

ALEXANDREA
AD AEGYPTVM
THE LEGACY OF
MULTICULTURALISM
IN ANTIQUITY

EDITORS

ROGÉRIO SOUSA

MARIA DO CÉU FIALHO

MONA HAGGAG

NUNO SIMÕES RODRIGUES



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ON THE TRAIL OF ALEXANDRIA'S FOUNDING

MARIA DE FÁTIMA SILVA

University of Coimbra. Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos (University of Coimbra).

Abstract: *This article tries to portray Alexandria's profile at the time of its foundation, using literary testimonies such as those of Herodotus – principally his descriptions of the territory where the new city came to be established – and other Hellenistic biographers, historians and geographers.*

To follow the trail of the Alexandria's founding by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. is, above all, to consider what Herodotus, the greatest narrator of Egyptian wonders, can tell us about what this region was like about a hundred years before the event itself. Of all the regions of Egypt, none of them merited as much attention and interest on the part of the Greeks as did the Delta, given its accessibility and the continuing presence of colonies there¹. For some, as seems to be the case of the geographer Hecataeus of Miletus², Egypt was confined to the Delta³ and did not extend below the city of Cercasorus⁴. Herodotus repeat-

¹ Intense Greek commercial activity increased in the Delta beginning in the 8th century B.C. Naucratis, for example (cf. Str. 17.1.18), is a central case, founded at the Canopic river mouth during the period of Psammetichus I at the beginning of the 7th century B.C. by the Milesians. Hdt. 2.178-179 tells us that Amasis concentrated the innumerable Greeks dispersed around the Delta in Naucratis, which greatly expanded the city's commerce (cf. also 2.154).

² Cf. BROWN, 1965: 68.

³ Cf. Hdt. 2.15.1.

⁴ A little more than a dozen miles to the north of Cairo; cf. Ach. Tat. 4.11.3.

edly accentuates⁵ the character of the recent formation of this space. According to the author of the *Histories*, in the period of the Pharaoh Min (around 3200 B.C.),

the whole of the Egypt, with the exception of the region of Thebes, was wetlands and nothing at the time emerged in the parts of the territory which today exist below (that is to say, to the north) of Lake Moeris, where we arrive from the sea after seven days of navigating upstream⁶.

For those who observe well, Herodotus continues, it is enough to look with attention at the territory that the Greeks who arrived by ship confronted, to recognize it as land that extended Egypt, a kind of «gift of the Nile». In fact, Greek navigators knew that, until a certain distance off the Egyptian coast, the sea had a muddy bottom, which had to do with the sedimentation from the Nile⁷. Herodotus even concludes that the Egyptian coastline is projected further into the sea than in neighboring regions because of these same deposits⁸; and going even further, he points to the contrast between the soil of Egypt, black and crumbly, which is carried from Ethiopia by the Nile, and the red sand of Libya and Arabia, documenting this with physical proof. In addition to the geophysical testimony, Herodotus invokes the opinions of priests, in order to confirm that a good part of the coastal territory of Egypt, which before had been a gulf, was reclaimed from the sea because of the interference of the Nile⁹.

In Greek literature, the configuration and limits of the Delta are constantly referred to. In 2.17.2-3, Herodotus, making himself the spokesperson for Greek thinking, describes the route of the Nile, from the falls to the sea, as Egypt's central dividing line. From the city of Cercasorus, the region divides into three branches: to the east there is the so-called river mouth of Pelusium, to the west the Canopic river mouth, and a third which divides in half the space defined between the two, which is called Sebennytic¹⁰, not to mention other lesser branchings. In various instances, Greek tragedy envelops this geographic reality in a poetical aura. Aeschylus¹¹ speaks «of the Nile's river mouths of fine sand» and associates Canobus, a city of the extreme west of the Delta, with the myth of Io and his son Epaphus, born in Egypt¹². Euripides¹³ celebrates the one hundred river mouths of the Nile. Situated

⁵ Hdt. 2.15.2; 2.43.4; 2.144.2.

⁶ Hdt. 2.4.3.

⁷ Hdt. 2.5.

⁸ Hdt. 2.12.

⁹ Hdt. 2.10.

¹⁰ Hdt. 2.17.4-5.

¹¹ Aesch., *Suppliants* 4-5.

¹² Aesch., *Prometheus* 846-852; *Suppliants* 311-314.

¹³ Eur., *Bacchae* 406-408.

by Herodotus in the extreme west (seemingly in error) we find «the so-called tower of Perseus»¹⁴, the place where Andromeda was saved from a sea monster by the young hero Perseus, the theme to which Euripides dedicated a famous tragedy, *Andromeda* (412 B.C.). Unavoidable as well is Helen and Menelaus' mythical journey into Egypt; escaping with Paris – in Herodotus' version – Helen would have come into port at the Canopic river mouth, whose name as a matter of fact was taken from Canopus, Menelaus' helmsman who lost his life there. It was, according to legend, the priest of the temple of Herakles, guardian of this particular Nile river mouth, who was responsible for revealing the kidnapping, committed by the Trojan, to the Pharaoh Proteus, at the time residing in Memphis¹⁵. During his return from the Trojan War, Menelaus sailed in his turn as far as the Egyptian capital¹⁶ to rescue Helen, as well as the treasures they had brought there.

