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Alexandria, a Memory of a Belle Époque

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CIAH

Introduction:

Alexandria is located on Mediterranean south shore, founded by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.

Alexandria- Greek :Aleksandreia, Italian : Alessandria French : Alexandrie, Arabic: al-Iskandariyya.

Alexander needed a harbor and a city to consolidate the conquest of Mediterranean flank. Alexandria was an intellectual center at the Hellenistic world, the resort of artists, poets from all over the world attracted by a lively cosmopolitan town.

Alexander the great linked the island of pharos to the mainland by a causeway, the Heptastadion.
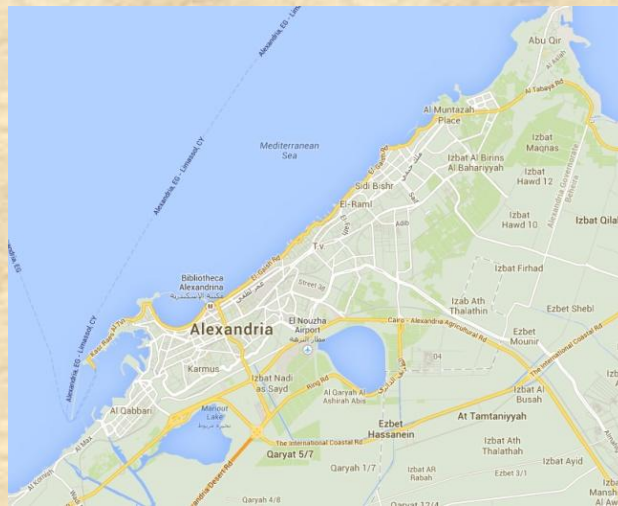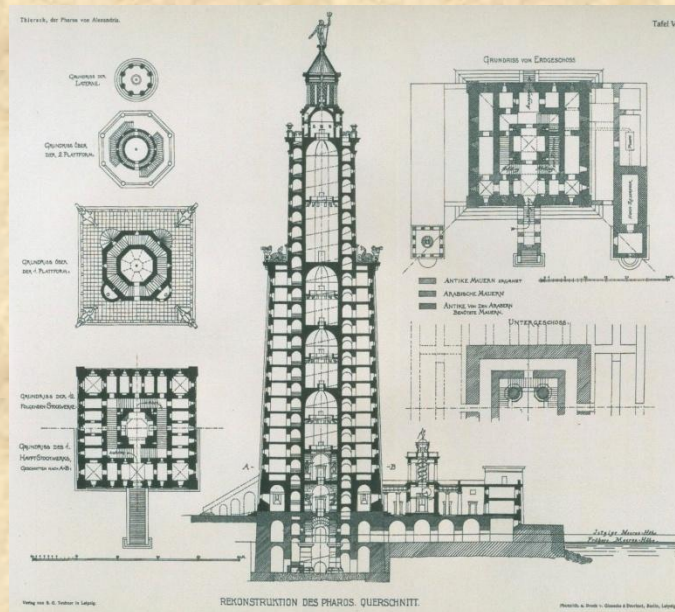
Map of Alexandria
Google map

During Ptolemaic Period (305-30 B.C.)

Ptolemaic Alexandria endured for 275 years; it was the greatest city of its time. Alexander had a dream leading him to build a lighthouse in the harbor of Alexandria, an oracle advised him to build a city opposite to the island of Pharos. The lighthouse was destroyed in the 14th century earthquake.

Alexandria was the centre of literature and mathematics in the ancient world as whiteness the Ancient Library of Alexandria, the largest library in the ancient world, with its Mouseion and the Lighthouse.

Alexandria lighthouse
Thiersch,H.: Pharos Antike Islam und occident

Greek historian Diodorus estimated that 300,000 citizens lived within the city of Alexandria [1] .

