

## **ALEXANDRIA IN LATE ANTIQUITY**

Founded at the western end of the [Nile](#) Delta in 331 B.C. by Alexander the Great, Alexandria soon replaced Memphis as capital of Egypt and the Ptolemaic empire, thus focusing Egypt more resolutely than ever on the eastern Mediterranean and the Greek world. Alexandria became a center of Hellenistic civilization as the court of the Ptolemies attracted outstanding poets and scholars. It also played a leading role in economy and commerce, draining goods from the Egyptian chora (hinterland), the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean, and forwarding them to the Mediterranean world.

Alexandria must have been the most populous city of that area (one million [inhabitants](#) in the first century, by an optimistic estimate), until it had to cede this place to imperial Rome. With the victory of Octavian (later Augustus) and the death of Cleopatra VII in 30 B.C., Egypt became a Roman province with Alexandria as its capital. But even then the predominantly Greek city maintained an identity of its own compared with the Egyptian chora, a status acknowledged by a distinct citizenship and reflected in the official designation of *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum*.

We have a good description of the city by the Greek geographer and historian Strabo (*Geography* XVII.1.6-19), who visited Egypt in 25-24 B.C. in the company of Aelius Gallus, prefect of Egypt. Many of the features that were characteristic of Strabo's Alexandria had disappeared by the time of DIOCLETIAN (284-305) as a consequence of old age and new building activity, but also in the course of destruction due to natural disasters and warfare, particularly in the third century. There is thus a certain discontinuity between Hellenistic and early Roman Alexandria, on the one hand, and the Byzantine town, on the other; several important features remain, however, largely unaltered.

As before, the two maritime harbors, the Great Harbor and the Harbor of Eunostus (of Fortunate Return), were in existence, separated by the

Heptastadium, which linked the mainland and the island of Pharos, so called after the famous lighthouse of the third century B.C. Whereas these harbors assured the exchange of goods between the Mediterranean and Egypt, the port facilities on the southern side of Alexandria and the northern shore of Lake Mareotis brought the capital in contact, via canals, with the Canopic branch of the Nile, with the [Nile](#) Delta, and with Upper Egypt.

Beyond the city walls, to the east and west, lay necropolises (later to become Christian *coemeteria*) and suburbs, such as Eleusis on the east side and, still farther east, the Roman legionary camp of Nikopolis. West of the city wall, the burial grounds seem to have molded the whole area, Strabo therefore calling it simply Necropolis. The map joined to this article can give only a very approximate idea of the streets and sites of buildings in late Roman Alexandria. The slow decay following the ARAB CONQUEST OF EGYPT, the transfer of the capital of Egypt to Fustat-Cairo, and, above all, the hectic building activity since the nineteenth century have partly destroyed and partly covered the older strata of the town. In the Serapeum area, Pompey's Pillar (a victory monument erected after the recapture of Alexandria by Diocletian c. 299) is one of the few monuments still erect in situ.

Despite excavations (mostly on very limited sites) and careful observations, many localizations and attributions of public buildings and churches remain hypothetical. The many cemeteries on the fringe of the town, in particular, yielded interesting results. More recently, the Polish archaeologists digging in Kom al-Dikka, in the very center of Alexandria, discovered important sections of the Roman and Byzantine town: a small, very dense residential quarter of the late Roman period, baths (probably dating back to the third century A.D.), a public building (interpreted as an odeum), and another building with rows of marble seats that the excavators took to be a theater but that Balty has identified as the *bouleuterion*, the hall of the town council of Roman Alexandria (terminus post quem, 200). The same place yielded dozens of graffiti and drawings

related to the games of the hippodrome and to other motifs.

As capital of the Roman *provincia Aegyptus*, Alexandria was the seat of the *praefectus Aegypti*, the representative of the emperor, who headed the provincial administration. Alexandria and its immediate surroundings were heavily garrisoned by the *classis Alexandrina* in the harbor and especially by the troops in the camp of Nikopolis. During the Roman period and until the reforms of Diocletian, Alexandria had its own mint and issued coins with representations of gods, emperors, and city buildings. Alexandria had been equipped by its founder with the institutional set of a Greek polis: assembly of the people (*ecclesia*), town council (*boule*), magistrates, and other officials.