The sedimentation of the new lands of the Delta had a positive impact on the local populations since the fertility of the soil could compete with any other in the world, even with that which the inhabitants of Middle and Upper Egypt knew¹⁷. Herodotus describes agriculture in the Delta as a nearly automatic process, bordering on utopia; it is not even necessary to make furrows or plough the fields; it is enough to wait for the Nile to water the fields, sew the seed and let the animals themselves wander around burying them with their hoofs.

Therefore, in the second half of the 4th century B.C., when Alexander entered the Delta, the Macedonian invader was not landing on soil unfamiliar to the Greeks; this was simply the furtherance of Greek recognition of a place that they had known – and fantasized about – for around five centuries. The route that Alexander adopted during his incursion into Egypt is still debated and, above all, the moment and the significance of a visit that he would have made to the oracle of Ammon. Was this before or after the foundation of Alexandria? There are a variety of sources that place this consultation before the foundation of the city¹⁸, yet only Pseudo-Callisthenes claims directly that his objective was to hear the oracle about the establishment of a city that would use his name¹⁹. Other sources²⁰ place Alexander's visit to the oracle after the founding of Alexandria. It is still possible to conciliate the two suppositions with the argument that, to stoke the project after visiting the locale of the future city, Alexander would attempt to obtain the confirmation of the oracle. Arrian 3.1.5 describes Alexander's reaching Mareotis Lake, in a march along the Nile's

¹⁴ Hdt. 2.15.1; cf. Eur., *Helen* 768-769.

¹⁵ Hdt. 2.113-115.

¹⁶ Hdt. 2.119.

¹⁷ Hdt. 2.14.2.

¹⁸ D.S. 17.50-52; Cur. 4. 8.1; Just. 11.11.13; Ps.-Callisth. 1.30-31.

¹⁹ On the chronology relative to the hearing of the oracle and the foundation of Alexandria, *vide* FRASER, 1972: 3; BLOEDOW, 2004: 94-99.

²⁰ Arr. 3.3; Plu. 26-27; Str. 17.1.43.

Canopic river mouth. In his turn, Pseudo-Callisthenes²¹ 1.3.1 describes him marching to the location where the new city would be founded by another route, following a west-east itinerary. After referring to certain small indigenous communities, starting in Libya, on which the Macedonian king left his mark by founding small cities (as in the case of Paratonius), Alexander comes upon «the terrain where the city exists today». This is a vast plain that stretches out of sight, where there were already twelve villages. Strabo 17.1.6 adds: in the region nearby there was a lookout and protection against pirate attacks from the sea, known as Racotis. Perhaps, bringing together the two descriptions, we could imagine Racotis as the largest of the twelve hamlets known to exist in the area and in a certain way their administrative center.

It was the area between a place called Pandisia and the Nile's Canopic mouth, turned to the rising sun, and between Bendidion and Hormoupolis running south to north, where the king imagined Alexandria. The etymological argument that Pseudo-Callisthenes advances in favor of the toponym Hormoupolis, «the port city», against Hermoupolis, «city of Hermes», the god of commerce, alludes to the fundamental characteristic of the new city, its harbors («everything that arrives by the river anchors there», referring to just one of the city's ports, *vide infra*). Alexander's historian concludes that, from the moment that the city was founded there, the whole region inherited from the founder the name «region of the Alexandrians» (*chora alexandreon*).

Those characteristics which Herodotus paints in broad strokes as fitting the Delta's most salient features – that, in terms of coastal area, Egypt's territory is extensive 3.200 furlongs²² in length, flat, irrigated and muddy²³ – would certainly not have left the Macedonian invader indifferent. As such, it is not surprising that, with his already proven sharpness of mind, Alexander would have immediately understood, in covering the territory situated between the Mediterranean and Lake Mareotis, that «the area was by far the best place to found a city, and that this city would necessarily prosper»²⁴. To that Diodorus Siculus 1.50.3 adds, attesting to the future realization of a kind of hidden prediction in Alexander's project: «After Alexander founded by the sea the city that takes his name»²⁵, «all of the kings of

²¹ The sources for the foundation of Alexandria are, in addition to Ps.-Callisth., *Life and Deeds of Alexander of Macedonia* 1.31-32 (4th or 3rd B.C.; on the doubts raised by the identity of the author of this text, *vide Historia* 11.3 in WELLES, 1962: 272; FRASER I, 1972: 4): Arr., *Anabasis of Alexander* (2nd A.C.) 3.1-2; Plu. *Alex.* 26. 3-10 (1-2nd A.C.); D.S., 17.52 (1st B.C.); Str., 17.1.6-7 (1st B.C. - 1st A.C.); Curt., 4. 8.1-2 (1st B.C.).

²² This is a «macroscopic measure», in the words of LLOYD, FRASCHETTI, 1996: 238; in accordance with what we know today it corresponds to about 475 km. Str. 17.1.6 changes the measurement of the «base» of the Delta to 1,300 furlongs.

²³ Hdt. 2.7.1; 2.9.2; 2.6.1.

²⁴ Arr. 3.1.5. Arrian, praising the obvious quality of the place itself, delays the divine intervention; only after drawing up the city plans, setting its boundaries, resolving the question of temples, in his version, does Alexander make the sacrifice of appeasement. Thus, this is not an actual ceremonial part of the foundation.