Plan of Alexandria – Hellenistic period (323 B.C- 30 B.C)

[1] Classical demographic, Wikipedia.org

Early Ptolemaic Tombs-1 st half of the 3 rd century B.C
Haag, M.: Alexandria Illustrated, AUC press

Pompey's Pillar-part of Ptolemaic Serapeum

# Roman and Byzantine Periods (30 B.C- 642 A.D.)

The Roman conquest of Alexandria took place in the period of 47-30B.C. Alexandria was the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world. Roman persecution of Christians reaches its peak under Diocletian (284-305 A.D.).

After Constantine ended his persecutions to the Christians, Christianity spread all over Africa.

The city was full of traders and merchants. Alexandria remains the primary place of manufacture, famous for its production of luxury goods (jewelry, metal works and sculptures [2]) .

The catacomb of Kom el Shoqafa (Mound of shards) one of the Seven Wonders of the Middle ages, In 391 A.D. the Serapeum was destroyed.

In 40 A.D., the apostle Mark established Coptic Orthodox Christianity in Egypt.
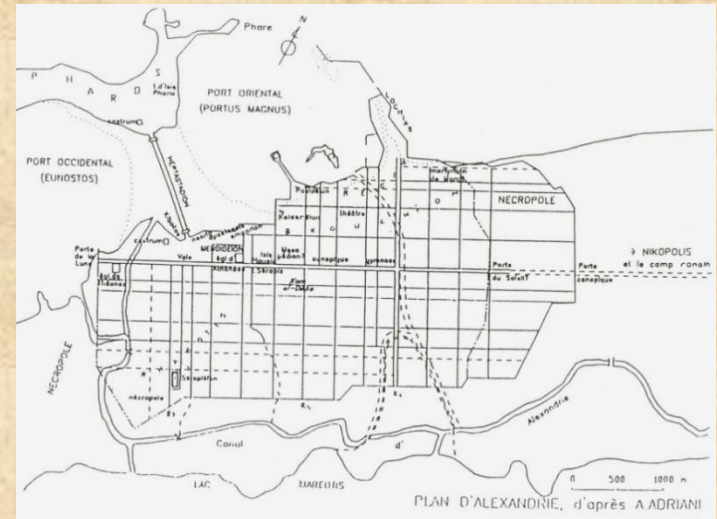
Map of Alexandrian in the late Roman period (4 th – 6 th centuries) , by A. Adriani.
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

