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Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk

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Towards a social history of modern Alexandria

Khaled Fahmy

A social history of modern Alexandria would need to rely not only on the personal memoirs of (in the main) Europeans who have left the city, and the records of European-dominated institutions, be they municipal councils, boy scouts' organizations or social clubs, but also on the Arabic records of the police, the census department, the local courts and the Governorate, which may all be found in the Egyptian National Archives (Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya) in Cairo. It would have to zoom in not only on such locales as department stores, bars and fancy restaurants, but also on seedy taverns, brothels and popular cafés. Instead of stressing the infrequency of intermarriage to highlight the segregation of ethnic communities, it would have to cite the all too frequent cases of illicit sex between members of different ethnicities, classes and neighbourhoods. Rather than concentrating on official political life, it would also need to take in culinary habits and tastes, how members of different communities ate, drank and smoked together, and how recipes were exchanged and shared between different communities. What follows is not such a history, but a preliminary exploration of some of this neglected evidence.

I have shown, in the previous chapter, that the openness and cosmopolitanism of Alexandria, much celebrated by novelists, poets and historians alike, is essentially predicated on ignoring and silencing the city's Arabic-speaking population; now I propose to offer an alternative viewpoint from which to reconstruct Alexandria's modern history. In the section headed 'Alexandria in Aegypt', I present brief accounts of three important institutions that shaped Alexandrian society in the nineteenth century (the Mahmudiyya Canal, the dockyard and the Quarantine Board), and argue that a close look at these institutions (as indeed at other, more familiar ones) reveals a city which, contrary to common belief, was intricately connected to

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As can easily be seen, the phenomenal expansion of Alexandria in the nineteenth century would not have been possible without a secure supply of fresh water and access to the hinterland, but these were dearly paid for by the Egyptian population. Some contemporary reports put the casualty figures among labourers digging the Mahmudiyya Canal as high as 100,000. Most of these – men, women and children – died in accidents attributable to the highly improvised manner in which the canal was excavated.⁶

The Liman

Our second stop will be in the dockyards of Alexandria. After the disastrous naval battle of Navarino (October 1827) in which Muhammad 'Ali lost most of his beloved fleet, the Pasha determined to acquire a new one.⁷ This time, though, he would construct it in Egypt rather than ordering it from Europe. With this end in view, he secured the services of a French engineer, M. de Cerisy, to build a dockyard in the western harbour, starting in June 1829.⁸ It was in this dockyard that the Pasha's formidable new navy was built, a navy that brought him victory in his most daring military venture, the Syrian Campaign of 1831–33.⁹

From the outset, the dockyard became an important part of the Alexandrian landscape.¹⁰ The number of workers is said to have been around 4,000,¹¹ although other estimates rise to twice that figure;¹² and in the first ten years, it produced twenty-two naval vessels.

In addition to having provided the Pasha with a formidable fleet which considerably enhanced his offensive capabilities, the Alexandria dockyard also occupies a significant place in the modern history of Egypt, because it

⁶ Rivlin 1961: 221, 353 n. 15; Al-Jabarti 1880: IV, 301–4. See also Cuno's cautionary remarks (1992: 121–2) on Al-Jabarti's figures, which form the basis of Rivlin's assessment.

⁷ The battle of Navarino was fought between the combined Egyptian–Ottoman fleet and the combined fleets of Britain, France and Russia. The European navies had gathered in a show of force, intending to impress upon the Ottoman sultan the importance of granting independence to his Greek subjects, who had been in revolt against Ottoman authority since 1821. The battle took place on 27 October 1827 and resulted in the destruction of the Egyptian–Ottoman fleet. For the significance of this battle in the relationship between Muhammad 'Ali and the Ottoman sultan, see Fahmy 1997: 58–60.

⁸ Cerisy later became a resident of Alexandria, and the Pasha approved his request to acquire land on which to build a house, granting him, on 27 Ramadan 1249 (8 February 1834), a sum of 15,000 piastres to purchase a five-*faddan* plot next to Muharram Bey's gardens. See Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya (Egyptian National Archives, Cairo, hereafter 'ENA'): Muhafazat Iskandariyya, Awamir, Box No. 1, Doc. No. 38).

⁹ For a history of Muhammad 'Ali's military career, see Fahmy 1997.

¹⁰ For a diagram of the dockyard as designed by de Cerisy, see Clot-Bey 1840: II, pl. between 240 and 241.

¹¹ Owen 1981: 71.

¹² Clot-Bey 1840: II, 246; St John 1834: II, 478.

was there that what can be safely be called the first national prison was located. All the penal codes that were passed during Muhammad 'Ali's time mention the *liman* or *tarsanat Iskandariyya*, the port or the dockyard of Alexandria, as a place of imprisonment. In contrast to Liman Abu Qir, the main prison, reserved for public officials and military personnel and located in Abu Qir Bay to the east of Alexandria, the *liman* of Alexandria interned civilians from all over Egypt, including Bedouins, and foreigners who had been sentenced by their consular courts. The time spent in the *liman* was estimated to have been about 300 days on average in the late 1840s, and anything between 100 and 350 days in the 1860s. The prisoners, whose number at any one time ranged from 250 to 650, were mostly employed in hard labour at the dockyard, doing such tasks as digging and carrying earth as part of efforts to enlarge the harbour, in addition to working in the various workshops of the arsenal (carpentry, sail- and rope-making), and loading and unloading carts.¹³

Even though the number of prisoners in the dockyard was small compared to the total number of workers employed there,¹⁴ the association between the dockyard and port, on the one hand, and the prison, on the other, was so strong in Egyptian popular imagination that the word *liman*, which in Turkish (and in the original Greek) means 'harbour', came to mean 'prison' in its new Egyptian context. It maintains this association to this day, and any previous connection to port or harbour has been lost.¹⁵

The Karantina or Quarantine Board

We turn next to another institution important in the modern history of Alexandria: the International Quarantine Board, which was formed to deal with the devastating cholera epidemic of 1831, and lasted, with various changes of name, into the twentieth century.¹⁶ When news of the outbreak of cholera in Cairo reached Alexandria, panic seized the city, and Muhammad 'Ali proposed to the European consuls resident in Alexandria the formation of a medical council to recommend measures for the protection of the city from the epidemic. To enable it to carry on its functions, the Pasha promised to meet all expenses that the Board deemed

¹³ All the information used in this paragraph is drawn from the pioneering and meticulous study by Rudolph Peters (forthcoming).

¹⁴ Reimer (1997: 56) says that the large number of workers in the dockyard made the government the largest employer in the city in the 1830s.

¹⁵ Fahmy 1997: 137.

