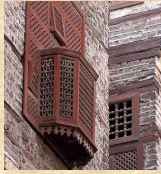


### Rosetta (Rashīd) Mediterranean City

Past, Present & Future of a living Heritage  
Saleh Lamei

Since the dawn of history, architecture of Egypt has had its own and distinguished entity, expressing the originality of its peoples.

It is an architecture deeply rooted in the home soil and it reveals the tradition and habits of these peoples and is organically linked with the environment.

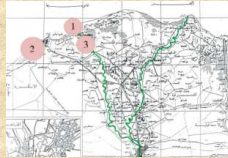


CENTRE FOR CONSERVATION & PRESERVATION OF ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

### Rosetta location:

Rosetta is situated in lat. 31°24' N, long. 30° 24' E, on the western bank of the western branch of the Nile, at a distance of 65 km north east Alexandria. Its location had been of great strategic importance.

The town which is situated near the site of the ancient Bolbouthiō (Greek: Bolbitis) seems not to have existed before the Arab conquest, even at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.



1- Rosetta, 2-Alexandria, 3- Fuvwah  
Rosetta location

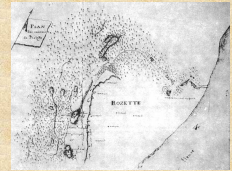
The papyri mention only the name of Bolbitine as emporium for merchandise from Upper Egypt (Bell, The Aphroditic papyri, 1414, I, [59], 102).

Till the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D., ships sailed direct to Fuvwa in the Nile Delta; but owing to the excessive depositing of the silt in this region, Rosetta began to take its place.

Amdino mentioned it in his book, as the name was driven from the old name *Rachī* found in Coptic papyri.

Rosetta is first mentioned in 132A.H./750 A.D. when the Copts of the town revolted against the caliph Marwan II, who had taken refuge in Egypt from the 'Abbasids.

In 278 A.H./891-2 A.D. al-Yakūbī (Bulḍān, 338) mentioned its port.



Rosetta 1779

### Tulunid period and 'Abbāsīd period ( 827 A.D/ 904 A.D.)

In 870 A.D, it was mentioned that the city was originally located north to its present location. It coincided with the rule of caliph abu al-abbas al-Ma'tamad; Rosetta was mentioned several times by Arab historians.

When the Fāṭimid heir-apparent (the future caliph al-Qā' im) tried to conquer Egypt in 307A.H/ 920A.D., his fleet was presented by an 'Abbāsīd squadron from sailing into the seaport of the Rosetta branch of the Nile, and was then annihilated.

### Fāṭimid period ( 969A.D/1171 A.D.)

After the Fāṭimid conquest in 969 A.D., the sailing on the Nile for exterior commerce was through Alexandria and Rosetta.

It was mentioned in book, the *Masalek* and *Mamalek*; its location along Nile river, famous by its markets and Hammams ( Public Bath).

### Avvubūd Period ( 1171 A.D.-1250 A.D.):

It was mentioned by Al-Mīrī (560 A.H.-1165 A.D.): "It is a civilized city, having markets merchants, with farms wheat barley, many palms and different kinds of fruits".

### Mamlūk Period : ( 1250-1517 A.D. ):

A fortress was built in Rosetta in 660A.H/1261 A.D. In 824A.H/1421 A.D, was used as external Port as well as a defensive role for its inhabitants. Mentioned by Abulfidā ( 732 A.H/1332 A.D) as a small village along the western Nile river.

Ibn Duqmīq ( 809 A.H/ 1406 A.D.): "Rosetta seaport is part of the region nastrouah at the junction of the Mediterranean and the Nile river, has a mosque, public Bath, al-'Afrāh hill with lighthouse to monitor the foreign fleet, most of its inhabitants are fishermen".

In 884 A.H/1479 A.D, Sultan Qū'ibāy inaugurated his famous citadel in Alexandria, then he went to Rosetta to supervise what was achieved of its citadel that was being built on the western bank of the River Nile.



Qū'ibāy Citadel

### Ottoman Era (1517 – 1848 A.D.):

After the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 and the decay of European trade through Alexandria, Rosetta became an important center for maritime trade with Istanbul and the Argian territory of the Turkish Empire.

Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the usual route for travelers proceeding from Alexandria to Cairo was via Rosetta.

The Viceroy 'Alī Pāshā, in 956H/1540 A.D., restored its old khāns ( caravansary ) and funduks (hotels), built new ones, and cleared the silt from its docks.

Till modern times, its wall was maintained for defense against Arab raids. At the mouth of the River, near Kom al-Afrāh, two castles guarded the waterway entrance to the town. Vansleb, who visited Rosetta in May 1672, gives a description of the castles and their garrison (State of Egypt - London1678,105). In 1693 there was a sort of weekly service running between Rosetta and Cairo.



Urban Development phases



Rosetta in 1897 A.D.

Rosetta Layout – 18<sup>th</sup> century

### Napoleon army Description d'Egypte

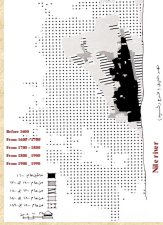


House in Rosetta Description d'Egypte

### Rosetta at the 17<sup>th</sup> century:

This period was characterized by urban extension in all directions, the area of the urban mass was 23.1 Hectares with increase about 22%. Some crafts had decline and two crafts had flourished basket and ropes handicrafts.

The economic and social conditions indicates a great activity in the rice trade, the city had been greatly flourished during this period so that the traveler Johan Wld who visited the city on 1601, couldn't find a place to spend the night.



Urban Development Phases

### Rosetta at the 18<sup>th</sup> Century:

During the French campaign to Egypt (1798 A.D.) the city gained great fame after the discovery of Rosetta stone in Qa'itbay's citadel.



In July 1799 A.D. one of the French troops under the command of the officer Bouchard discovered a stone of Black Basalt known as Rosetta stone with Hieroglyphic, Demotic and Greek writing. Champollion discovered that the oval shapes in the Hieroglyphics include the name of the Kings and queens; comparing them with the Greek text, the name of Ptolemy V and Cleopatra were recognized.

Rosetta lived vicious battles during the recent period against the English invasion under the command of Fraiser in 1222 A.H/1807 A.D., 'AE Bek As-Salanikly, the governor, Hassan Karah and Rosetta savants played a great role in the defense of the city.

### Muhammad 'Ali Period (1805-1848 A.D.):

The economic and commercial activities was flourished at Rosetta until the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The development of the terrestrial transportation had affected the trade activities to Rosetta.

The town continued to flourish until Muhammad 'AE (1805-1848). He reconstructed the Mahmudiyya Canal for navigation between Alexandria and the Nile (1819 A.D.), and thus diverted the course of trade from Rosetta to Alexandria, which resulted the rapid decline of the city to a mere fishing town with a few minor local industries, such as rough cotton weaving, rice production and oil squeezing.



Map 1897

### The 19<sup>th</sup>, -to 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Most extension at this period were towards the North and North West, most of the wakilats were suffering from the lack of maintenance at the end of the 19th. The city began to extend toward the south but with the slow urban and population growth. The decline of Rosetta began at the end of the 19th Century.

Most of the monuments were neglected for several years beside being surrounded by the modern building that almost deprived them of their distinguished monumental character and damaged the aesthetical aspects of its architectural features.

Its population in 1907 was only 16,660 but in 1970 the population Of the town which still benefits from coastal trade and fisheries had risen to 36,711.



### Architectural & technical characteristics

Rosetta is distinguished by its national history and unique decorative architectural heritage.

It is considered a large open museum for the Islamic architecture and that is clear in its sacred and profane buildings (houses and mosques).

The city was surrounded by old walls, the streets are characterized by a unique architectural vocabulary, the magnificent mashrabiyas, the house constructed of colored bricks.

The carpenters of Rosetta were very skilful in turning and defoliating the wood without using nail, as well as inlaid with ivory and mother of pearl and defoliating the panels forming geometrical units.



### Old Houses of Rosetta

The houses are characterized as multi stories buildings with different uses for each storey. The house consists of three or four floors, has wooden multilevel ceilings; using wooden corbels to support the projections and upper floors.