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[2] On the economic situation of Alexandria under Roman rule, see J. G. Milne, A History of Egypt under Roman Rule 3rd ed. (London, 1924), A. C. Johnson, Roman Egypt in An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, ed. Tenney Frank, vol. 2 (Baltimore, 1936), and M. Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, 2 nd ed. (Oxford, 1957).
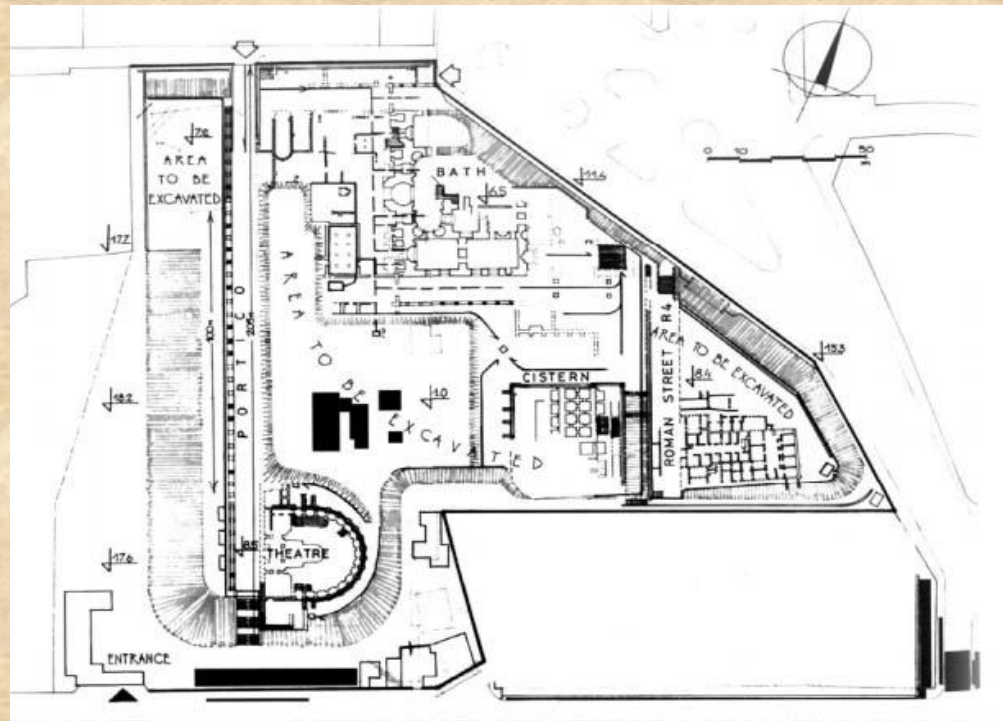
Burial chamber of the catacomb
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria
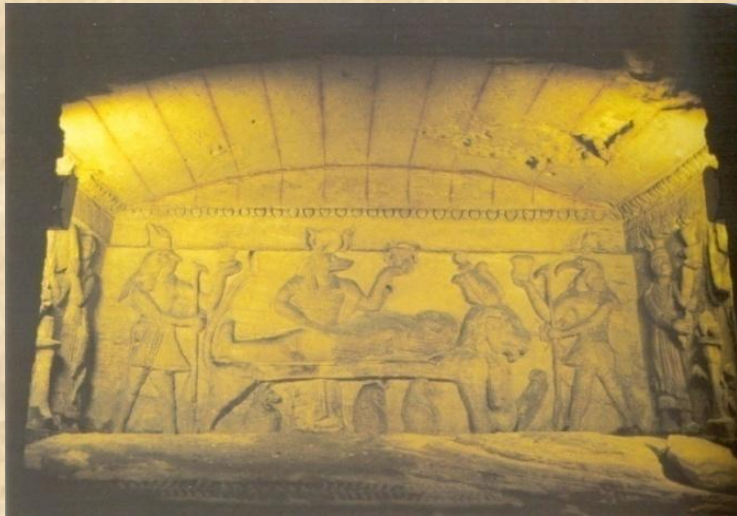
**Catacombs of Kom el-shoqafa
(Greco Roman period)**
Haag, M.: Alexandria illustrated

Kom el Dikka excavations (Mound of Rubble)

During Ptolemaic period it was a garden then Roman encroached the site and built villas, baths and a small theater.


Site plan of Kom el Dikka, The plan reveals a complex including an amphitheatre, Roman baths, cisterns, house district, shops and classrooms of the philosophical schools.
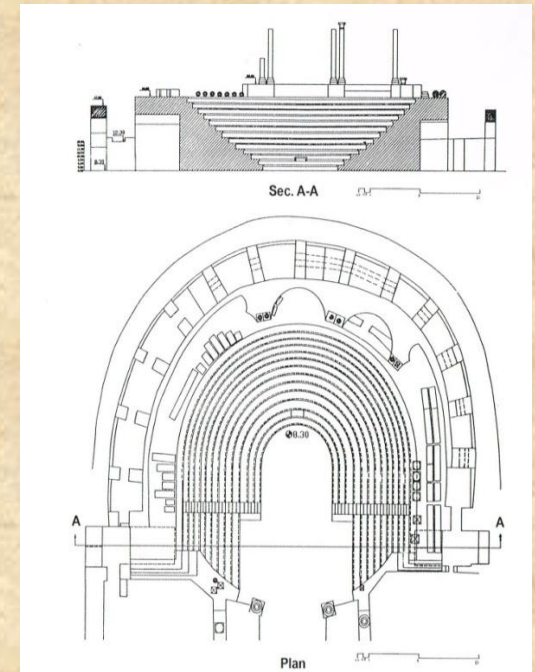*Awad, M. Italy in Alexandria*

The Theater was a roofed Odeon for musical performances, to the North a large Roman Baths complex, to the east are the remains of shops and Villa of the Birds named for its beautiful mosaic floors.

