

ALEXANDRIA

Alexandria was located on the northeast coast of Egypt between Lake Mareotis (Mariout) and the Mediterranean Sea. It was one of many cities named after Alexander the Great during his conquest of the ancient world. Previously, the site had been a fishing village known as “Rhacotis” (Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 5.11; Strabo *Geography* 17.6). Alexandria was founded by Alexander in 331 B.C., after he had taken Egypt from Persia the previous year (Strabo *Geography* 17.6). The Egyptians had enthusiastically received Alexander, treating him as a pharaoh.



Alexander the Great
(Museum of the Ancient Orient,
Istanbul)

Alexander envisioned a link between Greece and Egypt. According to one report, he received a vision in which Homer was directing him to the island of Pharos as the area to build his new city (Plutarch *Life of Alexander* 26.2-7). He constructed a causeway from the island to the mainland, forming two sizable harbor basins to be used for military and commercial purposes. The causeway was called the “Heptastadion,” since it was seven stadia long (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile). The city of Alexandria was designed by Dinocrates of Rhodes; it was built using the grid system with wide colonnaded streets (Strabo *Geography* 17.8). A complex water system with underground pipes and cisterns was installed before the city itself was built; it was fed by canals from the Nile.



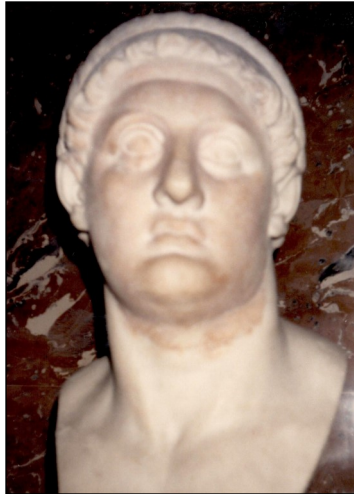


Alexander Fighting Against Darius III and the Persians in the Battle of Issus (333 B.C.)
(Mosaic Replica, Bible Museum, Washington D.C.)

Alexander and his Greek army eventually defeated the Persian Empire in 331 B.C. The events of this period took place in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, in which the "goat" represents Alexander and the Greeks and the "ram" represents the Medo-Persians:

As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. He came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at him in great rage. I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him; the goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him; and none could rescue the ram from his power (Dan. 8:5-7).

Nevertheless, Alexander's reign did not last very long. "The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven" (Dan. 8:8). After Alexander's death in Babylon in 323 B.C., his kingdom was parceled out into four parts to the *Diadochoi* ("the Successors"). While Ptolemy I Soter, one of the *Diadochoi* (323-285 B.C.), took Alexander's body to Memphis (Pausanias *Description of Greece* 1.6), it was later buried in Alexandria (Quintus Curtius *Life of Alexander* 10.10.20). When a new royal mausoleum (the "Soma" or "Sema") was completed in the city, the remains of Alexander were transferred there (Strabo *Geography* 17.8). Presently, the location of Alexander's tomb is unknown, but archaeologists continue to search for it.



Ptolemy I Soter
(Louvre Museum, Paris)