When Ptolemy I moved with his court from Memphis to Alexandria and monarchical rule made its impact felt during the reigns of the following Ptolemies, the development of polis autonomy was decisively restricted. Perhaps Alexandria lost its *boule* under one of the later Ptolemies (Bowman, 1971, pp. 12-14); another theory makes Augustus responsible for its abolition (Fraser, 1972, Vol. 1, pp. 94ff.; Geraci, pp. 176-82). Later Roman emperors, unimpressed by Alexandrian delegations, did nothing to restore their town council until Septimius Severus granted it in 200. But about the same time, the nome capitals of Egypt were also given town councils, so that the restoration of the Alexandrian *boule* was not much of a privilege.

But Roman Alexandria nevertheless had its own laws and its own citizenship, which set the Greek or Hellenized citizens apart not only from the Egyptians of the town and the chora but also from the numerous Jewish inhabitants. Dissensions between Alexandrian citizens and Jews about the latter's constitutional position and civic rights were a source of serious conflict and even civil war in the first and second centuries (especially the Jewish revolt of 115-117).

As the capital of Ptolemaic, Roman, and Byzantine Egypt, and as a

crossroads of men and products, Alexandria had acquired a quite varied population. Besides the immigrants from the Greek and Near Eastern areas, among them many Jews who had settled in Alexandria since the Hellenistic period, there was a nucleus of native Egyptians centered in the old village of Rhakotis, which had become an important quarter of the town around the Serapeum. Moreover, there was a constant supply of autochthonous Egyptians from the chora, threatening, as the city authorities felt, the Greek character of Alexandria and thus occasionally expelled by order of the Roman government.

Alexandria also played host to many foreigners attracted by a wide range of commercial, industrial, and other activities. Various languages were thus spoken in that Levantine metropolis, but Greek was dominant in official business, as in everyday life, from the time of Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest and even beyond (see GREEK LANGUAGE IN EGYPT). The often volatile mixture of Greeks and Egyptians, of Jews and Arabs, of people from black Africa, Central Asia, India, China, and the West gave the city a reputation of being frivolous and rebellious, deriding kings and emperors, intolerant of both Jews and Egyptians, finding in theater and hippodrome an outlet for their anger and their passions.

In the second half of the first century, the speech of Dio Chrysostomus "To the People of Alexandria" (*oratio* 32; see Jones, pp. 36-44) bears eloquent testimony to the Alexandrian addiction to exciting music and circus. These tensions exploded often enough. The massacre of the Alexandrian population and the expulsion of native Egyptians by the emperor Caracalla provide a particularly dramatic example (Kolb, 1972). Alexandria kept its antagonistic structures and unruly character in Byzantine times, violent clashes occurring now between Christians and pagans (destruction of the Serapeum in 391, murder of the pagan philosopher Hypatia in 415) or between rival Christian factions (Orthodox vs. Arians and Melitians, Monophysites vs. Dyophysites).

Alexandria suffered terrible losses in human lives, as well as in public and

private buildings, during the riots and wars of the second and third centuries. The quarter of the Brucheion, for example, had been ravaged in the course of the Jewish revolt of 115-117. That section of the town was obviously resettled afterward, and Alexandria in a more general way must have thoroughly recovered since the reign of Hadrian (117-138).

If we may believe the figures given in a very short but precise survey of Roman Alexandria in the Syriac *Chronicle* of Michael bar Elias, Jacobite patriarch of Antioch from 1166 to 1199, there were in Alexandria 2,478 temples (obviously shrines included), 47,790 (or 24,296?) houses, and 1,561 baths (not taking account of the important peripheral quarters of the town). Michael concludes, "Alexandria is the greatest of the cities of the inhabited world." If these figures are exact, his conclusion might well be correct, as a comparison with similar surveys of Rome and Constantinople shows.

Michael gives no precise information concerning the period to which his notice refers, but the text itself hints at a date after the accession of Hadrian in 117 and before the Palmyrene occupation of Alexandria in 270-272 (for English translation of Michael's text and commentary, see Fraser, 1951). The conquest of the town by the Palmyrene troops of Zenobia and its recapture by the emperor Aurelian in 272 caused lasting havoc, resulting in the abandonment of the coastal area in the northeast, once the core of the Ptolemaic city with the palace and other public buildings. The quarter of the Brucheion, again in ruins, was now given up.

The city walls were rebuilt under the Byzantine emperors, but they now included a smaller surface. This reduction is clearly indicated by both literary sources and archaeological investigations, illustrating the abandonment of the eastern quarters beyond the street R 1 of the map in Adriani's *Repertorio* (p. 269; cf. Rodziewicz, 1984, p. 335). The successive contractions of the city area resulted in the perimeter of the Arab wall of the eleventh century, leaving out substantial sections of the eastern and southern quarters of the town.