²⁵ Sixteen Alexandrias were founded with the name of the famous conqueror, the Egyptian one being the most famous. Cf. Ps.-Callisth. 3.35, where twelve of these cities are listed, with the Egyptian Alexandria in first place. WELLES, 1962: 275 n. 17

Egypt after him made a great effort to develop it». In fact, during the period of the Ptolemies, Alexander's successors in the administration of Egypt, Alexandria became the new capital, after Memphis²⁶, and experienced particularly happy times.

In accordance with mythical tradition, that which attributes the foundation of cities to legendary heroes, the founding of Alexandria appears in many versions and is imbued with fantasy²⁷. The idea, however, is to point to the birth of a city destined to become, already in the Ancient World, a reference to which posterity continues to pay due respect; and to put its founder on the level of a true eponymous hero.

Plutarch²⁸, cautioning us about history's lack of verisimilitude («if what the Alexandrians say is certain, in accordance with the Heraclides' account») still cannot resist contextualizing the event by surrounding it with an aura of wonder. Two symbolic signs underline so many other fundamental aspects about the birth of the city: the choice of location and the promise of a prosperous future. According to Plutarch, Alexander was influenced in his choice of location from the «divine Homer»; the author of Chaeronea begins by indicating that Alexander had brought a copy of the *Iliad*²⁹ with him, as though it were a treasure, hidden in a coffer, which was part of Darius's legacy. Almost an «amulet», it seemed to contain promising powers. On the one hand the coffer, something that belonged to one of the most distinctive rulers of Persia, takes on the aura of an inheritance transferred from one monarch to another superior one; on the other hand, its content, the *Iliad*, was destined to guide, as though it were a manual on excellence (*arete*), the bearing of a hero, young but of

remembers that the idea of founding cities was a habit in Greece. The novelty was that it was an individual who was taking this initiative and giving the city his own name, as though it were an extension or memory of its founder. In the same way, Philip, Alexander's father, following the same principle, was the first important personality to promote this strategy, establishing the cities of Philippi (358 B.C.) and Philipopolis (342 B.C.). This is a form of political propaganda, useful in projects of expansion, followed by Alexander and by his successors (the period between 359-220 B.C. represented because of this practice a new era of colonization).

²⁶ WELLES, 1962: 273-274 n. 8 sums up the doubts as to the dating of this transference that made Alexandria the capital of Egypt throughout the Ptolemaic Dynasty. On the other hand, FRASER I, 1972: 36-37 calls our attention to the difficulty that exists, from the archeological and literary point of view, in following the urban evolution of the city through its successive transformations.

²⁷ SMITH, 1992: 136 considers the so-called «literature of foundations», highly disseminated during the Hellenistic epoch, in debt to the paradigmatic narrative of the foundation of Alexandria.

²⁸ Plu. *Alex.* 26.

²⁹ Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 8.2: «He also showed a natural inclination for literature, for pleasure in learning and was a great reader. He considered the *Iliad* – and this was the way he referred to it – as “a primer on the military art” and carried a copy with him, annotated by Aristotle, a copy known as «the coffer copy; he had it with him at all times, together with his knife, under his pillow, according to the evidence given by Onesicritus» (author of a treatise on *The Education of Alexander*, of which only few fragments are left; cf. CAVERO, MORILLO, HERMIDA, 2007: 34. He is a cynical philosopher who participated in the Macedonian expedition in Asia; the narrative, of which he is the author, follows, in a certain fashion, the standard of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*). The same love of Homer by Alexander is confirmed by Plu. *Moralia* 327f-328a. According to MOSSMAN, 1995: 211, Plutarch's source for the reference to this enthusiasm would have been precisely Onesicritus.

epic stature³⁰. Homer was a useful companion on Alexander's campaigns, responding to all contingencies. Therefore, after liberating Egypt from Persian rule and establishing Macedonian colonization (332 B.C.), Alexander proposes the foundation of «a city that would be large and highly populated», to which he would give his own name, in this way creating in the annexed territory a kind of «new capital» demarcating his authority. It was Homer who inspired his decision. Thus the new city would arise under the most traditional Greek sign. Initially guided by the suggestions of technicians who accompanied him, the king was preparing himself to define an area for his project, when he had a dream. Plutarch makes the ominous character of the occurrence explicit, in the best literary tradition³¹; following the norms of the convention, Alexander saw a man with venerable air and with completely white hair, who approached him and said: «There, in the middle of the choppy sea, you will find an island off the coast of Egypt, which is called Pharos»³². In the anonymity that Plutarch preserves, the shadow of an old man is visible, Homer or Ammon in the form of Homer, who recites two verses from the *Odyssey* which will point Alexander to the ideal place for the realization of his project; indicated is the island of Pharos, off the coast of the future Alexandria as its natural emblem. As soon as the sun was up, Alexander moved quickly, like an epic or tragic leader inspired by a prophetic dream, to verify the plausibility of the proposal, recognizing unhesitatingly «that the place offered magnificent conditions» and that «Homer, as well as being admirable in all ways, was also a fantastic architect». The first phase of the plan had been fulfilled, the location for the city's establishment, supported by superior advice, had been chosen.

