Conflicting Histories of Alexandria, or Alexandrians with No Museum (1892-2016)

Histoires conflictuelles d'Alexandrie ou des Alexandrins sans musée (1892-2016)

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CONFLICTING HISTORIES OF ALEXANDRIA,
OR ALEXANDRIANS WITH NO MUSEUM¹
(1892-2016)

ABSTRACT

Museums of history are also research objects for historians. Museography can be analysed in order to reconstruct the museology and the historical narrative it shapes. This contribution explores the narratives of the two main museums of history in Alexandria: the Greco-Roman Museum, which was founded in 1892, and the National Museum of Alexandria, which opened in 2003. After putting their foundation into context, it analyses their collections, settings and visitor itineraries to retrace their conception of the Alexandrian past, present and future. The opposition between the two, highlighted by the Egyptian Antiquities at the beginning of the 21st century, points to an unresolved tension between colonial and post-colonial discourses. Yet, it is argued that both institutions provide an account of Alexandrian history that forgets Alexandria itself. Whether Eurocentric or Cairo-centric, their narratives do not take into account the city's local reality and population. This is even more striking since 2011, when the lack of approaches from below has widened the gap between the history of the museums and the history of the Alexandrians.

1 The expression is an adaptation of the newspaper's title *Iskandariyya bilā matāḥiḥ* ("Alexandria with no museums"), see footnote 30.

INTRODUCTION

Museums of history may be studied as identity-makers, for they provide narratives that link the present to a specific past that is considered as its source. Tracing roots back to certain selected ancestors shapes the image of a society in accordance with its present needs and concerns (Burguière 1992). An analysis of this process is highly significant for formerly colonized countries, where the museums of history that had been established during the colonial epoch were challenged – discarded or updated – after decolonization. This aspect has recently attracted wider attention, and scholars from different backgrounds specializing in the Arab world have shed light on the complex links between the museum and the nation, both under colonial occupation and after the country's independence, until the present day (Erskine-Loftus 2016; Reid 2015; Rey 2015; Mejcher-Atassi and Schwartz 2012; Wien 2010).

Drawing upon these reflections, this article seeks to decentralize the issue by looking at the relationship between museum and nation from a local angle, namely the city of Alexandria. Governed by a European or Europeanized elite during the colonial era, Alexandria did not acquire capital status with Egyptian independence. The construction of the new nation-state coincided with that of Alexandria's peripheral position within its territory. Adopting a long-term historical perspective, this study draws a parallel between two historical narratives, represented by the two main museums of history of Alexandria: the Greco-Roman Museum, founded in 1892, and the National Museum of Alexandria, founded in 2003. From the colonial to the post-colonial era, they establish different timelines for Alexandrian history and build different places for Alexandria in Egypt and the world.

For each institution, a contextual analysis of its foundation will precede the reconstruction of museology (the museum's narrative) through museography (the concrete translation of museology into the physical space, from the external façade to the internal setting, the collection and the visitor itinerary). This will shed light on the discrepancies between museology and museography, as well as on the unresolved tensions provoked by museology in its definition of Alexandria's space and time. I will argue that while they oppose each other, both historical narratives fail to give the city a local ancestry. Either by locating its antecedents outside Egypt, in the late 19th century, or in Cairo, in the early 21st century, the two museums seem to share a lack of interest in Alexandria and its particularities. This twofold silence has become even more striking since 2011, when the failure of the museums to confront the revolution and the counter-revolution widened the gap between their narratives and the history of Alexandrians.

Closed for restoration work since 2005, the Greco-Roman Museum is no longer accessible to the general public. Its reopening, initially scheduled for 2007, has been continually postponed since then. Having been denied access to the building, I rely for my analysis on photographs and written sources

Figure 1: “The Two Museums on a Map”; source: *Alexandria maps*

– mainly guides and catalogues (Botti 1893, Botti 1899, Breccia 1914, Forster 1982 [1922], Breccia 1932, Nagel 1978, Empereur 2000, Fekry 2002) – that follow its evolution from its opening until it closed. Among them, I consider as primary sources the works by Giuseppe Botti (1853–1903), the museum’s first director, and Evaristo Breccia (1876–1967), its second director, who held that position for almost thirty years, from 1904 to 1932.² Breccia, in particular, played a major role, not only because of the duration of his mandate, but also due to his influence on the Greco-Roman Museum’s development during the decades of its greatest reputation (Jockey 2007).

Unlike the Greco-Roman Museum, the National Museum of Alexandria, located nearby, is easily accessible, at least for tourists. I rely for my analysis on several visits I made between November 2008 and April 2016, during which I studied the collection and the setting, as well as the information panels in Arabic and English. The museum’s website and catalogue also provided information, supplemented with online materials, newspaper articles and official statements. Although I was received by the museum’s board in 2010, what I obtained from this meeting added nothing to the official discourse that

2 More details on Botti can be found in a work on the Italians in Egypt that was published at the beginning of the 20th century (Balboni 1906), which in spite of its hagiographical tone also contains some factual information. A more recent work, published by the Italian Cultural Centre in Cairo, celebrates Breccia’s career in Egypt (Abdelfattah 2003).

can be found in the written support materials. After 2012, my questions about a possible expansion of the museum's timeline to include the Egyptian revolution of 2011 went unanswered.

THE GRECO-ROMAN MUSEUM, OR ALEXANDRIA OUTSIDE OF EGYPT

Shaping the narrative

As many Alexandrian projects in the late 19th century, the establishment of the Greco-Roman Museum (*Musée Gréco-Romain*) in June 1892 was a phenomenon of local euergetism (Ilbert 1996): an undertaking through which private citizens from the socio-economic elite conducted themselves as public actors, funding initiatives for the community and thereby gaining social legitimacy. Under the British occupation, the Egyptian authorities, too weak to assert direct control over the entire territory, delegated public services and cultural initiatives to city notables. In Alexandria, they were mainly Europeans or Levantine protégés of European countries who had established their trades in the city, taking advantage of the Capitulation and the legal privileges granted to foreigners, especially during the reign of Ismā'īl (1863-1879). They found an official voice in the Municipality of Alexandria, which they had instituted in 1890.³ The Greco-Roman Museum was a municipal project. It was promoted by a small learned society, the *Athenæum*, led by foreign residents, amongst whom Italians had a position of influence. An Italian archaeologist, Giuseppe Botti (1853-1903), played a prominent role: he depicted the Greco-Roman Museum as a cultural necessity for Alexandria and was appointed its director as soon as the museum first saw the light of day. Some years later, he recalled the various stages of its foundation:

