

Alexandria the *cosmopolis*: a global perspective

An international conference organized at the *Centre d'Études Alexandrines* in cooperation with the Leiden University NWO VICI project *Innovating Objects* by Eleni Fragaki, Marie-Dominique Nenna & Miguel John Versluys

Alexandria, Egypt, December 2-3-4 2019

Hellenistic Alexandria has often been characterized as *cosmopolis*: a place where the ancient world coincided. From its foundation onwards, the city of Alexandria was indeed an important node where many roads from all over the world crossed; a world city full of people and artefacts from all across Eurasia. During this period, the global circulation of people, ideas, and objects and their confluence in Alexandria seems to have constituted not only the physical appearance of the city, but also its (cultural) identity.

Even though it should be read as dynastic discourse, Callixenus' well-known passage about the grand procession of Ptolemy II Philadelphos in Alexandria clearly illustrates the point by mentioning Indian women; negro tribute-bearers; Indian, Hyrcanian and Molossian dogs; birds from the Black Sea as well as Aethiopia; Arabian, Aethiopian and Euboan sheep; Laconian shawls and golden mixing-bowls; tableware of Corinthian workmanship and Panathenaic amphoras – amongst many other peoples, animals and objects from all over the then-known world. Philadelphos' pavilion is described equally cosmopolitan, boasting Phoenician curtains, Delphic tripods and Persian carpets, while the *thalamegos* of Ptolemy Philopator was made up from Milesian cypress, Corinthian capitals, columns built of marble from India, and portrait-statues in Parian marble amongst other things. A papyrus from the 3rd c. B.C., most likely a school-book, suggests that this *global awareness* was not just confined to the circle of the court and elites: it lists rivers in Thrace along with the Sangarius and the Scamander in Anatolia, as well as the Hindus and the Arachotes, near present-day Kandahar in Afghanistan.

When investigating the multicultural character of Alexandria, the “in-betweenness” that seems to characterize this *cosmopolis*, scholars have often focused on particular regions and their interaction with the city. In the past, much has been written about the Greek face of Alexandria and its connections with the eastern Mediterranean, while relations with the Levant also got due attention. More recently, the Egyptian face of Alexandria and its relations to the Nilotic hinterland have also received the attention they deserve. But Alexandria was more than a confluence of Greek and Egyptian elements.

The first aim of our conference is to arrive at a truly global understanding of the *cosmopolis* that was Alexandria. To that purpose, an exploration of what we call its object-scape –the repertoires of material culture that were present and can still be found in the archaeological record– is crucial. Building on the excellent work that has been done on influences from the Greek Mediterranean, from the Levant, and from the Nile valley already, we intend to explore a much wider world. What can we learn about Alexandria's connections with Carthage and the Punic world? What insights are to be gained about the city's link to the Celtic West and regions like Etruria? What role(s) did

the (sub-) Sahara and Nubia play? How should we consider elements from Arabia and the Persian Gulf, or the Persian heartland itself, with cities like Babylon and Seleucia? How important was the development of the early 'Silk Roads' and the arrival of objects from Central Asia for Alexandria? What role did objects, ideas and people from the Indian Subcontinent and China play?

The second aim of our conference is to go farther than giving an overview of Alexandria as a central node in a truly global network alone. We are interested in analyzing the ties that held the network together. The overview of specific regions from all over Eurasia and their relations with Alexandria should allow us to qualify their interactions with Alexandria from a comparative perspective. We propose to do so on the basis of four parameters and investigate the 1. frequency, 2. strength, 3. content, and 4. directionality of these ties. This will enable us to better define what made up these global connections, how and why they functioned and changed overtime, and what kind of impact they had.

The latter point – impact - is highly important and describes the third aim of our conference. We propose that the coinciding and confrontation of objects, ideas, and peoples in Alexandria did not merely result in a multicultural melting pot. *Through this confluence something novel was created that was more than the sum of its parts.* In debates about art and visual material culture, the term “Alexandrianism” was coined to try and describe this surplus value of Alexandria the *cosmopolis*. The expression that Hellenistic Alexandria was “a factory of gods” alludes to the same innovative power of global connections for the domain of religion. We believe that, if we want to understand their global dimensions, these shifts should be investigated for much wider domains of society than art and religion alone. What can we learn about innovations through increased connectivity in the domains of science and technology; food production and culinary habits; plants and medicine; the use of animals; et cetera? Many innovations in Hellenistic Eurasia are thought to emanate from Alexandria. The overview and analysis of Alexandria’s global ties that our meeting aims to provide will not only allow us to better understand what exactly came together in Alexandria, but also why the *bricolage* of these elements had such an innovative power.