Pseudo-Callisthenes transfers this sense of the marvelous, which sponsors the moment, to the aegis of Ammon, the Egyptian oracle expressly consulted by the king for the same reason³³. In a context that is clearly close to that which Plutarch describes, he narrated «the vision of Ammon, an old man with golden hair and sheep horns», who likewise advises him, sending him to Proteus' island, Pharos, the ideal terrain for the project. Even though in accord with the Homeric suggestion, Ammon's discourse is more complex, denoting the ambiguous tone of an oracle. Identifying himself with Phoebus Apollo, also often consulted in the act of founding a city, as the sun god of prophecies, Ammon recalls, as the established divinity of the territory in front of the island – and this information is quite relevant – that in the location of the future Alexandria, there would be a cult that would gain importance in the city known as Eon Plutonium³⁴, which means Sarapis, a god from the beyond, equivalent to the Hellenic Pluto; or, in the words of García Gual³⁵, in

³⁰ On the insistence with which Alexander is, by various authors (D.S. 17.1.4; 17.97.3; Arr. 1.11-12), compared to Achilles and other Homeric heroes, *vide* MOSSMAN, 1995: 209-229.

³¹ On the presence of the dream in Greek literary tradition, cf. MARQUES, 2006. *Odyssey* 4.354-355

³² *Odyssey* 4.354-355.

³³ Ps.-Callisth. I. 33.

³⁴ According to WELLES, 1962: 282, *Aion* is equivalent to «Eternity» and Plutonic, an adjective, to «of Pluto».

accordance with the sense of Eon (gr. *aion*, «always») a god of the totality and of eternity. Finally the mention, by Ammon, of the five hills that the god plowed is enigmatic; according to Gual, these could represent the five parts of Alexandria that the oracle consecrates as the center of the universe. We can see that Ammon does not limit himself to indicating an ideal geographical location; he instructs the king to consecrate the new city to guarantee its protection by the divinities. Later³⁶ Pseudo-Callisthenes returns to the theme of the oracle to confirm the fact that Alexander did indeed pay attention to Ammon's words, and describes the measures that, following their lead, he undertook. For the king, the most memorable part of the prophetic message was the mention of the five hills and of the god Sarapis³⁷. In the search that he now undertook, he found a venerated statue and a heroon on the summit of the hills that crowned the city to the South, which demonstrated the existence of cults in the region and which the Macedonian understood needed to be respected. In Sarapis, Alexander recognized the omniscient god, who he elected as protector of the city. To establish a cult, he ordered the construction of a large altar in front of the heroon – much later identified as «the great altar of Alexander – where he conducted an initial ritual sacrifice accompanied by a significant prayer: “That you are the god that protects this land and that you sail as well through the infinite universe, there is no doubt. So accept this sacrifice and be my protector in war”».

Yet the extraordinary events that guided the founder at this crucial moment of the city's consecration had still not come to an end. An eagle – a well-known symbol of power – flew low over the altar where offerings were accumulating snatching the innards of the victim only to deposit them on another altar. Rushing in that direction the king came upon an ancient complex made up of an old altar, a temple and a seated statue that, with his right hand, caressed a multiform animal³⁸ and, with his left, held a scepter; to the side an enormous sacred virgin was standing in profile. From the indigenous peoples he was informed that this had to do with an ancient cult to Zeus and Hera established by the Pharaoh Sesonchosis, or Senuseret (Sesostris), corresponding, in the Egyptian religion, to Sarapis and Isis. Found at the site as well, as an emblem of the sacred architecture of ancient Egypt, were «the obelisks, that are still today at the Sarapeion, outside the complex that exists there now»³⁹. The engraved inscription in hieroglyphics that was found on them consecrated the

³⁵ GUAL, 1988: 80.

³⁶ Ps.-Callisth. 1.33.

³⁷ WELLES, 1962: 272 emphasizes how, to ancient authors who took up the subject of Alexandria's foundation, the connection with the cult of Sarapis was generally misunderstood. Pseudo-Callisthenes is the exception, perhaps because he was actually a resident of Alexandria. On the relationship between Alexander and the cult of Sarapis in Alexandria, which seems doubtful, *vide* FRASER I, 1972: 246-250.

³⁸ This multiform animal corresponds to Cerberus, the dog with three heads who guarded the entrance to hell during the Hellenistic epoch associated with Sarapis.

³⁹ *Vide* GUAL, 1988: 86 n. 56 and the evidence included therein that these obelisks had been offered by the Pharaoh Senuseret to the god Sarapis.

territory to the protector god, Sarapis. As such, Pseudo-Callisthenes pushes back the consecration of the two ancient temples in the region, the Heroon and the Sarapeum, to the time of the founding. Bradford Welles⁴⁰ adds to this evidence the much later findings of John Malalas (6th A.D.) and of the *Suda s. v. Sarapis*, that testify to Alexander's construction of another temple to the same god, probably within the walls of the new city, conceived by the architect Parmenio and known as «Sarapeion Parmeniskos»⁴¹.