The first public collection of Greek and Roman antiquities in Alexandria was gathered by the Institut Égyptien, and came from donations from generous private individuals. (...) This collection was accessible until 1878 and although it was not a museum in itself, it certainly constituted the core of one. When the Institut Égyptien moved to Cairo, the city of Alexandria lost the collection. Since the "Control Committee for Alexandrian Antiquities" was not operational for a long time, Passalacqua's, Anastasi's, Zizinia's and Harris' private collections ended up enriching European museums. Discouragement seized the other

3 The Municipality was represented by a Municipal Council, the members of which were elected by census suffrage, thus *de facto* excluding the vast majority of local residents. Its composition was multinational by decree: no more than three members of the same nationality could be elected, which meant that Egyptians were perpetually in a minority.

collectors, and as a result, de Demetrio's collection left for Athens, and parts of de Pugioli's went to Bologna, Vienna and New York: almost everywhere. (...) Mr. Maspero's arrival at the General Directorate of Antiquities of Egypt was a sign of better times for the study of Alexandrian heritage. (...) Yet, these collections, which were gathered by Mr. Maspero and Mr. E. Grébaut, his successor at the General Directorate of Antiquities, looked out of place [in Cairo]. They seemed to be crushed by the monolithic stones and colossuses of old Pharaohs. Alexandria, the ancient capital of human eclecticism, appeared to be the obvious location for a Greco-Roman Museum (Botti 1893: iii-v).⁴

Under Botti's pen, the creation of the Greco-Roman Museum becomes a foundational narrative, moving from the embryonic presence of a collection in Alexandria to its dramatic loss, followed by a sense of defeat that, channelled into constructive commitment, eventually led to a positive outcome, with the establishment of the Greco-Roman Museum. It is worth mentioning that it was not simply the rescue of private Alexandrian collections that was perceived to be a necessity, but also their preservation in Alexandria. While Cairo was depicted as the city of Pharaonic Egyptian ruins, Alexandria came to embody a heritage, epitomized by the expression "human eclecticism", which was seen as both Hellenistic and universal.

The universalization of Alexandria's Hellenistic heritage through its symbolic placement outside its space and time lies at the core of the museum's external architecture. Also funded by the Municipality and dedicated in 1895, the building has a neoclassical façade, reproducing that of a Doric temple, with six columns. On the pediment, the word *Mouseyon* is engraved in Greek letters. It is no coincidence that the architects Dietrich and Sténon found the model for Alexandria's Greco-Roman Museum in the National Museum of Athens: from the entrance, the visitor is guided by the spirit of (another) place. Moreover, this shift is temporal as well as geographical. The parallel between the Greco-Roman Museum and its Greek archetype reveals a tension between the present and the past: between the modern museum as it is and the Hellenistic *Mouseyon* as it was, and should be, to regain its ancient glory. Along with the museums, the cities are compared: modern Alexandria is seen as a defective version of Hellenistic Alexandria, which the Greco-Roman Museum struggles to keep alive.

This tension powerfully shaped the museography, due in particular to the museum's second director, the Italian archaeologist Evaristo Breccia. During his long tenure from 1904 to 1932, Breccia seemed to treat the city of Alexandria as an imperfect duplicate of the Greco-Roman Museum (Chiti

4 His text, in French, is the preface to a museum catalogue printed in 1901, but is dated 1893 and was conceived as an eyewitness account of the museum's origins. I translated this and all the other French and Arabic quotes in the article into English.

Figure 2: “The Greco-Roman Museum in the Late 19th Century”; source: de Lagarenne, Édouard 1897, *L’Égypte fantaisiste*, Alexandria, Imprimerie de la Correspondance Egyptienne

2015). His *Guide de la ville ancienne et moderne et du Musée Gréco-romain*, written in 1907 under the patronage of the Municipality of Alexandria,⁵ is divided into two parts: “the ancient and modern town” on the one side, and “the Greco-Roman Museum” on the other. Yet, the museum’s first room, the Topography Room, which was devoted to the topography of Hellenistic Alexandria, featured “a collection of plans and views of the ancient and modern city” (Breccia 1914: 145). Not only was the modern city presented alongside the old one, but city plans were displayed next to views that Breccia himself defined as “fanciful” (*fantaisistes*). Moreover, in the list of items in the Topography Room, photographs of old and modern pieces can be found that were neither in the museum nor in Alexandria. Some, such as the obelisks known as “Cleopatra’s Needles”, had been sold or donated to foreign institutions before Breccia took over as director of the museum. In other cases, photographs portrayed Roman mosaics, Flemish textiles or Italian paintings that had never physically been in Alexandria, and whose authors probably never set foot in the city. They represent Alexander or Cleopatra, Antony or

5 Originally published in French in 1907, the guide was expanded and reprinted in 1914 and translated into English in 1922.

Saint Mark, or other figures of Alexandrian history and myth, and this is why Breccia included them in the selection. In fact, the only criterion that justifies their inclusion is imagination (Jockey 2007). Imagination can be seen as a utopian vision that oriented the museography and eventually led to the symbolic exhibition of items the museum should have had to embody its narrative, rather than those it actually did have (Malraux 1947). In fact, Breccia acknowledges the lack of the archaeological evidence necessary to properly reconstruct the topography of the ancient city, which he describes as “approximate, conjectural and provisional” (Breccia 1914: 54), but he switches from archaeological lacunae to philosophical heritage. Despite the scarcity of ruins from its Hellenistic past, Alexandria has for him an “ideal eternity”, since “the Alexandrian civilization has not ceased, even after its disappearance, to be profitable to the human mind, which will forever retain its deep traces” (Breccia 1914: 49). Breccia’s topography is, in reality, “utopography”. It is, in Foucauldian terms, a heterotopia of the city, its projection into another space-time (Foucault 1984). Through the Greco-Roman Museum, Alexandria was placed outside Egypt. This was the meaning of the Latin subtitle in the second edition of Breccia’s guide, *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum*: “Alexandria near Egypt”: physically close to the country, but not a part of it.