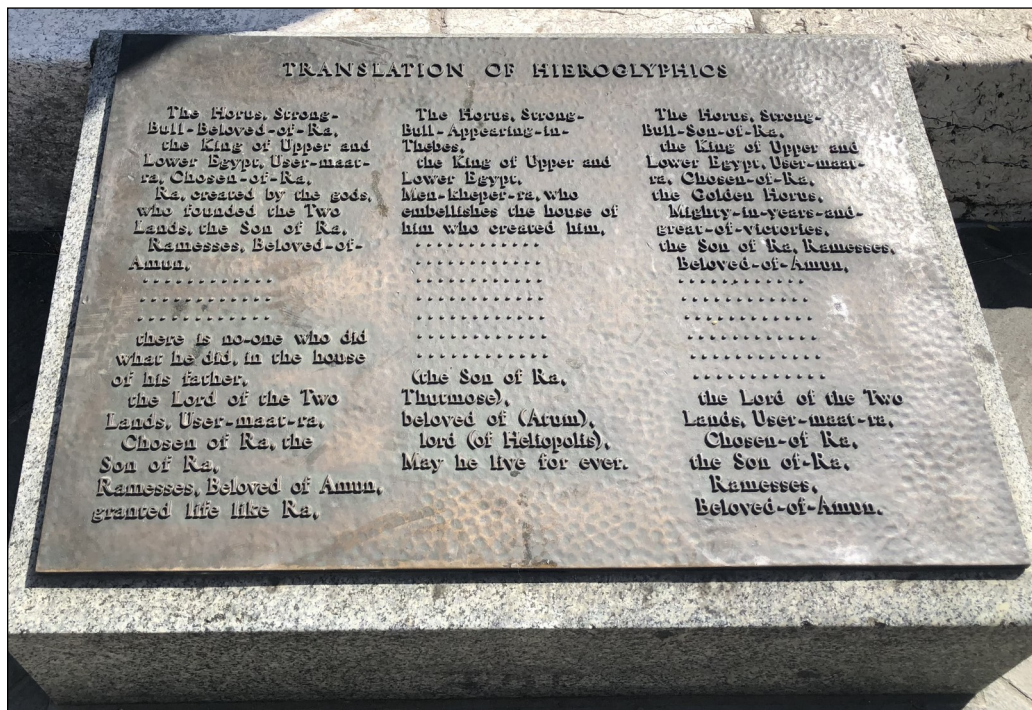
Alexander had rewarded the Jews with property in Alexandria due to their loyalty to him (Josephus *Wars* 2.18.7 [487-88]; *Against Apion* 2.4 [33-36]). When Ptolemy I Soter took control of Egypt, he overcame Judah and took Jewish captives to Egypt (Josephus *Antiquities* 12.1.1 [1-10]; see *Against Apion* 1.22 [186-88]). Therefore, a thriving Jewish colony was established at Alexandria. Synagogues were located in every quarter of the city (Philo *Embassy to Gaius* 20 [132]; see Talmud *Sukkah* 51b).

A few hundred years later, Alexandria was absorbed into the Roman Empire. Alexandria and all Egypt came under Roman control in 30 B.C., when Cleopatra VII (as well as Mark Antony) committed suicide (Strabo *Geography* 17.10). Octavian (Augustus Caesar) took control of Egypt, incorporating it into the Roman Empire. The province of Egypt was then governed by an imperial prefect.

Two particular obelisks were originally constructed in Heliopolis (modern Cairo), being inscribed by Pharaoh Thutmose III and Pharaoh Ramesses II during the New Kingdom Period. Over a millennium later, they were transported to the Caesareum in Alexandria, which had been conceived by Queen Cleopatra VII. Nearly two millennia after that time, the two obelisks were removed from Alexandria; one was taken to London in 1877 and the other to New York in 1879. The former was set up in London at the Victoria Embankment in 1878, and the latter was dedicated in Central Park in 1881. These have been dubbed “Cleopatra’s Needles.”



Cleopatra’s Needle in New York



Translation of One Side of the Obelisk

Alexandria had the busiest ports on the Mediterranean. Wheat, papyrus, tapestries, linen, and articles made of alabaster, ivory, glass, bronze, and precious metals were exported from there. Alexandria was the home of the Pharos Lighthouse (Strabo *Geography* 17.9). Named after the island on which it was built, the lighthouse guided ships into the great harbor. It was begun by Ptolemy I and finished by his son, Ptolemy II (c. 300-280 B.C.). The tower was reportedly built in three stages (in decreasing size) and stood more than 350 feet high. In some listings, it was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Its image appears on coins minted at Alexandria in the second century A.D., during the reigns of Antoninus Pius and Commodus. The lighthouse stood until about A.D. 1400, when it was destroyed by a series of earthquakes. The ruins of this structure were surveyed in 1994 on the floor of Alexandria's harbor and can be seen by divers today. Some stones have been removed from the sea and are on display in the city. (For photos and further study, see "Atlas of the Stones of Alexandria Lighthouse [Egypt]" at <http://infoterre.brgm.fr/rapports/RP-56218-FR.pdf>.)



