recent decades, helping to reshape our mental image of what Alexandria looked like.[17]

Alexandria also had the largest Jewish community outside Palestine in the entire eastern Mediterranean.[18] Profoundly Hellenized, it produced both high-ranking officials and philosophers, sometimes in the same family. The famous philosopher Philo produced both Platonic treatises and works on the Hebrew scriptures. His Platonizing, allegorical readings of these scriptures (which he read in the Septuagint,

the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible produced in Ptolemaic Alexandria) had a vast influence on later Christian writers. Philo was the uncle of Tiberius Julius Alexander, who became prefect of Egypt and served with Titus in the Jewish War that ended with the capture of Jerusalem in AD 70. The family included successful businessmen as well. The Ptolemaic origins of this community and its large scale have already been mentioned, along with the periodic conflicts over rights and privileges in the first century AD between the Jews and at least some segments of the local Greek citizenry. The Roman emperors seem on the whole to have been sympathetic to the Jewish community and unwilling to give free rein to the hostility expressed by representatives of the Alexandrian elite. But when a revolt of the Jewish population in the Cyrenaica under the emperor Trajan spread to Egypt, the era of even hostile coexistence was over. Much of Egypt was swept up in the war that followed. As was usual with revolts against Rome the outcome, early in the reign of Hadrian (117–38), was a disaster – both for the Jews of Egypt, whose numbers were devastated to the point that the abundant papyrus documentation of the Jewish population in the period down to Trajan simply vanishes for a century and a half after Hadrian, and for the entire cosmopolitan Jewish culture that their Alexandrian presence created and sustained.

Given the small numbers and indeed invisibility of Christians in Alexandria until the late second century,[19] the city was dominated by the cults of the Greek and Egyptian gods – and of the more Hellenized versions of Egyptian cults – for more than a century after the destruction of Alexandrian Judaism. There are traces of the beginning of the rebuilding of a Jewish population in Egypt in the middle to late third century, around the time the numbers of Christians also become significant. Alexandria probably continued to manifest the many parallels that mark the efforts of Late Antique Judaism to recast itself in a mode more competitive with Christianity, but there is no evidence that the Jewish community ever recovered a numerical strength comparable to that in earlier centuries.

The picture is complicated by the tendency of Christian rhetoric to use 'Jew' as a term with which to attack enemies, including enemies within the church.[20] This tendency is only part of a long history of such anti-Judaic rhetoric, but it offers a profound challenge to the historian in attempting to know when an ancient writer talking about Jews is actually referring to a real Jewish community and when it is a stick with which to beat a fellow Christian. It can at any rate hardly be doubted that by the end of the fourth century the dominance that Christianity had achieved in political terms in the early to middle parts of that century was essentially complete, and that

52 Charioteer papyrus

Antinoopolis, excavated 1914. *c.*500
Papyrus. 12 × 7.5 cm
Egypt Exploration Society, London

This fragmentary page from a codex shows a group of charioteers in their distinctive helmets and protective strapping, one holding a whip. A yellow arc behind them perhaps evokes the arched starting-gates or entrance of a hippodrome. Their clothing displays three of the four colours – red, green and blue – associated with the Roman circus factions (white is the missing fourth). Rivalry between supporters, divided on both social and political lines, was intense. The writing surviving on both sides of the page suggests that the context of the illustration was a literary text, but too little remains to identify it. The papyrus was retrieved from one of the rubbish dumps at Antinoopolis, where a monumental hippodrome was situated just outside the city wall. [HW]
Bib: Cat. New York 1978 no. 93, pp. 102–3; Humphrey 1986, pp. 515–16

53 Terracotta Horus as rider

Egypt, provenance unknown. 1st–3rd century
Fired Nile clay with traces of paint (red-pink, black, formerly white). 26.2 × 18 × 6.8 cm
Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Berlin. Inv. ÄM 9685

The unique terracotta shows the falcon-headed god, riding on a caparisoned horse. Horus, almost frontally turned to the viewer, is wearing the Egyptian royal kilt, with a tunic and a cloak. On his head he wears the double crown, and his hair frames his face in thick strands. With a broad, sweeping gesture he pierces an enemy, not shown here. The enemy of Horus was the god Seth, who is usually depiucted in one of his forms, either animal or human. Comparable representations of Horus are mainly familiar from the temple of the god in Edfu but also from other regions of Egypt. The crown shows him as ruler of the two parts of the country – as for any reigning Egyptian king. Images of this type also form part of the royal succession. [JHD]
Bib: Cat. Berlin 1899, p. 369; Philipp 1972, p. 9, p. 13, p. 32, no. 46, fig. 42; Trioche 2012, pp. 96-97, fig. 3; Wilhelm 1914, p. 89, no. 82, pl. 7

54 Horus as rider in stone relief

Faras (Nubia). 1st–3rd century
Sandstone. 46.1 × 32 cm; diameter 7.5 cm
Department of Egyptian Antiquities, Louvre, Paris. Inv. E 4850

This relief seems to be the exact illustration of the text in which Plutarch (*De Iside* 39, 19, 358C) describes how Horus claimed to have chosen the horse as a fighting animal 'to avenge his father and mother for the evil that had been done to them.' The figure of Horus as rider is a theme increasingly attested in late paganism, just as Horus-avenger-of-his-father is a god as old as Egyptian religion itself. Here, pharaonic and classical styles can be seen mingled, at a time when Hellenism was spreading across the provinces of the empire. The figure of the Roman god dressed as a senior military officer, his weapon a mixture of lance and harpoon – standing as vertically as a hieroglyph in the centre of the composition, with the crocodile here meant to embody the enemy – helps to convey the victory of divine power and give it a visible form for the supplicant. [VR]

struggles of religion were largely between factions in the Christian community. The supposed expulsion of the Jewish population of Alexandria in 414–15 by the bishop Cyril should be viewed with some skepticism.[21]

In the midst of all of these struggles, however, Alexandrian high culture experienced a late flourishing, in the form of the 'university' of which two dozen or so classrooms are now visible in the central archaeological zone of Kom al-Dikka (Fig. 55), excavated by the Polish mission over more than a half century.[22] Although most of the learning imparted in these halls was classical and even what might be called 'pagan', the professors and students were in large part Christian. Classical culture was not only the common inheritance of the educated elites of Late Antiquity, it was systematically used in the development of Christian theology and philosophy. Alexandria was the most important home of that fusing of traditions.

55 The so-called Small Theatre at Kom al-Dikka, Alexandria

Built in the middle of the 4th century, the open-air structure was equipped with a scene structure suggesting it was used for entertainment. Significantly remodelled in *c.*500, when it was domed, the theatre may have had multiple purposes such as poetry performance, pantomime and lectures. In this latter phase of use, architectural elements were decorated with crosses, and graffiti dating up to the early 7th century praise the Greens circus faction. [ERO]
Bib: McKenzie 2007, pp. 209–12, figs 357–65