Discrepancies

The shift from “topography” to “utopography” reveals a discrepancy between museography and museology. The former was so inconsistent with the latter that Evaristo Breccia ended up exhibiting his own vision with no mediation, choosing imagination (fanciful views and photos of non-Alexandrian items) over reality (an approximate reconstruction of Hellenistic Alexandria). In his guide, he talks openly about his never-ending struggle to create his museum with the items he actually has, and the battle appears to have been a losing one. Dissatisfied with the average quality of the museum’s collection, Breccia expressed regret that so many beautiful pieces had departed Alexandria before his time. The Greco-Roman Museum was left with items that could not make it a serious international contender:

Our collection, made up mainly of Greek (...) and Coptic papyri, is not rich in comparison with the splendid collections of England, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland and America, but our museum nevertheless possesses some first-class pieces (Breccia 1914: 163).

The collection was not the only weak point, however, and probably not the most problematic. From the very beginning, the physical space was not adequate for the artefacts it contained. When it opened in 1893, the museum was located in five rented rooms in rue de Rosette (later rue Fouad, and currently tariq al-Ḥurriyya). The collection was enriched through private donations and

Figure 3: “Map of the Greco-Roman Museum”; source Breccia 1914, p. 142

archaeological excavations. As a result, it had outgrown its home even before Breccia’s time, which pushed the Municipality to fund the construction of a new building (Botti 1899), the one that was inspired by the National Museum of Athens and opened in 1895. But the collection continued to expand and stretch its capacity. Initially composed of 10 rooms, the museum counted 12 rooms only a year later. In 1899, rooms 13 through 16 were added, followed by rooms 17 through 22 in 1904, and many other expansions were completed throughout the 20th century. Owing to excavations and unexpected donations, the growth of the museum’s collection led to constant rearrangements. Once more, Breccia greatly regretted the discrepancy between the museological concept and its difficult museographical translation. The struggle between ideal setting and physical constraints clearly emerges from his guide:

Ptolemaic inscriptions are arranged along the right-hand wall as *much as possible* in chronological order (...). The large marble base in honour of Valentinian is an exception: for reasons of space, we have been obliged to place it in the middle of the wall (Breccia 1914: 149; the italics are mine).

For reasons of a material nature, the colossal statue of Hercules was placed in the garden, as was the colossal head of Marc Antony. Unfortunately, we were obliged to leave the funerary group in nummulite limestone in room 4, for fear of breaking it (Breccia 1914: 190, the italics are mine).

The drawback that required the most complicated adjustment was associated with the plan of the museum itself. It could not accommodate the visitor itinerary, which had been conceived in chronological order and conflicted with the layout of the building. As Breccia explains in his guide, the visit started with the Topography Room, which was in a vestibule right after the main entrance (Breccia 1914: 145). After that, visitors were not supposed to go to room 1 on the right, but rather to turn left towards the Greek and Roman Inscriptions Room. From there, they could follow the arrows guiding them from room 6 through to room 22. However, room 22 was not the last one on the tour: at this point, visitors had to go all the way back to the Topography Room and from there turn right into room 1, from which they were finally able to access rooms 2 through 5 and complete the visit. This complicated itinerary, hardly comprehensible without reading the guide, was considered to be a major problem well beyond Breccia's time. An article announcing the launch of the restoration campaign in 2005 pointed to the conflict between the chronological itinerary and the physical plan of the building as the main reason behind the renovation.⁶ The same argument was made in 2010 by a representative of Egyptian Antiquities, who explained that "since the plan of the Greco-Roman Museum was different from that of the other international museums, the visitor found it difficult to follow".⁷

Tensions

Breccia opened his guide with a claim for modern Alexandria: "For the elements and the nationalities which compose it, it is true to say, *mutatis mutandis*, that the conditions of the Greco-Roman period are closely paralleled, for Alexandria can be defined once more as a cosmopolitan city" (Breccia 1914: 1). Cosmopolitanism was associated with tolerance and openness to the world and presented as the sum of the eternal, universal values of Hellenistic origin, inherited by the West and only the West. It was from this viewpoint that Alexandria's European and Europeanized élite drew its legitimacy as the heirs of the Hellenistic past. As Reid points out, it was "cosmopolitanism without Egyptians" (Reid 2015: 234).

Moreover, Breccia used "vandalism" – a term meaning intentional damage to material heritage – to refer to all the construction activity that had been carried out by modern Alexandrians: "it is known that with the feverish activity which they deploy to level and to build, they break, or they cover up, forever perhaps, monuments as numerous as they are precious" (Breccia

6 Samir A., "Patrimoine, Le scénario de la rénovation", in *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, published on 24/08/2005, URL: <http://hebdo.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2005/8/24/patri1.htm>, consulted on 15/11/2017.

7 Personal communication, Alexandria, April 2010.

1914: ix). Indeed, the Islamic conquest was seen as the beginning of Alexandria's decay. Breccia used expressions such as "ruin", "death", "huge cemetery", "endless silence" and "nothing" to label what he considered to be a barren interlude between the Hellenistic period and the late 19th century, when the arrival of the Europeans allegedly restored Alexandria's Hellenistic glory (Breccia 1914: vii-viii). British writer E. M. Forster, who resided in Alexandria from 1915 to 1919, used Breccia's guide as his major reference while writing his own *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, printed in 1922.⁸ The vision of Arab-Islamic Alexandria as culturally dead is one of the main points he drew from Breccia: "The physical decay that crept on her in the 7th century had its counterpart in a spiritual decay. Amr and his Arabs were not fanatics or barbarians and they were about to start near Cairo a new Egypt of their own. But they instinctively shrank from Alexandria; she seemed to them idolatrous and foolish; and a thousand years of silence succeeded them" (Forster 1982 [1922]: 84). Some decades later, another British writer closed the circle: Lawrence Durrell, who lived in Alexandria from 1942 to 1945, visited the city with Forster's guide and used it as the key reference for his famous *Alexandria Quartet*, published between 1957 and 1960.⁹ Once more, the millennium after the Islamic conquest of the city was depicted as a blank space: "Between Amr and Napoleon stretch nearly a thousand years of silence and neglect" (Durrell 1982: xvii). This conception led to a stratigraphic hierarchy of the Alexandrias that succeeded one another in time: until today, the superficial layers built by Arab inhabitants in modern times were often seen as a mere disturbance. The descriptions published in the Nagel guide of 1978, written by the Alexandrian notable Max Debbané, are a significant example of this trend: modern Alexandria is labelled as a "layer" or "level", whereas the "city" worthy of the name – "the capital of the Ptolemaic and modern worlds" – is the one buried underground (Nagel 1978: 679). Until recently, travel guides have presented modern Alexandria as a sort of barrier that prevents tourists from seeing the ancient city: "Alas, fate dealt the city a spate of cruel blows. The Pharos collapsed and the Great Library was torched. Part of the ancient city disappeared under the sea and part under the modern city, so there are few visible remains of the glorious past".¹⁰

8 Forster himself acknowledged his debt to Breccia: "There is a guide (in French) by the Director, Professor Breccia (...). On this scholarly work, the following notes are based" (Forster 1982 [1922]: 115-117).

