Glimpsing Alexandria
from archaeological evidence

Judith McKenzie

with an appendix by John Baines

Media coverage of the underwater discoveries in the harbour of Alexandria has resulted in the impression that much of the ancient city, or at least the so-called Royal Quarter (the area of the palaces), has been lost under water. As this misconception has been accepted by those less acquainted with the archaeological evidence, an indication should be given of what new information about the city as a whole is provided by the recent underwater discoveries. It is also worth considering what can be gleaned from the in situ remains on dry land of buildings going back to the Ptolemaic period. The archaeological evidence for the city’s design and architecture than is generally realized.

The purpose of this paper is to consider some instances of what is known about the city from archaeological evidence, not just from underwater discoveries and recent excavations on dry

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1 Because of limitations of space, only the main references are given in the notes and only some aspects are discussed. More detailed bibliographies and discussion will be found in my book on the monumental architecture of Alexandria and Egypt during the millennium from the city’s foundation to soon after the Islamic conquest, based on archaeological evidence and written sources. I started working on Alexandria in 1980 and my work on the book began in earnest in 1990. This project, directed by myself, is concerned with the interpretation of the archaeological evidence and written sources for the city’s architecture and topography, in combination with relevant evidence from elsewhere in Egypt.

Frequently cited abbreviations:

- Adriani, Annuario vol. 1: Adriani, Annuario del Museo greco-romano, vol. 1 (1922-23)
- Annuario: Annuario del Museo greco-romano
- BSAIA: Bulletin de la Société d’archéologie d’Alexandrie
- Dassowska, Mosaics: W. A. Dassowska, Corpus of mosaics from Egypt I (Aegyptiaca Treterensia 3, 1985)
- Études: Études et Travaux
- Goddio et al., Alexandria: F. Goddio et al., Alexandria, the submerged royal quarters (London 1993)
- Kolataj, Baths: W. Kolataj, Imperial baths at Kom el-Dikri (Alexandria VI, Warsaw 1992)
- Mahmoud-Bey, Mémorie: Mahmoud-Bey, Mémorie sur l’antique Alexandre (Copenhagen 1872)
- PAM: Palesh Archaeology in the Mediterranean
- Rowe, Enclosure: A. Rowe, Discovery of the famous Temple and Enclosure of Serapeis at Alexandria (Supplement aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Egypte, cahier no 2, 1946)