Programme

December 2

17:00 - 17:15

Welcome and presentation of the contributors to the conference

17:15 - 18:00

« Alexandria the cosmopolis: towards a global perspective »

M. J. Versluys

18:00 - 19:00

« Alexandrian archaeology : achievements and perspectives of the Centre d'Études Alexandrines »
M.-D. Nenna

19:00 - 20:00

Keynote lecture

« Alexandria between the 4th century BCE and the 6th century AD, a global city »
Philippe Beaujard

20h00

Welcome dinner

December 3

A. Interregional contacts, routes and exchanges

1. *Looking East*

9:00 - 9:40

« D'Alexandrie à Pétra... et retour, ou de la nécessité d'élargir le débat »

Laurent Tholbecq, Université libre de Bruxelles

9:40 - 10:20

« Seleucia on the Tigris. The Cosmopolis of Seleucid Asia »

Vito Messina, University of Turin

10:20 – 11:00

« Alexandria and Gandhara »

Peter Stewart, University of Oxford

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 12:10

« Links between the Mediterranean world, India, Southeast Asia and China during the 1st millennium BC »

Bérénice Bellina, CNRS, PréTech UMR 7055

Krisztina Hoppál, MTA–ELTE–SZTE, Hungarian Academy of Science

2. *Looking West*

12:10 – 12:50

« Between the sand and the sea, Alexandria as Mediterranean gateway to the Egyptian Western Desert: a long-term perspective (late 4th century BC - 10th century AD) »

Damien Agut-Labordère, CNRS-ArScAn, Nanterre

12:50 – 13:30

« Alexandria and the Punic world: some remarks on cultures in contact »

Luisa Bonadies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (video-conference)

13:30 – 15:00 Lunch break

15:00 – 15:40

« The Galatians in Hellenistic Alexandria »

Franck Perrin, Université Lyon 2

B. Dynamics of assimilation and innovation

1. Religion and philosophy

15:40 – 16:20

« Alexandria the cosmopolis, and the formation of the Nechepso-Petosiris tradition »

Ian S. Moyer, University of Michigan

16:20 – 17:00

« Les religions de l'Inde chez les auteurs alexandrins durant la dynastie ptolémaïque »

Guillaume Ducœur, Université de Strasbourg (video-conference)

17:00 - 17 :30 General discussion

December 4

B. Dynamics of assimilation and innovation

2. *The natural world*

9:00 - 9:40

« Sur la piste des gemmes extraites ou travaillées en Égypte à l'époque romaine tardive »

Thomas Calligaro, *Centre de recherche et de restauration des musées de France*

9:40 – 10:20

« Archaeobotany of the Egyptian Delta: State of Research »

Charlène Bouchaud, CNRS, MNHN, UMR 7209-AASPE

Mennat-Allah El Dorry, Ministry of Antiquities, Egypt

10:20 – 11:00

« Animaux lointains et images du monde : l'intégration des faunes méridionales dans la culture alexandrine »

Jean Trinquier, ENS (Paris), UMR 8546

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

3. *Science and medicine*

11:30 - 12:10

« Astrology at Alexandria: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Worlds »

Daryn Lehoux, Queen's University

12:10 - 12:50

« The World in & out Alexandria (3rd cent. BC - 6th cent. AD): notes on the ancient representations of spaces and people »

Anca Dan, CNRS, UMR 8546 – AOrOc ENS

12:50 – 13:30

« Alexandrie : phare de la médecine hellénistique au miroir de Galien »

Véronique Boudon-Millot, CNRS, UMR 8167

13:30 – 15:00 Lunch break

4. *Literature and arts*

15:00 – 15:40

« L’Alexandrie des poètes et les objets importés d’Orient. Images du transfert et de l’innovation littéraire chez les auteurs hellénistiques et les *néoteroi* »

Florence Klein, Université Lille 3

15:40 – 16:20

« Alexandrian funerary architecture : from a Near-Eastern *koine* to the creation of new models »

Eleni Fragaki, Leiden University

16:20 – 17:00

« Le Phare d’Alexandrie à Rome ? »

Vincent Jolivet, CNRS, UMR 8546 – AOrOc ENS

17:00 – 18:00 Conclusions and general discussion

Farewell dinner

December 5

Excursion

9:00 – 9 :45	Sarapeion
10:00 - 11:00	Kôm esch-Schugâfa
11:15 – 12:30	Anfushy necropolis
12:45 - 14:00	Kôm el-Dikka
14:00 – 15:30	lunch