The ground floor mostly include:

- 1-A Caravansary or storeroom for keeping the goods and receiving merchants.
- 2-A Stable; a place for keeping animals of the house owner and his guests provided with a separate door overlooking a side street.
- 3-A Sabli: A room commanding the main street with a marble basin in front of a brass grill presenting water to the thirstiest; often framed by inscription including Qur'anic texts, the founder name and foundation date.
- 4-The Cistern: Located below the house and was used for keeping water. It was supported on columns or brackets and covered with vaults and shallow domes.



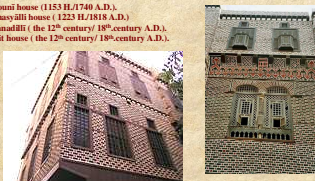
'Araba House

The second floor designated for men and called dikh having courtyard surrounded by rooms. The third floor for the family. The house include a bathroom in each floor.

All houses of Rosetta often include a main room on the third floor called *al-gharbi room* (main living room) distinguished by wooden cupboards in one of its walls with niches (khowarnaques) and screens of turned wood.

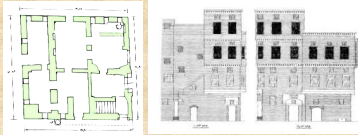
The city still comprise several historical houses from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, such as:

- 1-'Arab Kili House (12<sup>th</sup> A.H/ 18<sup>th</sup> A.D.).
- 2-Maizonni house (1153 H/1740 A.D.).
- 3-al-Amayyili house (1223 H/1818 A.D.).
- 4-al-Manaillil (the 12<sup>th</sup> century/ 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).
- 5-Thabit house (the 12<sup>th</sup> century/ 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).



### 'Arab killi House (12<sup>th</sup> A.H/ 18<sup>th</sup> A.D.):

It is one of the biggest and most famous houses of Rosetta and is known by the name of its founder - 'Arab killi' who was the governor of Rosetta. It consists of four floors, the ground floor includes a storeroom and a cistern; the second includes rooms with windows of iron grill windows; while the third include a hall with octagonal lantern; the fourth floor designed for summer.



Ground floor and Facades

### 'Arab killi House Rosetta National Museum

The rehabilitation has just been completed of the regional museum of Rashid (Rosetta), based in one of the city's most emblematic Ottoman houses.

This intervention forms part of an overall project to renovate Egypt's regional museums carried out by the Ministry of Culture, and makes Rashid the first city affected.

The singular location of this museum in killi House makes it an exceptionally interesting element. The building, in itself an important heritage value, is an excellent example of the Ottoman houses that can be visited in the city.



The façade of Arab killi house which is now the Rosetta National Museum

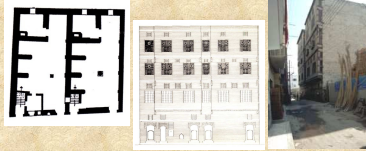
### Maizouni house (1153 H./1740 A.D.):

It is one of the most famous houses of Bouetta as it was a theatre for historical events covering a historical period. It was built by 'Abdarrqman al-Bawwib al-Maizouni; merchant's family coming from Algeria; father of Zoubaida wife of Jack Francois Mino; one of the French main military commander.



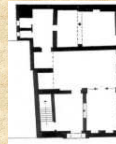
### Maizouni house (1153 H./1740 A.D.):

The house consists of four floors; the ground includes the storehouse and the cistern; the second floor was for men and the third was for the family with halls overlooking the street with maymuni turning wood mashrabiyya. The fourth floor has a bath and al-Aghani room (room of songs- entertainment) distinguished by wooden cupboards.



Maizouni House - Ground Floor & Main Facade

### 'Uthmān Aghā Al-Amasyalli



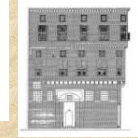
Ground Floor  
'Uthmān Aghā Al-Amasyalli  
( Al-Amasya Turkey)



First Floor



Ottoman-style living room in  
'Uthmān Al-Amasyalli house



Main facade

### 'Uthmān Aghā Al-Amasyalli



Main facade



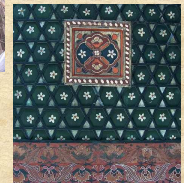
### Thābit House



Thābit House- Main Facade



Ramajān House



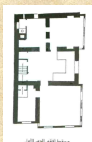
### Tuqaytli House:



Ground Floor

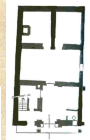


First Floor



First Floor

### Manādīli House:



Ground Floor

### Shāhin MILL

The mill has been beautifully restored, and it is fully functional.