The task ahead was then to create the borders of the future urban space, a task that Alexander once again entrusted to the city planners that accompanied him, recommending that the layout of the terrain be respected. Diodorus Siculus⁴² excluded the fantastical element of tradition from this act of foundational planning. A team of architects was put to the task under the guidance of the sovereign himself: «After having preceded with the measuring of the terrain, and having traced out the principal streets in grid form, according to the best technique, he gave the city the name of Alexandria». With royal applause, Plutarch tells us⁴³, «as they had no chalk, they grabbed a bit of flour⁴⁴ and, in the black soil, designed a semi-circular area, whose interior circumference was divided by rays which parceled out the space in a regular way, suggesting the contour of a chlamys»⁴⁵. In the soil, which had the color identified as Egyptian earth⁴⁶, the Macedonian presence was registered in white, represented by the emblem of a warrior, the chlamys⁴⁷; the extent of the city was defined by two waterfronts, one being the Mediterranean to the north and the other Lake Mareotis to the south. It was in this symbolic context that another wondrous occurrence took place:

*A flock of innumerable birds of all types and sizes, coming from the river and the lake, swooped down like a cloud over the area and didn't leave a trace of flour. Alexander was perplexed, unable to understand what this presaged. For the soothsayers, however, the message was clear, that the city would be very prosperous and provide the right living conditions to attract people from all around*⁴⁸.

⁴⁰ WELLES, 1962: 285-286.

⁴¹ Cf. Ps.-Callisth. 1.33. On the temple of Sarapis in Alexandria, *vide* FRASER I, 1972: 27-38.

⁴² D.S. 17.52.2.

⁴³ Plu. *Alex.* 26.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ps.-Callisth. 1.32; Curt. 4.8.6 confirms that it was a Macedonian practice to outline the boundaries of cities to be founded with flour.

⁴⁵ Cf. D.S. 17.52.3.

⁴⁶ This is a persistent topic in reference to Egyptian soil; cf. Helioid., *Ethiopica* 2.26.5.

⁴⁷ The *chlamys*, a rounded mantle, was part of the Macedonian and Thessalian military uniform. Applied to the urban plan, the idea of a chlamys would represent, on the whole, a rectangular outline with one part enlarged and rounded to the south and another a bit narrower, «the colar», to the north; the two would be connected by two shorter and symmetrical sides. Cf. Str. 17.1.8; Pliny, *Natural History* 5.62.

⁴⁸ Plu., *Alex.* 26.

For Alexander's city a future of cosmopolitan abundance was inscribed in the large and mixed flock of birds that had found food in the new territory⁴⁹. Referring to this episode, Strabo⁵⁰ slightly alters the details in a way that seems worthy of our attention:

When the architects were marking the perimeter of the city they ran out of chalk. In front of the king who had arrived, his subjects dispensed with a part of the rations of cereal that was meant for the workers, which allowed for the streets, many more than before, to also be mapped out⁵¹.

This is how Alexandria was established, as a city that was carefully planned from its outset⁵². By voluntarily giving up a part of their rations, the army, or rather, the Macedonian people approve of their king's project and make the foundation of Alexandria into a cause of national interest. Arrian⁵³ repeats the same episode, which he feels to be credible, with some small changes. He includes the soldiers in the marking out of the city's borders, who give over their rations, but he omits the attack of the birds. Of the outline created through the collaboration of the king and his people, he only prophecies – through Aristander of Telmessus, a celebrated seer who is faithful to Alexander – «that the city will prosper in a variety of ways, especially with the fruits of the earth»⁵⁴.

Pseudo-Callisthenes⁵⁵ adds even another wondrous event of good omen that happened once the construction had begun to take on form: in the shipyards, the beasts of burden began to transport numerous materials. It was then that a tablet covered with characters, whose meaning is omitted, fell from the façade of a temple. What was truly revealing about this was that from under the debris a snake appeared, which, following Alexander's

⁴⁹ Cf. Amm. Marc. 22.16.7.

⁵⁰ Str.17.1.6.

⁵¹ Strabo speaks of the ample width of the streets, «prepared for horses and wagons, above all two of them particularly wide» and perpendicular to each other, which constituted the large axes of the city (which later would be called «Canopic Street» and «Memorial Street»). This is certainly the how it was in Strabo's day, which possibly respected the original outline in general. A comparison between ancient Alexandria and that city which the visitor will find today is made by MARLOWE, 1971: 329-336.

⁵² In spite of the fact, according to some sources, that the foundation of the city was wrapped in legend, even so, since the birth of Alexandria is not lost in the distant past, the concrete steps that led to the choice of location and the urban design can be established with a certain plausibility.

⁵³ Arr. 3.2.1-2.

⁵⁴ Ancient sources limit themselves to mentioning the designation to «establish a large and prosperous city» (cf. Arr. 4.1.3; 4.24.7; 6.15.2; 6.21.5; 6.22.3; 7.21.7, who uses the same justification for the foundation by Alexander of other cities). However, the mention itself of a «prosperous» city associated with Alexandria contains a commercial expectation (cf. Vitr. II, pref. 4). Modern scholars favor valorizing military, economic and political objectives. Cf. Ps.-Callisth.1.34, who gives Alexander, ready to invest great treasures in increasing the importance of Alexandria, the opportunity to proclaim: «This will be the capital of the whole civilized universe».

⁵⁵ Ps.-Callisth.1.32.

orders, was sacrificed and paid homage to with a temple – as a tutelary divinity. At the same time many other vipers also appeared rapidly slithering towards the buildings under construction, multiplying the city's *agathoi daimones*. A promising city was being born under the best auspices, divine and human. Alexander presided over the inauguration of the city and the temple during the new moon in the month of *Tybi*, giving origin to a celebration, contemporaneous with the author of this story, in honor of the *agathos daimon*, the protecting serpent; and, obviously, it commemorated the inauguration of the city, that officially would have occurred in the first months of 331⁵⁶.