The Modern Harbor and City of Alexandria



The Citadel of Qaitbay now stands on the site where the Pharos Lighthouse once stood. Some stones from the lighthouse were apparently used in constructing the citadel. It was built during the fifteenth century A.D. to defend Alexandria against the Ottoman Turks. The fortress is named after the Sultan who ruled at that time. It now houses a maritime museum.

Alexandria was known as an educational center. Numerous lecture halls (*auditoria*) have been uncovered there, although these date from a later period. (For photos and more information, see “The Auditoria on Kom el-Dikka: A Glimpse of Late Antique Education in Alexandria” at <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523866.0025.158>.) The city possessed a great library that, according to one source, consisted of 200,000 volumes (*Letter of Aristeas* 10). Other sources suggest that, at the library’s pinnacle, it housed either 400,000 or 700,000 volumes (Orosius *History Against the Pagans* 6.15.31-32; Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 7.17.3). Representatives were apparently sent throughout the Mediterranean world to collect or copy books for the library. Eratosthenes of Cyrene was once head of the library. He was a mathematician, geographer, and astronomer. He believed the earth was round and calculated its circumference with much accuracy. Aristophanes of Byzantium succeeded Eratosthenes as the head of the library about 194 B.C. He was known for his linguistic and scientific research. He is given credit for inventing Greek diacritical marks. The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old

Testament, was made at Alexandria during the third and second centuries B.C. (Philo *Life of Moses* 2.6-7 [31-44]; *Letter of Aristeas*). Reportedly, part of the library was accidentally burned in 48 B.C.; whatever remained of it was destroyed about A.D. 275.

Many other intellectuals were associated with Alexandria. In the first century A.D., the Jewish philosopher Philo—who tried to synthesize Moses and Plato—lived there. Galen the physician stayed in Alexandria for about five years (A.D. 152-157). The female Hepatia (d. A.D. 415)—a philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer—resided in the city. Although not inventing the astrolabe, she is remembered for developing this instrument (which was an earlier version of the sextant). It measured astronomical positions, the time of day, latitude, altitude, the width of a river, and the height of a mountain.