¹⁶ It was also known as the Consular Commission of Health, or the General Sanitary Administration. For a discussion of the different names by which the board was known, see Kuhnke 1990: 206, n. 1. Here, to avoid confusion, and following Kuhnke's practice, it is consistently referred to as the Quarantine Board.

necessary, and placed a force of 20,000 troops at its disposal. The Pasha's aims were not only to safeguard the health of the population and the prosperity of his main port city, but also to protect the large military force that he had been amassing for the invasion of Syria.¹⁷

In response to the Pasha's request, the entire European consular corps of Alexandria met and named a five-man committee, consisting of the consuls general of Britain, France, Austria, Tuscany, and Russia, to act as the first Quarantine Board. However, and in spite of the double cordon that was hurriedly put in place, cholera broke out in Alexandria in the summer of 1831, and peaked in August, claiming more than 100 lives a day. Even though the Pasha paid special attention to the protection of his troops stationed in Alexandria, the epidemic spread to the navy, both in barracks and on shipboard. Ultimately, the Board could not effectively protect Alexandria, and by the end of the epidemic around 4,000 people had died in the city.

On the basis of its performance, it could be said that the Board completely failed in its duties. Torn by internal divisions which reflected the competing interests of the consuls' countries, the Board was soon disbanded, once it had become clear that it could not protect the city from disease. More seriously, the Board's measures proved ineffective in safeguarding other cities in Egypt. The final impact of the 1831 cholera epidemic was devastating: 150,000 people died throughout Egypt in a matter of two months, including 36,000 in Cairo alone.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the creation of the Board represented the first attempt at international disease control and, if for no other reason, it deserves on this account a prominent place in Alexandria's history. More importantly, the Board was reconvened soon after the epidemic had died out and was charged by Muhammad 'Ali with the creation of a European-style lazaretto, an institution whose lack had hampered the Board's attempt to impose proper quarantine regulations. Two years later, the first lazaretto was built in Alexandria, two kilometres east of the European ('Frankish') Quarter, along the eastern harbour, with enough room to detain up to 2,500 persons at any one time. All that remains of it now is its name. In present-day Alexandria, the neighbourhood of al-Azarita is named after this nineteenth-century institution.¹⁹ It was partly thanks to the efforts of the Quarantine Board that Egypt was better prepared to face the next outbreak of cholera in 1848, when total casualties did not exceed 30,000, with 3,793 deaths in Alexandria.²⁰

¹⁷ As a result of the epidemic, the campaign planned for the summer was postponed to the autumn.

¹⁸ Kuhnke 1990: 51-7.

¹⁹ Kuhnke 1990: 94-5; Reimer 1997: 68-9.

²⁰ Kuhnke 1990: 59.

The record of the Quarantine Board's effectiveness with the 1835 plague, the last large plague epidemic to visit Egypt, is equally mixed. On the one hand, it could be said that the medical authorities in general, and the Board's measures in particular, were ineffective in either anticipating the outbreak of the epidemic or in bringing it under swift control. In the forty-month period that the plague ravaged the country,²¹ villages and cities alike, the epidemic carried away more than 200,000 souls. Many villages lost more than half their populations; the village of Giza lost over three quarters; Rosetta lost two fifths of the survivors of the cholera epidemic of only four years earlier;²² Cairo saw more than 1,200 deaths daily during the peak months, and eventually lost at least 75,000 people. Edward Lane estimated that Cairo's population was reduced by a third,²³ while Alexander Kinglake, who was present in the city during the peak months, believed that the capital must have lost half of its population.²⁴ Even though the police chief of Alexandria had been appointed as the government representative to the Quarantine Board (thus enhancing the Board's ability to implement its directives), and even though the Board had the full backing of Muhammad 'Ali (much to the indignation of European merchants, who were dismayed by the delays that their business suffered, and contrary to the desire of Muslim clerics, who claimed that many of the Pasha's and the Board's directives contravened Islamic principles),²⁵ the plague hit the city with merciless severity. The quarantines imposed on the military barracks and the naval arsenal with its 6,000 workers were reportedly better enforced than those imposed on the city as a whole, where between 180 and 200 people succumbed to the plague during the peak month of March 1835. The Pasha, typically concerned about his military personnel, ordered the fleet to set sail for Crete.²⁶ Ultimately the plague claimed nearly 8,000 lives in Alexandria, almost one seventh of the city's population of 60,000.²⁷

²¹ Although it is commonly believed that the plague hit Egypt during 1835, the first cases were recorded as early as July 1834, and the epidemic was only officially declared over on 30 October 1837. For a full discussion of plague and other epidemics affecting Alexandria, see George Contis in the present volume (ch. 12).

²² Kuhnke 1990: 85.

²³ Lane 1836: 561, n. 1.

²⁴ Kinglake 1908: 155-73.

²⁵ For the petition of the *ulama* of Alexandria to Muhammad 'Ali complaining of the strict measures imposed by the Board, and the Pasha's response to them, see ENA, Muhafazat Iskandariyya, Awamir, Box No. 1, Doc. No. 133, on 12 Sha'ban 1250 (14 Dec. 1834), and Doc. No. 160, on 12 Shawwal 1250 (11 Feb. 1835). For the reaction of the religious men to quarantine, autopsy, vaccination and other novel medical practices, see Fahmy 1999a: 267-70.

²⁶ ENA, Muhafazat Iskandariyya, Awamir, Box No. 1, Doc. No. 178, on 14 Dhu al-Hijja 1250 (14 April 1835).

²⁷ Sticker 1908-12: I, 312 (quoted in Kuhnke 1990: 86). Although Lane estimates the population of Alexandria in 1833 to have been 40,000 (E.W. Lane, 'Description of Egypt',

Nevertheless, and in spite of these failings, the Board came to play an important part in the highly elaborate and widely dispersed public health establishment. Together with the General Board of Health in Cairo and the Qasr al-'Aini Hospital and its adjoining medical school, also in Cairo, the Quarantine Board of Alexandria played a significant role in raising the level of public health and improving conditions of hygiene throughout the entire country.²⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, the Board was so confident of the effectiveness of the measures it had put in place to combat disease that, when news reached Egypt of an outbreak of plague in India in 1896, it felt justified in dispatching a small commission to Bombay to 'make a study of the disease on the spot, and to investigate the best method of arresting it should it make its appearance in Egypt'. According to the report written by Dr Pinching, the Director General of the Sanitary Department, on the activities of the Commission that had been headed by his predecessor, Dr John Rogers, and which also included Dr Ibrahim Pasha Hassan, Director of the Qasr al-'Aini Medical School, 'it was largely owing to the knowledge acquired by the Commission and the far-seeing policy adopted by Sir John Rogers in making preparation in Egypt to combat the disease long before any cases occurred, that the success in dealing with the epidemic in Alexandria [in 1899] was due'.²⁹

A freshwater canal, a dockyard, and a quarantine board: there may be very little connecting these diverse historical 'landmarks' in the modern history of Alexandria; and choosing them to the exclusion of other historical stopping points may seem arbitrary. They do, however, highlight a number of important features of Alexandria and Alexandrian society in the nineteenth century. First, they all point to the intimate and intricate connection that Alexandria had with the rest of Egypt. The Mahmudiyya Canal might be thought of simply as a canal that supplied the city with fresh water, allowing its population to grow and prosper in the manner it did in the nineteenth century, but it was also a canal that tied the city even more firmly to the hinterland, if only because it was through it that Egypt's produce was shipped to the outside world.³⁰ Similarly, the harbour might be thought of as the main facility that attracted thousands of Europeans to

British Library MS, vol. 1, fol. 14, quoted in Reimer 1997: 90), it seems that Clot-Bey's estimate (1840: II, 192) of 60,000, which, admittedly, he cites for 1840, is a more plausible figure, especially since this was also the figure that the European consuls gave for the year 1835 (Kuhnke 1990: 86).

