

# *Alexandria*

*Urban Development and Analysis*

*Neeraj Bhatia*

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## Introduction

This book is an attempt to understand modern day Alexandria through a study of its urban elements and history. Alexandria, has been a city of discussion for the Western world for several centuries. The physical remnants of its almost mythical story are still being discovered today. Alexandria was the center of knowledge and learning in the Hellenistic World. It was home to the first library and Museo, and these were made available to the public for free. The city slowly decreased in vitality and population after the Roman rule in 642 AD. When Napoleon reached Alexandria in 1798, it was no more than a small village. Thus, the history of the modern city is a fairly recent one. The renaissance of Alexandria can be attributed to Mahammed Ali, an Ottoman Soldier who took control of Alexandria in 1805. Through a series of infrastructural and building projects, Alexandria grew from a small town of 4,000 to a thriving city of 143,000 in just 50 years. The city has continued this growth at an unprecedented rate with a current population of 3.7 million. The physical size of the city is 6 times longer than the village of 1798.

Because of its rich history and geographic location, Alexandria has always been home to many diverse ethnicities and eclectic architectural styles. A study of the urban morphology and fabric reveals how this diversity has extended to the city form. Recent ‘revitalization’ projects including a the New Bibliotheca Alexandria (a library to match the grandeur and spirit of the ancient library), a Corniche (a highway running parallel to the coast to resolve traffic problems), and a re-development to Masr Square indicate the renewed collective vision in the city that has been born in the past 150 years. The speed of new construction does, however, involve some irreversible sacrifices. Parts of the ancient city are still being discovered today, and some archeologists believe that most of Ancient Alexandria lies as little as 10m below the modern city due to subsidence. This is the Alexandria of today; caught between its mythical past and strive for a modern future. The city vacillates between modes of being a museum and shedding its past. We must wonder if the city can ever be rebuilt to its glory in ancient times and how modern Alexandria can cope with its mythical heritage.

Despite the rapid and large amount of growth in Alexandria in the past 200 years, little has been documented from an urbanistic standpoint. Most scholars tend to focus on ancient Alexandria, perhaps widening the gap between the present and past city. The following study analyzes the urban components that comprise the present day city; namely the building types, block types, fabric types, neighborhoods, street types, squares and the civic structure. Through this analysis an assessment of urban problems was carried out. This allowed for a suggestive design to enhance the civic structure of the central core of the city. As the city of Alexandria continues to expand at a fast rate, urban designers and architects must treat the modern city with the care of analysis that scholars treat the ancient city.

*“There is an island in the surging sea which they call Pharos, lying off Egypt. It has a harbor with good anchorage, and hence they put out to sea after drawing water”*

*Odyssey, Homer.*