### PUBLIC BATH:





### 1- Architectural style in the 18 & 19<sup>th</sup>. century :

Rosetta had two main architectural style: local type which reflect the architecture of the 18 and 19<sup>th</sup>. century (Ottoman architecture) and the contemporary type .

In addition we had the Renaissance style with its architectural features and façade mouldings , as well as the Eclecticism style trying to revive the local style mixed with European architectural features.



Asfur House



Hasha Ghazal House

### 2- The Eclectic style beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century :

The factors affecting the eclectic style:

- 1- The strong connections between Alexandria and Rosetta; the two cities extend along the Mediterranean coast; the establishment of commercial projects between the two cities.
- 2- The domination of foreigners on the construction industry; at the beginning of Muhammad Ali rules the royal family and the foreigners owned the Bahariya region which lead to an economical dominance.
- 3- The presence of foreign colony and their residences in the city; creates a cultural channel between several cultures which meet with the customs and traditions .



The architectural characteristics of the Eclectic Neo Baroque such as 'Arafat , Al-Kassir and 'Imin House .

As an example of the Eclectic style is the 'Arafat House which differ from the Islamic type in design , the design doesn't concentrate on privacy as the old Islamic houses, the bedrooms opens on the living area; there is no separation ( Hararek and Salamek ) , there is no courtyard , no services courtyard ; the facades had curved projection.



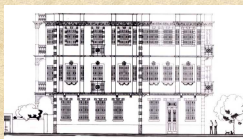
Rosetta Houses facades



### Facade Articulation:

Mouldings decorate and manifest some of the important elements of the façade over the windows and doors, cantilever, cornice, terraces on cantilevers

Similarity and different treatment of each floor, masonry facing at the corners.



South Façade

### Contemporary Architecture (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century)

The modern buildings had 2 to 6 storeys , but most of them were two and three storeys.

In the fifty & the sixty :

The buildings had simple facades , using one material and one colour in the construction without mouldings or decoration . Façade similarity at the several floors.

In the seventy and eighty :

There were some examples aiming to revive the traditional vocabulary of the old Islamic house. Decorated colored mouldings were used in terraces parapet; as well as plaster & stained glass.



'Arafat House



### 2- Rosetta Old Mosques:

Rosetta stand as eloquent testimony to over 12 century. It has preserved in its medina many magnificent religious and residential buildings constructed over the centuries, including mosques & houses.

Zaghbil mosque (985 A.H./1577 A.D.)

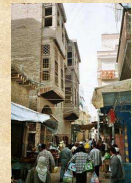
Domaqsis (al-Mu'allaq) (1116A.H/1704 A.D.)

Al-Gundi mosque (1133 H./1720 A.D.)

Al-Mahali mosque (1134 H./1721 A.D.)

An-Nour Mosque (1177H/ 1764 A.D.)

Al-'Abbasi mosque (1224H/ 1809 A.D.)



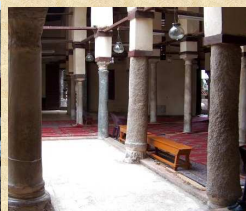
### Domaqsis (al-Mu'allaq):



Domaqsis (al-Mu'allaq) (1116A.H/1704 A.D.)



### Al-Mahalli mosque (1134 H./1721 A.D.)



### Al-'Abbasi mosque (1224H./ 1809 A.D.)



## Architctural Characteristics of mosques:

Mosques include more than one entrance, riwaqs with arches supported on marble columns ; facades are decorated with floral and geometric decorations, using ceramic for decorating walls and umbrellas.

### 1-Zaghlul Mosque:

The mosque was built at the circassian mamluk period ( 1577 A.D.), it is one of the largest mosque of Rosetta with an area of 4000,00m<sup>2</sup> ; located at the intersection of the three main streets.