9 Durrell acknowledged his debt to Forster's guide thus: "For two years I was able to walk about in the pages of this guide book, using it as piously as it deserves to be used, and borrowing many of its gleams of wisdom to swell the notes for the book I myself hoped one day to write" (Durrell 1982: xvi).

10 Lonely Planet, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/egypt/mediterranean-coast/alexandria>, consulted on 15/11/2017.

As the only museum of history in Alexandria for decades, the Greco-Roman Museum became the Alexandrian museum par excellence. From its dominant position, uncontested for a century, it helped shape the dominant image of Alexandria as a Greco-Roman/cosmopolitan/European city. This historical narrative, suitable in colonial times, was not appropriate for an independent Egypt, and yet for many decades, the Greco-Roman Museum was left as it was. Things gradually changed in the 1980s under Hosni Mubarak's regime, when the Egyptian government opted for an interventionist policy in the cultural field. Since then, the Greco-Roman Museum has been heavily criticized, not only for the incongruities in its museography – most notably in the visitor itinerary – but also for the museology itself, which is seen as a remnant of colonial times. The new museum guides, issued by the Supreme Council of Antiquities, did not seem to promote the institution, instead questioning its very function and *raison d'être*. The last edition I was able to find, published in 2002, openly depicted the Greco-Roman Museum as anti-Egyptian:

Well before the Greco-Roman Museum was established, some of the best collections had passed into private hands and thence out of Egypt. The greater loss, however, is perhaps not in the objects that have disappeared from the public domain, but in the use of objects from the Greco-Roman period to divert Egyptians from an important epoch in their own history (Fekry 2002: 19).

"Alexandria was in Egypt", states the 2002 guide, for the people who lived in the city ("Egyptians, Greeks, Macedonians and Levantines") contributed to the development of Alexandrian heritage in the broader context of Egyptian civilization. Far from being a self-evident assertion, this claim is an open polemic against Breccia and his *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum*, which depicted Alexandria as "near Egypt", yet outside it. In fact, the logic behind the establishment of the Greco-Roman Museum was harshly attacked by Egyptian Antiquities, leading to the dismissal of the institution itself:

A revision of what we know about Alexandria from a new perspective will require not only a rewriting of history but also a different kind of museum. The Greco-Roman Museum is now an historical object in its own right (Fekry 2002: 19).

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, OR CAIRO IN ALEXANDRIA

Shaping the narrative

The National Museum of Alexandria (*Maṭḥaf al-Iskandariyya al-qawmī*) may be studied as a material response to the Greco-Roman Museum. A strong ideological tension can be seen in the way Egyptian Antiquities shaped its narrative, chose its physical location and structured its setting. The organizational stage

took place mainly during the 1990s, under Mubarak's regime, at a time when political authorities were extremely active in the cultural field, which they attempted to mould according to their propaganda needs. Notions such as nation and homeland were widely used. At the core of Mubarak's rhetoric, they echoed the very name of his party: the National Democratic Party (*al-ḥizb al-waṭanī al-dīmuqrāṭī*), which ruled Egypt as a single-party state for more than thirty years. Presenting itself as an enlightened power acting for the sake of Egypt, the regime aimed to portray its repressive measures as an unpleasant yet inevitable means of controlling anti-Egyptian forces, which were mainly identified with Islamic movements (Abaza 2010) that owed their loyalty to the Islamic *umma* rather than to the Egyptian nation-state. The concepts of state, nation and homeland tended to overlap with Mubarak, who presented himself as the natural leader of the three.¹¹ Under the two-decade tenure of Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni (1987-2011), the state monitored, selected and subsidized the cultural initiatives in line with this conception. An awareness grew that history and archaeology could be powerful tools for strengthening it (Qadrī 1985; Fekry 2002; Al-Sādiq 2003), and historical museums seemed to be the ideal places to give a tangible shape to national belonging and pride (Qadrī 1985).

The National Museum of Alexandria was not the only national museum to be launched under Mubarak. Others opened in different cities, all with the same general purpose of incorporating urban histories into the Egyptian national narrative. While the others were quite small and mainly destined for a local audience, the Museum of Alexandria was larger in both size and importance. Presented as a model for national museums all over the country, it was also depicted as a leading institution on an international scale. On 1 September 2003, the state-controlled newspaper *Al-Ahrām* announced on its front page the museum's opening ceremony, which had taken place the previous day.¹² Its national and international prominence were both emphasized in the coverage. The Egyptian government travelled to Alexandria for the ceremony in full force. Not only Hosni Mubarak and his wife Suzanne, but also Prime Minister Atef Ebeid, Minister of Defence Hussein Tantawi, Minister of Education Safwat El-Sherif, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmad Maher, Minister of Housing Ibrahim Suleiman and Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni were present in person, as was Zahi Hawass, Director of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. As for the Alexandrian representatives, however, only two names were mentioned: the governor of Alexandria, Mohamed Abdul Salam Mahgoub, and the museum's director, Ibrahim Darwish. Neither was interviewed, while extensive space was given to Farouk Hosni, who praised the competitive position of the new museum on the global stage. In his opinion,

11 This is far from being new to Egypt, which has a long history of autocratic strongmen holding the leadership, from Nasser to Sissi.

12 *Al-Ahrām*, 1 September 2003.