As to questions of urban nature, Aristotle's lessons, internalized by his student, continued to influence Alexander; as an eminently political act, the institution of a new city must take into account, in addition to the selection of its location, the anticipation of resources that will be necessary to make it an agreeable place to live in; defense, healthfulness, provisioning, demographic equilibrium and security are among the priorities.

Under the influence of this aura of fantasy, it is important not to forget the technicians, those that Alexander consulted and whose intervention was decisive, however marginalized by the power of omens. Among them is Dinocrates of Rhodes, who appears, with a certain insistence, as *the architect of Alexandria*⁵⁷ and, in general, as a technician of exceptional competence⁵⁸. Pseudo-Callisthenes⁵⁹ cites, along with their specific functions, the names of Cleomenes of Naucratis⁶⁰, Nomocrates of Rhodes and Crates of Olynthus, who were charged with the mission to direct the work of planning and constructing the new city. His first recommendation, to an Alexander who evaluated the available terrain with a broad vision, had to do with the vastness; to use all of that immense space seemed exaggerated to them and, in terms of urban management, hardly functional: to fill it with inhabitants, effectively assure the provisioning of the population and maintaining order, seemed like impossible tasks in this circumstance. On the contrary, they favored a smaller city with a controllable number of inhabitants. Convinced of the wisdom of these arguments, the king let himself be persuaded. The first consequence of this was to move the indigenous people that he encountered to the new urban perimeter, and those that lived further away, «up to thirty miles from the city», would comprise its suburban belt; to persuade the population

⁵⁶ On the antiquity of the *agathos daimon* cult in Alexandria, related traditionally to the foundation of the city, *vide* FRASER I, 1972: 209-211. The same author even records details of this celebration, in which the beasts of burden were crowned in homage to their contribution to the founding of the city.

⁵⁷ Vitruvius II pref. 4; Valerius Maximus 1.4.7; Pliny, *Natural History* 5.62; Str. 14.1. 23; Amm. Marc. 22.16.

⁵⁸ Vitruvius II pref. 1 *architectus cogitationibus et sollertia fretus*; Pliny 5.62 *architectus pluribus modis memorabili ingenio*; Amm. Marc. 22.16.7 *architecti sollertia Dinocratis*. Certain interesting suggestions about the material are given by RUNIA, 1989: 398-412.

⁵⁹ Ps.-Callisthenes. 1.3.1.

⁶⁰ Cleomenes was a Greek from Naucratis, in the Delta, whom Alexander nominated to be responsible for the administration of Egypt after his departure for Persia.

to comply with his proposal, he provided them with land for free and, in order to create a sense of cohesion, he named them «Alexandrians»⁶¹. Once real consent was obtained, it was up to the urbanists to establish the limits within the vast space available. Pseudo-Callisthenes clarifies things: «They delimited the city's longitude from the Snake (Dracon) river, opposite the Taphosirion (Tomb of Osiris) sand bar, until the River of Good Fortune (Agathodaimon), next to Canopus, and, in latitude, from Bendidion until Euphorus and Melantius»⁶². Yet, Pseudo-Callisthenes indicates that Eurylichus and Melanthus had even more specific functions, as «supervisors of urban planning», organizing the residential neighborhoods which took their names; Numenius, «chief of the stonemasons», and Hipponomus, Numenius' brother, who advised the king to build the city on foundations of stone and give it water conduits and canals that fed into the sea. This system of canalization came to be known as «Hipponomus», thanks to his advice⁶³.

There were still other objective conditions that favored Alexander's plan. Practically virgin, the location of Alexandria presented itself to the eyes of the king as an ample bay to the west of the river mouths of the Nile, covered by the accumulated sediments from the flowing river, protected on the ocean side by Pharos island and, inland, by an elevation that ran parallel to the coast and separated it from Lake Mareotis. This locality, benefiting from various harbors, had the conditions to become a center of trade and a military base in the extreme West of Egypt. For this reason, established in the area between the ocean and the lake, the city was conceived as a fortress, surrounded by walls, «that stood out in size and were of prodigious solidity»⁶⁴. As a matter of fact, adds Diodorus Siculus, being situated between the lake and the ocean, the city could take advantage of a natural strategy of defense: «the points of access overland are narrow and very easy to control»⁶⁵.

According to Homeric and oracular criteria, we can give the island of Pharos⁶⁶ a certain priority in its contribution to Alexandria's physical conditions. Strabo⁶⁷ describes it as an oblong territory situated close to the coast so that it forms a harbor with two entrances.

⁶¹ Ps.-Callisth.1.31.

⁶² GUAL, 1988: 83 informs us that Alexandria's two canals, which, though altered, still exist, were called *Dracon* and *Agathodaimon*. And that Euphorus and Melanthius would be the names of two city zones. Fraser (I, 1972: 4-5) considers that these city boundaries would be inconceivable before the Roman epoch.

⁶³ Hipponomus, the name of the man who planned Alexandria's sewage system, signifies precisely «subterranean canal», which raises some doubt about whether or not he existed. MARLOWE, 1971: 335 tells us that, from its establishment, Alexandria benefited from the water supply that came from the Canopic river mouth of the Nile.