The mosque is composed of qibla area with ten riwaqs resting on tilted painted arches supported by marble columns; the western area is composed of three riwaqs; the eastern area consisted of four riwaqs.

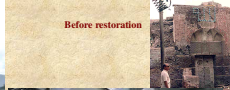


Plan , zaghlul mosque

### Zaghlul mosque (985 A.H./1577 A.D.)



After Restoration



Before restoration



## Problems facing Rosetta :

1- Like other Arab towns characterized by similar historic centers , Rosetta suffers from such problems as building deterioration and insufficiency of infrastructure. Historic buildings represent an important cultural and historical patrimony.

2- Salt water intrusion, coastal erosion contribute in particular to the degradation of the urban context.



3- Lack of maintenance for historical buildings. The city had lost much of its authenticity, of its fabric and the historical integrity of the town have been impaired.

4- Different other factors had also negative effects on the economical activity such as :

- 4/1-Strong sand wind which cover most of agricultural land .
- 4/2-After the construction of the High Dam , the decrease of silt coming with the yearly flood .
- 4/3-In the meantime the pollution of the north lake had affected the environmental balance, causing the fallback of sea output.

## Conclusion:

At the beginning of the 21 century , we found that Rosetta had been changed during the last 50 years , the flourished city had been transformed to a simple urban one . The historic memory is the starting point for a better future.

The conservation of Architectural Heritage should be considered , not as a marginal issue, but as a major objective of town and country planning co-ordination between the different authorities whose activities may have an impact upon the historic environment must be continued and improved.

The philosophy of preserving the cultural heritage should not impede the development and progress movement, but to make the new to be a continuation of the identity of the city and to create an integrated harmonised environment.

It must also be taken into account to set out on boosting the craftsmanship's schools for the training in old handicrafts which have perished and in order to train the new generation.



This case study reveals a large number of problems which are common to numerous other Mediterranean coastal towns.

I suggest that a joint governmental and non-governmental committee for the historical Rosetta should be formed focusing on two points:

- 1- Handicraft development and the development of fishing , so that the city could restore some of its economic prosperity .
- 2- As for fishing which played a significant role in the Rosetta economy for a long time, I propose to establish a cooperative society for fishermen , forming a small market for selling fish, creating a chain of small restaurant along the sea side serving all kinds of seafood.

The site of Rosetta remains as a magical window on Egyptian cultural heritage.



Shipbuilding on the banks of the Nile

## REFERENCES:

- 1- Al-Kindi: Wulit Misr, edition Guest, R., Leiden - London 1912.
- 2- Al-Mirisi : Nazhat Al-Mushitak Fi Ibtirraq al-Afaq ( Netherland , Amsterdam 1969 A.D.).
- 3- Ali Mahirak: Al-Khatat Al-Tawfiqiyya, part II, ( Biling 1985 A.H.).
- 4- Amelineau J.: La Géographie de l'Égypte à l'Époque Copte, Paris 1895
- 5- Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol. VIII (Leiden 1960).
- 6- Jullis, M.: Notice sur la Ville de Rosette, Description d'Égypte,Etat Moderne, XVIII ( Paris 1826).
- 7- Ibn Duqmaq : Al-Insaf li-Iwateja 'Aqd Al- Ansar, Fifth part ( Cairo 1369 H).
- 8- Ibn Yasin Badai' Az-Zuhair fi Waj' Al-Adhhar, Part I ( Biling 1311 A.H.).
- 9- Ibn Hawqal : Masalik wa Mamalik, Surat al-Ard - Cramer edition/Leiden 1938), copy published by Wiet - Beyrouit, Paris 1964.
- 10- Ministry of culture, supreme council of Antiquities: Rosetta monuments, EAO press 1985.
- 11- Robin Fedden: Bulletin de la société Royale de Géographie d'Égypte, XXI (1944) , Notes on the journey from Rosetta to Cairo in the 17 and 18 centuries.
- 12-Dr.Taher Al-Sadeq , Hosam Ismail : Rachid , beginning development and decline, Dar Al-Afaq Al-Arabia 1999A.D.

THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR KIND  
ATTENTION