Figure 4: “The National Museum of Alexandria, Bassili Palace”; source: Wikipedia

the institution benefited from the world’s most advanced techniques of organization, display and lighting. To stress this point, the newspaper mentioned the cooperation of “Italian architect *Mawrūtsū* [sic]”.¹³ Unlike the Greco-Roman Museum, which was seen as a second-rate institution even by its own director, the National Museum of Alexandria was immediately portrayed as one of the best of its kind. Its superiority over the Greco-Roman Museum is explicitly emphasized by its board,¹⁴ which states that the National Museum was not conceived as a storage house for relics, but rather as a modern institution: its collection is the result of careful selection, and not the outcome of uncontrolled accumulation. The number and kind of objects was established at the very beginning, on site as well as in the catalogue, and there was no conflict between concept and space. Perfect harmony between the two may also be found, according to the board, in the building which houses the museum.

Located in *ṭarīq al-Ḥurriyya* (formerly *rue Fouad* and, prior to that, *rue de Rosette*), extremely close to the Greco-Roman Museum, the National Museum’s physical position is significant. Once the heart of European

13 The reference is probably to Maurizio Di Puolo, an expert in exhibit design, who did in fact work for the National Museum of Alexandria.

14 Personal communication, Alexandria, April 2010.

Alexandria, marked by its Italian-style architecture (Volait 2001), rue Fouad hosted foreign banks and European and Levantine companies, as well as restaurants, cafés and cinemas patronized by the European or Europeanized elite. The National Museum is located in a villa, Bassili Palace, named after its founder and first owner. A Syrian-Lebanese resident of Alexandria who was engaged in the lumber trade, As'ad Bassili¹⁵ had his palace built in 1926. From its beginnings as the private villa of a Levantine merchant, Bassili Palace became the seat of the American Consulate during the Nasser era, until Egyptian Antiquities bought it in the 1990s. Although it was not designed to host the National Museum, Egyptian officials presented it as its natural home, being a building that Egypt had reclaimed from non-Egyptian possession at the end of the colonial era (Wizārat al-thaqāfa 2003). Tourist promotion websites emphasized the importance of this recovery by highlighting its cost: "The palace was sold in 1954 to the American Embassy [*sic*], for an amount of 53,000 EGP, and bought for an amount of 12,000,000 EGP by the Supreme Council of Antiquities".¹⁶ Placed together, with no regard for the period of time or the inflation rate between them, the two prices seem to be directly comparable, and the economic efforts of Egyptian Antiquities to be even more impressive. In the official discourse of the Mubarak era, the history of Bassili Palace comes to parallel the history of Alexandria itself, seen as a city that Egypt recovered after a long period of foreign domination.

This aspect was elucidated by Farouk Hosni in 2003: the museum deals with Egyptian history over the long-term, from the Pharaonic era until modern times, in its links to the city of Alexandria.¹⁷ Indeed, linearity lies at the core of the visitor itinerary, which was first followed by Mubarak's delegation, and later by ordinary visitors. The itinerary is conceived in chronological order, made easy to read and strictly guided by arrows. In the catalogue, the virtual tour on the website, or the on-site visit, the museum is not divided into "sections" whose temporal boundaries may overlap, but into "epochs" (*'uṣūr*) that neatly succeed one another. They are displayed on three levels: the Pharaonic period in the basement, the Greco-Roman period on the ground floor and the Coptic, Islamic and modern times, in that order, on the first floor. The visitor moves upwards, from the oldest period, which is showcased underground, to

15 Almost invisible in the official Egyptian sources, which simply describe him as "one of Alexandria's wealthy inhabitants" (*aḥad athriyā' al-Iskandariyya*, as in al-Bawwāba al-iliktrūniyya li-muḥāfazat al-Iskandariyya, <http://www.alexandria.gov.eg/services/tourism/alextourism/museums/alexmusuem.html>), As'ad Bāsīlī has been claimed by the Lebanese: Lebanese Republic, Wizārat al-khārijīyya wa'l-mughtaribīn, <http://www.emigrants.gov.lb/maps/pdf/egypt.pdf>, both consulted on 15/11/2017.

16 Tour Egypt, <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/newstoday06112001.htm>, consulted on 15/11/2017.

17 *Al-Ahrām*, 1 September 2003.

Figure 5: “The National Museum of Alexandria, Basement”, source: Museum Catalogue of 2003

the most recent, which is located in the highest section of the building. This organization recalls the stratification of layers in an archaeological stratigraphy, with the modern layers at the top and the older ones below, and the most ancient located in the lowest point.

A stratigraphic vision also oriented Breccia in his description of the Alexandrias that lie buried beneath one another, but here the hierarchy is reversed. Whereas Breccia treated the upper layer, the modern city, as the one that archaeologists discard, the National Museum celebrates it as the perfect fulfilment of Alexandria’s evolution. With the Pharaohs in the basement and modern times at the top, the Greco-Roman era is now sandwiched between two equally important phases. It is no longer the culmination of Alexandria’s history, as it was in the Greco-Roman Museum; now it is but a simple stage in an Egyptian journey that began long before the Hellenistic epoch, and will last long after it. As the National Museum’s board emphasizes, the Greco-Roman period “enriched the Alexandrian stratigraphy, and therefore the Egyptian national civilization, with a new layer”.¹⁸ In this way, the Hellenistic contribution has been desacralized and imbued with a different meaning, as one of the many chapters of a broader Egyptian narrative.

¹⁸ Personal communication, April 2010.

Figure 6: “Ground Floor”, source: Museum Catalogue of 2003

Discrepancies

In the official discourse of the Mubarak era, the National Museum of Alexandria was the symbol of perfect conformity between museology and museography. Its establishment was presented as the outcome of a long-planned policy, and not as a response to an emergency: its purpose was not to rescue scattered treasures, as had been the case with the Greco-Roman Museum, but to educate visitors through a well-established narrative. Celebrated for its ability to integrate Alexandrian archaeological discoveries into Egyptian national history, the National Museum of Alexandria stood as the model for national museums all over the country. It represented the harmony between local

Figure 7: “First Floor”; source: Museum Catalogue of 2003

heritage and national achievement. This claim, which is overwhelmingly present in the institutional materials and official statements, may be seen as an element of the narrative itself, a discourse that helped shape the image of a modern museum in a modern nation. Indeed, a closer look at the provenance of the items may reveal some discordant notes. As Eissa and Saied point out, when the Authority of Antiquities and Museums decided to establish the National Museum of Alexandria, it was assumed that they would collect objects relating to the history of Alexandria, mostly from stores and archaeological sites found in Alexandria.