²⁸ For a brief social history of medicine in nineteenth-century Egypt, see Fahmy 2000a.

²⁹ Pinching 1900: 9.

³⁰ It was also suspected that the Pasha might have thought of the Canal in military terms, specifically as a means of defending Alexandria from a possible attack from the land side (Driault 1927: 154).

settle in Egypt, for without it the lucrative cotton trade could not have been controlled by the city. And yet the port, with its adjoining dockyard and workshops, provided ample employment opportunities and enabled tens of thousands of Egyptians to settle in Alexandria. Likewise, the Quarantine Board, even though based in Alexandria, and initially composed of European consuls whose main aim was to facilitate the trade of their respective countries with Egypt, had its most lasting impact in measures that were based on the realization that its main duty of safeguarding the health and hygiene of their city could never be properly carried out without paying equal, if not more, attention to the country at large.

Secondly, the manner in which these three projects were conceived, planned and executed is illustrative of their 'joint' nature and of the way 'foreigners' and 'Egyptians' collaborated in building modern Alexandria. For the Mahmudiyya Canal, although mostly planned by Turkish engineers in Muhammad 'Ali's service, was finally executed thanks to the services of the famous French architect, Pascal Coste, then resident in Cairo, and of two other less known and, judging by the record, far less competent compatriots of his, Huyot and Lachaise.³¹ The *liman* of Alexandria, whose conception and final execution is usually credited to the diligent work of de Cerisy, seems also to have involved the highly energetic and imaginative local naval architect, Hajj 'Umar.³² And the Quarantine Board can only be seen as a very fertile ground, on which Europeans and local officials worked together, sometimes in a spirit of cooperation, at other times with considerable friction, to render their city a healthier place.³³

Thirdly, and most significantly, these three projects or institutions also illustrate the role played by lower-class Egyptians, and, specifically, the enormous price paid by them in the development of the 'cosmopolitan' Alexandria that has been eulogized so often by historians, poets and literary critics. For, like that other canal whose history is synonymous with Egyptian national history, the Mahmudiyya Canal was dug with the bare hands, the sweat and the blood of tens of thousands of fellaheen from all over Egypt. The 30,000 men, women and children who died digging the Canal, and the countless others who were dragged to the project's site with ropes around their necks, and who were forced to toil under the blazing sun from sunrise to sunset, deserve to be recognized as the true founders of modern Alexandria. Similarly, the harbour which was enlarged and dredged to

³¹ Rivlin 1961: 219–20.

³² There are various documents in the ENA which refer to this man; see for example Mahafiz al-Sham, Box No. 3, Doc. No. 126, on 21 Sha'ban 1247 (25 Jan. 1832), which mentions his efforts to organize the naval dockyard properly in order to supply Ibrahim Pasha's army in Syria with the necessary war material.

³³ Kuhnke 1990: 92–110.

dangerous mix is specifically referred to by the police, as, for example, in the case of a Prussian woman called Bella Christina who owned a tavern-cum-coffee-shop in Ramleh. (At this time, 1855, Ramleh had not yet been incorporated within Alexandria proper, and lay outside the city limits.) Late one night, when she was about to close her shop, some European customers came by asking for drinks, and when she turned them down, saying it was too late, a fight broke out which ended in the police station. The different parties reached an amicable settlement, and Christina decided not to press charges. However, the Alexandria Governorate (Muhafazat Iskandariyya) wrote to the police headquarters to check whether Christina had a permit to operate a tavern in such a place, and whether she had a criminal record. It emerged that Christina had been involved in a similar incident five years before and that there had been an earlier order to exile her to her own country,³⁷ 'since she is a prostitute who causes problems, and since she was receiving various Frenchmen and Greeks who were evildoers in her place'. After checking her detailed criminal record, the Alexandria police suggested to the Governorate that this time she should be exiled and her tavern-cum-brothel-cum-coffee-shop closed down, explaining that 'the presence in a remote area such as Ramleh of coffee shops and taverns where women and [alcoholic] drinks are mixed' would necessarily 'result in trouble'.³⁸

Alcohol

Alcohol, consumed in taverns or in public places, was sometimes named by itself as the source of trouble. The Alexandria police records contain voluminous correspondence about sailors who came ashore and went straight to brothels, where they got drunk and caused disturbances.³⁹ But alcohol-related problems were not confined to sailors looking for a good time; many locals also ended up in police stations after having a bit too much to drink in a tavern or a wine shop. On 15 June 1865, for example, two Turkish guards joined two Greek men for a drink in a tavern. After getting a bit tipsy, the Turkish men started arguing with each other and, when they were kicked out for fear of the damage they might cause, got into a fight in the street,

³⁷ This was common practice with all non-Egyptians who were convicted of any misdemeanor, and was not limited to prostitutes. The punitive use of 'exile' (in effect repatriation), stipulated in various penal codes, was one way of defining who was Egyptian and who was not. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, numerous Europeans, but also Turks, Moroccans, Syrians and Hijazis, were effectively deemed non-Egyptian by this process.

³⁸ ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/4/1 (old No. 850), Letter No. 1 to Diwan al-Muhafaza, p. 3, 29 Dhu al-Hijja 1271 (12 Sept. 1855).