In the absence of reliable data, it is, of course, very hazardous to give an estimate of the population of Alexandria in late antiquity, but 500,000 [inhabitants](#) is perhaps not too far off the mark. In Byzantine times, Alexandria with its reduced area, reshaped quarters, and rising churches must have looked very different from what it was in the Ptolemaic and early Roman periods. It must, however, have been a splendid metropolis in late antiquity, even if we allow for some exaggeration in the panegyric descriptions of Alexandria by Ammianus Marcellinus (XXII.15-16) and other late authors (for *encomia* of Alexandria, cf. Jones; J. H. M. Hendriks et al.; and *Expositio totius mundi* 35-37).

As Alexandria had had to serve Rome by contributing largely to the [food](#) supply of the imperial capital during the first three centuries of the Christian era, so it had to bow to Constantinople when this city became the seat of the emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire. Products and taxes were now drained to the new imperial capital. Political directives issued by Constantinople, soon followed by ecclesiastical patronizing, often led to opposition and violent clashes between representatives of Byzantine and Egyptian interests.

Notwithstanding several incisive changes in Byzantine times, Alexandria kept some of its former political structures. One of these was the *boule*, composed of a smaller number of notables, including essentially big landowners, rich merchants, and higher administrative personnel. The members of the *boule* were responsible for the application of the imperial edicts and the payment of taxes from their own funds.

Even in the Byzantine period, Alexandria probably remained the most important economic center of the not yet divided Mediterranean world. In this respect, the capital of Egypt was well served by an abundant and highly professional working force. The transportation services, of paramount importance in a commercial city, were operated through associations of shippers. Specialized workers were active in linen weaving, processing of papyrus, and glassblowing. The manufacture of

perfumes, jewelry, and drugs, a traditional domain of Alexandria, was still widely practiced in Byzantine times.

Well equipped with harbors both on the sea and on the northern shore of Lake Mareotis, Alexandria availed itself of the opportunities of its site at the conjunction of the Mediterranean and the Nile. Commerce continued to flourish not only with its Western and Near Eastern neighbors but also with the Middle and the Far East (cf. Rougé). From the Egyptian ports on the Red Sea, especially from Leukos Limen al-Qusayr, goods were transported through the Eastern Desert to the [Nile](#) Valley. There the town of Coptos was the most important trading center from which products were shipped down the Nile to Alexandria and the Mediterranean. In the third century, Coptos had attracted many foreigners who not only were active in commerce but also propagated new beliefs (MANICHAISM; cf. Koenen, 1983) and alien interests (sympathizers of Palmyra; Schwartz, 1976).

The important role of Egypt in sustaining Constantinople and the Byzantine armies not only mirrors the auxiliary function of Alexandria in regard to the Byzantine capital but also shows how essential it was for the emperor and the central administration to secure the loyalty of Egypt and especially of Alexandria. This helps to explain the often far-reaching compromises between imperial and Egyptian interests, and the liberties conceded to the Alexandrian patriarch and his church in ecclesiastical and overall policy.

The interference of the Alexandrian clergy in worldly matters can be understood first in the light of the strong connection between religious policy and political allegiance. But there is another aspect not to be neglected—the influence exerted by the church and its agencies on the professional groups of Alexandria. Not only was the church the single most important organization providing social welfare but, as Christianity conquered the majority of the Alexandrian population during the second half of the fourth century, it could and did use its new muscle in the

struggle against heterodox rivals (Arians and Melitians), pagans, and Jews. In the course of the next centuries, the church, besides being the most influential political and social unit, became a potent economic organization, accumulating property, attracting legacies, and running its own enterprises.

Besides the reasons for Alexandrian unruliness already mentioned, there was further potential for social conflict in the late Roman period. Many Egyptians of the chora, being unable to pay their taxes, fled to Alexandria, where unemployment, notwithstanding the economic opportunities of the place, could be a problem. This was especially true during the winter months, when navigation on the Mediterranean had to be interrupted and many sailors and dockers were idle. There was an antagonism between these poorer classes and the richer members of the Alexandrian town council, who ran the local administration. When these economic and social tensions were fueled by religious conflicts, as occurred in the fourth century, when pagans were still numerous, this could result in bloody outbursts of anger and frustration.