The villa was discovered by the members of the Egyptian-Polish mission during their forty years of work at Kom El Dikka, Alexandria. In 1998, a group of competent archaeologists and conservators began the work to preserve the mosaic.

The successful completion of the project resulted from the partnership between the (SCA), (ARCE) and (USAID).
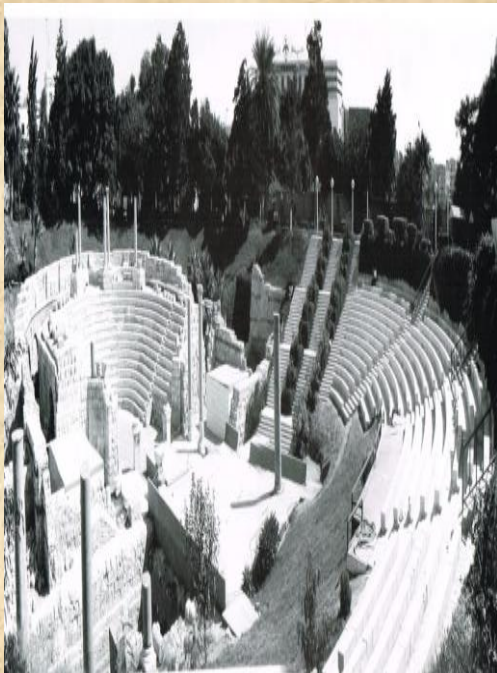
Mosaic floors of Villa of Birds:
pavement depicting nine recognizable birds: pigeons, peacock, parrot, quail and water hen, 2nd century
www.guardians.net/

Plan and section
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

Islamic Period (642 A.D.- 1798 A.D.)

In 641, The Arab defeat the Byzantine and Alexandria falls under Islamic rule. Alexandria was eclipsed by the new Arab capital at Al-Fustat, but Alexandria continued flourish as trading centre.

Map of Alexandria, Helffrich 1566.
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

During the Islamic period Alexandria's landmarks, including Pharos Mouseion and city walls were neglected, some churches were converted to mosques [3] .

Under the Mamluks (1250-1517) Alexandria plan was a chessboard of eight perpendicular avenues surrounded by walls with 4 main gates [4] .

Sultan Qa'itbay has built an enormous fortress on the location of the lighthouse in 1477. After Egypt became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1517 the city expanded from its original site onto Green Island.

Sultan Qa'itbay citadel, 1477
Thiersch,H.: Pharos Antike Islam und occident

Sultan Qa'itbay citadel, 1477
Haag, M.: Alexandria illustrated

[3] Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria, influences on the built environment, Alexandria Preservation Trust, 2008, P 65.
[4] Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: A historical Encyclopedia.

The Qa'itbay Citadel has guarded Alexandria Eastern Harbor. The ottoman governor Sinan Pasha built a caravansaray in 1570 which attracted merchants and craftsmen.

The Ottoman invasion in 1517 brings decline, the 17th and 18th travelers depict the ruins of the classical city [5]. As Alexandria was a commercial center, traders, travelers wishing to make a pilgrimage to Holy land and scientists were attracted to the city .

During Ottoman times Alexandria's inhabitant clustered in this area, named Turkish town as streets were narrow with closed packed houses with old souk and mosques. Its Ottoman architecture and the décor of Turkish and Moroccan mosaics were preserved in houses and mosques.

During the French occupation, Alexandria population was 7000 inhabitants. The French paved the way to Renaissance period in the 19th century. The French fleet decimated by the British at Aboukir.