³⁹ ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/3/12/4, Letter to Muhafazat Iskandariyya No. 21, p. 6, on 23 Jumadi I 1281 (28 Oct. 1864), and *ibid.*, No. 43, p. 8, on 29 Jumadi II 1281 (29 Nov. 1864).

during which they struck each other with their swords. They were sent to hospital, where they were treated at the cost of 372 piastres. When the case was reviewed by the local judicial council, and then ratified by the Majlis al-Ahkam, the highest legal body in the land, they were sentenced to one year in the *liman*, after which they were to be exiled to their own country.⁴⁰

In another case, four Greeks got drunk on the street and decided to block the passage of some camels which were being escorted through the city laden with bricks. A contingent of Turkish soldiers ('*asakir Islambuliyya*) was passing by and tried to force the camel caravan through, while avoiding a confrontation with the drunken Greeks. This proved rather difficult and the situation was further complicated by the arrival on the scene of a group of Egyptian soldiers ('*asakir al-tuf*), who were apparently intimidated by the Greeks and did not want to drag them out of the tavern where they had sought refuge. Once the Greeks had stepped out of the tavern, however, the Egyptian soldiers laid hands on them only to be stopped by the guard of the Greek consulate, who succeeded in setting two of the Greeks free. When news of this reached the barracks of the Turkish troops, they rushed to the site and managed to seize the two freed Greeks, whom they escorted to the police station.⁴¹

A more telling case illustrating the problems that were occasionally associated with drinking, especially in public places, concerns two Egyptians (*abna* 'Arab) and four Greeks (*arwam*). One Friday morning, the four Greek men were sitting together in a small park opposite Muharram Bey's gardens. They were eating and drinking and one of them was already exceedingly drunk, when the two Egyptians came by to drink from a small well that was in the park. The drunk Greek, whose name appears in the Arabic records as 'Costandi Nicotwilu', then apparently splashed some wine on the Egyptians, who angrily accused him of having defiled them so that they could not participate in the Friday prayers. A fist fight broke out, which resulted in the death of one of the Egyptians and the wounding of the other.⁴²

⁴⁰ ENA, Majlis al-Ahkam, Reg. No. S/7/10/29 (old No. 633), Case No. 91, pp. 90-91, on 22 Jumadi II 1282 (13 Nov. 1865).

⁴¹ ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/18/1 (old No. 1672), Case No. 18, pp. 44-8, on 3 Ramadan 1273 (27 April 1857).

⁴² ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/18/1 (old No. 1672), Case No. 7, pp. 7-11, on 3 Jumadi I 1273 (30 Dec. 1856). The details are interesting, showing the care with which the police handled such sensitive cases. Most of the questioning had to be conducted in the hospital where both Egyptians were being treated, and where one of them eventually died. The questioning was conducted in the presence of the Governor of Alexandria himself, and also in the presence of the Greek consul, his translator, and the four accused men.

Arms

The most serious problem faced by the Alexandria police in their attempts to impose law and order on the rapidly expanding city was that of firearms. At a time when the Khedival government was having some success in implementing a 'gun control policy' throughout Egypt, both in the urban centres and in the countryside,⁴³ the attempt to impose this policy on European newcomers to Alexandria proved much more difficult. After the police had received numerous reports of cases involving the use of firearms, they felt compelled, in 1855, to write to the Governorate reminding it that in 1851 the Foreign Affairs Department (Diwan al-Khariyya) had written to the foreign consuls telling them to notify their subjects that they, like all other residents of Alexandria, had to carry a lantern if they went out after three o'clock Arabic time (three hours after sunset), and that there was a law against carrying firearms or any potentially lethal weapon. The police added that when they were informed of these regulations, the European consuls had agreed to assist the local authorities in implementing them. But when the police saw that in practice their repeated appeals to the consuls went unheeded, they requested the Governorate to allow them to circumvent the consuls altogether and to print leaflets and distribute them throughout the city.⁴⁴ It is not clear if the police were allowed to proceed as they had requested; and their complaints about the rowdy behaviour of many European residents continued.⁴⁵ Further requests were made to the European consuls to impress upon their subjects the importance of abiding by local regulations banning firearms, but apparently to no avail.⁴⁶ When caught, Europeans sometimes claimed that they had no intention of harming any person, and that their only purpose was to shoot pigeons. As if possessed of second sight and terrified at what was to happen half a century later in the small Delta village of Dinshaway,⁴⁷ the police would make clear to the

⁴³ Toledano 1900: 164–6.

⁴⁴ ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/4/1 (old No. 850), Letter to Diwan al-Muhafaza No. 54, p. 71, on 10 Rabi' II 1272 (20 Dec. 1855).

⁴⁵ See, for example, the case of the Neapolitan man who had a row with a candle merchant, in the course of which he used a knife, wounding a local man who attempted to intercede: ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/4/1 (old No. 850), Letter to Diwan al-Muhafaza No. 55, pp. 71, 73, on 12 Rabi' II 1272 (22 Dec. 1855). From the lengthy correspondence about this case (e.g. Letter No. 17, p. 84, and Letter No. 23, p. 103) one gets an idea of the sense of frustration felt by the local police, given the limitations put on their work by the Capitulations, even when they were dealing with murder cases.

⁴⁶ See, for example, ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/4/7 (old No. 904), Letter to the British Consul No. 65, p. 435, on 11 Shawwal 1276 (2 May 1860).

⁴⁷ The Dinshaway Incident occurred in June 1906. A group of British soldiers went pigeon shooting but ended up wounding a local villager. Trouble escalated and ended with the death of a British officer. The authorities responded swiftly and brutally: four villagers were sentenced to death and hanged the following day, many were imprisoned and others publicly

relevant consul that 'pigeon shooting without a license is a grave offence and shooting within the city, even with a licensed firearm, is strictly forbidden'.⁴⁸

Obviously what was at stake, and what alarmed the Alexandria police, was that Alexandria, like other port cities, was considered by many gangsters to be a safe haven, and a place in which they could evade the government authorities. Many such men arrived in Alexandria intent on using the port city as a new base for their criminal activities. This was the case, for example, with the eighteen-year old Giuseppe Gatti, who arrived on board an Austrian vessel some time in July 1856. When asked about his papers and of which European country he was a protégé, he claimed that he was a French subject (*tahta himayat Faransa*). He was then sent to the French Consulate to obtain a proper passport,⁴⁹ but he escaped from his guards on the way. Before he was caught by the police, a Sardinian subject by the name of Carlo Yanni filed a complaint against Gatti, accusing him of causing harm to many people including other Sardinians. In the meantime a note arrived from the French consulate denying that Gatti had ever been a French subject. Without the 'protection' of a European consulate, the police were able to arrest him with no fear of consular intervention. In due course, Gatti was arrested and, when asked why he was carrying weapons, said it was to protect himself. He was charged with striking and causing harm to a man, of carrying pistols, guns and knives, of threatening people with these weapons, of entering the city with no proper documentation, and of escaping his guards. The police found Gatti guilty of being 'an evildoer who causes harm to others', and after trial he was sentenced to one year in the *liman* of Alexandria.⁵⁰

As it happened, the police pursued their investigation of Gatti and his activities even after he had been imprisoned. It transpired that, during his short stay in Egypt, he had joined a large gang of twenty-two brigands

flogged. The incident triggered a series of anti-British campaigns and acted as a catalyst for the budding nationalist movement.