But actually nothing like that happened. They [chose] most of the objects from the Egyptian museum in Cairo, with no relation to Alexandria. Objects were selected just because they looked nice! This is definitely a random “NON-POLICY” situation (Eissa and Saied 2014).

The perfect congruity between the setting and the catalogue can also be questioned, since the catalogue appears to display a selection of beautiful pictures of renowned items, rather than a series of images of the actual Alexandrian collection:

A first look at the catalogue of the National Museum in Alexandria may be disappointing. It gives [the impression] that the Egyptian Museum in Cairo had been stripped of its famous masterpieces, which were transferred to the Alexandrian Museum. (...) No less than two-thirds of the pictures of objects in this catalogue do not belong to it. They simply belong to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and have never been transferred to any other place (Eissa and Saied 2014).

In this way, an unresolved discrepancy between museography and museology appears behind the discourse of perfect congruity. This is similar to the incongruity that emerges from the comparison between topography and “utopography” at the Greco-Roman Museum. The difference lies in the kind of utopia envisioned: during the colonial era, Alexandria was taken out of Egypt and moved towards the realm of Hellenistic Europe; here, Alexandria is taken out of Alexandria and moved towards a national ideal designed in Cairo. The utopia of a great Egyptian nation that controls its past, present and future gives shape to a nationalist narrative that must provoke a sense of astonishment in the audience if it is to function. A foreign visitor who acknowledges the magnificence of the showcased items is supposed to be filled with respect, and an Egyptian is intended to feel a sense of pride that gives way to a deeper sense of belonging (al-Sādiq 2003). This dramatic effect needs to be produced by the physical setting, which explains why sensation is privileged over faithful adherence to Alexandrian history. The arrangement and lighting of the objects, which is extremely well done, can only enhance the effect that the collection has been designed to produce in the first place. This is why both the exhibition and the catalogue contain numerous objects that have no connection with the city of Alexandria, but are associated with an idea of majesty and beauty that is supposed to make visible the grandeur of Egypt. In the end, as in many museums after decolonization, nationalist wonder is the key to approaching national history, and the emotional guidance of visitors is a more important goal than increasing their knowledge.

Tensions

It seems that nationalist pride, rather than knowledge of national history, is the anticipated outcome of the exhibition at the National Museum of Alexandria. The information panels reveal a number of significant semantic shifts that highlight the intention to rewrite Alexandrian history from a nationalist perspective. The most notable is that between “foreign/foreigner” (in Arabic *ajnabī*) and “enemy” (*‘aduww*). It starts from the Pharaonic period, in the basement, where a sculpture portraying two heads of prisoners is accompanied by the following English caption: “Corbel with heads of northern foes (...). The heads represent foreign prisoners, the traditional enemies of Egypt”. While the enemies’ origins are not clarified in terms of space, the word “traditional” makes their enmity appear eternal in terms of time. Moreover, in the absence of any further detail, the claim seems to be banal, as if there were no need to explain it. On the ground floor, the panel on Rhakotis reads: “There was a military garrison permanently stationed there to prevent foreigners from entering the Nile Delta”. The Arabic also uses the term *ajānib* (“foreigners”) in the same way: devoid of any geographical specification and inserted in a long-term perspective, it stands out in a sort of spatial vacuum where hostility emerges as the characteristic feature of foreigners.

Even when they belong to a specific people, foreigners continue to represent a threat, whether as a rebellious minority or a ruling oligarchy. The English information panel on Alexandria in Roman times reads: “In the time of Trajan (AD 98-117), the Jews, who made up a large proportion of the city’s inhabitants, began a revolt, which was finally suppressed under Hadrian (117-138). He visited the city twice, and restored many buildings destroyed in the revolt”. The “large proportion” in the English text takes on a specific dimension in the Arabic panel, according to which Jews made up one-third of the city’s population (*thulth ‘adad sukkān al-madīna*). This numerical weight leads to *thawra*, an Arabic term that is traditionally used as the translation equivalent of “revolution” rather than “revolt”. The negative impact of this foreign presence in Alexandria is emphasized, in a way that might recall Breccia’s condemnation of Arab vandalism, by describing the destruction of buildings and infrastructure caused by the Jewish *thawra*. Not far away, the presentation of Ptolemy I Soter reads: “With regard to his internal policies, Ptolemy I decided to continue to employ Egyptians in certain posts, while more important administrative positions, such as those connected with the army and the finance, were held by Greeks”. This is not an unbiased description of the status quo. Although the Hellenistic epoch was certainly marked by hierarchically-organized degrees of belonging, with full access to citizenship restricted to a small minority, the use of terminology associated with modern-day nationalities, such as “Egyptians” and “Greeks”, seems to move this discrimination forward in time from the Greco-Roman period to the present day. In the absence of any contextualization, with no further details on citizenship and ethnicity in Hellenistic times, Ptolemy’s choice appears to be a form of colonial restriction

Figure 8: “The Greco-Roman Museum under Restoration”; source: Elena Chiti

that targeted Egyptians. The same ethnic discrimination is underlined in the Arabic text, with an additional nuance between Macedonians and Greeks, with the former obtaining higher positions than the latter.

On the first floor, before arriving at modern times, Coptic culture seems to be foreignized and confined to the past. In the visitor itinerary as in the catalogue, in Arabic as well as in English, the adjective “Coptic” always follows the noun ‘aṣr (“epoch”). Associated with time rather than space, it refers to an ancient period rather than a contemporary minority. This view also guides the restoration of the Greco-Roman Museum launched in 2005. An article illustrates the reorganization of the tour based on a chronological order, stating that “the Coptic epoch will show that there is no separation between the late Romans and the Copts. They go together in parallel”.¹⁹ The board of the National Museum of Alexandria implicitly confirms this view, which clearly emerges during a visit: Pharaonic, Hellenistic and Coptic civilizations gave Egypt a cultural substratum that was subsequently Islamized to give rise to the Egyptian civilization; occupied by foreigners for long centuries after the

19 Samir A., “Patrimoine, Le scénario de la rénovation”, in *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, published on 24/08/2005, URL: <http://hebdo.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2005/8/24/patri1.htm>, consulted on 15/11/2017.

Pharaonic era, Egypt was finally freed from their control, gaining national independence, and Alexandria was symbolically returned to it. Nevertheless, ambiguity persists in the very definition of foreigners: on the one hand, they seem to be identified with hostile forces surrounding Egypt; on the other, with an internal Egyptian minority.