Turkish town as documented by the French Expedition in 1798-1801
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

[5] Awad: op cit P 69.

Muhammad Ali -Khedivial Period (1805- 1882 A.D.)

Since the early 19 th century, Europeans began to settle in Egypt, the city embraced different cultures and nationalities; as it became a major cotton exporter and specially in Alexandria as a largest port and financial centre.

In the nineteenth century under Muhammad Ali (r. 1805 - 1848) the founder of modern Egypt who granted land for settlement to the Greek, English, French, Armenian and other communities making it the largest city in the Mediterranean and a cultural pole of attraction.

Muhammad Ali's vision to revive Alexandria included many projects such as the digging of the Mahmoudieh Canal, the creation of a new port and arsenal, and the expansion of the city to include new European quarters that matched those of the Great European Capitals.

Alexandria in the 1930's and 1940
Haag,M.: Alexandria , City of Memory

In 1839 a modern infrastructure had been created; at Mohamed Ali death (1848) the population was 100,000[6]. A railroad linked Alexandria to Cairo in 1854, another to Suez in 1858; a tramway was completed in 1863.

On the eastern seashore of Alexandria stands the former royal palace of Ras Al-Tin, taking its name from the fig trees that grew on the site.

The palace built by Italians architect Veroci in 1834 as a memory of Egypt's Royalty. It was built in Italian renaissance style, occupying an area of 17,000 square meters surrounded by 4 Acres garden full of rare species.

The palace was added to Egypt's official heritage list on September 2013.

[6] Dumper, M; Stanley, B.: Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: A Historical Encyclopedia ,ABC- CLIO.

Daguerrotype of Ras el-Tin Palace
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

Ras Al-Tin palace (1830)
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

Ras Al-Tin Palace overlooking the Mediterranean
Ahram .org- Issue No. 1164, September 2013

In Early and second half of 19th century, Italian architects and engineers are involved in the development of public projects (Place des Consuls, Zizinia Palace, Tossiza palace, etc .)

Tossiza palace, Palais de Justice , 1840
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

Place of Muhammad Ali before bombardment of 1882
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

During the 19th century Egyptian trade with Europe flourished, the Ministry of Commerce offices moved to Alexandria.

During British occupation 1882- 1952

In 1882 Colonel Ahmed Orabi revolt against Khedivial rule, hundreds of people lost their lives which served as a pretext to the British occupation .A modern city was rebuilt after the bombardment. The urban morphology and architecture were European and eclectic style.

Alexandria was defined by a strong presence of European nationals. The numbers of foreigners was about 140,736 about 32.5% of the population , the Greeks the largest community, the Italians the 2nd , then French, British, Belgians, Germans, Swiss forming a cosmopolitan community which was reflected on the built environment [7]. In 1879 foreigners living in Alexandria made 61% of the total foreign population in Egypt.

*Haag, M.: Vintage Alexandria, photographs of the city 1860-1960, AUC press*

[7] Archnet.org publications " Italian influence on Alexandria's architecture (1834- 1985).

Italian Community Population Statistics

Year	Egypt	Cairo	Alexandria
1871	13906	3367	7539
1882	14251	4969	11579
1897	24454	8670	11743
1907	34926	13296	16669
1917	40198	15655	17860
1927	52462	18571	24280
1937	47706	16443	22881