⁴⁸ ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/4/7 (old No. 904), Letter to the British Consul No. 70, p. 473, on 11 Safar 1276 (9 Sept. 1859).

⁴⁹ It should be noted that carrying the passport of a country was not the same as being a national of that country. Passports were simply papers issued by various local and foreign authorities requesting *laissez passer* for their bearer.

⁵⁰ ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/18/1 (old No. 1672), Case No. 2, pp. 2–3, on 16 Safar 1273 (16 Oct. 1856). The expression 'evildoer' should not be read as implying an ethical judgement; rather, it referred to a clause in the main penal code of the time, *al-Qanun al-Sultani* of 1852, which was a revision of the Ottoman Penal Code of 1850. Article 13 of Chapter Three of this code stated that 'the group of evildoers (*zumrat al-ashrar*), that is, those who appear different [or delinquent?] (*allathi tazhar mughayrathum*) in some respects, if their situation is such that it results in disturbing the peace (*salb al-ann*) of the populace, if any one of the said people is arraigned, he should be exiled [here meaning "imprisoned"] with iron shackles for a year (quoted in Zaghul 1900: Appendix, 165).

(*ashrar*), all Europeans, who were active not only in Alexandria, but also in Cairo. They were implicated in a series of very serious crimes that had long remained unsolved, including highway robbery, the counterfeiting of currency, arms smuggling, theft, and even one case of murder. Their base was in the Frankish Quarter of Alexandria. Faced with the serious nature of the police findings, the consuls dropped their protection of all the gang's members, who, as a result, all received prison sentences, ranging from three to seven years. Gatti, who was retried, received eight years in the *liman*. All were to be deported to their countries of origin after serving their prison sentences and were debarred from ever living in Alexandria again.⁵¹

Passports and the daman ('guarantee') system

Guiseppi Gatti's case was, of course, far from typical: it was not every day that the Zabtiyyat laid its hands on a multinational gang operating over such a wide area and showing the boldness that his gang exhibited; nevertheless, it illustrates very well the kind of problems that Alexandrian society faced in one of its most dynamic periods. In the fifty-year period from 1833 to 1882, the population increased almost fourfold, from around 60,000 to 231,396.⁵² The main source of this increase in population was, of course, internal and international migration. Reimer, who worked on the Alexandria census records, makes the important point that out of the 104,000 who resided in the city in 1848 only 24,000 were natives of Alexandria (*ahl Iskandariyya*).⁵³ By the time the 1868 census was taken, the proportion of people who were identified as natives of the city had risen to over 50%.⁵⁴ This very rapid and 'unnatural' increase of the population was of course beneficial to the city's commerce and general prosperity. As illustrated above, however, it also caused serious security problems, since it meant that the personal face-to-face contact that typically binds and renders safe pre-modern cities was crucially absent. The different societies, associations and clubs (studied in depth and with much dexterity by Reimer and Ilbert) which the various ethnic communities founded, starting in the 1850s, may have had their origins in the uncertain and precarious nature of those times. What is of concern here, however, is the steps taken by the local authorities to achieve tighter control over this transient population.

As we have seen, the police were always on the lookout for any dangerous activities; and, judging from the record, it seems that they were relatively

⁵¹ ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/18/1 (old No. 1672), Case No. 13, pp. 21–36, on 11 Rajab 1273 (7 March 1857).

⁵² Reimer 1997: 90 (Table 5.1), 110 (Table 6.1). See also, for a survey of Alexandria's demographic trends, Ilbert 1996: II, 754–64; and, in the present volume, Robert Mabro (ch. 13).

⁵³ Reimer 1997: 90.

⁵⁴ Reimer 1997: 15.

successful in carrying out what must have been a daunting task.⁵⁵ In dealing with this rapidly expanding and 'rootless' population, the authorities resorted to the all-too-familiar technique of modern governments, and especially those in colonial settings: the recording, tabulating and categorizing of the population.⁵⁶ Another strategy, evident in Gatti's story, was requiring all European newcomers to present proper passports on arrival. A special officer was stationed in the western harbour to go through the papers of all Europeans who disembarked, without causing any delays.⁵⁷

In 1858 a law was issued by the Government printing house in Bulaq, Cairo, spelling out the problems that faced the authorities and specifying a number of measures that foreigners had to take:

Since the number of foreigners who have been arriving in Egypt has been increasing in the past few years, and since most of these foreigners end up living in Cairo and Alexandria, the foreign community in Egypt has expanded and now includes many people from different ethnicities (*ikhhtilaf ajnasihim*). As a result, they has been mixing (*mukhalata wa-ikhhtilat*) [with each other and with locals]. These foreigners (*ajnabiyyin*), include not only well-respected people, but also others who follow dangerous routes, people who can cause serious threat to public security unless they are put under close surveillance by the police. Accordingly, it has become essential for the local authorities to undertake any measures they deem necessary to maintain effective supervision and surveillance.⁵⁸

The decree went on to specify that all foreigners landing in Alexandria had to have either a 'proper passport' (*basaburt mustawfi al-shurut*) or a permit (*tadhkira*) issued by one of the European consuls or by the local authorities (Art. 10). Any foreigner who wished to reside in Cairo or Alexandria had to have his name entered in the local residents' register, unless he possessed a residency certificate (*tadhkirat iqama*) (Art. 14). Furthermore, on leaving these cities for touristic reasons, these foreigners had to have 'internal passports' issued by the appropriate consulate and certified by the Zabtiyyat, stating explicitly 'the area that the foreigner intended to visit, his full name, physical description, age, religion and the number of his

⁵⁵ Successful, that is, until the 1882 riots. But in all fairness, it may safely be said that these riots reflected tensions throughout Egypt, and even beyond, and that they were of such a nature and on such a scale that no police force could have been expected to deal with them.

⁵⁶ Besides Reimer 1997, see Robert Mabro in the present volume (ch. 13). For the origins of the Egyptian census and its connection with conscription needs in Muhammad 'Ali's Egypt, see Fahmy 1997: 107–11. For the census in British India, see Cohn 1990: 224–54; Prakash 1999: 135.

⁵⁷ ENA, Mubafazat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/3/1/33 (old No. 52), Letter to Nazir Qism al-Basaburtat No. 24, p. 35, on 28 Dhu al-Qi'da 1268 (14 Sept. 1852).