It comes as no surprise that a church leader like ATHANASIUS presents conflicts in terms of religious affiliation, accusing the Arians of allying themselves with pagans and Jews in their hostility to orthodoxy. But that even a writer like Ammianus Marcellinus does so is perhaps a better proof of the pervading influence of religion on political and social matters. Describing the situation in Egypt in 362, after the death of Constantius II, who had favored Arianism, and the accession of Julian, Ammianus (XXII.11) gives a vivid account of the gruesome excesses of Alexandrian pagans against leading Christians. Georgius, the Arian bishop of the town, was lynched because he had denounced fellow citizens to Constantius.

He was also thought to have given damaging advice on the taxing of public buildings and had infuriated pagan Alexandrians by insulting remarks on the sanctuary of the *Genius* (the temple of the Agathodaimon

or, perhaps, the Serapeum; cf. Thélamon, 1981, pp. 248-50). The wrath of the pagan *plebs* turned also on Dracontius, the *praepositus monetae*, for having destroyed an altar in the Alexandrian mint and against the *comes* Diodorus, who, while overseer of the building of a church, had offended pagan feelings by cutting off the curls of boys, “thinking that this also had to do with the worship of gods” (Ammianus XXII.11.9). Ammianus stresses that even the Christians did not come to the rescue of the victims, because of the general hatred for Georgius. (One might, of course, suspect the antagonism between Arians and Orthodox Christians as the real reason for this failure to help.)

After having insulted and murdered Georgius, Dracontius, and Diodorus, the pagan rioters cremated the corpses and threw the ashes into the sea in order to avoid, as Ammianus specifies, the collecting of the remains and the construction of [memorial](#) buildings such as had been erected to the martyrs of the past. Learning of these events, the emperor Julian, while utterly unsympathetic to Georgius, expressed his strong displeasure with the popular lynch law but refrained from punishing the culprits (Julian, *epistula* 60, ed. Bidez).

From roughly the same period as Ammianus is the *Expositio totius mundi* by an anonymous author of the Greek East (probable date, 359-360). He gives an interesting account of the state of affairs in Egypt and Alexandria (chs. 34-37), not only describing the geographical features of the country and its products, but also stressing the cultural activity of Alexandria and the fervor of pagan worship. Popular unrest in Alexandria is tersely recorded, with a surprising explanation (37.1): *Iudices enim in illa civitate cum timore et tremore intrant, populi iustitiam timentes* (for the governors enter this city with dread and tremble, fearing the people’s justice). The anonymous writer goes on to specify the violence against culpable governors (*peccantes iudices*). Obviously, the author of this passage combines an extraordinary admiration for the presumed sense of justice of the Alexandrian population with a deep distrust of representatives of the central government.

In the following centuries of Byzantine rule, urban unrest is a recurrent theme in Alexandrian history. Conflicts between Monophysites and Dyophysites, patriarch and emperor (or his representatives), were frequent. As in many Roman and Byzantine towns, there had been and still was in Alexandria a strong interest in spectacles and mass entertainment. The hippodrome and its chariot races enjoyed special popularity, and the charioteers were public celebrities.

In that context, a series of graffiti and drawings mentioning and depicting charioteers, discovered by Polish archaeologists in the central quarter of Kom al-Dikkah, in a building that may have been the *bouleuterion* of late Roman Alexandria (and not the theater; cf. Balty), could make an interesting contribution to our knowledge of Alexandrian circus factions. Borkowski, who first edited this material, connected it with the uprising of Heraclius and his partisans against the emperor Phocas in 608. This connection, however, has been seriously challenged by Cameron and Bagnall (discussing chronological problems and the general [interpretation](#) of circus inscriptions).

We cannot deal here with the details of the last phase of Byzantine Alexandria and Egypt, but a short concluding note on the Arab conquest of Alexandria is indispensable. While Byzantium and Sassanid Persia exhausted themselves by waging war against each other, the forces of Islam gathered strength for their onslaught on both the [Persian Middle East](#) and the oriental provinces of Byzantium. After the fall of Egypt's eastern stronghold, Pelusium, in 639, the Arab troops of 'Amr forced their way through the Delta. Babylon fell on 6 April 641, and Alexandria followed on 12 September 642.

Dynastic strife in Constantinople following the death of the emperor Heraclius in 642 and the resulting confusion had greatly helped the Arab cause. When, on the other hand, dissensions in the Islamic camp led to the demise of 'Amr, the Byzantine general Manuel seized the opportunity and recaptured Alexandria in 645. This in turn provoked the reinstatement

of 'Amr and the final conquest of Alexandria in 646. It sealed the close of an epoch that had begun nearly a millennium before with the coming of Alexander the Great in 332-331 B.C. But the end of Greco-Roman rule did not generate total disruption. However, notwithstanding the numerous links with the past, Egypt was now set on a new course, which finally led to the decline of Alexandria and the ascension of Cairo.

