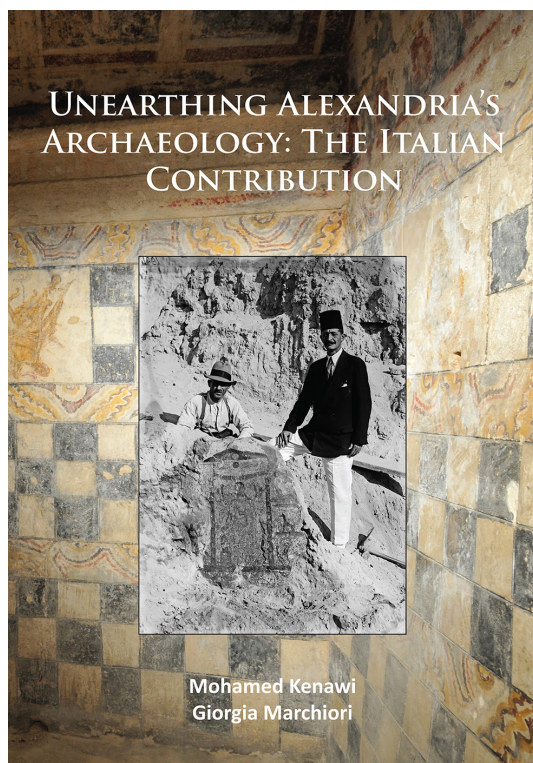


Mohamed Kenawi & Giorgia Marchiori
Unearthing Alexandria's archaeology: The Italian Contribution

Archaeopress Archaeology, Oxford 2018
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illustrated throughout in colour and black & white, 81 colour plates
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Review by Carlo De Mitri¹



In the studies dedicated to the Italian presences in Egypt, scholars recognize two phases of involvement, a first phase at the beginning of the nineteenth century, due mainly to political reasons and the second wave of Italian immigrants to Egypt mainly due to economic reasons. This phenomenon began in the late nineteenth century and continued until the years following the First World War and culminated in the advent of fascism².

Naturally, political and economic factors intertwined with cultural ones, just think of Giuseppe Verdi's presentation of *Aida* in 1870, or of Giuseppe Ungaretti who lived in Egypt until 1912 publishing his youth articles on the *Egyptian Messenger of Alexandria*, and finally of the experience of Fausta Cialente, writer and intellectual who lived first in Alexandria, the city that inspired her book *Cortile a Cleopatra*, and later in Cairo where, from 1941 to 1947 she conducted a daily broadcast on Radio Cairo attacking fascist propaganda. These three historical moments well exemplify the periods of greater presence of

Italians in the cultural and archaeological legacy of the ancient Kingdom of Egypt.

It is beyond doubt that the egyptploitation involved the Italian academy, bringing Italian representatives to hold prestigious roles in the archaeological scene of the African country, and the volume of Kenawi and Marchiori returns the vitality and cultural ferment of a multi-ethnic city like Alexandria, outlining the personalities of engaged Italian scholars and researchers.

In the first chapter, after having pointed out the presence of Italians in archaeological exploratory activities between the seventeenth and early nineteenth century, those who have had academic and structured roles are presented. Here then are Giuseppe Botti, the founder of the Greco-Roman Museum of Alessandria; Evaristo Breccia, Botti's successor in

1 Thanks to Giovanni Dini for the English translation.

2 Marta Petricoli, *Oltre il mito. L'Egitto degli italiani (1917–1947)*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2007 and Ibraam Gergis Mansour Abdelsayed, *Italiani sulle rive del Nilo: storia, contributi e prospettive di una comunità italiana a Il Cairo (1800–1950)*, in *Rapporto italiani nel mondo*, Tau, Todi 2016, 417–423.

the directorship, and finally, Achille Adriani, also director of the Museum. For these figures a brief biographical information sheet and a complete bibliography are provided. Along with these, the names of those who collaborated in the excavation and study activities in Alexandria are recorded. The last in the chronological order is Nicola Bonacasa who, from 1983 to 2005, worked on excavations in Alexandria. Lastly, the data on the Italian archaeological missions that operated in the territory of Alexandria since 1998 are reported.

The second part deals with the history of some sites: the Hadra necropolis, with the description of Italian excavations in the different periods since 1892 to 1939; the Shatby neighbourhood located at the centre of modern Alexandria where in the necropolis the Italian teams found different graves, two hypogea, the Alabaster Tomb and other Roman remains like the hunt mosaic; the Anfushi necropolis on Pharos Island with the hypogea and their decoration and painting; Kom al-Shuqafa where the Italian Mission supported other archaeological missions to investigate the ›Catacombs‹ and the bath complex; the Serapeum, the ancient temple dedicated to the cult of the god Serapis, recorded by the Napoleonic expedition in Egypt; Kom al-Dikka where the Italians activities take turns with the Polish Mission for investigation of the residence and the rich architectural remains.

For each site, from chapter 3 to chapter 7, the research activities are summarized, carried out in the various excavation campaigns, with unpublished archive photos and plans that, though already published, have been reorganized and made more readable.

Finally, the book is enriched by an interesting catalogue of photos from additional sites: Taposiris Magna, the drawings of unpublished tombs found in Abu Qir, the Souk al-Wardian Tomb, the Mustapha Kamel necropolis and the Fort Qaitbay as well as a bunch of photos, depicting sites during excavations, tombs and architectural fragments from Alexandria.

Hence, the book succeeds in emphasizing the substantial contribution made by Italian scholars and researchers to the exploration of Hellenistic-Roman Egypt in the last century. However, it is important to point out a crucial flaw: the absence of an overall plan with the location of the sites mentioned in the text, their distances and interconnections in ancient Alexandria's network.