Finally, in modern times, the concepts of “nation” and “homeland” overlap. The English version reads: “More recently Alexandria has been the scene of various patriotic events. Before the 1952 Revolution, it played a significant role in the national struggle against occupation forces”. The Arabic only uses the term *waṭanī*, which can be roughly translated as “patriotic”, even when it comes to the English word “national”, a conventional translation of which would be *qawmī*. The exhibition ends with this fusion and confusion, through which an independent Egypt celebrates Alexandria as an important actor in its struggle for independence. Yet, these Alexandrian “patriotic events” are not mentioned in detail,²⁰ and nothing seems to give any local substance to the national celebration. The impression is that a Cairo-driven project has been transferred to Alexandria, rather than integrated into the local cultural landscape.

THE MUSEUMS TODAY

Beyond the Greco-Roman Museum

Designated as a mere historical object by Egyptian Antiquities, the Greco-Roman Museum was closed in 2005 for a restoration campaign whose completion date has been continually postponed. In February 2017, rumours arose that ascribed the delay to a lack of financial resources, but this does not explain why its old webpage on the Egyptian Antiquities website²¹ has not been replaced by an updated version. Moreover, part of the collection has

20 Alexandria was an important centre for the nationalist movement from the 1870s. The city hosted newspapers opposing colonial penetration and later the British occupation, linked to Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and his disciples, notably Adīb Iṣḥāq and Salīm al-Naqqāsh (Chiti 2017). During the revolution of 1882, ‘Abdallāh al-Nadīm played a prominent role on the national scene from Alexandria, with his clandestine publications and ‘Urabist propaganda. In 1896, nationalist leader Muṣṭafā Kāmil chose to give his first speech to the Egyptian people from Alexandria, and it was from there, in 1907, that he announced the formation of the National Party (*al-ḥizb al-waṭanī*). In 1919, after the arrest of the members of the Wafd, massive protests erupted in the city, which became a major centre of this second nationalist revolution. These are only a few examples of Alexandrian “patriotic events”.

21 Supreme Council of Antiquities – Museums, http://www.sca-egypt.org/eng/MUS_Greco-Roman.htm, consulted on 15/11/2017.

been moved to the National Museum of Alexandria and nothing indicates that it will be moved back at any time in the future. In the meantime, tourist materials present the National Museum as *the* Alexandrian museum par excellence, a position that was once occupied by the Greco-Roman Museum. Even its street name indicates the change: simply called *Rue du Musée* ("Museum Street") for decades, its Arabic name is now *Shāri' al-Maṭḥaf al-Yūnānī al-Rūmānī* ("Greco-Roman Museum Street"), a clarification that pointedly marks the loss of its uniqueness. The National Museum has succeeded in challenging, opposing and possibly replacing the dominant position of the Greco-Roman Museum. In April 2016, two huge pictures – of Nasser and Sisi – stood at the two opposite extremes of the Greco-Roman pediment, above a façade that was still being restored.²² In some grotesque way, they physically marked the appropriation of a territory.

The Greco-Roman Museum is also losing the battle on its own ground, against the competition of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. This is due less to the small exhibition of Hellenistic antiquities housed there, than to the aura that surrounds the place. Opened in 2002, the Bibliotheca was presented as the modern venue of a classic Alexandrian institution: the library that made the city great in the Hellenistic world. Its website opens with this claim: "The Library of Alexandria was *reborn* in October 2002 to *reclaim* the mantle of its ancient namesake".²³ The place was described as much more than a storage place for books or antiquities. Its intangible cultural heritage was emphasized: it was "a vast complex where the arts, history, philosophy and science come together", a new "house of the Muses" (Butler 2007). Apparently, it is Breccia's dream come true: the museum turned into the *Mouseyon*, for – as Breccia explained – the *Mouseyon* did not resemble contemporary museums and could instead "be compared to *our Western Universities*" (Breccia 1914: 36; the italics are mine).

But the Bibliotheca was Mubarak's dream, not Breccia's. A joint Egyptian-UNESCO project, it was advertised as an attempt to restore the international cultural prominence Alexandria had enjoyed as the venue of the mythical library. Carried out between 1989 and 2002, the enterprise was a global chapter in Mubarak's propaganda: freed from the dangers of obscurantist Islamic forces, his enlightened secular Egypt was secure enough in its national strength that it could open up to the world. The choice of the location, in the Eastern Harbour, represented a symbolic opening to the Mediterranean and the West, as was the choice of an internationally-renowned architectural firm, Snøhetta, to design the building. Universality was at the heart of the official discourse, as Project Manager Mohsen Zahran pompously emphasized: "I do recognize with pride my close collaboration with UNESCO

22 I was prevented from taking photographs.

23 Bibliotheca Alexandrina, <https://www.bibalex.org/en/default>, consulted on 15/11/2017 (the emphasis is mine).

during nearly two decades of total devotion to the Revival of the international dream of rebuilding the famed Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the universal beacon of knowledge, the star of the rotunda of world wonders".²⁴ Officially depicted in inclusive terms, Mubarak's universality, like Breccia's, also had its own exclusion zone. As Zahran himself ended up admitting, the Bibliotheca "is open to anyone as long as they are not simply there to use the air conditioning" (Butler 2007: 182). Materially limited by the entrance fee, which is required even just to use the library,²⁵ access by the local population was symbolically discouraged on class terms.²⁶ Born under the patronage of the European and Europeanized elite in colonial times, the Greco-Roman Museum has now been eclipsed by the new House of the Muses, reborn under the auspices of the Egyptian Mubarakist elite. Yet, its connection with Alexandria's population is probably not much deeper.

Beyond the National Museum of Alexandria?