Awad, M. ''Italian Influence on Alexandria's Architecture

The half century between 1882 and 1936 was the peak of Alexandria, the golden age of this Cosmopolitan city, La Belle Époque.
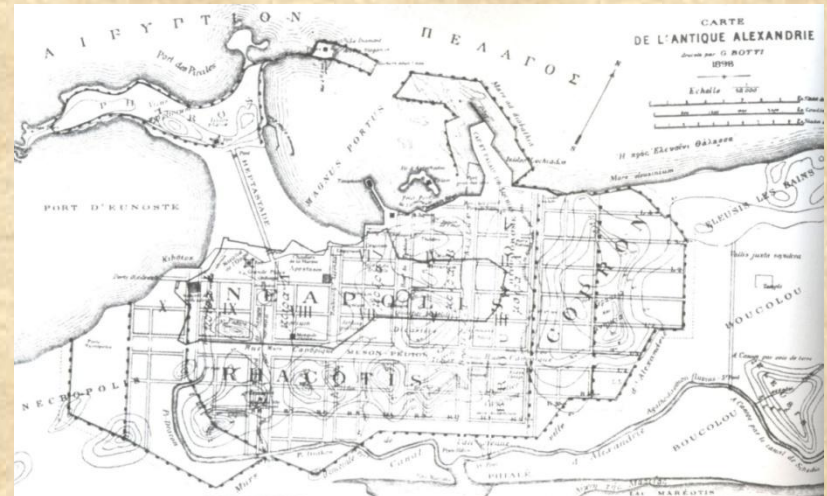
Map of Alexandria by G. Botti , 1898
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

During the First World War (1914-1918), Alexandria's population approached half a million, about 30 thousands of the population were Greeks and 20 thousands Italian. One third of the population of Jews living in Egypt was located in Alexandria.

The builders of the city were Italians, the architects and Engineers of modern Alexandria .

Aerial photo after First World War (c.1922)
The modern city follows the outline of the old
Haag,M.: Alexandria , City of Memory

The architectural history of the city reflects the interaction between the Roman, Egyptian cultures and civilizations, in addition to the West and East architecture styles.

The different religious and national community contributed to the development of the city, this is one reason why architecture reflects varied building style from the Neo-classic, Neo- Baroque Neo-gothic and the Neo-Islamic style, which gives the city an outstanding architectural composition. After the war appears the new decorative style (Art Deco).

Italian architects designed for elite people such as villa Binder Nagel on the colline Eleusis in Roushdi – Ramleh owned by Cordahi Family, Neo-classical style.

Greeks were the largest foreign community 37,882 in 1937 [8].

St. Catherine Cathedral, 1927

Residential building -Italian Style

[8] Dumper, M.: Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: a Historical Encyclopedia

**Villa Binder Nagel
(German cotton broker)
classical style**
Haag, M.: Alexandria illustrated

**Princess Fatma El-Zahra (Jewelry
Museum) 1919- Antonio Lasciac
Architect**
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

In 1930 Alexandria was in the myths of its modern form where we could find prominent figures artists, writers, actress, filmmakers, and painters of the twentieth century.

In this modern city, a landmark is founded Cecil hotel at Saad Zaghloul square and Ramlah station. The hotel building introduces the eclectic Style of Alexandria 19 th and 20 th century.

Muhammad Ali square and French garden 1887

Cecil Hotel 1929, Moorish style

The Muhammad Ali square, former place of Consuls destroyed by the British in 1882 and was rebuilt named Tahrir square.

During the Second World War (1939-1945):

There was increasing fear from continuous raids, many Germans, Italians, British chose to leave Alexandria.

Nationalization period (1952- 1970) :

The nationalization of European property from 1952- 1970 leading to the exodus of foreigners and the ending of cosmopolitan community as a consequence of the political situation.

Following the socialist changes of the society, old buildings were transformed into schools, governmental office and public utilities, suffering lack of maintenance.

The increase of population and migration increase, the demand for housing leads to the destruction of many splendid villa to be replaced by towers and concrete blocks.