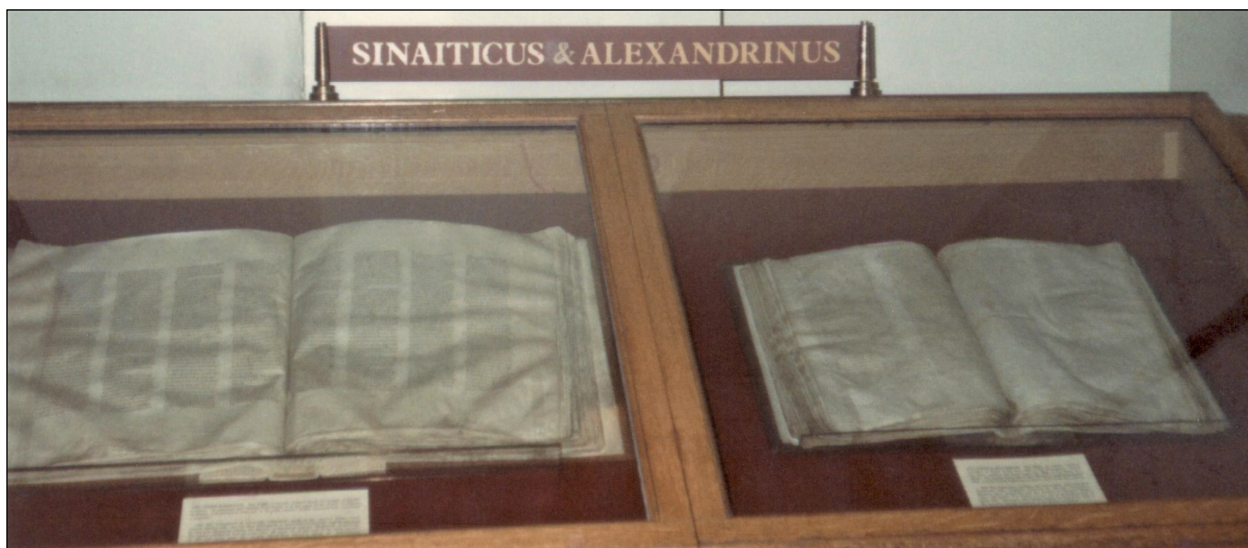
What connection is there between Alexandria and the New Testament? To begin with, Jews from Egypt were present at Pentecost when the church was established; this number would have certainly included people from Alexandria (Acts 2:10). When Stephen preached Jesus as the Christ, he was opposed in Jerusalem by members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, which was composed of Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria as well as Cilicia and Asia (Acts 6:9). Later in the Book of Acts, we encounter a Jew named Apollos who was from Alexandria. He is described as “a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). This is fitting, since Alexandria was a great educational center and a place where the sacred writings were translated and studied. At the end of Acts, Paul traveled to Rome on ships from Alexandria sailing to Italy (Acts 27:6; 28:11). The last ship had the *Dioskouroi* (“Twin Brothers”; NASB) for its figurehead. This reference is to the “twin gods Castor and Pollux” (NIV). In Greek mythology, Castor and Pollux (Polydeuces) were twin half-brothers born to Leda, the queen of Sparta; the first was fathered by her husband, King Tyndareus, and the second by the god Zeus. Pollux supposedly shared his immortality with Castor, and the twins were transformed into the star constellation Gemini (which is Latin for “twins”). It was believed that these pagan deities protected seamen; they were called “guardians of the sea” and “saviors of sailors” (Strabo *Geography* 1.3.2). The architect Sostratus dedicated the Pharos Lighthouse to the “Divine Saviors” (Lucian *How to Write History* 62). Some think that this reference is to Castor and Pollux.

Later Christian tradition says that Mark went to Alexandria and founded the church there. According to some, he did this between A.D. 42 and 49. However, Mark did not travel as *an assistant* to Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey until A.D. 47-48, and he abandoned that work when it was just getting started (Acts 13:5, 13; 15:37, 38). Others date Mark’s supposed ministry in Alexandria to the 60s A.D., claiming that it ultimately ended in martyrdom about A.D. 68 (see Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 2.24.1). This is questionable, since Mark was associated with the ministries of Peter and Paul in Rome during the first half of that decade (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13).

Alexandria was divided into four sections. (1) The Jewish quarter, with its many synagogues, was located on the east. Although concentrated here, Jews also lived in other parts of the city. (2) The Royal Area was the Greek quarter known as “Bruchium” (or “Broucheion”). It contained the theater, the famous library and museum, the Soma (with the tomb of Alexander the Great), the agora, and the temple of Poseidon. (3) The western quarter, which was predominantly Egyptian, was known by the old name “Rhacotis.” (4) Farther west of these quarters was the necropolis.

A triumphal pillar was set up in honor of the Roman emperor Diocletian around A.D. 300. The giant Corinthian column still stands today, although it is missing the statue of Diocletian that once rested on its top. Having been misnamed in the Crusader period, it is known today as “Pompey’s Pillar.” The column is located next to the ruins of the Serapeum, beside the temple of Serapis.

Codex Alexandrinus (A) is an important Greek manuscript of the Bible dating from the fifth century A.D. It is named after Alexandria, Egypt, where it apparently originated. It was taken to Constantinople in 1621 and then to England in 1627. A few decades ago, it was on display in the British Museum in London. Now it is housed in the British Library.



Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus
(British Museum, London)

Today, Alexandria is the second largest city of Egypt behind Cairo, and it has the largest harbor in Egypt. An impressive library, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, was completed in 2002. Further, the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria has been reopened after many years of renovations. The city also features the Alexandria National Museum.