⁵⁸ *La'iha 'Ummiyya fima Yakhass Tartib Zabti wa-Rabt al-Ahali al-Ajnabiyyin bi-Mamlakat Mahrusat Misr al-Qahira* [A General Decree Regarding the Organization and the Surveillance of Foreigners in the Realm of Egypt], Cairo: Bulaq, AH 1274 (AD 1858), pp. 2–3.

dependents, regardless of whether these were foreigners or locals (*min al-ahali*)' (Art. 23). As for locals, both those who were identified as *dakhil al-hukuma* (under the authority of the Khedival government) and those simply identified as *min al-ahali* (locals) were subject to government surveillance. The thousands of 'Egyptians' who arrived from various parts of Egypt to reside and work in Alexandria were monitored either through their guilds (*tawwa'if*)⁵⁹ or through an intricate system of 'guarantees' (*daman*). According to this system anyone in employment was required to have a guarantor (*dhamin*), who would be responsible for finding him in case he was wanted by the authorities or by debtors. Guarantees were also required for those renting property or engaging in trade, unless they were merchants by profession. In a society that was still relying on personal contacts, and at a time when identity cards had not proved their reliability,⁶⁰ the *daman* system had gradually assumed more importance and was often resorted to by the authorities to obtain a clear account of the whereabouts of the indigenous population.⁶¹

The marketplace

Given the 'not so respectable' background of some of the European newcomers and the dubious intentions of many of the Egyptian ones,⁶² the police had every reason to be constantly alert to what was happening in the city. The main point to stress, though, is that for the most part, Alexandria was a safe city and that the Babel-like composition of the population did not prevent people from interacting with each other and doing business together. There were, for example, many cases in which foreigners lived in houses owned by Egyptians and vice versa, although we may assume that

⁵⁹ For the manner in which guilds operated in Alexandria, see Reimer 1997: 161–7. The literature on guilds in nineteenth-century Egypt is large, but Cole 1993 is particularly useful. See also Ghazaleh 1995: 60–74.

⁶⁰ *Tadhkiras* (identity cards of a sort) had been introduced in Muhammad 'Ali's Egypt to catch draft dodgers and villagers who deserted their villages to avoid paying taxes. They gradually evolved into an important tool used by the authorities to 'fix' the population, both in cities and in the countryside (see Fahmy 1997: 106, 108, 125–6).

⁶¹ The records of the *Zabtiyyat* in both Cairo and Alexandria are replete with cases of people caught without a *daman* and employers charged with employing men without checking whether they had a proper *daman*. For a good case from Alexandria that shows how the system worked, see ENA, *Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya*, Reg. No. L/4/18/1 (old No. 1672), Case No. 32, pp. 66–7, on 22 Rabi' II 1274 (18 Dec. 1857). See also Toledano 1900: 161, 198–9.

⁶² See the interesting case of the four Bedouins from the Sa'id (Upper Egypt) who arrived in Alexandria with the intention of making quick money. They raided the house of a Jew named Salmun Salama, who was an Italian protégé, and stole considerable property. They were then caught, while having a fight about who was to take the most valuable of the stolen goods, a gold watch: ENA, *Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya*, Reg. No. L/4/18/4 (old No. 1675), Case No. 288, pp. 138–41, on 24 Rabi' II 1295 (27 April 1878).

newcomers to the city would have preferred to live with people from their own Egyptian village who had preceded them to the city, or to seek out those from their home countries and try to squeeze in with them.⁶³ In employment too there were contacts between people from different communities. The example of the Greek proprietor, Andrea, who employed two Egyptians in his restaurant was not untypical; what was perhaps strange was that the two Egyptians fought together so frequently that he finally reported them to the police.⁶⁴ Nor was it unusual for the Italian, Dr Marsio, to employ Sulayman Muhammad as his butler (*sufraji*). Sulayman, however, was ungrateful to his employer and used to steal his carpets one after the other, justifying his act by saying that it was too cold in the shed where he slept, and that he used the carpets to keep himself warm.⁶⁵

If the record shows that people from one ethnic community had no problem in employing a person from another community and providing him or her with accommodation, it is in the marketplace that the frequency of inter-ethnic interaction is most obvious. It is common to assume that, 'reinforced by the weight of history', different occupations were dominated by certain communities. Thus money-lending was the preserve of Jews, grocery and tobacco shops were dominated by the Greeks, while construction specialists were mostly Italian.⁶⁶ It goes without saying, however, that no product was restricted, as far as its consumers were concerned, to the community whose members dominated its production. In other words, Jews might have dominated the bureaux de change, but they certainly lent money to non-Jews; non-Greeks as well as Greeks would patronize the grocery shop on the corner; and Italians were certainly building houses for non-Italians to live in.

This Babel-like intermingling of people was, obviously, not without its problems, and sometimes its humorous ones. On 7 April 1878, for example, Nafisa bint Muhammad al-Sammak entered the shop of the Italian Angello Giri, on al-Saba' 'Umarat Street. Angello sold marble products, and Nafisa picked up a marble apple to buy. When she paid for the product, Angello's wife, who was standing by the counter serving the customers while her husband was sleeping in a back room, had to go to the neighbouring shop to get some change. Nafisa seized the opportunity and stormed into the back room shouting and yelling at Angello to give her back her money. The man,

⁶³ See, for example, ENA, Muhafazat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/3/1/33 (old No. 52), Petition to the British Consul (without number), p. 27, on 27 Dhu al-Qi'da 1268 (13 Sept. 1851), and *ibid.*, Petition without number, pp. 27, 32, on 28 Dhu al-Qi'da 1268 (14 Sept. 1851).

⁶⁴ ENA, *Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya*, Reg. No. L/4/18/4 (old No. 1675), Case No. 237, pp. 31–2, on 16 Rabi' I 1295 (20 March 1878).

⁶⁵ ENA, *Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya*, Reg. No. L/4/18/4 (old No. 1675), Case No. 250, pp. 55–7, on 3 Rabi' II 1295 (6 April 1878).

⁶⁶ Ilbert 1997: 24.

who had arrived in Alexandria only the previous month, could not understand what she was saying and tried to tell her in Italian that this was not proper behaviour. But neither could understand the other. When he took her back to the counter again and opened his purse to show her the different denominations, which he knew even less well than the language she was speaking, Nafisa then stuck her hand in and got the 'change' that she claimed was owed to her. It took Angello and his wife some time to count the money and to make the proper transfers and calculations, and thus to discover that Nafisa had robbed them of the equivalent of more than 300 francs. Angello went immediately to the local police station, and then to the Italian consulate (which promptly wrote to the Zabtiyyat), and demanded a quick resolution. Soon afterward Nafisa was arrested, and Angello and his wife managed to identify her from among three other women, even though she had her veil on. While she denied the charges, the police found her guilty of theft, being further convinced when a guard testified that she had tried to bribe him to set her free.⁶⁷

Magic

The police records of Alexandria (which date back to the second half of the nineteenth century) can be read in various ways, to show how the Capitulations worked, how the indigenous legal system functioned,⁶⁸ or how the people perceived the police force and its gradual encroachment on daily life.⁶⁹ For our purposes, though, I have tried to read them as a source for the social history of Alexandria in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Specifically, my intention has been to use them to determine how internally segregated Alexandrian society was, how members of different ethnic communities dealt with the local police authorities, and, more importantly, how they dealt with each other. The picture one gets from these records, tentative as it must be, is of a highly integrated society in the process of rapid change – change that gave rise to considerable tension – but a society that evinced, nevertheless, a considerable degree of stability and calm. While a comparison with Cairo police records from the same period immediately shows how much more frequently firearms were used in Alexandria, they also show how ready the police were to deal decisively and efficiently with this phenomenon. The records also reveal a society that was highly 'cosmopolitan', not in the elitist sense that comes across in much of the literature of modern Alexandria, but in a much more down-to-earth way. One final example from the police records may illustrate this point further.