Cotton Palace Office Building 1984
Curtain walls and glass blocks
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

Qadi Ibrahim mosque 1949
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria
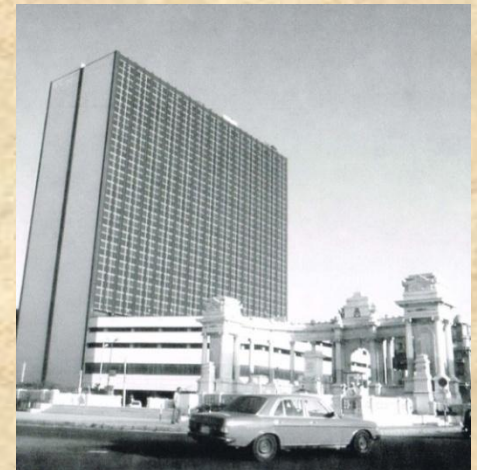
In 1970, the modern glory of Alexandria has passed away. Alexandria today is a place of demographic explosion. The population 2010 is about 4.4 millions; the city is overcrowded and suffers infrastructural crises.

Braun & Hogenberg, map in 1517
www.theantiquarium.com
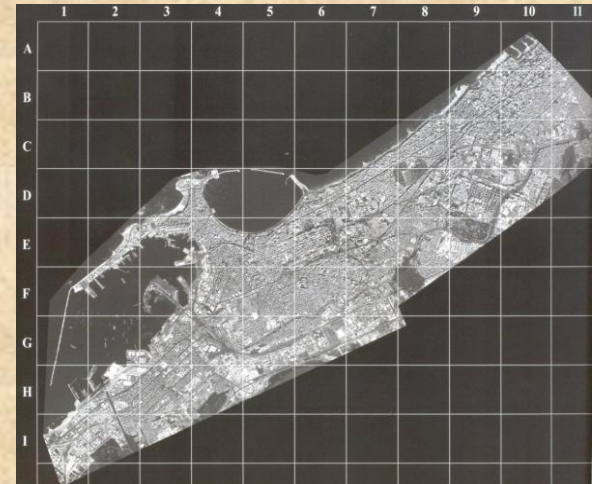
Map of contemporary Alexandria
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

Urban development of Alexandria 1517- 2013

Contemporary Architecture:

In the time being, Alexandrians have been accused of neglecting their glorious past and their precious unique monuments. The urban population growth had led to the destruction of landmark buildings and irreplaceable landmarks all over the city .

Most of the destructed buildings such as ex-German consulate building [9], Villa Gustave Aghion (built in 1922) were included in architectural heritage list [10]; old villas abandoned by the Greeks, Jews, Italians. The building derives additional historic significance from being the first of a series of buildings erected by the Perret brothers in Alexandria and Cairo between 1927 and 1938. About 28 ancient villas were decided to be demolished according to the law No. 144 - 2006 which allows the demolition??!!.
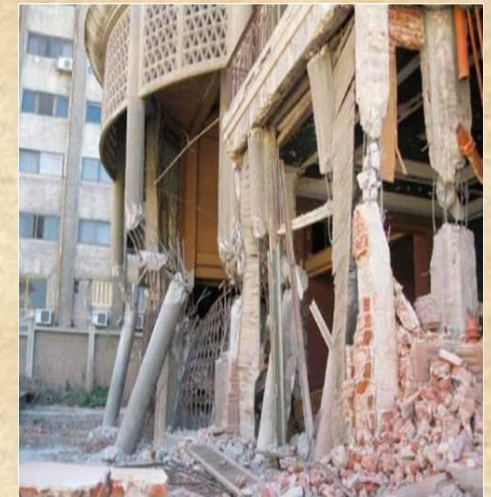
Thirty-five similar historic properties in Alexandria have been demolished in the last five years [11].

Villa Aldo Ambron
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

Villa Baron Menasce
Awad, M.: Italy in Alexandria

Villa Aghion
The art tribune, October 2009

[9] Daily news newspaper Egypt, April 26 [th] , 2014
[10] Cairo post news- Published by Youm 7 ,February 2014
[11] Ahram online, February 2014

The governor of Alexandria established two committees to identify the historical buildings throughout Alexandria Governorate. A digital maps and databases of the buildings, streets, districts and art works, in the form of GIS were created.

Architects, urban planners and intellectual people had protested the demolitions; they should aims to raise awareness and save what is left of Alexandria's architectural heritage. The state should enforce the law against violators.