⁶⁴ D.S. 17.52.2-3; Arr. 3.1.5.

⁶⁵ Certainly Diodorus Siculus considers that the only foreseeable route for an invasion of Egypt would be from east, through the Sinai Desert. On this side Egypt was guarded from Pelusium, in the extreme northwest of the Delta. The Nile itself, with the network of canals into which it was divided, constituted a natural barrier of protection in the Egyptian north.

⁶⁶ Plu. *Alex.* 26, speaks of Pharos in the time of Alexander as still an island that in Plutarch's epoch was joined to the continent by a causeway, the Heptastadium.

⁶⁷ Str. 17.1.6. Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 26.

He goes on in more detail: as the shore creates an ample bay, terminating at each end in a promontory, the extensive island, which is positioned in the center of the bay, creates, at each end, an entrance to a sheltered harbor. Centrally positioned, a causeway connected the island to the continent – the *Heptastadium*, «passage of seven stages» – creating a divider between the two harbors. The opening on the eastern side, closer to the promontory that marked the end of the bay, the Lochias, is narrower and less navigable because of the rocks that have accumulated there; but it constitutes an important barrier of resistance against the ocean waves⁶⁸. On the other hand the western access to the bay, though not exactly easy, was comparatively more accessible, forming a harbor known as Eunostos⁶⁹ («Safe Return»). Strabo⁷⁰ speaks of even another harbor, this one artificial, that was more important than Eunostos, called Cibotos or «Box», which established via a canal a link between Mareotis Lake and the ocean. Fraser⁷¹ considers this harbor, because it was more secluded, to be the location where, in the time of the Ptolemies, the ship-building yards would be established; in addition it would become a fundamental point of access to an inland area of great commercial importance. This constitutes the group of harbors that served Alexandria. In its turn, Mareotis Lake had a relevant influence over Alexandria; according to Strabo⁷², it was located to the south, as though the city were positioned «between two oceans»; the waters of the Nile fed it through a network of canals more abundantly than the water that came from the sea. Because of its length and depth it could shelter a harbor that, in the words of the geographer, «was more active than the coastal one» (though we must bear in mind the reality of his time). Even more than ease of commerce, the double maritime front guaranteed pure air for the city, a process in which the Nile itself played a major part. With the summer floods, the river's water levels rose to those of the lake, which removed swampy accumulations and the health risks that these deposits threatened⁷³. Likewise, the annual breezes that blew in off the sea from the north countered the summer heat and guaranteed a more agreeable season for the Alexandrians.

As Pseudo-Callisthenes tells us⁷⁴, Alexander knew about the existence of the island from the continent, about which he had questioned the indigenous people of the area. He was informed that it was known as Pharos, in the past inhabited by Proteus and where

⁶⁸ This is, according to Strabo, the place where later the celebrated «lighthouse of Alexandria», one of the seven wonders of the world, was built. It was precisely the configuration of the coast which Strabo describes in detail – low and barred by rocks – which demanded the installation of a signal for those who came close by boat. On the lighthouse of Alexandria, *vide* FERREIRA & FERREIRA, 2009: 107-125.

⁶⁹ According to WARMINGTON, 1967: 26, this was the name of Ptolemy Soter's son-in-law and could have been attributed to it later because of the happy coincidence between the name and the configuration of the harbor.

⁷⁰ Str. 17.1.6.

⁷¹ I, 1972: 26

⁷² Str. 17.1.7; 17.1.13.

⁷³ For Aeschylus the waters of the Nile are «sacred and healthy», *Prometheus* 812; *Suppliants* 561.

⁷⁴ Ps.-Callisth. 1.32.

the tomb of the Pharaoh was to be found, an object profoundly venerated by the local populations⁷⁵. In addition to visiting the island personally and paying homage to the king buried there, Alexander also took on the project of restoring the time-ravaged site. With this generosity, which he wanted spent «rapidly», the Macedonian gained for his project the thankful protection of the hero, whom tradition had deified.

For Arrian⁷⁶ it was Alexander who took personal responsibility for the several essential stages of the foundation⁷⁷: the initial idea of building the city, its planning and even certain of the details of its construction, leaving out the specific intervention of the architects. In this way, he can be seen in line with the traditional pose attributed to founders, that they were present and involved in this original stage. Pseudo-Callisthenes⁷⁸, saying more or less the same thing, defines certain aspects of the sovereign's instructions. When the time came to create the foundations, Alexander divided the city into five sectors, designated by the first five letters of the Greek alphabet⁷⁹: «A for *Alexander*, B for *basileus* (“king”), G for *genos* (“lineage”), D for *Diós* (“of Zeus”), and E for *ektisen* (“he founded”)»; in other words, «Alexander, king of the lineage of Zeus, was its founder»⁸⁰. He was also careful to recommend the direction the streets should take⁸¹, perpendicular to the coast, in order to take advantage of the coolness brought by the Etesian winds to improve the city's climate.

He needed then to consider the network of streets that constituted the civic heart of the new city⁸². Arrian⁸³ could be close to the truth when he says that, in addition to the walls, Alexander indicated where the agora should be constructed, and indicated which and how many temples should be built, some of them dedicated to Greek gods, another in honor of Isis, the Egyptian divinity⁸⁴ (*vide supra*). It seems to have fallen to the king to set

⁷⁵ Cf. *Odyssey* 4.399 ff.; Eur., *Helen*.