In later Roman times, Alexandria still had the reputation of being intellectually active and a town of learning. In his description of fourth-century Alexandria (XXII.16.7-22), Ammianus emphasizes the importance of arts, mathematics, music, and medicine. In the second half of that century, the Museon was still in existence. The famous library had already suffered several serious losses in the course of the successive devastations of the town. It seems never to have regained its former significance.

Nevertheless, teaching, research, and literary activity were still flourishing in late Roman times, paganism and Christianity following their own, often uncompromising ways. Open and brutal hostility often prevailed: the persecution of Christians, the destruction of pagan sanctuaries (e.g., the Serapeum in 391), the savage killing of the pagan philosopher Hypatia in 415. But the brightest of Christian intellectuals never completely shed the heritage of Hellenic philosophy and of a classical tradition deeply imbued with paganism.

Even after his conversion to Christianity, Hypatia's pupil Synesius, bishop of Ptolemais and later bishop of Cyrene, maintained his veneration for his pagan teacher. In late antiquity, Alexandria still had its adepts of Platonist and Aristotelian philosophy, while Justinian had already closed the Academy at Athens in 529. But the philosophers of that age progressively lost their pagan affiliation, being or becoming Christians, for example, the Monophysite John Philoponus (born c. 490), author of philosophical and theological works.

Poetry in Byzantine Alexandria largely followed the patterns of classical Greek tradition. Its practitioners were mostly scholars and teachers, often active as rhetors and attached to political figures. One outstanding example is Claudian, a pagan Alexandrian writing Latin verse at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries, who was part of the entourage of Stilicho, his patron and *magister militum* of the Western Roman Empire. In late Roman Egypt, Alexandria was not the only center of literary activity. Notwithstanding the rise of Coptic in the Egyptian hinterland, Greek language and culture were still firmly entrenched in several towns of the chora—for instance, in Panopolis, hometown of Nonnos, who in the fifth century wrote an epic poem in forty-eight books on the god Dionysus (*Dionysiaca*) as well as a metrical paraphrase of the Gospel of John (*Metabole*).

The classical tradition, until its final absorption by Christianity, was only one branch of the intellectual life of late Roman Alexandria. There was another, more genuine contribution of Christianity to Alexandrian teaching and philosophy—the so-called CATECHETICAL SCHOOL. At first offering no more than a basic program for catechumens, it became in the second century something of a philosophical school, particularly under the direction of CLEMENT and, from 203/204 to 231, of ORIGEN, one of the greatest and most controversial teachers of the church.

Origenist influence was still perceptible in the fourth century, when DIDYMUS THE BLIND (c. 313-398), author of theological treatises and of commentaries on the Old Testament, was head of the Catechetical School. There is a marked contrast between the widespread influence of this school on Christian intellectuals in the Mediterranean world and the absence of Coptic translations of the writings of, for example, Clement and Origen (Krause, 1983), whereas the festal Letters of the Alexandrian patriarchs were translated into Coptic.

Various explanations for this situation may be possible, the most obvious being perhaps, besides a lack of intellectual interest in this kind of

theoretical work, the presumed unorthodoxy of Origen and his tradition. The fact that the Coptic language played virtually no role in Alexandria, but prevailed in the chora, is a clear indication of the cultural barrier between that town and native Egypt.

That barrier, however, was not totally impermeable. Whereas the influence of Greek Christian spirituality and theorization on native Egyptian Christianity seems to have been limited, the impact of the Coptic church on Alexandria and, via Alexandria, on Christianity at large was considerable (Krause, 1981). Coptic influence on the formulation of trinitarian theology, on monophysitism, and on the worship of Mary, [Mother](#) of God (THEOTOKOS) is obvious. Native Egypt also contributed a large share to monasticism in the late Roman Empire, by direct contact (visitors staying with Egyptian hermits or in Egyptian monasteries) and by the appeal of writings such as the *Life of Antony* by Athanasius.

This work, in its combination of Greek and Egyptian spiritual traditions, impressively illustrates the role of Alexandria as a mediator between Coptic and Mediterranean monasticism. (Athanasius was one of the very few patriarchs familiar with the Coptic language.) In the course of time, monks came to dominate the church organization in the chora almost completely. By the sixth century, nearly all bishops in Egypt originated from Egyptian monasteries, which bears testimony to the influence of autochthonous Christianity in a number of once Hellenized nome capitals.