The National Museum of Alexandria also seems to be cut off from present-day Alexandria. Powerfully shaped by Mubarak-era propaganda, its timeline is stuck in the institutional narrative of that period. Today, as in 2010, its account ends with the revolution of 1952, as if it were the last to have occurred in Egypt. No mention is made of the 2011 revolution and its many links to Alexandria. In fact, since the first protest on 25 January 2011, many protesters from all over Egypt carried pictures of a young Alexandrian man: Khaled Said, a civilian who was illegally arrested and tortured to death by two policemen in June 2010. An Alexandrian affair, this murder turned into a national case: the photographs of Khaled Said before and after custody became a symbol of police brutality under the emergency laws, while the Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said", in Arabic and English, gathered grievances from all over the country, calling for public demonstrations.²⁷ From 25 January to 11 February, Alexandrians took to the streets to oppose Mubarak's regime, sometimes in connection with Cairo and sometimes, when the regime blocked internet access, on their own. Alexandrian blogger and researcher Amro Ali has reconstructed a timeline for the Alexandrian uprisings, which also covers some protests in autumn 2010 that only took place in Alexandria. The competition

24 Prof. Dr Mohsen Zahran, <http://www.mohsenzahran.com/>, consulted on 15/11/2017.

25 Bibliotheca Alexandrina, <https://www.bibalex.org/Libraries/Presentation/Static/15510.aspx>, consulted on 15/11/2017.

26 The researcher Hala Halim has written extensively on the Bibliotheca in *al-Ahram Weekly*, giving a voice to critical positions.

27 The Facebook page was launched by Cairo-born activist Wael Ghonim.

with Cairo, to establish which city would be the first to overturn the status quo, fuelled the protests in both cities with “a mutual cascading effect”.²⁸

For the National Museum of Alexandria, however, the 2011 revolution was nothing more than an incident. Its striking absence from the exhibition is paralleled by its presence in communications from the museum’s board. For fear of looting, the National Museum was closed for a short period in February 2011, protected by armed guards stationed in front of it. In November, an official statement was published on its website, which addressed the archaeologists running “foreign missions” in Egypt. It encouraged them not to believe the rumours of a possible end to foreign operations in the country: “I would like to draw your attention to the fact that *all* you hear or read is *completely wrong*, since you did not receive an official note from our department”.²⁹ For the National Museum, the return to normality implied a return to the historical narrative of Mubarak’s days, by avoiding, rather than confronting, the events that challenged it.

Reopened in February 2011, the National Museum is today celebrated as the most important in Alexandria, the one that represents the city at its best. Yet, its dominant position can be seen as the simple outcome of a lack of competitors. In 2012, a local newspaper provocatively addressed the issue of “Alexandria with no museums” (*Iskandariyya bilā matāḥif*).³⁰ With the Greco-Roman Museum under restoration, the Royal Jewellery Museum closed for fear of theft, the Marine and the Mosaics Museums not yet open, and the Underwater Museum still only a paper project, Alexandria was left with the small museum within the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the larger National Museum, “which” – the article stated – “is too little too late to satisfy the tourist’s hunger for knowledge”.³¹ The Alexandrian Museum par excellence can be seen, like its Greco-Roman predecessor, as no more than the museum by default.

28 Ali A., “Media and Intranational Cascading Effects: The Egyptian Revolution’s Cairo-Alexandria Interdependency”, in *Amro Ali*, published on 05/09/2011, URL: <http://amroali.com/2011/09/media-and-intranational-cascading-effects-the-egyptian-revolutions-cairo-alexandria-interdependency/>, consulted on 15/11/2017.

29 Supreme Council of Antiquities, http://www.sca-egypt.org/eng/BN_MP.htm, consulted on 15/11/2017 (the emphasis is mine).

30 ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥ., “Iskandariyya bilā matāḥif”, in *Amwāj sakandariyya*, published on 08/08/2012, URL: <http://www.amwague.com/article-single-id-375.html>, consulted on 15/11/2017.

31 *Ibid.*

In lieu of a conclusion: Alexandrians with no museum

Two conflicting historical narratives offer two seemingly incompatible views of Alexandria. Each tends to present itself as a sort of Alexandrian cosmogony, so much so that they appear to be mutually exclusive. The cosmopolitan/colonial discourse, embedded in the Greco-Roman Museum, locates Alexandria's roots in the Hellenistic period and its future in the European or Europeanized elite that was supposed to revive it. The nationalist/post-colonial discourse, embedded in the National Museum, traces Alexandria's past back to the Pharaohs and envisions its future as a restoration of their grandeur, which is implicitly left to the guidance of the military ruling elite based in Cairo. This binary opposition, which was explicitly pointed out by Egyptian Antiquities at the beginning of the 21st century, refers to an internal dialectic rather than an external reality. In this game of mirrors, where colonial and nationalist rhetoric each seek to prevail over the other, Alexandria is treated as a mere battlefield. It becomes both the target and the support of two narratives that have been shaped outside the city and are disconnected from its reality. The Greco-Roman Museum links Alexandrian prestige to its pre-Islamic heritage, thereby obscuring the majority of the city's – Muslim and Arabic-speaking – population. The National Museum ignores Alexandria's particularities in favour of a generic Egyptian whole designed in Cairo. No more than vandals from the former viewpoint, no more than an empty frame from the latter, Alexandrians seem to be absent from both narratives.

Other initiatives sought to give them historical agency after the 2011 revolution. One, in April 2016, aimed to give visibility to the Alexandrian Arab histories that have been eclipsed by both Euro- and Cairo-centric narratives. Held in Arabic, in the framework of “*lḥkī yā ta'rīkh*” history workshops,³² the Alexandrian gathering brought together academics, students, teachers, artists and ordinary citizens of different ages. Envisaging history-writing in a dynamic way and heritage-making as a perpetual work in progress, it endeavoured to bridge the gap between active and passive uses of history. Historical sources were made available online and brought physically to the workshop. They were discussed and appropriated by the participants, seen and touched, and eventually used to enhance personal recollections of Alexandria or to inspire creative works. The places and figures mentioned in them were placed on a map, and a number of Alexandrians led a tour through areas of the city that emerged as being particularly significant. For a week, Alexandrian history was shared in an effort to find a balance between academic rigour and personal participation – and the latter would have been more extensive in the absence

32 *lḥkī yā ta'rīkh*, <https://historyworkshopsegypt.net/>, consulted on 15/11/2017.

of a political climate that encourages self-censorship.³³ While a workshop is certainly more appropriate for a living exchange, many museums across the world seem to be rethinking their functions and settings, leaving more space for “real things, real places, real people” (Moore 1997: 135-155), and encouraging visitors’ active participation. Yet, this is not realistically conceivable in present-day Egypt, where control over historical narratives is treated as a part of maintaining public order.

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33 I myself was on the team that presented the Alexandrian workshop, and rely for these remarks on both my notes and the reflections of the main organiser (Mossallam 2017).

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