⁶⁷ ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/18/4 (old No. 1675), Case No. 276, pp. 110–12, on 15 Rabi' II 1295 (18 April 1878).

⁶⁸ See, for example, Fahmy 1999a.

⁶⁹ For a study that uses the Cairo police records for this last purpose, see Fahmy, 1999b.

On one cold January day, a Jew by the name of Abraham bin Isma'lun was sitting at a shop owned by a druggist ('*attar*') when a beggar came by asking for money. When the beggar saw that Abraham was very sad and preoccupied, he asked why he was so preoccupied, and Abraham told him that some days before he had lost a considerable amount of money while gambling with some friends. The beggar then told him not to worry since he knew of a Copt called Faransis, who, in turn, knew of a Maghribi (Moroccan) sheikh called Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib, who could help him recover his money. They then went together to Faransis, who took them to a local tavern where the sheikh was amusing himself.

On hearing about the case, the sheikh told the Jew that there was no reason to be sad, because he could retrieve his money. After some failed attempts to foresee the future by burning incense, and asking a young lad, whom he covered with a long white piece of cloth, to advise on the best day for playing cards again so that the Jew might get his money back, the sheikh then told the Jew that he had a better way, although it might cost him more than the usual fee for reading the future through burning incense. Sheikh Muhammad told both Faransis and Abraham that he had been informed about some old houses in Kawm al-Dikka in the south of the city which had hidden treasures, and asked them to fetch him some dust from the thresholds of these houses so that he could 'read' them to identify which one had the largest treasure. When they did so, the sheikh managed to 'read' the dust collected from the threshold of one house and identified it as the one which had five earthenware jars buried therein: one filled with golden coins, two with pure gold, one half-filled with diamonds and half-filled with gold, and the last one filled with gold and also containing a small statue of a man with diamond eyes. They wisely decided that it would be in that house that they would start digging for the hidden treasures.

At this point, the sheikh asked the Jew to dismiss the Copt and to send for his own servant, a Jewish lad called Rahmin, to help him dig. He also told him that he needed some money to buy sheep to be slaughtered each time they started digging, in order to cleanse the house of the evil spirits. Abraham duly complied and, all in all, he paid the sheikh more than twice the amount of money that he had lost in gambling, money which he was now desperately, and rather foolishly, trying to retrieve.

After the sheikh and the Jewish lad had managed to unearth four sealed jars at considerable expense to Abraham, the sheikh refused to work any longer. For two months Abraham continued to beg him to finish his business, slaughtering sheep for him and even sending them to his wife at home (despite the sheikh's pretence that the sheep were required for cleansing the houses of bad spirits); but to no avail. Finally, he decided to go in person to the sheikh's house, presumably to fetch him by force, only to

catch him leaving with his wife, children and belongings and heading for the port, in a clear attempt to board a ship and flee the city. Having finally realized that he had been deceived all along, Abraham dragged Sheikh Muhammad to the police station where, predictably, the sheikh denied any fraud, and said that he did, indeed, unearth four jars and it was not his fault that they turned out to have been filled with dust and not with gold and precious stones. He also claimed to be a French protégé and demanded to be released. When the young Jewish servant, Rahmin, said that he could neither ascertain nor deny the sheikh's claim that he did, in fact, unearth the jars, the police had no option but to summon the local pottery makers to give their expert opinion on whether or not these had really been ancient jars. When these experts said that, although the jars did indeed look strange, they were not antique, and were of a kind currently imported from southern Turkey, the sheikh's denials became more difficult to believe. The final blow to his attempt to prove himself innocent came, though, from the French Consulate, who said that seven years earlier, according to their records, Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib had been accused of stealing money from some Muslims in Damascus but had escaped to Algeria. The French Consulate added that they had withdrawn French protection from Sheikh Muhammad and that the Egyptian authorities should feel free to do with him as they wished. Sheikh Muhammad was then found guilty and sentenced to one year in the *liman* of Alexandria, and to be exiled to his home country after serving his sentence.⁷⁰

A Muslim, a Copt and a Jew who were searching together for hidden treasure: this story could have come straight from *The Arabian Nights*. But it appears in the Alexandria police records, and is a true story of events that took place in Alexandria in the middle of the nineteenth century. For it to be plausible at all, it has to be assumed that Alexandria was associated in at least some people's minds with easy money – a place where one could get rich fairly easily. It also has to be remembered that it was not so improbable to come across ancient treasures hidden in desolate spots.⁷¹ Indeed, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed repeated attempts by the Khedival government to gain control over the unrelenting search for ancient Egyptian antiquities by foreigners and locals alike; and the general principle that was adopted was that any ancient treasure that was unearthed should be

⁷⁰ ENA, Zabtiyyat Iskandariyya, Reg. No. L/4/18/4 (old No. 1672), Case No. 17, pp. 40–44, on 28 Sha'ban 1273 (24 April 1857).

⁷¹ The theme of hidden treasures was a common one in much of the popular literature of Egypt in the second half of the nineteenth century.

handed in to the authorities and that, legally, it belonged to the state. The result was simply to drive these activities underground.⁷²

More significantly, the story is indicative of the ease with which members of various confessional and ethnic groups interacted with each other. It is also illustrative of the seriousness with which the police treated cases of fraud, and of the degree to which foreign consulates were willing to cooperate with the local authorities in making Alexandria a place where business could be done. Above all, it shows the ease with which people of different professions associated with each other, and how easily confessional lines were regularly crossed in daily life.

The shadow of the past

It is characteristic of the historiography of modern Alexandria to present the city as dominated by its classical history. And this is not simply because it is commonplace to assume that the modern city is doomed to live in the shadows of its ancient past, which (according to Beauman, paraphrasing Forster) is 'all that Alexandria has': 'the historical artefact, the monument, the readily identifiable leftovers of history have all, or nearly all gone. There is nothing to see – except what there was once, for Alexandria, is, in some ways, merely an idea, the spurious East, as [Forster] called it.'⁷³ More significantly, the history of modern Alexandria is often written in a manner that uncannily resembles the history of the ancient city.