Our knowledge of the beginnings of Christianity in first-century Alexandria is very insufficient, but the heritage of these early stages was still visible in Byzantine Alexandria. In the second century, GNOSTICISM played a significant role there through teachers like Basilides and his son Isidorus. This tradition survived into fourth-century Alexandria but finally succumbed to orthodoxy.

Because of the nearly total absence of reliable archaeological data, our knowledge of the churches of Byzantine Alexandria rests almost

completely on literary sources (Calderini, 1935; Krause, 1966; Martin, 1984). As for monasteries, there were none or very few within the walls of late Roman Alexandria, but they were extraordinarily numerous in the immediate surroundings of the town (Krause, 1981, p. 57). Among the most important was the monastic complex of ENATON at the ninth milestone west of Alexandria. Many churches were built on the ruins or within the existing structures of pagan sanctuaries. Alexandria counted seven or more churches before the victory of Constantine in 324.

Constantine himself does not stand out as a builder or benefactor of Alexandrian churches, since the capital of Egypt was neither an imperial residence like Constantinople nor a holy place like Jerusalem. His successor, Constantius II (337-361), authorized the construction of a church in the former Caesareum as a favor to the Arian bishop Georgius. The chief promotor of Alexandrian church building was the patriarch THEOPHILUS (385-412). On the ruins of the Serapeum, devastated in 391, he erected a martyrium and a church of [Saint John](#) the Baptist, which is probably identical with the church named after the emperor Arcadius. Another church, bearing the name of the emperor Theodosius, was perhaps built on the site of the Serapeum as well. On the island of Pharos, Theophilus had a church consecrated to Saint RAPHAEL, the [archangel](#) then replacing Isis Pharia as a protector of navigation.

Only a few of the Alexandrian churches can be localized exactly or approximately. The Baucalis Church (where Arius had been presbyter) derived its name from the eastern suburb of Boukolia or Boukolon. In the vicinity stood the martyrium and the Church of Saint Mark. More to the west, in the quarter of the former temple of the god Bendis, probably near the Great Harbor, Athanasius had built in 268-270 the Church of Bendideion or Mendideion, which later took his name. Another church, called by the name of the predecessor of Athanasius, ALEXANDER I (312-326), was perhaps a former temple of the god Kronos Saturnus transformed by Alexander into a church of Saint Michael.

When, about 325, Constantine ordered the transfer of the [Nile](#) cubit from the Serapeum to an unnamed church, this church may well have been the Church of Saint Michael (following Martin, p. 219), since elsewhere this saint replaced the god Hermes Thoth as the patron of inundation (see also Thélamon, pp. 276ff.). The main church of [early Christian](#) Alexandria stood in the western part of the town and bore the name of Bishop Theonas (282-300). It was the cathedral of the Alexandrian patriarchs until this function was transferred to the Church of Saint Dionysius and later to the church built in the former Caesareum (Augusteum or Sebasteum), which Constantius II put at the disposal of the Arian bishop Georgius. Later it was taken over by Athanasius and was designated the Great Church. A church in the western necropole had received the name of the martyr-bishop Peter (300-311); it was later consecrated to Saint Mary Theotokos.

After the Council of CHALCEDON in 451 and the ensuing schism between Monophysites and Dyophysites, Alexandria was torn by rival communities. The Dyophysites, siding with the Orthodox emperor and thus called Melchites (from *melech*, which means king or emperor), competed with the Monophysites for the patriarchate and the possession of the Alexandrian churches. In the Egyptian chora, the Monophysites held a near monopoly, and they certainly represented the majority in Alexandria.

This conflict finally led to the simultaneous existence of two rival patriarchs in Egypt, the Melchite one (most of them of non-Alexandrian and non-Egyptian origin) being recognized by the emperor, whereas the Monophysite patriarch was virtually excluded from Alexandria, finding shelter in the numerous monasteries surrounding Alexandria, especially in the Enaton. When the Arabs conquered Alexandria, the Melchite patriarch Cyrus al-Muqawqas left the town with the Byzantine troops, whereas the Monophysite [patriarch BENJAMIN I](#) seized the opportunity and returned to Alexandria. His successors maintained their see there until the eleventh century. Only then did the patriarch CHRISTODOULUS

(1047-1077) transfer his see to the political capital, Cairo.

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