⁷⁶ Arr. 3.1.5.

⁷⁷ In a different version, Plu. 26 seems to distance royal intervention from the process when he affirms that while establishing the boundaries of the city «Alexander ordered the foremen to take charge of the construction while he left for the sanctuary of Ammon». D.S. 17.52.7 has the same opinion: «King Alexander charged some of his friends with the construction of Alexandria, organized everything that had to do with Egypt and returned to Syria with his army».

⁷⁸ Ps.-Callisth. 1.32.

⁷⁹ On these five city zones, *vide* MARLOWE, 1971: 336.

⁸⁰ GUAL, 1988: 84 underlines the fictional character of this aetiology.

⁸¹ D.S. 17.52.2.

⁸² Smith, 1992: 142, in considering the motives that led Alexander to found multiple cities, denies the tendency for monumental urban construction, though he accepts the effort to valorize the presence of Greek culture. Nevertheless, he refers to the polemic generated around a conscious policy of Hellenization undertaken by the Macedonian conqueror, which seems that it should be counterbalanced by a proposition to integrate, in a desirable linkage, with the local reality.

⁸³ Arr. 3.1.5.

⁸⁴ D.S. 1.50.3, certainly with the Alexandria of his day as a presence in his own memory, speaks of «magnificent palaces, docks and harbors» and other prominent monuments, as the city became progressively wealthier (cf. Str. 17.1.8, who even mentions «dedications», perhaps small temples, statues or other works of art). WELLES, 1962: 273 n. 8 accepts the construction of a first palace had been part of the project that Alexander established with Cleomenes of Naucratis, as a royal residence and

the boundaries of the city, which remained throughout its future development as the historical center. It is important to keep in mind the prudent words of Fraser about Alexandria's foundational stage:

The city's original plan, in other words, the one Alexander conceived, modified up to a certain point by Cleomenes and Ptolemy Soter, was completed in all probability before the end of the century (4th B.C.), but we cannot specify to what point the perimeter of the city as it was then defined differed from that which the following generations knew⁸⁵.

In the inscription transcribed by Pseudo-Callisthenes⁸⁶, not only did Sarapis proclaim himself protector of the city, he also anticipated the future deification of Alexander, forever connected to the place that dignified his name, with these words:

You, converted into a god, will, after death, be adored and will receive offerings from innumerable rulers; you will live in this city dead and not dead. Because your tomb will be the city you founded⁸⁷.

The god predicted, as an omen, what Alexander would become. Ptolemy, his general and successor in leading the destiny of Egypt, transferred the mortal remains of the king to Alexandria in a gold sarcophagus⁸⁸, where later they were interned in the area of the Palaces⁸⁹ and the royal tombs. Known as Sema, «the memorial»⁹⁰, Alexander's tomb remains in the heart of the city he founded, with those that brought Alexandria development, magnificence and eternity⁹¹. In the end, among all the cities to which he gave his name, the

administrative center (cf. D.S. 17.52.4). On the initial plan proposed by Arrian, *vide* FRASER I, 1972: 3- 4. On the temple to Isis in Alexandria, *vide* again FRASER I, 1972: 20-21.

⁸⁵ FRASER I, 1972: 36.

⁸⁶ Ps.-Callisth. 1.33.

⁸⁷ This is, to a certain extent, how it was carried, a process which would become conventional practice in the Hellenistic epoch for the foundation of cities: the establishment of a cult dedicated to the founder. Alexandria in Egypt constituted, from this perspective, an exceptional case in reference to Alexander, founder of various cities. Cf. SMITH, 1992: 136.

⁸⁸ On the conflicting versions in reference to the disinterment and transference of the Macedonian King to Alexandria, *vide* JONES, 1967: 35; ERSKINE, 2002: 163-179. Str. 17.1.8 attributes this initiative to Ptolemy I, who snatched the body from Perdikkas when he was transferring it from Babylonia and took it to Egypt, moved by the impetuous desire to make this country his kingdom. D.S. 18.26-28 tells us that Arrhidaeus spent two years organizing the transference of Alexander and that Ptolemy went to Syria to meet him, to accompany the body on its journey to Egypt. Pausanias 1.6.3; 1.7.1 said that Ptolemy I buried Alexander in Memphis and that it was only Ptolemy II who transferred it to Alexandria. Ps.-Callisth. 3.34 affirms that, in the beginning, the Macedonians intended to take the body of the king back to his native land; only later through the indications of the oracle of Zeus Babylon, did they bring him to Egypt, first to Memphis and later to Alexandria.

⁸⁹ Str. 17.1. 8.

⁹⁰ At first made of gold, the sarcophagus end up by being stolen and later, in the time of Ptolemy X, it was substituted for one of alabaster; cf. FRASER, I, 1972: 15.

⁹¹ On the cult of the founder which existed in Alexandria, *vide* FRASER I, 1972: 212.

Egyptian city was the one that most contributed to the immortality of the great conqueror⁹²: «Your name is immortal for having founded the highly celebrated city of Alexandria in Egypt».

⁹² Ps.-Callisth. 3. 24.