For like Alexander's Alexandria, the modern city is very often described as the brainchild of a Macedonian – that other Macedonian, Muhammad 'Ali, who dominated Egyptian history in the first half of the nineteenth century. Whereas the Pasha comes across in Egyptian nationalist historiography as the founder of modern Egypt, his European admirers thought (and still think) of him as another Alexander who, with his remarkable tolerance towards non-Muslims, opened Egypt in general, and Alexandria in particular, to outside influence, and helped to turn Alexandria into the cosmopolitan, tolerant, open city which it became half a century after his death. There are in fact many traits shared by Alexander and Muhammad 'Ali, and the Pasha used to enjoy being compared with his illustrious predecessor. He often boasted of having the same birthplace as Alexander, just as he boasted that he shared with Napoleon the same year of birth. Indeed, the state that the Pasha founded, and which he passed on to his successors, resembles in many important features the Ptolemaic state. For, like the Ptolemies, Muhammad 'Ali diverted Egypt's considerable

⁷² See, for example, ENA, Majlis al-Ahkam, Reg. No. S/7/33/1, Order, p. 232, on 11 Dhu al-Qi'da 1277 (21 May 1861). See also the various similar orders relating to antiquities quoted by Filib Jallad (1890–92: I, 80–83, 90–91).

⁷³ Beauman 1993: 293.

agricultural wealth into a mighty military machine, which he used to expand its borders; and his economic policy was based, like theirs, on state monopoly in important agricultural crops. Furthermore, he introduced a cash crop, cotton, which, like the Ptolemies' sesame, helped link Egypt's economy to that of the European and Mediterranean world. And, like them, though not to the same extent, Muhammad 'Ali paid considerable attention to his window onto this world – Alexandria.

One might even add that both Muhammad 'Ali and the Ptolemies shared a distinctive disdain and disgust for the local population, which they viewed as a source of cheap, docile labour. Even more interesting is the fact that historians usually attribute the Egyptians' increased feeling of self-importance at two distinct periods to the crucial role they played in the military victories which their governments achieved: after the Battle of Raphia in 217 BC; and after the introduction of conscription by Muhammad 'Ali in 1821.

Be that as it may, there is one important difference between the two regimes as far as the history of Alexandria is concerned: unlike ancient Alexandria, which was closed to Egyptians at least until 217 BC, modern Alexandria was never closed to them. Egyptians were never a minority in the modern city; indeed they never constituted less than 80% of its population. And even more important, the modern city was physically built by their efforts: the Mahmudiyya Canal, the port, the Khedival palaces and the numerous other buildings that dotted the landscape of the cosmopolitan city, and which historians and poets alike typically celebrate, were actually built by thousands of construction workers who flocked to the city from all over Egypt seeking employment. Modern Alexandria was never empty of Egyptians. And these locals should never be dismissed, or left out of the historical narrative, or brushed aside – as they have often been in the studies and memoirs of those who bemoan the 'Alexandria we have lost' – simply because they smell.

In these pages, I have tried to reintroduce Egyptians into the history of modern Alexandria, where they rightfully belong. I have tried to do so without assuming that they should have pride of place simply because they constituted the majority. The Greeks, Italians, Jews, Armenians, Syrians and Moroccans (and let's not forget the Moroccans) all contributed to the amazingly rich life of the city from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century. These people of different religions and diverse languages lived together with remarkable ease, thanks not only to the clubs and schools and the numerous voluntary associations that members of the European community had founded, but also to the liberal and flexible policies adopted by the local authorities, even before the British takeover of 1882. The cosmopolitanism that characterized Alexandrian life was not only

manifest, I have tried to argue, in the number of languages some elite members spoke, but also in the confusion that a newcomer often encountered when setting foot in the city with the Babel-like language of its streets. It was also detected, not only in the ease with which business was conducted in the cotton bourse between financial magnates, despite their diverse ethnic origins, but also in the plethora of currencies that were all accepted as legal tender. Most important, it was seen, not only in the ability of the different communities to establish their own schools, religious institutions, and cemeteries, which allowed them to retain their distinctive marks of identity, but also in the frequency with which people from different communities were willing to do business with each other, to eat with each other, to drink with each other, and to have sex with each other.

This wonderfully rich, open and tolerant city is, alas, no more; the rabid nationalism of the 1940s has killed it. The nationality laws, the new photo-passports with the new sense of personhood on which they are predicated, and, above all, the new nationalist ideologies of Fascism, Arab Nationalism, and that most successful of all nationalist ideologies, Zionism, have together contributed to the death of cosmopolitan Alexandria. The cosmopolitan Alexandria has indeed been lost, and its loss is felt not only by the Greeks, the Italians, the French, the Armenians and the Jews who departed, but also by the 'Egyptians' who were left behind.

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Egyptian literary images of Alexandria

Azza Kararah

Though many modern Western writers have portrayed various facets of Alexandria, none has adequately reflected the native element of the city. Most Egyptians will find it difficult to recognize in Cavafy's verses,¹ in Robert Liddell's 'unreal city',² or in Stratis Tsirkas 'drifting city'³ – and least of all in Lawrence Durrell's *Quartet*⁴ – the Alexandria they know.

The Western authors were mostly outsiders, and few of them bothered to learn the language of the country. And why should they, when they could get along so well without it? In the Alexandria of the first half of the twentieth century, one could easily manage to deal with servants and dependants with only a smattering of Arabic; in the shops of the Rue Cherif or Rue Fouad, French was the lingua franca, understood by all. In his book, *Out of Egypt*, André Aciman sums the matter up when he has the great-grandmother of the story, in her speech on the day of her 'centennial', proudly assert, in a 'halting, heavily accented French' that she had lived in Egypt for exactly fifty years and that in all these years she had never learned more than fifty words of Arabic! 'One for every year,' her son laconically remarks.⁵

¹ See David Ricks on 'Cavafy's Alexandrianism' in the present volume (ch. 18).

² Liddell's novel, *Unreal City* (1952), is set in Alexandria (called 'Caesarea' in the novel), where Liddell himself had spent several years in the 1940s. Liddell's attitude to Alexandria is discussed by David Roessel in the present volume (ch. 17).

³ Tsirkas was an Egyptian Greek. His trilogy of novels – *The Club* (1960), *Ariagni* (1962) and *The Bat* (1965), set in Jerusalem, Cairo and Alexandria respectively – has the collective title 'Ακυβέρνητες πολιτείες', and has been translated into English as *Drifting Cities* (Tsirkas 1995).

⁴ Durrell's four novels (*Justine*, 1957; *Balthazar*, 1958; *Mountolive*, 1958; and *Clea*, 1960) were republished in one volume as *The Alexandria Quartet* (1962). On Durrell, see David Roessel in the present volume (ch. 17).

⁵ Aciman 1994: 135. For a discussion of Aciman's book, see Khaled Fahmy in the present volume (ch. 14).

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