But since 1990 Alexandria began to invest in the future and revives memories of its glory with many modern buildings and urban development such as Bibliotheca Alexandrina which shares heritage for all humanity, built on the same location where the ancient library had once stood.
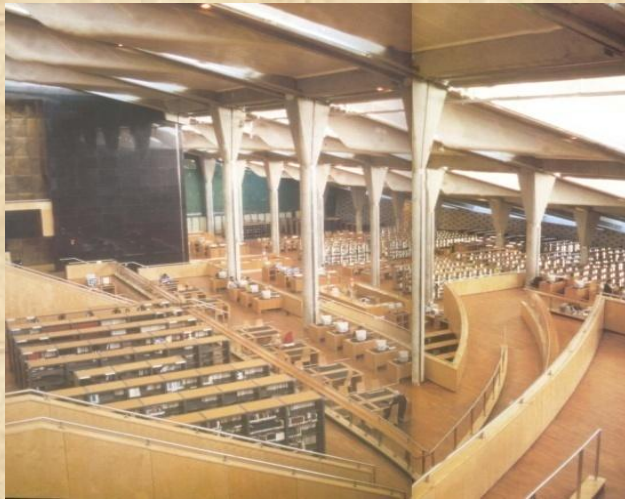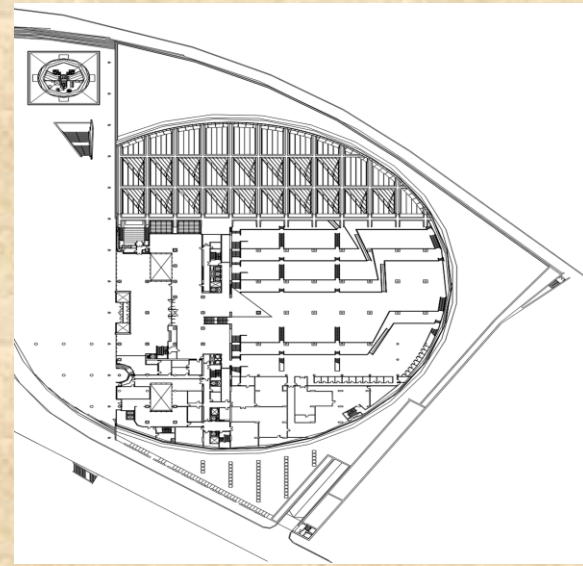

Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Aerial view of Alexandria, 2013
New Stanley Bridge.

Aerial view
Google map

Plan at entrance level
http://www.bibalex.org

The contemporary urban landscape marks the birth of Bibliotheca Alexandrina in 1988, this magnificent building put Alexandria back as international center of learning. It is the eternal Alexandria which always is alive in the hearts of cultural people, gathering scholars and intellectuals from everywhere.

Bibliotheca Alexandrina
http://www.bibalex.org

"A whole new chapter is being written right now, not least by the rebirth of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the new Library of Alexandria and its daring gamble that it can revive cultural activity in Alexandria and reverse the decline that had set in over the last sixty years." (Ismail Serageldin). [12]

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[12] www.Dailynewsegypt, 26 March 2014, Experiencing Alexandria: The city as text and context.

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2- Archnet.org: Italian influence on Alexandria's Architecture (1834-1985).

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5-Experiencing Alexandria: The city as text and context, daily news article by Dr. Ismail Serageldin, March 26, 2014.

6-Haag, M.: Alexandria illustrated ,AUC press, 2004.

7-Haag, M.: Alexandria, City of Memory, AUC press, 2004.

8- Haag, M.: Vintage Alexandria, photographs of the city 1860-1960, AUC press, 2008.

9- Thiersch,H.: Pharos Antike Islam und occident, B. G. Teubner in Leipzig und Berlin, 1909.

10- The urban context the Late Roman City, Ohio State University Press books, 1979.

11- The art tribune, October 2009 .

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION