

**VOICES FROM
COSMOPOLITAN ALEXANDRIA**

BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA

VOICES FROM
COSMOPOLITAN ALEXANDRIA

Volume 1

EDITED BY
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The Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center



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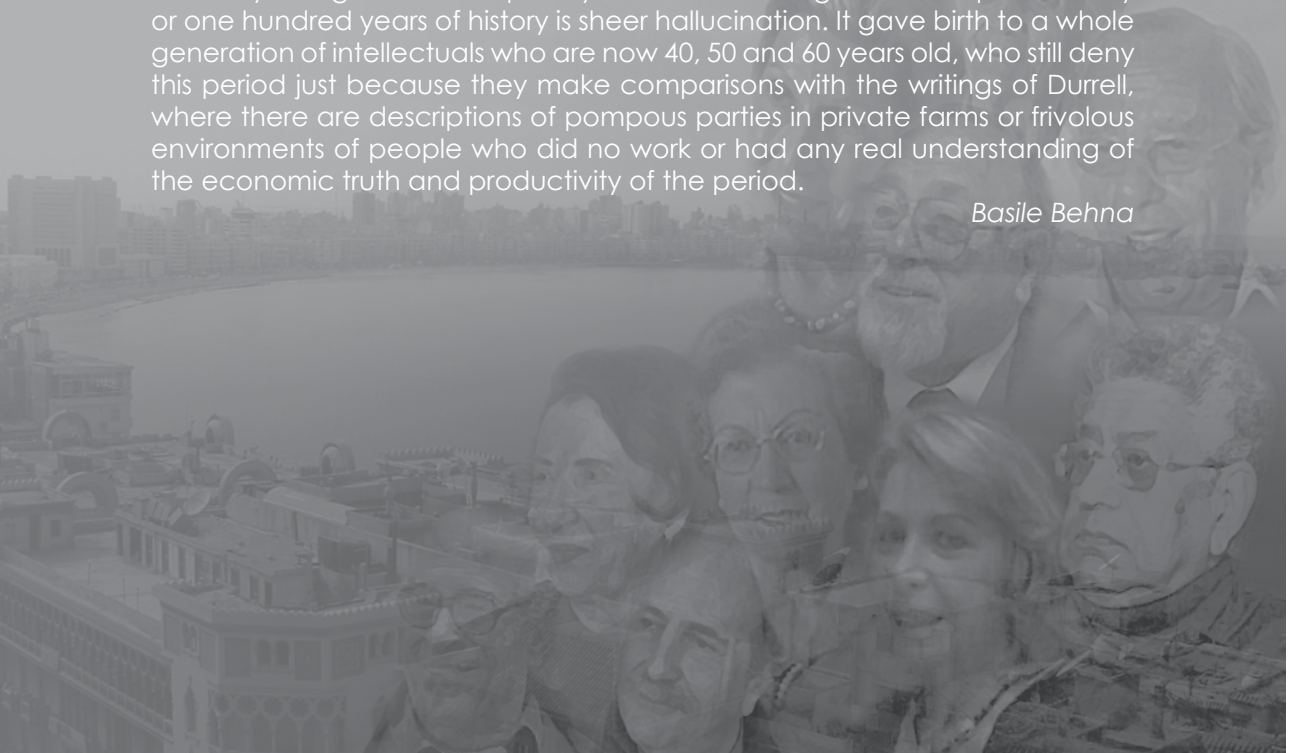
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In the nineteenth century a French traveller started his journey from France to Africa. He wanted to travel in Africa by land, and started from Alexandria. He stayed for a few days in Alexandria and then headed to Cairo to follow the Nile route to the heart of Africa. On his way to Cairo, about twenty kilometers from Alexandria, he reached Kafr el Dawar, and declared "Africa starts here", as though cosmopolitan Alexandria wasn't in Africa. In other words, there is a marked difference between cosmopolitan Alexandria and the rest of Africa.

Ahmed Abou Zeid

We must convince the youth to reevaluate the cosmopolitan experience and prove to them that we were the best. This is how they will understand: by proving that we used to produce sixty movies a year because of a certain environment, a certain mix of richness, whereas now we produce only fifteen or twenty. And this was true of all the other industries, not just the cinema industry. These are the aspects of our success that we should highlight and analyze, by going back and reading our history again, instead of wiping it out and saying it was a period when we had only foreigners and depravity. The Nasserite regime that wiped out fifty or one hundred years of history is sheer hallucination. It gave birth to a whole generation of intellectuals who are now 40, 50 and 60 years old, who still deny this period just because they make comparisons with the writings of Durrell, where there are descriptions of pompous parties in private farms or frivolous environments of people who did no work or had any real understanding of the economic truth and productivity of the period.

Basile Behna





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due, first and foremost, to London Metropolitan University for including the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in this project. Within the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center (Alex-Med) has been responsible for the whole project. Its staff have done a wonderful job, whether as researchers, technicians, graphic designers, translators, administrators or organizers.

The interviews were conducted by Joseph Boulad and Alaa Khaled. George Kyrios conducted most of the Greek interviews, both in Alexandria and Athens, and Flora Cavoura conducted the Evangelia Pastroudou interview. Our sincere thanks go to them.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to all those who generously gave us of their time to be interviewed, and shared with us their personal memories and photographs. Without them, the whole project would have been impossible.

Many of the old photographs were provided by Mohamed Awad and Lucette de Saab, in addition to the family photos contributed by many of the interviewees.

Abdallah Dawestashy took the recent photographs.



PREFACE

““Mediterranean Voices: Oral History and Cultural Practices” was a project funded by the European Union and coordinated by London Metropolitan University, involving partners from Alexandria, Ancona, Beirut, Bethlehem, Chania, Ciutat de Mallorca, Granada, Istanbul, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Marseille, Nicosia North, Nicosia South and Valletta. The research comprised the collection and recording of oral histories and memories which included family origins, significant events, folklore, customs, feasts, rituals and places. Together, the recollections provided a panorama of life in the Mediterranean, heard through voices that have rarely been used to record the histories of their cities.

The Alexandria project revolved around its cosmopolitan experience, which was already a thing of the past. Hence, memory and nostalgia are an integral part of the narrative. For that reason, too, many of the voices that should have been heard were no longer there. They had either departed the world, or the country. That is why what we have are more like echoes of what Alexandria was like a hundred years ago.

Nevertheless, many ethnic communities have been represented here. Because they are so diverse and claim a variety of origins, it has been difficult to classify them. For instance, if somebody's grandfather came from Arabia, do we classify that person as Arabian or Egyptian? If another person's mother was from the Shawam (Syro-Lebanese community), would that person be considered Syro-Lebanese or Egyptian? And so on. As it was impossible to categorize people as this or that, especially in a place like Alexandria where identity was problematic, it was decided to try to recreate the rich mosaic as much as possible without being too rigid about categorizations. The desire was not so much make distinctions as to celebrate the diversity.

Only oral narratives are present in this volume, without any interference on the part of the editors, except for editing to render an oral narrative readable. Sometimes two narratives are contradictory, but both have been presented.

This is the case with the sheikhs of the Square of the Mosques for example. One narrative holds that the holy men came from Arabia with Amr ibn el Aas, and another claims they were slaves from the Maghreb. Also, great care has been given to the preservation of the collective memory of Alexandria, as with the story of Aboul Dardar, who rose in his white hooded cloak to clasp the bomb and detonate it, and who protected his shrine from demolition by paralyzing the hand of the engineer. All Alexandrians in their sixties or above would know these stories, but they are sadly no longer part of the memory of the younger generation, who are not conscious of their city's past. This project, therefore, has done Alexandria an invaluable favor by preserving its memory, through the voices of those who have either had the experience first hand, or who remember it from their parents' and grandparents' tales.

The success of *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria* since its initial publication in 2006 has motivated the editors to publish this second edition in a new format and with many additional photographs. Since then however, a number of elderly figures from Alexandria's cosmopolitan past, who were interviewed for the original project, are no longer with us. Among these are Max Salama, Anahide Meramedjian, Evangelia Pastroudis and Isabelle Tawil. The original biographical descriptions, however, have been kept as they were in 2006.

Volume 1 will be followed by the rest of the interviews that have not yet been presented in book form, as well as new interviews we conducted after the 25 January 2011 Revolution.



INTRODUCTION

Legendary Alexandria, capital of the imagination and of memory, was for millennia the cosmopolitan city par excellence. Founded in 331 BCE by Alexander the Great to be the model of pluralism and inter-cultural exchange, it surpassed its founder's dreams when successive Ptolemaic rulers developed it to become the cultural capital of antiquity. Its lighthouse the Pharos has survived as the symbol of enlightenment. The Mouseion (Temple to the Muses) was a research center attached to the Library, and together they drew scholars, scientists, philosophers and writers from all around the ancient world. The glittering three-hundred Ptolemaic reign ended with the tragic but immortal drama of Cleopatra and Antony, the subject of innumerable works of art. In the Roman and early Christian periods Alexandria remained a point of exchange and a bridge between Christian faith and philosophy, while in the Medieval period it continued to be a crossroads of civilizations.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were another period that won legendary fame. Under the directions of its modern founder, Mohamed Ali, Alexandria grew into a pro-European city that was the financial and cultural capital of Egypt. The prospect of wealth resulting from trade and construction in the city, added to the cotton boom, as well as the wars, revolutions and ethnic and religious strife that racked Europe and the Mediterranean, drove foreigners from all countries and religious backgrounds to seek the security and prosperity that the port offered. A safe haven, a burgeoning center of commerce, and the gate of entry into Egypt, Alexandria drew all kinds of people from the Ottoman empire, Europe, Asia and North Africa who settled down into what became their second home. People of all nationalities and creeds lived side by side with each other. Immortalized in Western literature by Constantine Cavafy, E. M. Forster, Lawrence Durrell, Stratis Tsirkas, Giuseppe Ungaretti and Enrico Pea, the modern cosmopolitan city has captured the imagination of writers and travelers since then.

The area of Ras el Tin, Bahari, Sayala and Anfoushi was the seventeenth century Ottoman quarter where the Turkish and Egyptian population lived, and thus it was called the Turkish Town by the foreigners. But even here signs of pluralism were visible. The most well known mosque of the modern era, the Abou el Abbass el Morsi, was designed by the Italian architect Mario Rossi.

As the city and its population grew, Alexandria expanded eastwards, into what was called the new European town. Designed, built and inhabited by the foreign population, it was in the beginning distinct from the old indigenous town. The European town remained the commercial and financial heart of the city, but people were increasingly building garden villas and elitist mansions in Ramleh, the stretch of sand that extended to the east of Alexandria. In 1863 a railway line was laid for Ramleh, and was later converted into an electric tram. The names of tram stations indicate the rich cultural variety of the expanding city: Chatby (a Maghrebian holy man), Ibrahimieh (the sultan Ibrahim), Camp Caesar, Cleopatra, Sidi Gaber (another holy man), Rushdy Pasha (an Egyptian minister), Bulkeley, Stanley, Fleming (wealthy English gentlemen), Laurens (French cigarette manufacturer), Zizinia (Greek cotton tycoon), Saba Pasha (Syrian postmaster of the Egyptian Post), Mazloum Pasha (Turkish minister), Gianaclis (Greek wine manufacturer): the list goes on.

Some argue that the death knell of cosmopolitanism sounded with World War II, when Germans and Italians began to feel threatened and to leave. Others would cite 1936, when the Montreux Convention abolished Capitulations and deprived the foreigners of their privileges, so they realized that their days were numbered. However, the actual rupture came in 1956, when the English, French and Israeli attack on Egypt in the Suez War led to the expulsion of English and French nationals. Waves of exodus followed the 1961 nationalizations: most of the remaining foreigners escaped the growing nationalism and restrictions on enterprise and commerce. Within a few years, Alexandria had lost its multicultural diversity and its polyglot character. This is the period described by Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz in his novel *Miramar*. Many of those who left, however, still yearn for an idyllic Alexandria, the golden age they remember in their nostalgic memoirs and semi autobiographical novels. Those who stayed share the same sentiments. They too live with their memories. But the younger generation is oblivious that another Alexandria had ever existed.

Now there are two Alexandrias. Some neighborhoods have retained their character and buildings, while others have changed beyond recognition. Jobs, lifestyles, traditions, practices, dress, urban space and social conditions are in a continuous state of change. The older, cosmopolitan Alexandria remains the “capital of memory” that survives in the urban spaces we, the inheritors of this legacy, still move in, and in the memory and oral narratives of those who experienced it, whether they were foreigners or Egyptians—regardless of social class—and whether they left or stayed. The other Alexandria is the contemporary one, which is just as diverse, in its own way. Its people try to negotiate space amidst population explosion, dying vocations, and new demands.

Med Voices brings all these people together and captures voices from the various ethnic communities who narrate their cosmopolitan experience

and what it feels to be living in Alexandria today, or in the diaspora. Whereas previously the foreigners had a central position in the city, today, ironically, they are the silent ones whose voices have to be recorded before they disappear forever. Other silent voices are those of the majority whose tale may not have been considered worth telling by official history. In addition, well heard voices, such as Demis Roussos and Edwar al Kharrat, also get to participate in this narrative. Combined, these voices bring the city to life. There are descriptions of the smells of the city, of vocations as diverse as florists, barbers, timber merchants and antique dealers, of living in harmony with foreigners but throwing stones at the British occupiers, and of the rich ethnic and religious mix of its citizens. These include Shawam (the term given to the Syrians and Lebanese), Russians, Italians, Greeks—the list is interminable. Men and women of all faiths and denominations imaginable lived and ate with each other, attended each other's feasts and shared their moments of grief. In addition to Muslims and Jews, there were Catholics, Coptic Catholics, Syrian Catholics, Greek Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Copts, and Protestants.

There are also descriptions of public and private spaces, whether they are squares, neighborhoods, shrines, cafés, bookshops or homes. As the voices describe the places, or their memories of them, these places become animated and full of vibrancy. Finally, there are a few memories of the times when life changed dramatically, such as World War II, the 1952 revolution, the 1956 war, the nationalizations of the 1960s and of the 1967 war.

While some assert that the different communities and faiths intermingled freely, and others argue that people married only within their communities, there is a general consensus that despite—or because of—the incredible diversity, there was a luxuriant tolerance. Also, a certain pattern begins to emerge from the narratives. Some foreigners decided that Alexandria was their home for better or for worse, and remained in it while most had left. But their children have chosen to migrate, and hardly any of the remaining Alexandrian cosmopolitans have their children with them. On the other hand, the pattern also shows a reversal of the migratory trend. Some of those who had left between the 50s and 60s are returning to “retire” in their native Alexandria, and more and more are coming back for visits. The magic of the city is making itself felt once again.

Whether it is a description of daily life in a certain neighborhood, or the relation between foreigners and Egyptians and between Muslims, Christians and Jews, or shared spaces, or cultural practices and vocations that still exist or are dying out, or the socio-political and urban changes that have taken place in the past sixty years and the impact on the residents, the voices recreate the rich mosaic that was the cosmopolitan city and express a nostalgia that has become synonymous with the word Alexandria.

Sahar Hamouda



THE VOICES

It wasn't difficult to integrate because it was a period when everybody was cosmopolitan. All our friends were Egyptians, foreigners, Italians, Greeks. There was never a question of color or of creed.

Zizi Niazi-Badr



ARABIANS



OMAR KOREICH

A third generation Arabian, Omar Koreich—apart from some spells in England and France—has always lived in Alexandria.



Omar Koreich with aunts in the garden of the Moharrem Bey villa, 1947

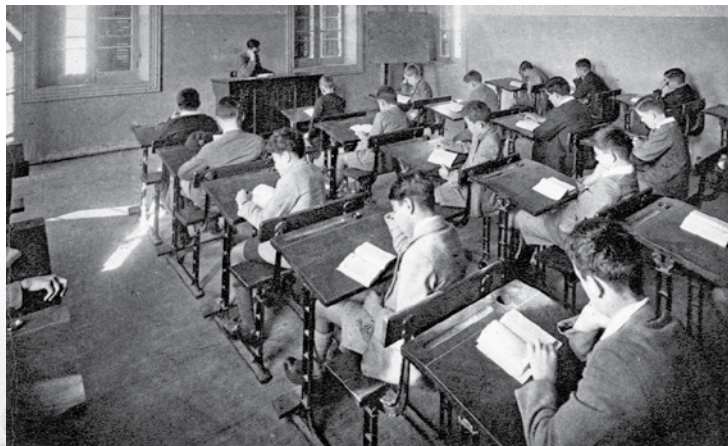
The name Koreich is, naturally, an Arab name. Unfortunately I have no direct linkage with the family, but my grandfather came from Saudi Arabia to Egypt via the Sudan. He studied the Koran at first and then went to Al Azhar University for a while, one of the first universities established in the world. He then came to Alexandria and met my grandmother, who lived in Bahari, which was the center of Alexandria. In those days, everyone knows, Alexandria was divided into the Arab town and the European city.



Mr. and Mrs. Koreich

My father was sent in 1931 by the government and Prince Omar Toussoun—who has helped my family a lot—to Aberdeen to study English literature. When he returned he worked as an English teacher. There was the 1952 Revolution and all the events that Egypt went through from 1952–56, and all the English left. He was appointed guardian of the British Council, then, its director—its first Egyptian director. In addition, he became headmaster of an Arabic school, Mohamed Korayem School, and after that of the foremost British school in the region, Victoria College.

When he was studying in England, my father fell in love with an English girl. But my grandmother would have none of it. I'm telling you this story because of all this talk about Alexandria being cosmopolitan. My grandmother wouldn't have her son marry an English girl, who was Christian.



Victoria College

My mother's family house was in Moharrem Bey. When I was six my parents got divorced and I went to live in my maternal grandfather's house in Moharrem Bey. That's why I went to a French school like all my maternal uncles.

In those days, Moharrem Bey was very cosmopolitan. There were Greeks, Italians, Egyptians and Turks. The school, Saint Marc, was also very cosmopolitan. There were the Levis, who were great friends of mine, and the Mousseris, the Cohens, the Dibs, the Salamonis, the Yansounis, and the Farahs. We also had Egyptian friends, the Nadouris, Abdel Ghaffars, Zahras.



Sarah Bernhardt in Alexandria

PAVLOVA IN ALEXANDRIA
A TRIUMPH OF ARTISTRY
 15.03.1923

Thursday evening at the Mohamed Aly Theatre again proved what an extraordinary attraction an audience of the magnitude presented by Pavlova has attracted on the public. The theatre was filled with a spontaneous and appreciative audience that were held spellbound by the beautiful music, the lovely stage setting, and the consummate art of the dancer. So much has already been written of Pavlova and her incomparable technique, the nothing more remains to be recorded, but let us add that every dancer in the company is so artistic in his or her figure lines, no it would perhaps be more correct to say like no one else.

The Grand Ballet given was design "Les Femmes", beautifully interpreted by Mlle Suzanne, M. Voltaire, and a company of eight dancers, and the audience was breathless every when the curtain fell.

Next came the ballet "Ballets" with Mlle Bernhardt, a beautiful scene from the Grand Ballet. Pavlova and Voltaire danced the principal parts in this beautiful work and as the finish led to some brilliant chorégraphie again and again.

The third part of the programme consisted of a series of divertissements, which included first a Mr. J. Magway, and the "Ballet of the House" from Mlle Bernhardt's "The Dancer". In these dances every member of the company took part, and the curtain fell for the last time. The audience seemed almost reluctant to leave the theatre.

GRAND THEATRE MOHAMED ALY ALEXANDRIA

Under the management of
THOMAS SHAFTO.
BANDMAN'S EASTERN CIRCUIT Ltd.
 have the honour to present
 the Peerless & Incomparable
Anna Pavlova
 The world's greatest dancer
 supported by
ALEXANDRE VOLININE
 and her original-London Company

Thirty distinguished artists in Russian Ballet.
 Musical Director M. THEODORE STEIN.

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Complete change of programme nightly.
 Box Plan now open.
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The parents were also friends. We met outside school, and our parents met in the clubs and other places, and in charity events. It was another Alexandria, as they say.

All the shopkeepers, everybody, spoke French. In Hannaux, nobody spoke Arabic. One would have said it was Europe. Chalons, Cicurel, Sednaoui—these stores were really elegant. It was Little Paris. More elegant and refined than Cairo.

The inter war period was very lively. My great uncle saw Sarah Bernhardt and my father saw Anna Pavlova.

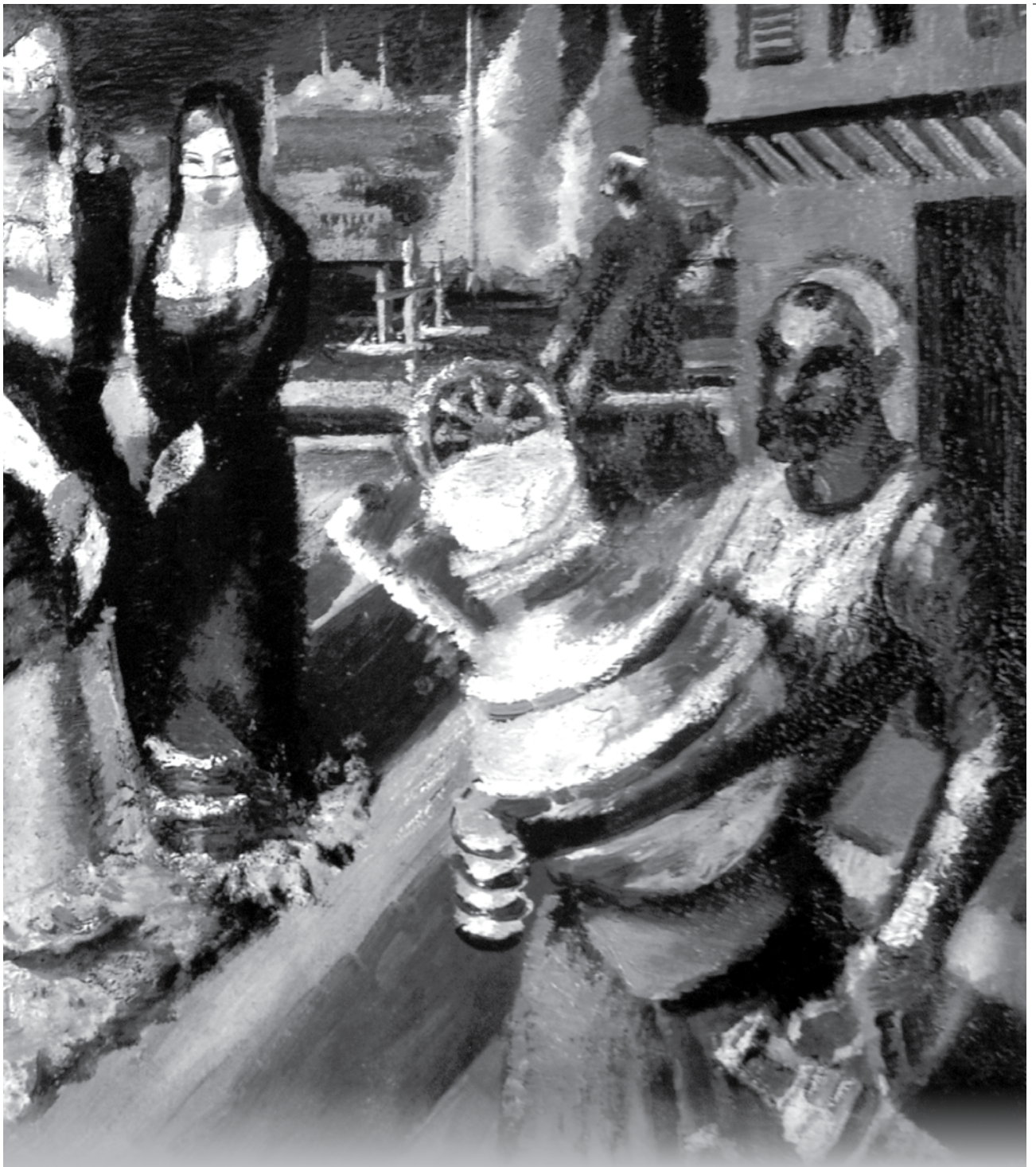
I specialize in antiques. I was trained in France, in porcelain. Then I worked here with someone who taught me a lot. Then I moved on to silver, carpets, Turkish embroidery etc. In the past, the upper classes naturally, like the French bourgeoisie, imitated Versailles. So everybody imitated the French and Italian styles. Ras el Tin Palace and all the palaces of the royal family, the Egyptian upper classes, the French, Italians, Jews and Greeks... all their furniture was in the French style, with some smothered in detail in the Turkish style, as it was called. In Cairo it was less French and more Arabesque, because Alexandria was more Europeanized.

Each period has its nouveaux riches. There were the nouveaux riches of the First World War, of the Second World War, and so on.



Girls of Bahari by Mahmoud Said

With time, they become the bourgeoisie. It is the same with the post revolution period. It was also a question of how the new bourgeois would live inside their homes. Unfortunately, it wasn't just their furniture that changed, but their whole way of life. The taste has declined. And we've lost our particular Alexandrian style, which was the Orient and the Occident at the same time.



Look at the culture of Alexandria, the paintings of Alexandria, the great painters of Alexandria like Mahmoud Said and the two Naguis, who were taught by Italians in Italian ateliers. It was a whole way of life that was both Oriental and Occidental, typically Alexandrian.



ALEXANDRIA. — The Stock Exchange. — LL.

The Stock Exchange

Alexandrian cosmopolitanism was different from Cairo. The foreign consuls, the Mixed Tribunals, the Cotton Exchange were all in Alexandria. The Cotton Exchange was the second largest in the world, after that of Liverpool. Alexandria was the foremost port in the Mediterranean.

ARMENIANS



VAHAN ALEXANIAN

Born in Alexandria in 1931, his Armenian roots go back four generations. Mr Alexanian manages the family business of dyes and cloth printing. He is the former consul general of Austria.

Many of the Armenians who came to Egypt were escaping massacres and genocides in Turkey and Syria. They were put in orphanages in Cyprus and from there they came to Egypt or to Lebanon. Many chose to come to Egypt because it was an open country. The Egyptians always welcomed us and shared their bread with Armenian immigrants. Then when in the 1940s the Soviet Union opened the doors for immigration to Armenia proper, the Egyptians again helped the Armenians go to their country, giving them full facilities to take their furniture and wealth. So they were the first to welcome them to Egypt, then to help them return to their country.

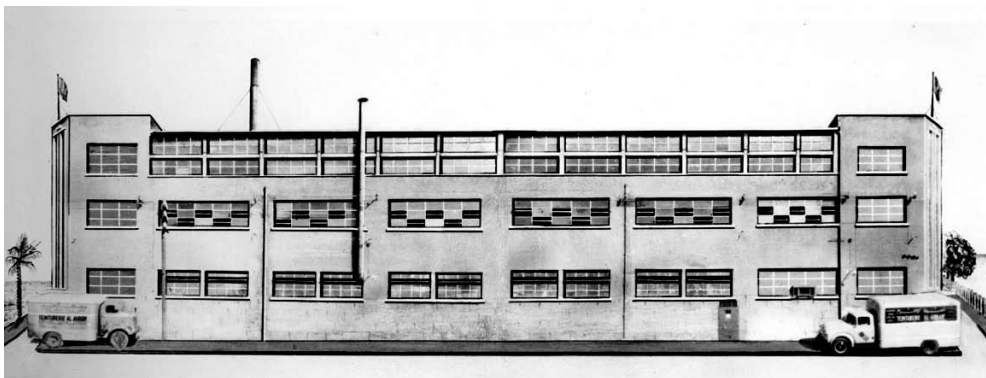
They were mainly immigrants and artisans, therefore they did not have capital, only their professions. They were specialized in jewelry and leather business: shoe making and tanneries.



The Alexanian factory

At the beginning of the twentieth century there were around twenty thousand Armenians in Alexandria. The community was centered around the Apostolic Church of Armenia, to which 85% of the Armenians belonged. Three schools were built around the church, then we had the main school, a private school run by a priest in Camp Caesar, and two Catholic Armenian schools. They did French, Arabic and Armenian. We also had a dispensary at About Dardar for the poor families, and also for the local Egyptian families. We also have a powerful volunteer system for our Armenian community. They help in hospitals and take care of the old and sick and poor. This work is financed by the Armenian community which became wealthy in the days of Boghus Bey. A lot of money was donated to the church, which belongs to the community.

Since they were in Turkey the Armenians had three political parties, which they brought with them to Alexandria, and which still exist today, with their newspapers and clubs. One is called the democratic party, the other is the revolutionary and the third is the socialist, but you have to be an Armenian



The Alexanian factory



Statue of Alexander the Great

to understand. There were great divisions within the community. First you were separated between Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox, and within the religious divisions there were political ones, according to the political parties. When it came to marriage, the two had to be from the same religion and political party. From the thirties onward, it became less strict. Look at my family. I was brought up 100 % Egyptian: that is, Armenian Apostolic Church. Then I married the daughter of a gentleman 100% Egyptian: I mean, Armenian Apostolic Church. In his family he had 4 children, of which 2 married non- Armenians, one a Muslim Egyptian and the other a Greek and 2 married Armenians. So that makes 50%. Also, we were 3 children. 2 married foreigners, one American and one Lebanese, so that makes 33% only married Armenian.

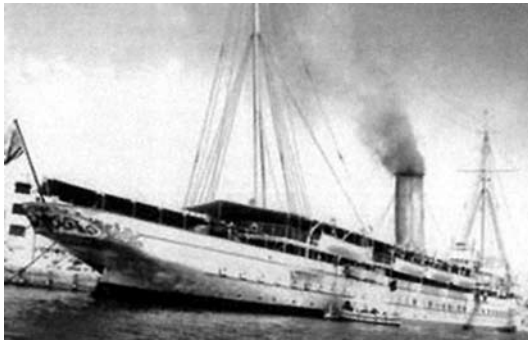
You cannot go back to that cosmopolitan spirit. We were constantly contacting a variety of people, meeting them in the streets, having them as friends ... We were living side by side. But today this does not exist. The fact that we have so many foreign experts working in Alexandria in different fields does not mean they are part of Alexandria: they come and go.

A year or two ago some two thousand Greeks came in a group to Alexandria. They were Alexandrian Greeks and had come for the inauguration of the new Library and the statue of Alexander the Great. You could see the elderly Egyptians crying and kissing them and the snobbish Greeks kissing the porters of the building and the gardener. They were all so happy. There was a real love and respect on both sides which has disappeared today.



ANAHIDE MERAMEDJIAN

After the interview was conducted in 2004, Ms Meramedjian left for France for good.



The *Mahroussa*

We are originally from Istanbul. Khedive Ismail offered my grandfather, Zenob Bey Meramedjian ten places on board the royal yacht the *Mahroussa*. My grandfather accepted and came to Egypt with his two sisters and his wife, and built on the Suez Canal a palace for the Empress Eugénie for the inauguration of the Suez Canal.

My father, at the orders of Nubar Pasha, built the Casino San Stefano, and designed Minet el Bassal and the Crédit Lyonnais, and it was he who built the Alexandria Sporting Club.



Meramedjian Bey



MERAMETDJIAN KEVORK 1860 - 1918

Né à Constantinople (Istanbul) il est venu en Egypte à l'âge de 10 ans.

Fils de Zenop MERAMETDJIAN, architecte du Kédivé Ismail Pacha.

Il fait ses études à Paris, d'abord au Lycée Charlemagne, puis à l'école des Beaux-Arts d'où il sort diplômé.

De retour à 23 ans en Alexandrie, il est nommé au poste d'Expert auprès des Tribunaux Mixtes, Section Architecture.

En 1891, il se rend à Istanbul où il collabore avec Yanko Bey, Architecte auprès du Ministère Royal de la Marine. C'est sous son contrôle qu'ont été construits des ouvrages tels que: l'Asile des vieillards de Chichli, la Caserne de Nischen Tech, le double Serail, les belles demeures résidentielles de Tchinali. Ces ouvrages lui valent le grade de "Wutemaizi" et il est décoré de l'Osmanieh, du Medjidieh et du Kezerekhdiz.

Rentré en Egypte, il retrouve son ancien poste et devient en même temps l'Architecte attitré de quelques grandes compagnies telles que: Crédit Lyonnais, Bonded Central Building, Pressages, etc.; sa première commande a été l'Hôtel San Stefano.

Il a été chargé par le Bonded Central Building de dessiner et construire Minet-el-Bassal, le Sporting Club, remise en état du premier Victoria College, le Crédit Lyonnais, le Barclay's Bank, le Club Gank, et le Cricket Club.

Les principaux immeubles de la rue Cherif sont son oeuvre.

Il a été membre de l'Assemblée TEBAGAN et trésorier de l'Assemblée KACHANAGAN.

My sister bought the Aghion bookshop and we had that bookshop, which was called Vient de Paraître, for sixty years. When the foreigners left in the 50s, my sister, who was Egyptian (being born here) with an Armenian passport, kept the bookshop open. For six years it was the only one selling foreign books. They came from France. We bought all the books from France. We never had any help, not from France or anywhere. We bought the books out of our own money. That's why I've been wearing the same dresses for thirty years. I've never bought myself a dress, but I've always bought lots of books.

Voce d'Italia
PERIODICO DELLE COLLETTIVITA ITALIANE D'EGITTO
LA RESPONSABILITA' DELL' ACCRESCIUTO PRESTIGIO POLITICO QUELL' ITALIA

PERIODICO DELLE COLLETTIVITA ITALIANE D'EGITTO

صوت إيطاليا

LA RESPONSABILITA' DELL' ACCRESCIUTO PRESTIGIO POLITICO QUELL' ITALIA

Appello del Pontefice per la pace nel mondo

ROMA. - Agli. Qualche giorno fa il Pontefice ha parlato di tutti le grandi responsabilità che gravano sul mondo...

Il Pontefice nel suo appello ai governi presidi sovietici e ai loro eserciti, ha detto che il mondo è oggi più unito che mai...

Primo, sul diritto di tutti di vivere in libertà. Ma non è tutto. Il Pontefice ha detto che il mondo è oggi più unito che mai...

Il Pontefice ha detto che il mondo è oggi più unito che mai. Ha detto che il mondo è oggi più unito che mai...

وفاؤ الجامعة
فرحة كلية الرشد على رأس الجامعة لترشح عبدالناصر
عرجت كلية الهندسة أساتذة وطلابا وعلماء وعلماء ومعلمين



OMAGGIO AL FANTE ITALIANO
"Torino (ANSA) - Il Primo ministro della Repubblica, Giuseppe De Gasperi, ha detto che il mondo è oggi più unito che mai...

ΗΜΕΡΑ
ΕΠΙΘΕΣΙΣ ΤΩΝ ΒΡΕΤΤΑΝΩΝ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΕΛ ΑΛΑΜΕΝ
ΑΙΧΜΑΛΩΤΟΙ, 40 ΠΥΡΟΒΟΛΑ & ΚΑΤΑΣΤΡΟΦΗ ΤΑΓΚΣ
ΝΙΚΩΜΕΝ!

IN ITALIA
in un discorso
Presidente Fanfani
Torino (ANSA) - Il Presidente della Repubblica, Giuseppe Fanfani, ha detto che il mondo è oggi più unito che mai...

CONVEGNO IDEOLOGICO DELLA D.C.

Il convegno ideologico della Democrazia Cristiana si è svolto a Roma...

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I've never been to school. In our days, only one or two of our friends went to the Lycée Français. But we all had French and English tutors at home. In addition, I spoke Italian with my nanny, who came from Trieste. This was my first language. Then I spoke Armenian with my mother, French with my father, Greek with the cook and Italian with the chamber maid. My father spoke Arabic very well, but unfortunately he died when I was eight, so I never learnt to speak Arabic. That's why I speak it so badly.

There were newspapers in all the languages. Each community read its papers.



San Stefano Casino



Mohamed Ali Theater

We used to go to the Hotel and Casino San Stefano, where there were concerts and matinées. The inhabitants of Ramleh used to go there, not those who lived in town. Those went to the Mohamed Ali Theater. Before that, there was the Zizinia Theater, where Sarah Bernhardt performed—but that was before my time. We went a lot to the theater. The French used to say this was the only city where the raising of the curtain was applauded. The audience was very refined and appreciative. And then the women were so grand, with Madame Salvago leading, and all the women in their diadems and gorgeous jewelry. We also went to the Cecil Hotel, to which everybody went. Not just Durrell and Churchill. Everybody went there. Churchill and De Gaulle held huge conferences there. That's why it was so famous. There was the Hotel Alhambra, where there were the famous costume parties, just like the ones of Venice. We had lots and lots of fun. Life was so gay. There were balls every night. Mrs. Finney gave her famous costume parties. And Matossian went as Charles XIII with eight ravishing women.



Cecil Hotel



Italian charity ball, 1955



Cecil Hotel



Mohamed Ali Club, now the Creativity Center

Alexandre, 12 Nov. 87

Je certifie par la présente que
M^r J. K. Meramedjian, architecte
ancien élève de l'École des Beaux
Arts de Paris, a travaillé sous
mes ordres à la construction
du Casino de San Stefano.

Je suis en tout le temps par
venu à son travail, à ses
connaissances techniques et
à sa probité. C'est donc

avec plaisir que je le
recommande à toute personne
qui pourrait avoir besoin
de ses services.

Boghos Nubar

A letter of recommendation of Anahide Meramedjian's father, Kevork Meramedjian, from Boghos Nubar Pasha, 1887

BRITISH



THALIA EL NAKIB

British, first married a member of the British community in Alexandria. She now lives in England, but continues to visit Alexandria almost every summer.

My husband's grandfather was John Ivans, and he first came to Egypt about 1860-1870 with Isaac Reading. They had the idea of planting onions between rows of cotton because there was a tremendous shortage of onions in Europe because it was seasonal, and the only place they could get them from otherwise was Chile. It became a very very successful business and my husband's father took over the business when his grandfather became too old. During the war his grandfather worked for the English Ministry of Health to try and supply the British with food from Egypt and from this part of the world and then my husband took over from his father until 1970 when the business declined very badly.

My husband's family was in Alexandria for three generations, but they always had a home in England and they used to come here for seven or eight months a year, usually from February to the end of June and then they would return and then they would come back again in the autumn for two months and then return to England for Christmas.

I got married in 1953, but I didn't come to Alexandria till 1955, when things had already started to become a bit difficult here. I remember we stayed at the Cecil Hotel and we'd been give the bridal suite and I remember I was taken to the Cricket Club to have tea and it was very mixed. I mean people still lived in a very grand way when I first came here. My husband played cricket and he was very keen on boats, so we spent most of our time at the Yacht Club because he had a yacht. So any free time we had, we would be out sailing. And he was one of the few people allowed to. There were a lot of restrictions.

I remember there used to be a number of dances really, especially fancy dress which were always very amazing. And I remember lots of tea parties with all the women I was taken to be introduced to because I was the young bride as it were and I was incredibly impressed by the beautiful houses that you had here which don't exist anymore, and the incredible generosity of the people and their hospitality which still exists of course.



Count Aziz de Saab and Lucette de Saab at a fancy dress party, 1956

The cosmopolitan aspect of the city was the incredible mixture of nationalities and religions. Everybody was all mixed up. It didn't matter what they were. You would never say "are you a Christian" or "are you a Muslim" or "are you" It didn't matter in those days. Everybody mixed very freely. Most of them were speaking in French, which at the beginning was quite a problem. But in the end I learned. The social language was French.

My mother-in-law was a French speaker. She was educated in Paris, so her first language was French, even though she was Greek, she'd always lived in France. But my husband Jock spoke Arabic, and so did his father because they had to because they were dealing with the people in Qabbari. But my mother-in-law never learned ...she lived here very many years.

I'm sure the British were very snobbish. I remember going to visit Mrs. Finney for tea one day. I think they felt themselves quite superior, quite incorrectly. It's a terrible trait in the English. They always thought they were better than everyone else and its absolute nonsense, they're not.

The French were here for a very short space of time and their influence was absolutely enormous, and the English were here for a long time and their influence was absolutely zero. Now why is that? I mean is it because the French mixed much more with the Egyptians, and the English didn't, I don't know. I noticed the enormous French influence when I first came here. The way you furnish a house, the way you eat at a table or serve at a table, it was completely French. The way you furnish a house, you know, it's French, it's not English. The furniture in Mrs. Finney's villa was not English, but then they were all very mixed, weren't they? I mean Mrs. Finney wasn't English was she? There was a lot of gold plush and red plush, and this always surprised me because it's very very un-English, you know. I always considered it French.

We were not expelled in 1967, but we had to get out because they were threatening the English because they were saying we were bombing Cairo which in fact wasn't true. But we had to get out and so they managed to get us, the children and I, onto a Russian ship and Jock got stuck here, because his passport for some reason had been at the British Consulate and they burned the British Consulate So he had no papers, and had to remain. He couldn't get out till he got some sort of document that would allow him to exit Egypt and enter some other country. That took two months.



Mrs. Oswald Finney in her house

We have all gained the advantage of being cosmopolitan by living here. I mean, we're different, because we've lived here, because we've had the opportunity to mix with people of so many different nationalities. You have a much broader point of view, way of thinking, understanding. I mean most of the friends I have in England now have all got something to do with another country. They're not English English, because I have nothing in common with them. They don't understand me, and I don't understand them.

Alexandria is part of my life. When I arrive it is as if I've never been away....

CHINESE



DIMITRIOS FENG CHUAN CHING

Born in Alexandria to a Chinese father and Greek mother, Mr. Ching has always lived in Alexandria.

My father is from China from Shantung province, from a port called Chi Fu, where Confucius was born. My mother was born in Alexandria and her parents come from the islands in Greece. My father came to Egypt in 1929, and to Alexandria in 1936. The political situation in China was really very bad at that time and he was an only son, so my grandfather preferred that he would leave China for a while until the situation got better and return to China, but he stayed here. He didn't know anything about Egypt. He thought it was a desert where you rode camels. But he chose it because some Muslim Chinese who had studied at Al Azhar [the Islamic university in Cairo] recommended Egypt as a prosperous and beautiful country with nice weather and lots of beaches.



Mrs. Feng Chuan Ching



Mr. Feng Chuan Ching





Chuan Ching stores

During World War II, there were a lot of Chinese and Indian sailors on board the British ships in the Mediterranean, since India was part of the British Empire and China was an ally. My father was nearly the only Chinese in Alexandria. There was a Chinese consul here but no community as such. So my father was in charge of the Chinese seamen who used to come here to fight against the Germans and Italians. He established a sort of private club, that was under the supervision of the Chinese government, for Chinese sailors. It was the Chinese seamen's club, where they could have dinner and drinks.

My father followed Confucius but he converted to Christianity to marry my mother. He got baptized in the Saint Saba Church and also got married there.

My father dealt with Chinese antiques and nothing else. He imported things from many parts of China. His best clients, of course, were the Egyptian royal family and the high society of Egypt, especially the Greeks and the Jews, who were very, very good clients. He had Italian, Greek, Armenian and Jewish friends.

He had a lot of friends. My father used to speak English very well and Arabic not well, but he could manage quite well with Arabic and a little bit of Greek. My mother could talk Chinese. We used to communicate in English in the family.

I have a bit of Chinese and Greek in me. I'm more inclined maybe to the Chinese way of thinking, more than the Greek and the Egyptian, because my Chinese roots are very deep in me, you see.

Saint Saba Church



EGYPTIANS



EDWAR AL KHARRAT

Alexandrian novelist now living in Cairo.

My name is Edwar Colta Faltas Youssef Abd el-Malek Samuel Mankarious Hermina Al Kharrat. My father is originally from Akhmeem [in Upper Egypt], then he lived in Fayoum for a while, and finally he settled in Alexandria.



A sibertaya, or small Primus stove

He influenced me greatly, first of all, because he was a great story-teller as I have written more than once, about him. He used to gather us around him, when we were little, me, my brothers and sisters and my mother. He used to make his own coffee on the 'sibertaya' and begin to tell us stories of his memories of his childhood in Akhmeem. He started by telling us his version of stories from modern contemporary history, like, for instance, how the Emperor of Gaul spoke to the King of Belgium before attacking Belgium during the War. It was a genre of story-telling that combined both history and imagination, and they were fascinating, bewitching stories. If I have inherited anything in story-telling, the talent of story-telling, I have, surely, inherited that from him.

My father had the average or below average kind of religiousness like attending the major religious celebrations or important occasions, and keeping the Coptic fasting, though not very regularly. There was not any kind of bigotry in our home. We combined the old Egyptian type of religiousness and enjoyed life—an hour for your God and an hour for your heart—we were not fanatical—Give unto God what is God's and unto Caesar what is Caesar's.

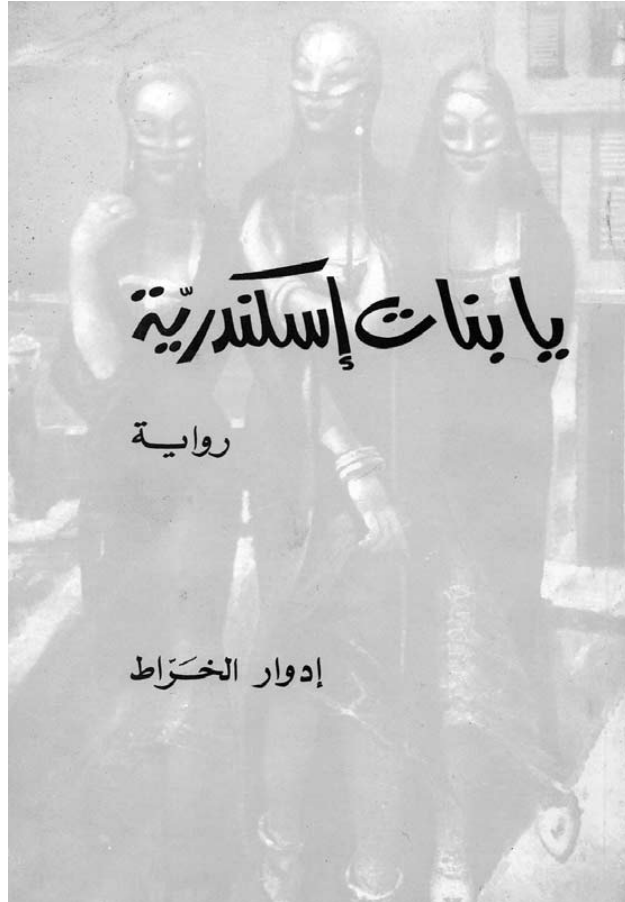
Gheit El Enab in the 20s and the 40s was a very beautiful place. First of all, because it was near the salt-lake, and because it is far to the south, closer to the countryside than to the city. There were only rice mills that is from the industrial side and its boundary was the Mahmoudieh Canal. It was a lovely canal. I do not know what happened to it now. I believe it has been recently converted to a rubbish dump or trash yard.

Even in Gheit El Enab, which is considered a local or a rather rural area, many members of the Greek community lived there, like 'Um Tutu' [Tutu's mother], who was a Greek lady. She was one of the people whom I talked about in my book, *City of Saffron*. She was a sociable woman and had a good relationship with my family. She liked my mother very much, and she was married to a butcher. Tutu, her daughter was Greek and Egyptian at the same time; she had the spirit of a local girl. There were Armenians and Italians even in Gheit El Enab. The most popular or local areas of Alexandria, like 'Karmouz' and 'El Farahda' were full of foreigners. They too were very cosmopolitan, not just the 'posh' areas, like rue Fouad and Bulkeley, and there was no feeling that those foreigners were 'alien' or not Egyptian. There was no difference between the Egyptian, the foreigner, the 'Shami', or the Moroccan. You know, one of Italy's greatest poets, Ungaretti, his father had a local bakery in Moharrem Bey. He lived in Alexandria till he was sixteen years old and he only knew the Egyptian Alexandrian dialect and Italian. He did not know any classical Arabic but spoke our local Alexandrian dialect, just like us.

Now, when I visit Athens, for instance, and I meet with the foreigners who left Alexandria, they are very nostalgic and tearful about having left Alexandria. When I take a walk with my friends in Athens and we speak Arabic, people stop us and ask us: "Are you from Alexandria?" and they tell us where they had lived in Alexandria, in some place or other. They are in tears, longing for their home country, for Alexandria was their home country—not Cyprus or Athens. Their fathers were born and lived here, in Alexandria. What made Alexandria special, and I still believe this is true, is that it has the power to 'Egyptianize' or to convert people into Alexandrians and Egyptians, especially the Greeks and Italians, for they were the two main foreign communities in Alexandria. There were hardly any French or English nationals who lived in Alexandria. They only lived in Cairo where they ruled as colonizers, in the government milieu. There were only Italians, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, in Alexandria—but all of them were Egyptian. When I walked in the streets of Camp Caesar or Ibrahimieh I felt as if I were walking in the streets of Athens. They were all Greeks, there was a lovely mix of foreigners and Egyptians.

I believe that the most important factor in my political upbringing was that the whole of Egypt was in a state of revolution and anger because of the English occupation. It was a painful thing to all Egyptians and as a sixteen year old boy I used to walk in Kom El Dikka, where the amphitheater is now, there was a military area for the English with the British flag flying on top. It was painful and shameful to see another flag—instead of your own—hoisted in your land, and that gave rise to feelings of vengeance. It was evident that it was not only a military occupation, but a many faceted occupation: a monopoly of the government, and an alliance with the Palace and the pashas. This coincided with the end of World War II and the desire for independence that colonised peoples were trying to achieve. There were other factors, such as, reading in Arabic writers such as Salama Moussa and the writers of the *El Migalah el Guedida (New Magazine)*, and in English writers such as Bernard Shaw, and Marxist writers, and so on. In addition to that inner feeling—my constant inner motivation for not giving in or submitting to the traditional status quo.

The difference between Muslims and Copts was never an issue. There was no such thing in the 20s, 30s, 40s and up to the 50s, not in Gheit El Enab, neither in Ragheb Pasha, nor in Moharrem Bey. There are many examples from the period I lived in Alexandria from 1926 up to the 50s, when I was forced to leave Alexandria. We lived in a house and there lived below us the overseer of Ragheb Pasha Bridge. His name was Mahmoud Effendi and his wife was Sit Baheya. We visited each other as if we were a family not neighbors, and that was a common thing. I got my education in a Christian nursery and a Christian junior school. Not all the teachers were necessarily Christians. There were Muslim pupils alongside the Christian ones. I have friends whose religion I never knew nor cared to ask about. It was not important. We never inquired about each other's religions or even thought about it. This started to become



Girls of Alexandria by Edwar Al Kharrat

an issue in the 70s with the cultural, social and political change that took place.

There is a Coptic reference in my novels and the Coptic goes beyond the Christian. It is specifically Egyptian. Because Egyptian Christianity is different from other forms of Christianity of other nationalities. Egyptian Christianity or Coptic Christianity is Egyptian and it is the social and spiritual environment that I know. I am also proud of my Christianity as it represents my Egyptianness. It is not as a breaking away from, not an obstruction, nor a separateness. Of course, there is a degree of independence and a subculture with Christian reference but I believe it is not separate at all from the ancient Egyptian culture or the adopted Islamic culture. When I was a child of four, I was the best pupil in class to read and recite the Koran.



The Commercial Café



Old photo of rue Cherif

During the 40s and 50s the cafés were all gathering spots, and I think that the Commercial Café was very important. It was like a great center for social and cultural activities. When Tewfik El Hakim's father died they announced the death of Ismail El Hakim there in the café. In other words, a café was also a place for making public announcements and holding events, and not just a pastime place for games or having something to drink. It played a cultural and an informative role. It was a place in which seminars and literary and cultural discussions were held in the Commercial Café. There was no freedom of expression in politics even in cafés. Now there is more freedom of expression.

The city center was very beautiful with rue Fouad and rue Cherif, now called Salah Salem Street. First of all these places were in very good taste, the shops and the streets were not over-stocked nor were they busy and overcrowded. The streets of Alexandria were clean. When I used to go to Cairo in the past, I was shocked by the dirt in Cairo. Rue Fouad was so clean, like a mirror! Actually, this was due to the Municipality which was made up of Egyptian officials as a majority, but also had Italian and Greek members. This Municipality was able to keep Alexandria clean. But it is a sorry sight now, saddening, to see the amount of dirt in Alexandria, nowadays. What happened to the people!

In the past the Corniche was very beautiful. It had an iron fence through which the sea could be seen, not like now a fence of concrete stone. It was a humane fence, made for the people. Now it seems to be made only for

traffic and if people venture to walk on the Corniche they are risking their lives. There seems to be no consideration for human beings walking on foot nowadays. One of the nice things to remember is hanging around in the early afternoons on the Corniche in Sidi Bishr, to flirt with the girls with my friend, Dr. Ahmed Zaghloul. He was, God rest his soul, an excellent Alexandrian artist and painter. We sort of flirted with the girls, politely, not in a vulgar or insolent manner, very sweetly and gently—we were not pushy at all.

Lawrence Durrell lived with the foreigners who were like strangers, and not with the Egyptianized foreigners: that is why his Alexandria is fictional. Every writer has his own Alexandria, and has the right to write whatever he wishes. But readers also have the right to refuse this kind of writing. He had an amazing language and an ability to analyse, narrate and characterize. But he is a writer who did not know Alexandria. He projected the image of Alexandrians as strange creatures, not human beings, whether they were Muslims or Copts, local or foreign. He always had this 'strange' aspect in his portrayal of them, with an eye to satisfying the desires of western readers, who have a certain fascination with the sensational strangeness or exoticism of the East.

Alexandria of course has a 'magical' effect for several logical reasons. There is the legendary Alexandria that comes from a cultural perspective, a special kind of magic as found in a few special cities. This magic is related to the sea and the coast-line, the beaches. That is why doing away with the beach is saddening for me and for many others, because the Corniche in Alexandria is long and starts in a popular district and ends in a bourgeois or aristocratic area and intersects all of Alexandria, passing by all its districts, overlooking an endless horizon, with wonderful environmental and climatic changes. But this special kind of beauty is only found in very few cities I have seen. Of the cities I have visited, Havana, in Cuba, is very similar to Alexandria and the Corniche. Leaving the issue of 'literary eternity' aside, there is the special beauty that arises from its geography and its history and that goes beyond its geography and history—each of them has a special presence. I think this is the magic of Alexandria—this is the magic that bewitched Durrell and Ungaretti and others, whether they wrote beautifully and genuinely or whether they wrote negatively. But there is this special magic, which is unique to Alexandria alone.

Alexandria, for me, is feminine. It is one of the personifications of woman: a beloved mistress. I don't know Cairo very well. Cairo is mixed. I don't think there is one Cairo, but there is only one Alexandria in my mind. Cairo is a diversified city with multiple moods and atmospheres. The Cairo of the Fatimides and of Al Moaz is different from the Cairo of Dokki and Mohandesseen, from the Cairo of Madinet Nasr, or the khedivial city center. Each of its districts has its own features which are different from the others. But in Alexandria there is a degree of fertile, not superficial, purity and serenity.



JIMMY MAWAS

The grandson of the famous Rosette de Menasce, and of one of the wealthiest and most renowned Jewish families of Alexandria, Jimmy Mawas now lives in Brighton and occasionally comes back for visits.

My official name is Jacques Félix Mawas. Jacques was rendered into English as James and everybody knows me as Jimmy, the diminutive of James. The Félix is after my maternal grandfather, Félix de Menasce. The Mawas family came to Egypt and settled in Tanta after 1840. They became a completely traditional family of the Jewish faith. At around the beginning of the twentieth century my father's family was transferred to Alexandria, though my grandfather kept an office in Tanta, which disappeared after World War II. My grandfather Abdou Mawas, my father's father, was in trade, and had lands and orchards.



The wedding of Jimmy Mawas's parents, Denise de Menasce and Alfred Mawas, 1931. Left to right: Miss Polly O'Mara, the bride, Baroness Rosette de Menasce, the groom, Claire Vincendon (the sister of the bride)



He was in the real estate business and could educate his children. My father did some of his studies in France at the Faculty of Law, and after his doctorate he wanted to return to Egypt to practice as a lawyer, which he did up to 1967. In 1967 things became bad and my father was expelled.

My mother is the daughter of Guy de Menasce. She was called Denise de Menasce. My father was great friends with her sister, Claire, who married Jacques and who was the mother of Claude Vincendon, who later married Lawrence Durrell. My mother Denise was partly brought up in England, and had an Irish governess and all that sort of thing.

Rosette de Menasce was my grandmother and she was also a great friend of my father's because he was the generation in between Claire and Rosette. There was a really grand wedding in 1931. I was born in 1932 and my sister in 1934. The two families were very important in Alexandria. The Menasces were very important, and at that time my father was very well established as a lawyer in the firm of Félix Padoua and Alfred Mawas. The Padouas were Jews and had been in Egypt for a long time.

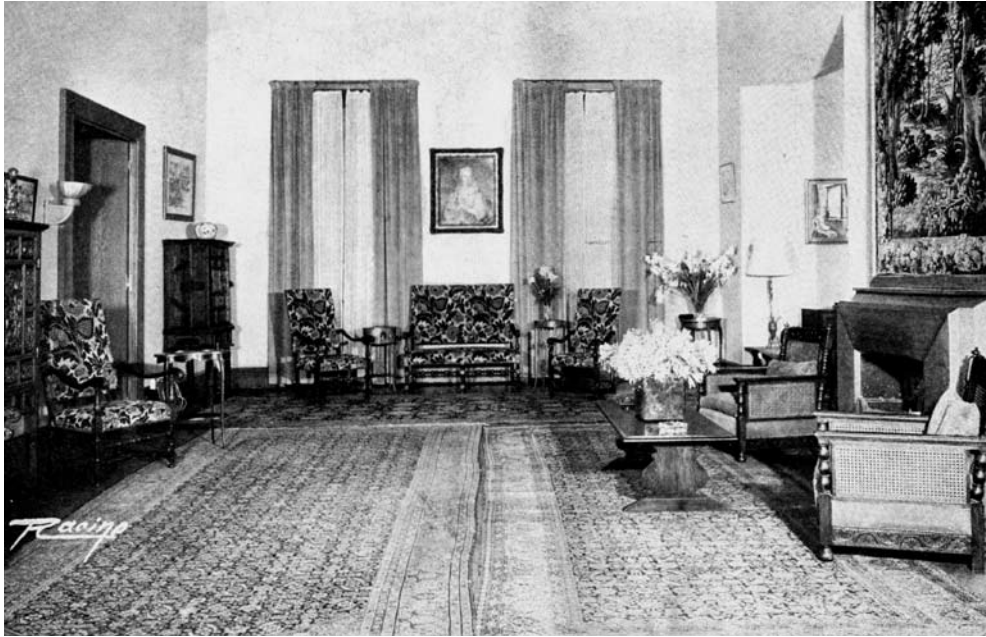
*Monsieur Haïm Mawas,
Monsieur et Madame Abdou Mawas
ont l'honneur de vous faire part du
mariage de leur petit fils et fils le
Docteur Jacques Mawas, Répétiteur
au Collège de France, Chef de laboratoire
à la Fondation Ophthalmologique A. de
Rothschild, et à l'Institut Pasteur, avec
Mademoiselle Jeanne Banoun.*

*Ils vous prient de bien vouloir assister
à la bénédiction nuptiale qui leur sera
donnée le Dimanche 25 Janvier 1914,
à 4 h. précises au Temple Israélite, rue
Nébi Daniel.*

Alexandrie, le 12 Janvier 1914

6, rue Chérif Pacha.

Invitation to the wedding of Dr. Jacques Mawas and Miss Jeanne Banoun, 1914



The sitting room of the de Menasce villa

My sister lives in Paris. We both met here last year and spent New Year's Eve together in Alexandria, for the first time in forty or fifty years. After my father died her son wanted to come to Alexandria to discover all he could. He had never been to Alexandria. So he came and took photos of my father's firm, and visited the last house we'd lived in. He tried to find the house of Félix de Menasce in rue Rassafa in Moharrem Bey, but unfortunately it was demolished around forty years ago.

What is now the Museum of Fine Arts used to be the house of Elie de Menasce. It used to be called the "Menasce de la campagne" because in those days it was just outside the city. We don't know exactly how and why, but it was our ancestor Yacoub Elie Menasce who got the Hungarian passport. He wasn't *de Menasce* then. The Menasces were bankers established in Constantinople, Paris, Geneva and of course Egypt, under the name *Crédit de Menasce*. The father of Yacoub Menasce, David, was a pharmacist or doctor or something of the sort, and settled in Cairo just after the French Expedition. He had come from Palestine where his father was a rabbi. I think he'd come to Egypt on holiday, as they did in those days. His son Yacoub was born in 1807 and made a remarkable career as a financier. He was made baron of the Ottoman Empire in two stages: first he was created chevalier, then baron in around 1860.

All the Menasce schools on rue Sultan Hussein, and the Menasce Hospital in front of Sporting Club, were founded by Behor de Menasce and Félix de



Inauguration of the new annex of the Israelite Hospital, 1956

Menasce over different periods of time. All the schools, and the Menasce Synagogue near Senghor University, were made for the Jewish community. They were built around the end of the nineteenth century. The hospital became one of the most important hospitals in Alexandria.

I certainly had a particularly happy childhood, at the beginning and the middle of World War II. We lived in a lovely villa in Rond Point, next to the Aghion villa. My mother loved going out a lot to fancy dress balls, charity balls, tennis at Sporting Club and, of course, to concerts. All the great French actors, opera singers, musicians and orchestras of the time used to come to the Mohamed Ali Theater. Alexandria was a must: they all had to come to Alexandria.

We didn't just mix with the Israelite community. One of my mother's greatest friends was Aline Salvago, and we mixed a lot with the Christian community and with the French Catholics. It was very cosmopolitan. Another family we were friends with were the Sednaouis. Many of the people were not Jews. And I must add that the matter of religion was relative in our family.

At home we had European meals but my paternal family remained essentially Oriental. So, for example, there would be a roast veal and potatoes, and then one of my aunts would ask one of the domestics, "What have you got in the kitchen?" And they would get her the *molokheya* that they were

having. But when we had guests it was a European cuisine. We had a superb Italo-Serbian cook who did a wonderful job.

Music was important to me. My mother was very good friends with Mrs. Awad, one of the best pianists in Alexandria in those days, and she wanted to take me on as a pupil. That was the beginning of an activity that was very important for me. I went to the Conservatoire, where professors would come and spend some time, and there would be exchanges with the Cairo Conservatoire. The president of the Cairo Conservatoire would come to examine us, with a jury from the Alexandria Conservatoire, and the president of the Alexandria Conservatoire would do the same in Cairo. We had the opportunity to participate in some concerts. There were very good piano and violin teachers in Alexandria and a lot of people got a good musical education. I keep very precious memories of a city which I think has been wronged.

I still speak a bit of Arabic, in dialect, and my vocabulary is what I would called adapted. But I can read a restaurant menu and the headlines in a newspaper. And when I am here I can follow what is going on, provided the language is not too literary. I have always considered English and French as my mother tongues. My mother was brought up in England, we had English governesses, and my sister went to the English Girls' College. But my maternal grandmother, the Baroness de Menasce, was French, and so my mother was raised speaking both English and French. My father was bilingual in Arabic and French, but always spoke French with my mother. When my father was there, we spoke French, and when he wasn't, we spoke English.

At the Lycée Français, to which I went, there were friends of all nationalities. But I must say in all honesty that it was never a matter of any particular importance. We are Jews, but I had plenty of Christian friends, and many of other confessions. There were some Muslims, and one never asked what was your religion or which church you went to, and the same went for nationality.

In 1980 I had a conference in Cairo University and I could not resist the temptation to take the coach from the airport and find myself practically in front of the Cecil Hotel. I was overcome by an enormous emotion. I deposited my luggage and walked down the streets of Alexandria, which became alive for me. Since then, my wife and I decided to come back regularly to our roots to research our genealogies.



Princess Toussoun, Mrs Aly Yehia Pasha, Gina Bachauer and Jimmy Mawas's grandmother, Rosette de Menasce, in about 1948



A ball at the Cecil Hotel, about 1950



KHAMIS M. KHAMIS

Talks about how florists started the business in Alexandria.

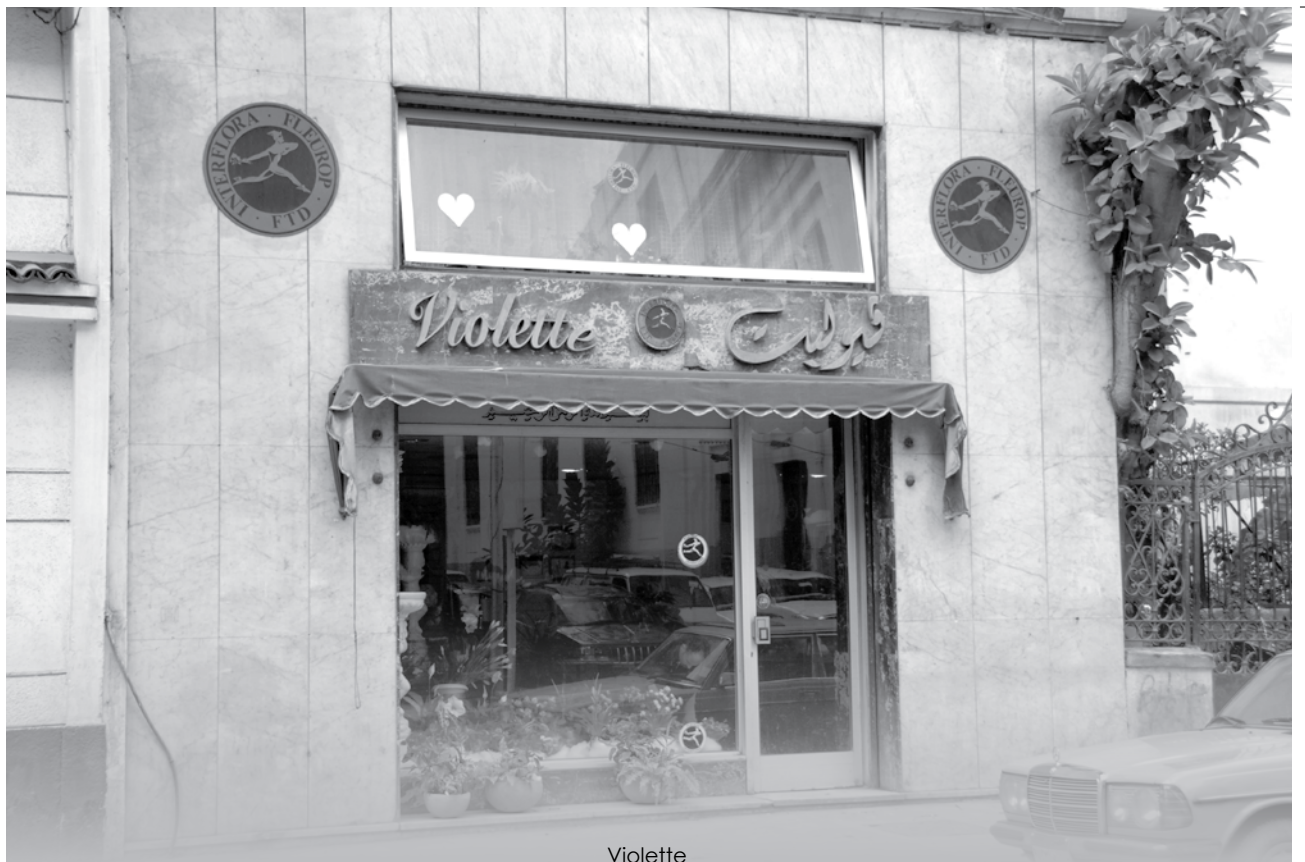
We are half Egyptian half Turkish. My grandmother is Turkish and my grandfather is Egyptian. We are originally from Bahari in Alexandria and at the beginning of the last century we moved to Bab Sharki. There was a reason why the family moved there. The area was farmland belonging to my paternal grandfather and my maternal grandfather, and it was called *gheit*, meaning farm or garden. Because they had to live next to the farm, they moved to the Latin quarter. The Latin cemetery was also adjacent to Bab Sharki. In our profession, the cemetery has a big role to play. We sell flowers on Sabbath and Dominica and when there are deaths and in November. Every Saturday and Sunday there are flowers to sell. So they had to live in the Latin quarter for two reasons. To sell flowers to the foreigners who lived in the Latin quarter. And also the Latin quarter was only one hundred or two hundred meters away from the Greek cemeteries; in fact, the Syrians and the Jews were also buried in that area. That's why the whole family (paternal and maternal uncles and cousins) started living there. We grew up there and soon other Egyptians started living there.



Florelle

This florist profession was introduced first to Alexandria then to Cairo. Those who had the monopoly in Alexandria were two French men, who had flower shops on rue Cherif and were competing with each other. The flowers came from France. Our families learned the trade from them and then started planting and working with flowers after a while. This was at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

The other communities began to get jealous. The French had their florists, but the British did not have any, so an Englishman started a florist shop. The Greeks did not have a florist, so they started a Greek florist shop. In that they were rather cunning. See, if I make a florist shop for my own community, all the community would become my clients and I'd cater to their needs and feasts. Even the Jews had two florists: Linda was one, but I can't remember the other. The Italians had Orlando, and Khawaga Joseph had another at the beginning of rue Fouad (Horreya Avenue). That's how the communities started their florist shops. Then the Egyptians started thinking of this profession in 1946. The first Egyptian florist was Florelle, who was my mother's uncle. We grew flowers, not sold them. We started the shops in 1946, by opening Florelle, and then we opened Violette in 1957, of which I have the honor of being the manager. And so Egyptians started thinking of opening florist shops on rue Safia Zaghoul, rue Sultan Hussein, rue Fouad, rue Cherif. That's how things started going.



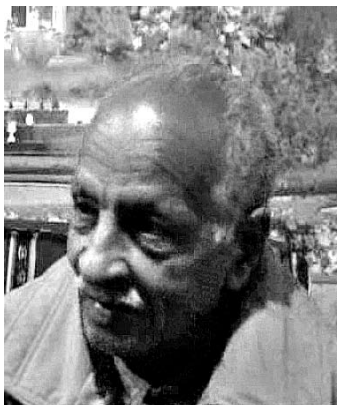
Violette

Those foreigners weren't only interested in food and commerce. No. They had a flower show in April, every year, and competed for the cup. In her palace, the lady would discuss matters with the gardeners—each would have thirty or forty gardeners—all year round, just so that the pasha would win the cup at the end of the year. If he didn't, there would be mourning! He would spend ten or twenty thousand a year, the equivalent of ten or twenty million today, so that people would say "So-and-so Pasha got a carnation for Prince Mohamed Ali," or for example a carnation called Pastroudis or Hortensia of Ahmed Pasha. There was a very important committee from the Ministry of Agriculture composed of really important experts including foreigners and the British and French. The committee would inspect each plant and interrogate the gardener on how it was planted and so on. I can't tell you how important flowers and plants were in Alexandria in the past. This cup was of utmost significance. I've forgotten the names, but they used to hold exhibitions and shows that were very costly. There was for example Georges Karam and his mother and sister, and lots of Greeks, such as the Zervudachis, the Benakis, the Salvagos, the Koremis and the Kotarellis. These shows were like feasts—a fiesta, as they say. Lots of pomp and food and drink. It would take twenty days of preparation. And he'd die if the committee didn't give him the cup!



Antoniadis Gardens where flower shows were held





KHODARY GASSER HASSABO

Waiter at the Elite restaurant and café, which used to be owned by the Greek Madame Christina, spoke about the old days.

New Year's Eve used to be a huge celebration at the Elite. We'd get thirty or forty turkeys, but now we get only one. I swear, only one. And even that doesn't get finished, and it takes us over a week to sell it. We used to send the turkey to Pastroudis to be baked in the oven. But now we have our own oven in the restaurant. On New Year's Eve we'd stay till five or six in the morning. The streets would be decorated inside and outside. Nobody would sit down, only Madame Christina and the Khawaga, up till 6am. The Khawaga would stay on the upstairs floor, and once he was upstairs dancing and the railings broke and he fell from the upper floor. He spent three days at home. He used to sing in front of the clients. The clients used to be really posh. There would be at least fifteen or sixteen at each table. But the upstairs hall has been closed for almost fifteen years.



The late Madame Christina



Elite



MAX SALAMA

One of the few remaining Jews in Alexandria, Salama is the head of the Jewish community.

During the Inquisition in Spain, my father's family left for Algeria or Morocco, and after that they came here. That was over 250 years ago. My grandfather wore a *gallabiya*, like the others. He spoke, read and wrote Arabic. My mother's origins are nothing important. She was born here, in Egypt. I don't know where she originally came from.



The Lycée Français d'Alexandrie

I was born here in Alexandria, in what has become a very working class area near Mohamed Ali Square. Eighty years ago the city center was in Manshieh. For my schooling I first went to Saint Catherine, then to the Collège Saint Marc, then to the Lycée. All my education was in French, even in the Jewish Union School. At home we spoke either French or Italian. My mother spoke Italian fluently. It was the lingua franca before French took over. When I studied dentistry, I went to Beirut to study in French, because in Cairo education was in English and Arabic.



Collège Saint Marc

When I started practicing in Alexandria, the most famous dentist was Harold Curtis Francis, an American who had settled in Alexandria since 1911. He'd come to Alexandria, liked it and settled there. In those days nobody asked for anything, not for diplomas or anything. There was also Nemzoghoulou, a Greek who had studied in Germany. Later on, during the war, all the Greek royalty were to be found in his clinic. These were the two top dentists in Alexandria.

Our life was extremely pleasant. My greatest pleasure was fishing. My brother, who brought us up, had two fishing boats with foreign sailors. Every day, after the fishing was over, they would wake up at five to take their catch to the market in Anfoushi. The captain was Italian. There was also dancing at the Romance in Stanley Bay, which was very fashionable, then la Côte d'Azur. The Monseigneur was also very fashionable. There were singers, and foreign numbers. It was the crème de la crème who went to the Monseigneur. Then there was Pastroudís, the pâtisserie and bar on the corner of rue Fouad. This Pastroudís was a very elegant gentleman. He knew how to receive people. The well-to-do went there frequently.

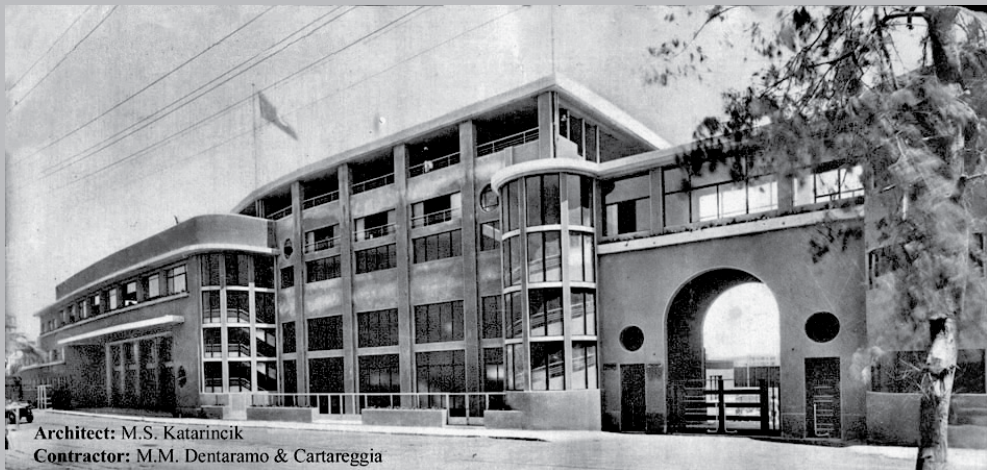


Anfoushi fish market



Eliaho Hanabi Synagogue

Admission into clubs, like the Sporting Club, was regulated by certain laws. You had to have the means, but you also had to be known in society. You had to have an important job and a good reputation. You didn't automatically become a member. It was a committee that decided, and it could very well turn you down.



Architect: M.S. Katarincik
Contractor: M.M. Dentaramo & Cartareggia

Alexandria Sporting Club



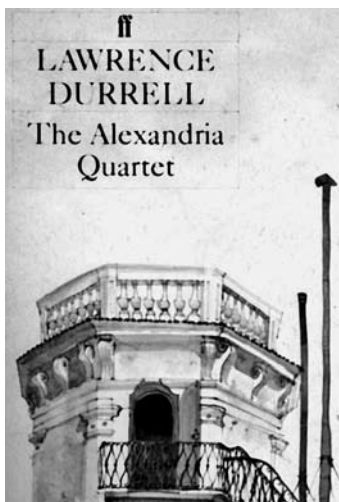
NADINE CAMEL-TOUEG

Now a freelance journalist living in Paris, describes what it means to be an Alexandrian.

My father, Djemil Camel-Toueg, considered himself Alexandrian above all else. Since I was a little child, it was the same old tune I heard: Alexandria, Alexandria, we are from Alexandria, we are not from Cairo. Always the sense of superiority, of being Alexandrian. Why did Alexandria have this aura? Because since I was small, I was lulled to sleep by the stories that the first performance of *Aida* was given in Alexandria by the Greek and Italian communities. My parents' best friends were a Greek couple, and I grew up with them, as they were always in our house. They also had a Swiss couple, the Zollikofers, whose children were also friends of my brother and sister. So, in our house, there were Greek words circulating, and Italian words circulating, and they formed part of the conversation along with the French.



Djemil Camel-Toueg



My father was a Copt, and always very proud of being Egyptian. There were marriages in the family with Syro-Lebanese, but there was always the belief in being pure Egyptians, and of being Catholic Copts, who are a minority within the majority of Orthodox Copts. They were very proud of this particularity of going to Catholic mass in Latin, and of having lunch with the priests.

My parents went to Beirut in 1967, and lived there for twenty years, but it was always Alexandria—*Alexandrie Alexandra*—and stories about Alexandria, and a nostalgia for Alexandria, which was always better than Beirut. Even their friends there were Alexandrians. I was nurtured by this constant nostalgia.

When I went to Paris, I had to say where I was from and who I was. Unconsciously, I would immediately whip out my Alexandrian card and say at once: I am Alexandrian. That was an overture and a window on the imaginary, on all that could evoke Alexandria. So, if I found myself in front of gentlemen of my profession of journalism, and they asked me: "And you, where are you originally from?" I would say, "From Alexandria. It's not the same as Egypt."

I am the citizen of a city. It is a keyword. The eyes of my interlocutor would immediately sparkle. Ah! Alexandria. This simple word opens up the imaginary, the dream, the Lighthouse of Alexandria, Alexander the Great, Lawrence Durrell.

Because of our cosmopolitanism, because of the stories that nurtured us, we can't help feeling superior wherever we go. We are aware we have lived the better life, and we are there as a choice, not as an economic necessity. We have nothing to envy or need. We are not immigrants.

Bust of Alexander the Great located on the plaza of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

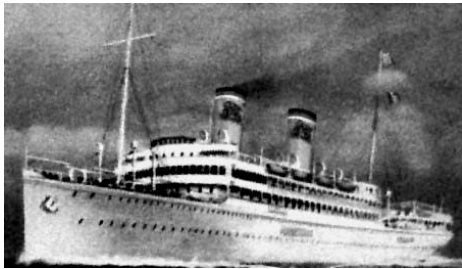




ASMA EL BAKRI

Film director, was brought up and continues to live between Cairo and Alexandria.

My father's side, the El Bakri, came from the Arabian Peninsula, probably during or a little after the Arab conquest i.e. around 632 or a little later. We can trace them during the thirteenth century, the fourteenth, the fifteenth, the sixteenth and even in the seventeenth century where we can find two Bakris, father and son, who made a dictionary of Egyptian Arabic, Arabic expressions pertaining to Egypt. Afterwards there was all the Sufi brotherhood who were called Sheikh el Segada el Bakriya. They were important philosophers and writers, the intellectuals of the family. Sheikh El Bakri remained the head of the Segada el Bakriya order till the early 50s. So from the paternal side there are scholars and military people like my father and my grandfather.



The *Espéria*



Espéria tickets

It was at the time of the Ottoman Empire. My grandfather, Rafik, was an officer and he fought at the Dardanelles with Mustafa Kemal and Van Sanders in the famous battle of Gallipoli. My father was born there. Both his father and his mother were in Turkey, in the Ottoman Empire, at that time, my father went to the military school and then we came back, he was in the air force. On my mother's side it is rather complicated. The Sakakinis, my mother's grandparents, are from Damascus and I think they go back to the crusades. In the 1850s they came to Egypt which was a haven of tolerance, business and commerce. The Fares, the family of my maternal grandmother are from Lebanon—more precisely from Deir el Qamar. They came to Egypt around 1860. They were wealthy people, and came to Alexandria where they settled. My father was Muslim and my mother was Christian. However at that time there were still some intelligent people: marry whom you want, when you want, as you want.

We used to spend all the summers in Alexandria at the villa at San Stefano, which was built during the First World War. At that time the Pasha was still living, and he used to travel every year to Europe on board ships like the *Ausonia* and the *Espéria*. When the war started and there was no more traveling at the end of 1914 and the beginning of 1915, he bought a piece of land and built the villa which was isolated, the Corniche was not built yet and my mother used to remember the sea waves reaching the walls of the villa. They used to spend all their summers there.

We were in Alexandria most of the time, then I went to Notre Dame de Sion, in the boarding school, and my brother went to Saint Marc. I still remember my school friends and we still meet when we have the school reunions each year in Paris during the month of January. We had a very high standard at school. We used to read and write fluently at the age of five. At the age of five I used to recite poetry. Notre Dame de Sion was mostly for the higher society. School fees for boarding house amounted to 90 pounds per year,

which at that time was quite a big sum of money. We had the best food, we were spoiled, we had everything we needed. Notre Dame de Sion had a huge garden, I do not know how many feddans to the north and to the south, and on each side two huge vegetable gardens. Our classrooms were very big. We were around thirty in each classroom so we were not overcrowded in the classrooms like nowadays where students in classrooms are like sardines in a matchbox.

The day-to-day life in Alexandria at that time for me in particular, was not the parties which they used to have every Saturday. Most of my friends used to give parties. But this was of no interest to me. I used to play sports. I was a swimming and rowing champion. I used to go to the cinema six times a week. We did not have much money. We lived in Ibrahimieh on Abu Kir Avenue. There were three cinemas, Odéon cinema, La Gaieté cinema and Riviera cinema: those three cinemas were around the house, so we did not need to take the bus or the tram to go to the cinema, thus we could spare 1 piaster each. Each cinema had two films, mostly American, so we were stuffed with American movies. The Riviera cinema used to show two movies, one American and the other Egyptian. This is how we started seeing a lot most of the movies of the 60s, Fatine Abdel Wahab, Salah Abu Seif, Barakat etc. and all the giants of the Egyptian cinema at that time.

In the Middle East of course, in Alexandria, we had the first movies. In Alexandria and not in Cairo. The movies were shown in a café close to Ramleh station. So Alexandria is the birth place of the cinema. The movie theaters were magnificent, during my youth. The cinemas like Metro, Amir, Rialto, Royal, Strand, all these were fabulous cinemas, even the small cinemas where we used to go very often; as I told you I used to watch six movies per week. People used to go a lot to the cinema; we had to book our tickets ahead of time as the seats were numbered. I remember that one year there was a festival for Greta Garbo and I went with my mother to buy the tickets ahead of time and the cinema was full, it was at the Metro. There was a taste for good movies, for music, for the interesting conferences which were given at L'Atelier and elsewhere.



Notre Dame de Sion

Cinema Metro





Cinema Royal

Here in Alexandria there was a gentle kind of life that you could not find elsewhere, we had everything and the best of everything, our generation, in our environment, had the best of everything.

FRENCH



ISABELLE TAWIL (NÉE DE LA NOUE)

Came as a bride to Alexandria and has been living in it since then.

My father is French. His grandmother was Peruvian, but he was born in Paris and not in Peru. He ended up marrying a Bolivian. I was born in Paris and lived there till I was twenty-two. My husband is originally from Damascus. We met when he was studying in Paris. Three months after we came to Egypt World War II broke out, but we stayed on in Egypt because we were Egyptians.



The Tawil house, now the American Cultural Center

Alexandria staggered me. It was an extremely elegant city where all languages were spoken: French, Italian, English, German, all. Everybody spoke French. When I came I thought I'd be speaking English, but not on your life! It was either French or Italian or Greek.

We lived in rue des Pharaons. The house is now the American Cultural Center. In those days it was a Jewish quarter. The Menascés and the Rolos and the great Jewish families had bought land when it was not expensive and built beautiful houses.

We all shared each others' feasts: Ramadan and Yom Kippur. There were church processions in the streets. There was a broadmindedness that I loved to see, and which is difficult to find now.

It was the Greeks who built the Kossika Hospital, schools and dispensaries; they gave much to Egypt. The French community was not as active as the other communities. It didn't even have a representative. They were mainly interested in making money.



Marilene Tawil, 1953



Front: Jean-Pierre, Aline
Back: Marilene, Edgar



Pierre Tawil with Viviane and Jean-Pierre



Isabelle Tawil with her children, 1947

When I arrived, Egypt was paradise on earth. I found a marvelous country and beautiful climate. The people are amiable, hospitable, and extremely nice. And I would like to spend my last days here, in this atmosphere of gentleness that one no longer finds in Europe.

Of my children, one is in Italy, one is in England, the third is in Greece, the fourth returned here fortunately, and the fifth is in Canada.

GREEKS



DEMIS ROUSSOS

Alexandrian-born singer Demis Roussos lives in Greece, where the interview was conducted.

As far as I recall, the memories from childhood are very, very nice, because they are, let's say, the most romantic memories. Today I am sitting in my house in Greece, and that's the Mediterranean for sure. But I don't know ... every time I go back to Alexandria, there are some smells. They are different, you see, because smells are very, very important for the trick of the memory of a person—you know, childhood and things like that. Alexandria was very Greek actually, and there was this Greek Arab atmosphere.



Sahar Hamouda and Demis Roussos on the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Plaza

My grandparents, like most of us, came from the islands. Yes, the Egyptian Greeks all came from the islands. I don't know why, probably there was no money. My grandfather's family came from the island of Paros, in Crete, and then our parents were born in Egypt, and we were born in Egypt. It's a little bit like the *pieds noirs* in France, the Algerian French, only us, we go further back in history.



The radios used to play things from Bill Hayley and the Comets as well as French and Italian songs. This is all because of this *méli mélo* of all these races because Egypt—Alexandria—was a melting pot of Italian and French. This is why we had all these influences and all this music which was good, because we had this culture, this melting pot of music. All this music we used to hear, Greek music together with the Arabic, that melting pot was very versatile. We became versatile and well-educated in music because we were inside all these sounds.



The Alexandria Corniche



EDMOND CASSIMATIS

Born in 1938, Mr. Cassimatis is a third generation Alexandrian Greek. He speaks Greek, Arabic, French and Italian fluently, and gave the interview in Arabic.

The family itself came from an island from the south of Greece called Kythera. They came around a hundred years ago and owned (and still own) three shops in the city center. The shops sell clothes for men, women and children.



Minerva Shop



Alexandria Stadium



The Greek Club at Soter, 2006

The Greek community used to mix with all the other communities of Alexandria, and with the Egyptians. It was part of the Egyptian social fabric. The temperament, habits, manner of speech and way of life of the Greeks are similar to that of the Egyptians. When they go to Greece they are told: "You are not Greeks, you are from Egypt". That's what they say about us.

I used to row for the Greek sailing club in the 1950s and 60s and I was one of the Egyptian rowing champions. In our playing field in Soter I used to throw the discus and play other sports. The Greeks were very active in sports in Alexandria. The Greek team of the Greek sailing club joined the 1920 Olympics and got fifth place. It used to win a lot of international prizes. In Alexandria it often got first place in rowing and in water polo. It was Angelo Bolonachi who established the Egyptian Olympic Committee in 1910 and was its first president. He also contributed towards building the Alexandria Stadium.

I have one son. He lives in Greece and has his own shops. Like me, he has a dual nationality, both Egyptian and Greek.



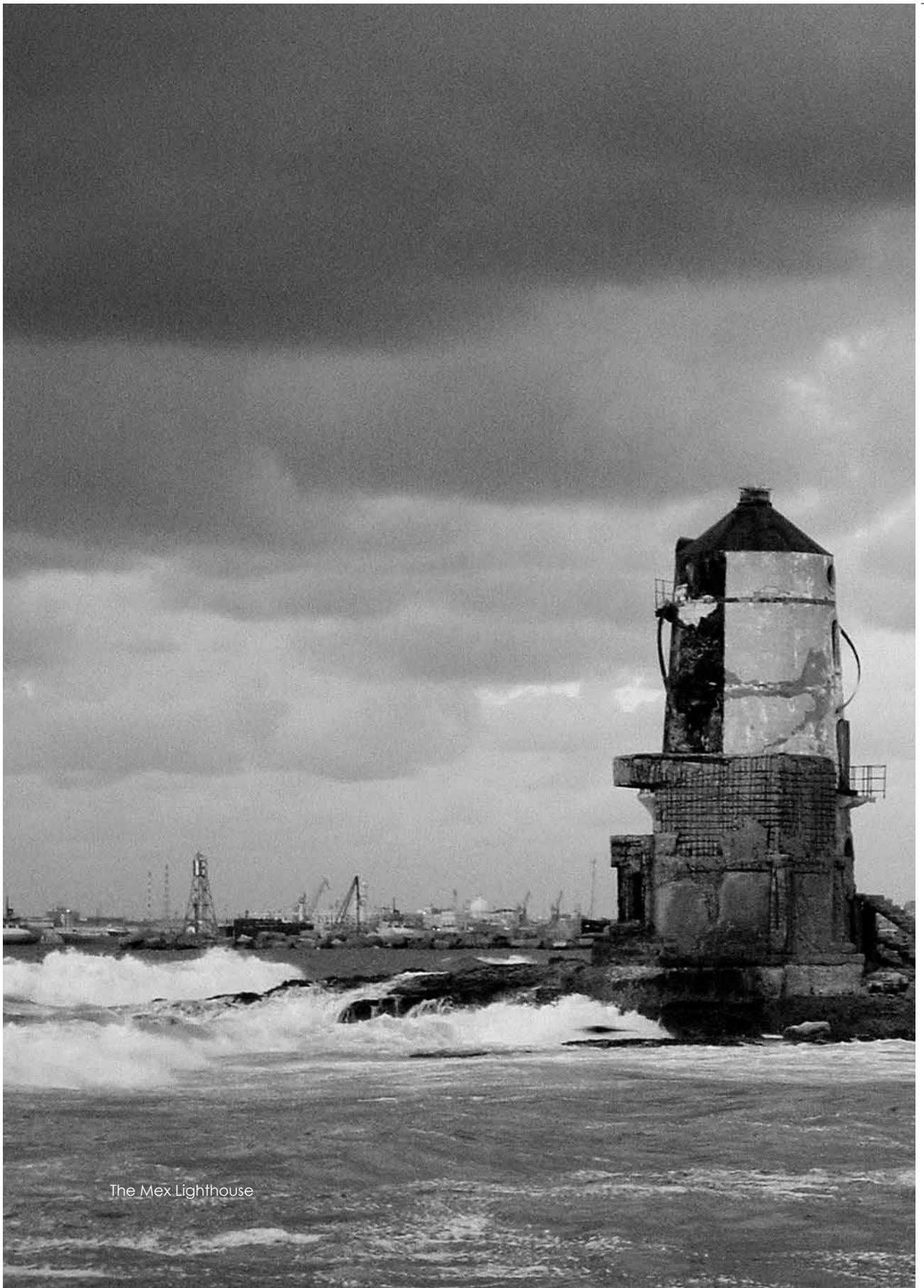
The Salvagos Hall in the Greek complex



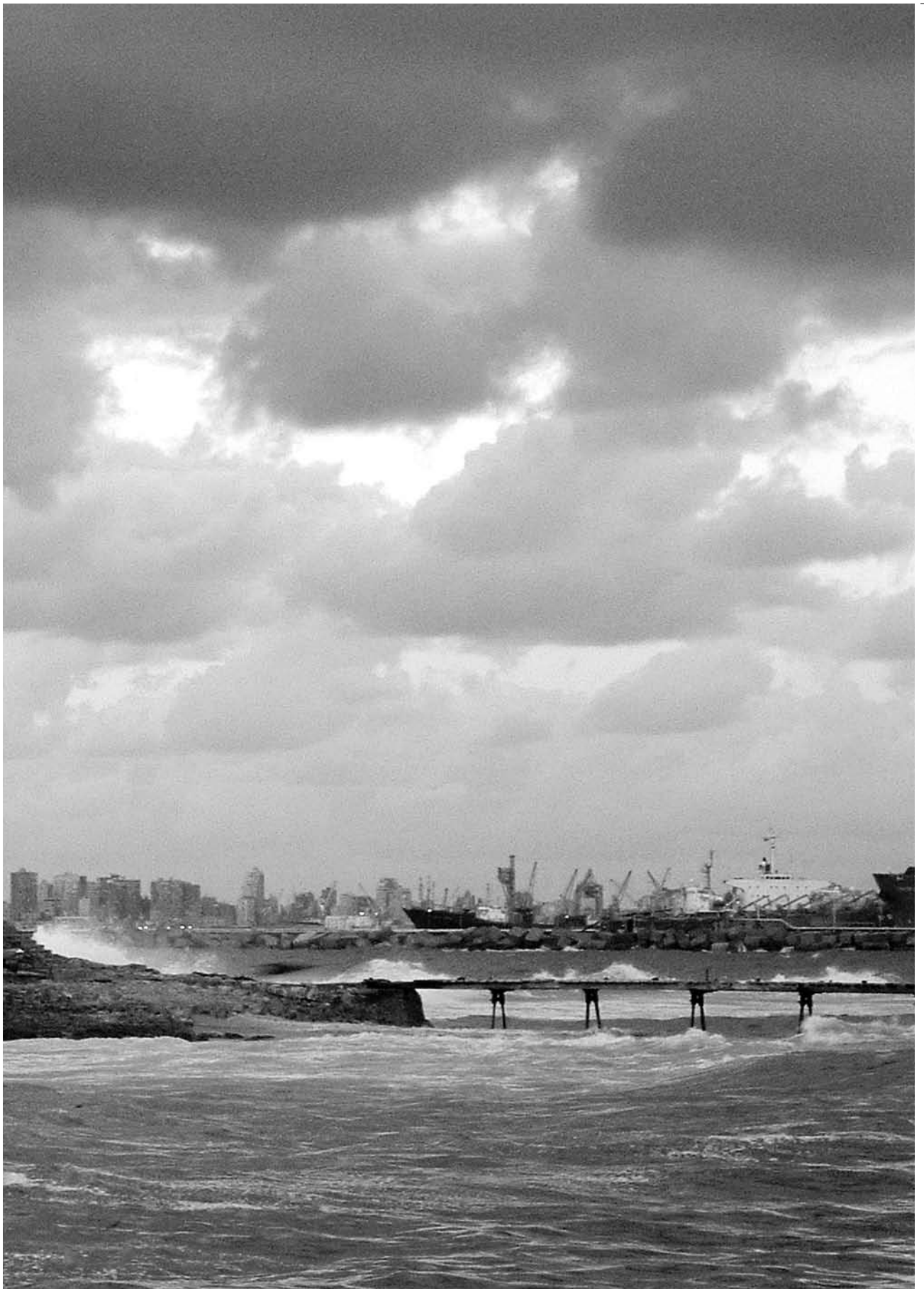
EVANGELIA PASTROUDIS

She currently lives in the Greek Old Peoples Home and likes giving visitors mint sweets.

My parents came from the Greek island of Lemnos. My uncle, Athanasios Pastroudis, had the famous patisserie in Alexandria and he was wealthy. He helped us at the beginning, because we were the poor branch of the family. I was born in Mex, to the west of Alexandria, on the road to Agami, in 1920. Mex derived its name from the drug trade in the area. The boats would bring in the drug "max" and that's how the area grew to be known.



The Mex Lighthouse



We had Egyptian, Italian, Armenian, and Jewish neighbors, and I loved them all. We were all one family. Our Egyptian neighbors were good people. If I didn't like my mother's food, I would go and eat with the neighbors. We were seven sisters and our Egyptian neighbors took care of us when there were demonstrations during and after the war. They would take us to sleep in their house which was on the safer side of the street.

I was in the Girl Guides for forty years, and met Despina Benachi there. Although I was poor and Despina came from one of the wealthiest families in Alexandria, she was a simple and funny girl. She invited me to her wedding, which was the biggest in Alexandria in those days.



EMMANUEL ZERVUDACHI

The Zervudachis were for over 150 years one of the biggest and wealthiest Greek families in Alexandria. They were immortalized in the city by Bernard de Zogheb's poem *Waiting for the Zervudachis*, a parody of Cavafy's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. There are no Zervudachis left in Alexandria. Emmanuel Zervudachi left when he was seventeen but comes to visit every year.

During World War II, my father was a major in the British army. He had Greek nationality but did not speak Greek well. My mother was also Greek but they spoke English and French with each other, not Greek.



The Zervudachi mausoleum

I think it was my great grandfather who built the family mausoleum in the Greek Orthodox cemetery.

IRAQI



BASILE BEHNA

After migrating to Lebanon in 1964, then to France, Mr. Behna has now returned to spend most of his time in his hometown Alexandria.

For a long time I thought we were originally *Shawam* from Aleppo. Then, when I was nineteen I got an identity crisis and started searching for my roots. My family originated from Mosul in Iraq. We belong to a particular religious sect called the Syrian (Syriac) Catholics. It is a Christian minority rather like the Copts in Egypt. We had to leave Iraq in the nineteenth century, in around 1830–40, and settled in Aleppo until the end of the nineteenth century. My grandfather Basile, after whom I am named, came to Alexandria between 1893 and 1897. The Behnas had two branches: one settled in Tanta and the other in Alexandria.

My father was three when he came to Alexandria. He was born in Aleppo at the end of the nineteenth century. But it was the patriarch of the family, my uncle Rachid, who started the family wealth. He more or less invented the kind of tobacco that is smoked in the narghile and convinced the Greek tobacco manufacturers, the Cotarellis, to manufacture this tobacco, *moassel*. This was the origin of the family fortune. At first only the rich smoked it, but now it's become extremely popular everywhere. Then the family became tobacco and silk merchants. The second brother Michel (they were four) went to Japan in the 1920s where he lived for twenty years. He used to send whatever he could, particularly silk and cars and furniture. He sent the first Japanese car to Egypt. It sold for thirty-five pounds. He adapted very well to life in Japan. He lived with a gheisha and was an opium addict in his final days.

The fourth brother, Georges, was the only one who got an education. He was the accountant. My father had offices in Kasr el Nil in Cairo and engaged in commerce, import and export. They were self made men. It was a patriarchal society with the eldest brother Rachid in the chair. Everything was in his name—all the sweat of the four was put in the name of a single brother. When he died in 1952 it all went to his successors, and I am the one looking after it. The office still exists at 1, Maronite Church Street, Manshieh.

The family started the film business to augment the material success with social success. They chose a new industry, which was full of foreigners, a new cultural milieu of artists that attracted them, providing social recognition. Towards the end of the 1920s they began to import Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy films. These were the first foreign films that they imported and subtitled or dubbed. The dubbing was done by university professors, not just any old translators!

They started producing movies in the 30s. One of their first productions was Frankel cartoons, animations. They were the only ones to have faith in Frankel and the world of animation. The Frankels were two Jews who lived in Alexandria—true Alexandrians. They followed Walt Disney and launched themselves very slowly. They created the first animated Egyptian hero, Mech Mech. They spent seven years looking for a producer till my father took them on.

I was born on 4 January 1955. The patriarch of the family, Rachid, wanted to continue the line. He married a Maronite girl from Lebanon, because the Maronites are the closest denomination to the Syrian Catholics, since Saint Maron had been one himself. But they had no children, so it was the turn of my father. He got married, also to a Maronite girl from Beirut, when he was around sixty years old. First he had two girls, then he had me when he was seventy. I am the only male heir.



A selection of posters from Behna Films

Many of the Levantine Christian minorities settled in Egypt. From Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan. The Shawam who made a fortune would go to Lebanon to choose a wife from a good Lebanese family. That's what my father did.

I was born in the family villa, 9 Ptolemy Street. It was sequestered in 1961 and is now the consulate of Saudi Arabia. I had a Swiss governess, and a golden childhood from 1955 till 1961.

There was a certain atmosphere which helped development in all domains. It wasn't just an economic growth but an accrued richness, a mix that would help bring everything to perfection, which would propel you forwards. Cosmopolitanism was an engine which would move you forwards, like new countries in the style of the USA are driven forwards. There was the proper social climate which helped the many nationalities that had amalgamated to blossom. This was exactly what we had in Alexandria during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, up to the 40s and 50s. The different communities made of Alexandria the engine for the whole of Egypt and made it rank third in the world in the manufacture of cigarettes and in the film industry. This is how we evaluate cosmopolitanism, which was creative and fertile. It is not at all the caricature we think of, people who hardly spoke Arabic etc. That kind of people could not create or integrate. They might have had money and made investments, but that is not what powered the engine. My parents were that engine and in my opinion they were 100% Egyptian. Those were people who knew how to integrate the wealth they had accumulated from different sources.

I have thousands of posters and documents about the history of the cinema. For instance, the first Greek speaking films were made in Alexandria, not Greece. My father was the producer and the director was Togo Mizrahi, while all those who participated were of different nationalities. Egyptians also played an important role in those films. These were Egyptian productions, because even people like Togo Mizrahi, who were called "foreigners", were in fact 100% Alexandrians. I remember, for instance, that in his speech, insults, and behavior, my father was splendidly Alexandrian. Thus to say someone was a "khawaga" was all wrong. Togo Mizrahi was Egyptian. This wealth of cultures was principally Egyptian. And so those who went to Italy or France grouped together. The Egyptian Jews in France were different from the rest: they were Alexandrians.

My family became the principal distributors of Egyptian films in the Arab world. By 1961 we had offices in all the Arab world: in Baghdad, Khartoum, Beirut, Damascus. At the beginning, my father used to produce films but he lost colossal amounts of money. For instance, he lost a lot of money in 1936 with *The Song of the Heart*, which was the first Egyptian talking movie. The public was still at the stage of finding out its taste; for instance, they didn't

know then whether musical films would be successful or not. They were trying things out, like a typically Occidental historical film that would be translated or adapted.

By the 1940s the studios had started moving to Cairo. In 1961 this saga ended, with the sequestrations of the Nasserite regime.



Togo Mizrahi



ITALIANS



ALESSANDRO MONTI

An Alexandrian-born Italian, Alessandro Monti is currently the director of the Dante Alighieri, the Italian Cultural Center

The Egyptian pound was very strong. I remember that in 1946 I was one of the first Italians to leave Egypt to study in Italy, and the exchange rate was such that I was almost rich in Italy. I was a rich student because the Egyptian pound gave me 2290 Italian liras. In those days one lived very well on that money.

The Dante Alighieri



The Italian Consulate is one of the oldest consulates in Alexandria. I don't know when it was founded. But the Dante Alighieri, which is the Italian Cultural Center, that I am director of, was founded in 1896, and the consulate was probably founded earlier. It was extremely active. In the past the consuls were far more in contact with their people than they are today. There was a very important social life in Alexandria, because there were so many foreign communities.

I first went to a school which was called Julio Cesare, which was in Camp Caesar. Then when the Littorio schools were opened, I went there, because they had become the important ones. Then World War II broke out and we stopped going to school.

We lived in Camp Caesar, where many Italians lived, and also Greeks. We had a lot of Greek neighbors. We lived in a house with a very large garden, and there were goldfish. I remember we lived very well indeed. The rent was very affordable. Now all that's changed. All the neighborhood has been converted into apartment buildings.

The Italian community numbered about 30,000. They often met the members of the other communities at the many charity balls



The Italian Hospital



The Littorio School



The Casa di Riposo

which were held by the different communities at their clubs, or at hotels. The Italian hospital and the Casa di Riposo (the Old People's Home) were founded by the charitable efforts of the Italian community.

It's very difficult to establish the truth about how many Italians are left in Alexandria. I mean the true Italians of Alexandria, those who were born here—or nearly born here—and who spent all their lives in Alexandria. They are either here no longer, or they are ill, or they are very old. We don't meet them in our daily lives. Also there aren't many left at the Casa di Riposo. The remaining are a few hundred who won't go Italy or into the Casa di Riposo, and who prefer to live alone. But now there are the new Italians, who are contracted to work here for a few years and then return to Italy. But there are no longer Italians who will settle here.



NICOLETTE MAWAS (NÉE PINTO)

Nicolette Pinto comes from one of the best known Jewish families in Alexandria. She lives in Brighton with her Alexandrian husband Jimmy Mawas, and returns to Alexandria on visits to retrace her origins and family tree.



Ezio Pinto and John Camenzuli hunting in King Mariout

I was originally called Nicolette Pinto, and I come from a family that was here, in cotton, from 1855 to the late 1950s. The Pintos came from Livorno with my great grandfather David and his wife, brother-in-law and six children. Within a month and a half three of them had died of cholera, leaving a woman with six children. My grandfather was twelve or thirteen and started working in cotton and left his children a handsome fortune. My father lived and worked here. Unfortunately he died prematurely in 1948. He loved fishing and shooting. He would go duck shooting in Lake Mariout, then make pâté. He was a very good cook. This he took from his mother who was a talented cook.

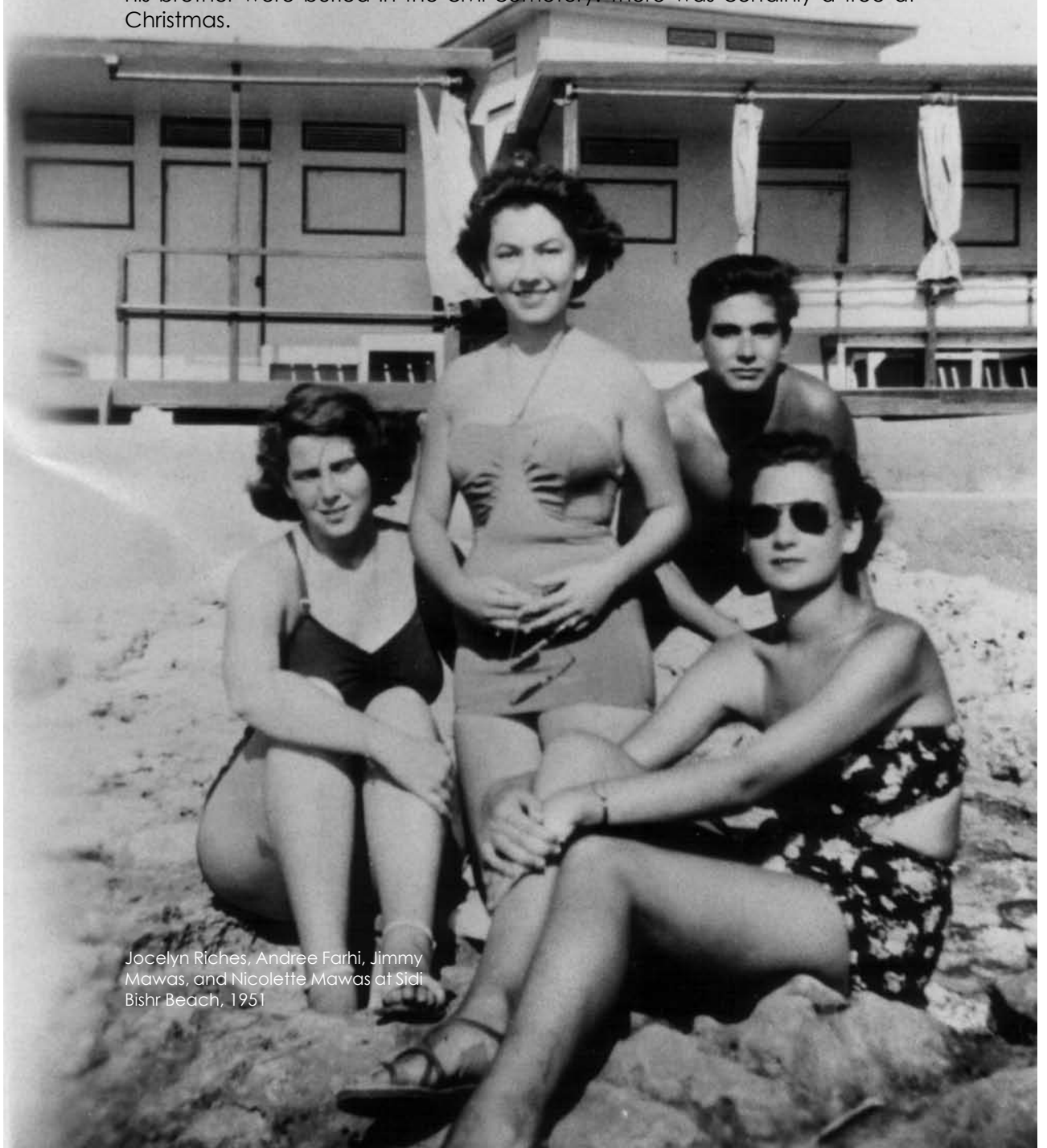


Nicolette Pinto, 1936

My mother was entirely Francophone, and my father spoke only Italian. I don't know how they understood each other, but they did.

My sister and my brother spent some years in the Italian school, up until 1938, and the declaration of martial law in Italy. To their great joy my mother pulled them out and entered them in the Lycée, which my father hadn't wanted. I went directly to the Lycée because that was in 1940 and there were no longer any Italian schools.

On my father's side, the family was, well, I don't want to say atheist, but we only celebrated the big feasts—especially because my maternal grandmother came from a rather religious family. When she died in 1949, we stopped those celebrations. My brother did his Bar Mitzvah, but we girls did absolutely nothing, because our family was anti-clerical. My uncle and his brother were buried in the civil cemetery. There was certainly a tree at Christmas.



Jocelyn Riches, Andree Farhi, Jimmy Mawas, and Nicolette Mawas at Sidi Bishr Beach, 1951



All the Pinto family at the wedding of Sylvia and Piero Calzolari, March 1948.
From left to right: Carlo and Nora Alhadeff, Piero Pinto, Silvio Pinto, Bianca Bigjavi,
Elvira Pinto née Mieli, Dina Weiser née Pinto, Paolo Pinto, Lola Pinto née Soria,
Nicolette Pinto, Ezio Pinto, the consul general of Italy and Professor Carlo Pinto





A fancy dress party at Silvio Pinto's villa in Bulkeley, Alexandria in about 1937



The Pinto families with nannies, including Sylvia Paolo and Nicolette Pinto, and Silvio's children, Nora, Aldo, Gino and Piero, in about 1934

PALESTINIANS



LAILA DEFRAWI (NÉE NASHASHIBI)

Born in Jerusalem, she came to Egypt in 1948 and has been living here ever since.



Laila Defrawi's father, Azmi Pasha El Nashashibi

My father is Palestinian, and my mother is Spanish, from Constantinople. My father's family, the Nashashibis, have been in Palestine for 800 years. My grandfather was mayor of Jerusalem. He laid the roads of New Jerusalem and paved them, and introduced electricity and running water. He did a lot there. As for my father, when he finished his studies at London University, where he got a degree in Political Science, he returned to Jerusalem. My mother had just finished her studies at the Dame de Sion. Theirs was a civil marriage, because he was Muslim and she was Roman Catholic. They had a civil marriage at the King David Hotel. My father worked with the government, which sent him as governor to Nazareth, Haifa, Jaffa, and then finally back to Jerusalem in 1945. In 1948 we left, he to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Amman, which was then Transjordan, and I with my grandmother to Alexandria.



Laila Defrawi's grandfather, Ragheb El Nashashibi

Laila Defrawi's maternal grandmother

My family used to take the waters in Europe during the holidays. Then during the war, they started coming to Alexandria instead, where they had a lots of friends among the grand families. So in 1948 my grandmother brought me to Alexandria.



Laila Defrawi with her grandmother

When life became impossible in Jerusalem, my family left. My grandparents went to Alexandria in February. I stayed on to finish the academic year at the Dame de Sion. It was an official examination and we used to be examined in the French Consulate. However, the consulate was outside Old Jerusalem, while the school was inside it, on one of the Fourteen Stations of the Cross, the Via Dolorosa. So I became a boarder at the school, with



Laila Defrawi at the Dame de Sion school



Laila Defrawi in Jerusalem

a few other girls who insisted on finishing the year. As soon as the exams were over, I went by car to Amman and from there to Egypt.

I went to the Sacred Heart school in Alexandria. Because I'd been to the Dame de Sion in Jerusalem, my family preferred to send me to a religious school rather than to the secular English Girls College. At home we spoke French, not Arabic, or some Turkish, because my paternal grandmother was also Turkish, from Istanbul. I also speak some German because when I was young I had a Swiss German governess.

When I got married, we used to go out a lot. We went out every evening. There were a lot of clubs: the Automobile Club, the Syrian Club, the Yacht Club. My husband had a lot of friends: Greeks, Armenians, Italians, Syro-Lebanese, Jews. There used to be a rich cultural life in Alexandria. All the great ballet troupes used to come: the Marquis de Cuevas, the ballet of the Champs Elysées, of Monte Carlo, the Bolshoi. There was the Italian Opera with Gino Becchia, the Comédie Française and Jean Marais, Edith Piaf and Malraux....

When the children were small, we used to spend the summers at the beach, Sidi Bishr No. 2, where the Defrawis, my husband's family, had a cabin. Then when the children were ten and



Laila with her husband Adel, and children Nihal and Mamdouh

twelve years old, we started going to Europe. I've also taken them to see Jerusalem.

Among my circle of friends, everybody loved Alexandria. Life was elegant and refined. Even the foreigners who were posted here on a mission for three or four years loved Alexandria and were sorry to go. I knew all the consuls who came, and they were all sorry they had to leave.

My husband is Egyptian. I got the nationality two years after I got married, my children are Egyptian, and I consider myself Egyptian. When people ask me what I am, I say Egyptian.



Laila's wedding



Laila in the Jardins de Bagatelle, Paris



Sayed Darwish Theater, formerly the Mohamed Ali Theater and now the Opera House



Mr. and Mrs. Defrawi

RUSSIANS



TATIANA MONTI (NÉE SERIKOFF-ANDRIEVSKY)

The last member of the white Russian community in Alexandria, Tatiana spoke about her family's arrival in Alexandria during the Bolshevik revolution.

My family is originally from St. Petersburg. They were landowners and the male members were in the military. My grandfather was a general and my father, who was only twenty during the revolution, was one of the earliest pilots—aviators—in the 1914 war. The revolution upset everything and they escaped to the south, since the revolution had started in the north. They were refugees in the south for two years, throughout the massacres and famines that took place in the north. It was the same story on my mother's side. They were evacuated by the British who collected them in three ships from Constantinople and Sinterople, which is in Crimea, and brought them to Egypt. As always, Egypt was marvelous. She offered them hospitality and protection. They were extremely well treated. They were placed for two years in a camp in Sidi Bishr, then gradually they began to adapt, to work, to get out of the camp, and they lived in Alexandria. My parents met and got married in the camp.

A Russian priest came over with the immigrants and they formed a church in the camp, where my mother got married. Once the camp was closed down, this same church was transferred to the building of Mimi Soukar, on Saad Zaghloul Street, where there was the old Russian Consulate, during the Tsarist regime. As you know, the Russians are very religious and keen on practising their religion, so it was vital for them to have some form of church and a priest. There was no patriarch, since communism had abolished the Orthodox religion in Russia. So the Greek community and patriarch looked after us, and our certificates. I, for example, was born here. So I have a certificate from the Greek patriarch that I was baptized a Greek Orthodox. They also gave us cemeteries. The Greek Orthodox gave us a place where we built a chapel for those who could not afford to buy a piece of land, so we used to bury them temporarily and then five to ten years later we used to collect the bones and bury them in these tombs which belonged to the whole community. It's a very nice chapel in the Greek cemetery with a tombstone on which are engraved all the names of those who are buried there.

We had our own parties, theater, concerts (because many of the community were musicians), and our church choir. Many of the women had beautiful voices. Many foreign women were interested in us. They founded committees to sell tickets and became close to us. I will tell you why. We were the first political refugees.



Count Aziz de Saab and Laudi Cordahi at a Russian ball

The Russian community had excellent relations with Egyptians and other communities. During the war many young girls married English, American and Australian soldiers, and left. All the community lived very well until the arrival of Abdel Nasser. They got scared because he was close to Russia, the Soviet Union, with the High Dam and all. They were scared that the Russians would come here and look for them, because we were the enemy, the enemy of yesterday. So many left, to America, many went to Australia, and some to Europe. And so, gradually, our community began to disperse, bit by bit. Then the High Commissioner for the United Nations, Sadr Eldin Khan (the brother of the Aga Khan), came to Alexandria and arranged for the elderly, or those who were alone, to go to Switzerland. That was the end of our community. No-one now remains. Today there are the new Russians in Alexandria. There were those Egyptians who went to study in the Soviet Union and came back with young Russian wives. They gather in the Russian Cultural Center, where there are a lot of activities.

Because we were Francophone, I went to the Lycée Français. There were people of all nationalities there. There were two of us Russians then, and we were exempted from Arabic because we were refugees, which is a shame because Arabic would have helped me a lot. We took Russian instead, my mother tongue. So I know Russian and not Arabic. Russian hasn't helped me one bit.

When I got to know Sandro, we would go to Smouha Club, where he would play tennis, then we would both walk the track. Then we would go to the cinema, and after the cinema to Pam Pam, where we danced, or to Santa Lucia. When we got married in 1961 we lived in Agami, a small seaside resort fifteen kilometers west of Alexandria. It was marvelous and empty. We lived in a small villa on the beach. There was no running water, only a pump. So began an enchanted life for me. I love gardens, I love the sea, I love the sand, and I love the sun. We lived for thirty-four years in Agami.

Egypt saved us. Not just me and my family, but all our community, which ended up here and received a wonderful welcome. The Russian Revolution was very bloody and very very cruel, and the community had felt extremely insecure. Egypt was the welcome, tranquility and security.

We Slavs, we are different from everybody else. We are a very particular race, but we adapt. My husband Sandro, an Italian, is Mediterranean, and I get on very well with him, but we are obviously different. I am not Italian because I was not born Italian, and I am not Egyptian. I don't know what I am.

SERBIAN



ZEINAB NIAZI-BADR

Is the typical Alexandrian with diverse origins.

Our origins are very complicated. Like all Egyptians, we have mixed blood. My father was Albanian and had a Serbian passport. We have mixed blood also on my mother's side. There is some North African blood—Tunisian or Moroccan—I don't really know where the dynasty started from, especially the Turkish blood. Was it since Ahmed or Amin Yehia Pasha? But even though we have such a mixture of blood, we are a hundred per cent Egyptian.



Amin Yehia Pasha and Abdel Fattah Pasha

We used to have English governesses, and one of them, called Miss Griffith, would take us for a walk on the beach during sunset. And every time she'd say, "Do you see the setting sun?" and we'd answer, "Yes, Miss Griffith." Then she'd go on, "The sun is setting but the sun never sets on the British Empire." So we could have had complexes with these foreign schools and all that, but never for a moment did we feel anything but Egyptian. It wasn't difficult to integrate because it was a period when everybody was cosmopolitan. All our friends were Egyptians, foreigners, Italians, Greeks. There was never a question of color or of creed.

At school, the English Girls College, it was a picnic. It was a "healthy spirit in a healthy body" and so it was sports. We played lacrosse and hockey and of course there was the swimming pool. Education wasn't as good, so I had extra classes at home and did matriculate.



Chamber of Commerce, established by Yehia Pasha

My mother believed in Saint Rita and Saint Therese. Once I had this strange experience. I was pregnant and had been in hospital for three months. She knew the priest of Saint Therese. He gave my mother some consecrated oil and he came to hospital to rub me with it. When it inadvertently fell to the



English Girls College

ground I told my mother, "Can't you see how I'm suffering? Why are you doing this to me now?" And my mother said, "Forgive her, Saint Therese, forgive her." That same night I lost the baby and was in danger of losing my life. They had to resort to a Caesarian operation and I almost died. So there are inexplicable signs.

Much later and due to circumstances, I took an exam and worked as a tour guide, which enabled me to rediscover our rich heritage. I also opened a gallery in the huge basement. Once it happened that Christmas and the Islamic feast, the Eid, coincided. So I had this Christmas tree with carols in the background, and at the same time I was passing round plates piled with Eid cakes.

My father was a magistrate who taught us to always listen to both sides of an argument before judging. He used to listen a lot to the Koran and often told me: "If I had the choice, I'd choose Islam." I read long passages of the

Old and the New Testaments, and so when my friends or foreigners asked what was happening, or what feast this was, I was able to come up with an answer most of the time. I have gone on pilgrimage but I don't wear the veil, because for us religion is compassionate and axiomatic. It is living your times today and tomorrow, but with yesterday's experience. And your conscience guides you, based on religious principles and the attestation "There is no God but Allah and that Mohamed is His Prophet". My brothers, who have emigrated, come with their children every year. That is to give them a sense of their roots and their religion. *Et que Dieu fasse passer avec douceur ce qui est écrit.*

<p>— 2 —</p> <p>У ИМЕ ЊЕГОВОГ ВЕЛИЧАНСТВА ПЕТРА I ПО МИЛОСТИ БОЖЈОЈ И ВОЉИ НАРОДНОЈ КРАЉА СРБИЈЕ AU NOM DE SA MAJESTÉ PIERRE I PAR LA GRACE DE DIEU ET PAR LA VOLONTÉ DU PEUPLE ROI DE SERBIE</p> <p>Издаје се путна исправа српском држављанину Le présent passeport est délivré au sujet serbe</p> <p>Име <i>Ahmed Mazi</i> Nom</p> <p>Занимање <i>Avocat</i> Profession</p> <p>Из <i>Dulcigno</i> Originaire de</p> <p>Среда <i>Monténégro</i> Appartenance</p> <p>Округа Département</p>	<p>— 3 —</p> <p>Лични опис — Signalement</p> <p>Године <i>12.6.29-1-1882</i> Age</p> <p>Сшас. <i> moyenne</i> Taille</p> <p>Лице <i> oblong</i> Visage</p> <p>Коса <i> châtain</i> Cheveux</p> <p>Очи <i> id.</i> Yeux</p> <p>Уши <i> régulièrs</i> Bouche</p> <p>Нос Nes</p> <p>Бркови <i> châtain</i> Moustaches</p> <p>Брада <i> rasée</i> Barbe</p> <p>Особени знаци <i> néant</i> Signes particuliers</p> <p>Својеручни потпис — Signature du porteur</p> <p><i>[Signature]</i></p>
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Zeinab Niazi-Badr's great uncle from Montenegro, Ismail Yousty



Amin Pasha Yehia, Zeinab's maternal grandfather, who was a great industrialist and a philanthropist



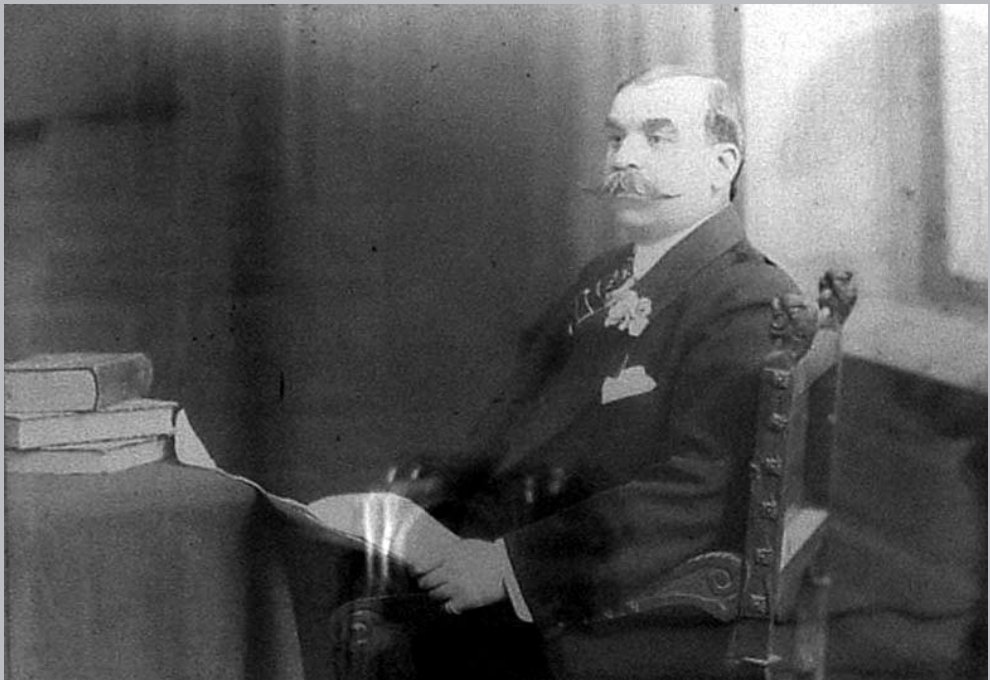
Zeinab Niazi-Badr's maternal uncle, Ali Amin Yehia Pasha



The Turkish wife of Ali Amin Yehia Pasha



Zeinab Niazi-Badr's mother, Saneya Yehia, with Zeinab's daughter, Louffeya Hassanein



Ahmed Yehia, Zeinab's mother's grandfather

SHAWAM (SYRO-LEBANESE)



LUCETTE DE SAAB

Is a fourth generation Lebanese who lived through all the changes the city went through and refused to leave even after the family wealth was nationalized.

My mother was born in Alexandria. Her grandparents, the Klats, originated in Tripoli, Lebanon. As for my father's side, his grandfather came to Egypt from Baabda in Lebanon. They came by boat and settled in Mansourah. They were merchants. My grandfather spent all his life in Mansourah. My father first went to boarding school in Cairo, with the Jesuits, then to boarding school in Alexandria, also with the Jesuits. When he got married he settled in Alexandria.



La Réforme Illustrée



Count Aziz de Saab and his wife in Vichy, 1927



Viviane Tawil in Sidi Bishr Beach No. 2

My father owned a lot of agricultural land. But his hobby, he always said, was the two newspapers: *La Réforme* and *La Réforme Illustrée*. He bought *La Réforme* from the Frenchman Cannivet. Then, later on he founded *La Réforme Illustrée*.

I was born in our house on rue des Pharaons. In those days we were all born at home. I had two sisters. One I never knew because she died of typhoid when I was two. My mother died when I was ten and a half. We've always had English governesses, and we spoke English at home, with the governess and with my mother, but French with my father. Although I went to a French school, Notre Dame de Sion, I have always been better at English and I think in English. I went to school only when I was ten years old. Because my eldest sister had died of typhoid, my mother was scared I would catch something at school. So I had private tutoring at home and went to school quite late. There were only sixteen of us in class. My best friends date back to schooldays: Sybille Magar, who is now in England, and Jeanette Stamatopoulo who is also in England, and then there were Lebanese like myself, Khoury, and Lumbroso who was Italian, and Heikal who was Turkish and Armenians and Egyptians and of course lots of Greeks.

In the summer we used to go to the beach, to Sidi Bishr Beach No. 2. I don't know why, but it was more chic than no. 1 or no. 3. That was before Agami. We also used to travel to Europe three months a year. We'd go by boat and take our car with us.



Sidi Bishr Beach No. 2

I was imprisoned by mistake in 1967. My husband used to work for the Egyptian arms factories, but at the same time we used to mingle often with the diplomatic corps. So he would be working with the Egyptian military on Fridays, and on Saturdays and Sundays he would be with the Americans. They had every right to suspect us. Afterwards they realized it was a mistake and apologized, and I was not upset.

By the seventies everybody had left: my friends, my family, everybody had gone. But I never thought of leaving Egypt, in spite of the hard times and the fact that all our property was nationalized. I love Alexandria, and the people here are adorable. You won't find like them anywhere in the world. I quickly made new friends, Egyptians I knew from golf. They were all very charming and very very warm, and we're still friends. Many of my friends who left come

back for visits. The old ones who don't have an easy life in Europe, come here and find a much more pleasant life which is also cheaper. Then, there is the human warmth which they do not find in Europe.



On board the *Espéria*

SWISS



ESTHER ZIMMERLI HARDMAN

Born in Alexandria to Swiss parents, she left Alexandria in 1950 at the age of sixteen and currently lives in Switzerland.

My father was a doctor and he came to Egypt in 1929. I was born in Alexandria in 1934. The Swiss community then included the four cotton magnates: Von Planta, Reinhardt, Cooper and Burckhardt. The doctors were Preisvlex and Koch. And of course there was the patisserie Flückiger, which still exists. There were around a thousand Swiss in Egypt, seven hundred of whom were in Alexandria. There was the Swiss Club, and we had an annual Swiss bazaar and national day. There were plays and performances in the Swiss Club.



The Swiss School of Alexandria in Chatby

I remember once I went with a friend of mine to a French church near Chatby. And then I told my mother I would like to wear a gold cross, and she replied, "We are Protestants, not Catholics!" Then the weddings. I would see things I never saw in Switzerland. Everybody got bonbonnières of almonds. That, too, is Egypt to me. It isn't the case in Switzerland.

I went to the Swiss School until 1945, where I studied French, with German as a foreign language and Arabic as the second foreign language. Then I went to the Scottish School for Girls and after that to the English Girls College. I spoke Swiss German with my parents and French with my brother. This city was extremely multicultural. We never had problems of "You are Jewish" or "You are Greek". We were all friends. There was



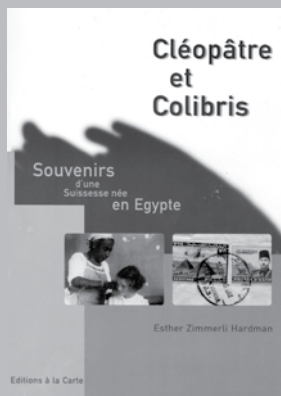
Pâtisserie Flückiger



A play performed at the Swiss Club by members of the Swiss community. Esther Zimmerli's father is on the far right.

a great friendship between all the nationalities. I loved it especially because we could speak all the languages throughout the day. When I came to Switzerland, I heard nothing but Swiss all day long, and I found that not at all interesting.

It was very difficult and distressing to adapt to life in Switzerland, especially in winter. I remember my father waking me up, saying, "You have to get up, it's time for school", and I said, "But I was dreaming of Stanley Bay. The sea was blue and you woke me up." I looked outside and it was gray and white. It was very painful for me. I have a great nostalgia for the Alexandria that no longer exists. And now that I have seen Dr Awad's exhibition, with all the old photos, I have difficulty in holding back my tears and I feel a warmth creeping upon me.



My book is entitled: *Cleopatra and Colibris: Memories of an Alexandrian-born Swiss*. The Cleopatra section deals with my life in Alexandria, Egypt. As a young girl I got married to an English officer and so I lived for a while with him in Germany: that was the British occupation army posted in Germany. Then I lived for three years in Jamaica, the Colibris section of the book.



Old photo of Stanley Bay beach and cabins

TURKS



HALA ABDEL HAMID HAFEZ

Is Turkish on both sides of the family and has always lived in Alexandria.



Abdel Rahman Hafez



King Farouk and Abdel Hamid Hafez, 1937

My grandfather was sent by the Ottoman Empire to work in the *daira* of King Fouad in Cairo. He came at the beginning of the twentieth century with his three sons, one of whom was my father, born in Kavalla in 1901. My grandfather's name was Abdel Rahman Hafez, while my father's was Abdel Hamid Hafez, so my name is really Hala Abdel Hamid Hafez Abdel Rahman Hafez. My father went to school in Cairo and then graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in 1925. He came to Alexandria in the 30s when the Faculty of Medicine was being established and they needed a surgeon. He established the Surgery Department which was called after him until recently. Also, his statue stood, until recently, in the premises of the Faculty of Medicine. He eventually became head of the Surgery Department, then vice dean of the faculty, as well as the chairperson of the Surgery Department in Moassat Hospital and manager of the Mohamed Ali Mabara Hospital. He died in 1955.



Hala Hafez with a foreign governess in Laurens



Fatma Azza Sabry, Hala Hafez, Hadir Hafez, Asser Hafez, Abdel Hamid Hafez

My mother was half Turkish. They were Turks on her mother's side. Ismail Sabry Pasha, who was the commander of the forts of Alexandria during the bombardment of 1882, then Governor of Alexandria, was my maternal grandfather's grandfather. On her father's side they were Ashraf; descendents of the Prophet. Each of the daughters had to have a name from the family of the Prophet. So Fatma was added to my mother's name, becoming Fatma Azza; Zeinab was added to my aunt's name to become Zeinab Tomader; and Nafissa was added to the third sister's name to become Nafissa Omayma. The Ashrafs received a form of stipend or grant from Saudi Arabia. However, the Ashrafs were perpetuated through the male line, and as there were no further male issues on that side of the family, the line stopped there.

When my parents got married they first lived in a rented villa in Ramleh, in Kafr Abdou Street. Then my father bought land and built a villa also in Ramleh, in Laurens. My father spoke English but not French, and my mother spoke French with a smattering of English, so they generally used Arabic at home. As children, we only had governesses until the age of three. I had English and German governesses; my sister had French governesses, and my brother, who was a good deal younger, had Lebanese governesses, as this was after the war and English, French and German governesses were getting rare. As there were no kindergartens then, I was sent to a small private establishment run by an Englishwoman called Miss Davies. After that I went to the Sacred Heart School.

Decorum was carefully observed at home. The correct form of address had to be used. My brother, who was the youngest, had to address his elder sister as *Abla*, a Turkish form indicating respect or reverence. And as I was the eldest, he had to address me as *Abla Hanem*, which indicated greater respect.

My mother was very particular about her kohl. She would ask the maids to collect jasmine flowers from the garden for her, which they did in large quantities. Then she would pour on the jasmine two drops of almond oil,

and heat the flowers over a low fire, covering them. Eventually, the soot which had collected inside the cover would be scraped and put in the *mak-hala*, the kohl container. That was how they made the kohl.

In the days before refrigerators, keeping water cool was an elaborate business. Water was kept in a clay jar called *olla*. In the evening, some mastic would be heated and the *olla* overturned above it, to take in the fragrance of the mastic. It would then be left standing upside down for a while to retain the fragrance. There was also a special copper tray and the copper covers for the *ollas*, which had to be cleaned daily, and made to shine brightly. They would be sent to the special copper cleaner once a month to be cleaned professionally. So every morning, the *ollas* which had been perfumed with mastic would be filled with water, arranged on the shining copper tray, and covered with the shining copper tops. The tray would



Mak-hala, the kohl container

be placed in a cool place in the shade, possibly a window sill, and cool water would be available for all. As the clay was porous, cool water would seep out of the *olla* onto the tray. They would put lemons on the tray, and the cool water would preserve the lemons, which could remain fresh for up to a week. So the whole system provided cool fragrant water and kept the lemons fresh. People still use *ollas* in the streets, to provide water for pedestrians. It is an Islamic form of charity and is called *sabil*.

My maternal aunt, Tomader, was a great patriot and the constant companion of Saad and Safia Zaghoul. She used to go on demonstrations and was often locked up in police stations by the British. She aborted herself seven times because she had no time to give birth or raise children. Once she failed to abort herself. She decided that if the child was a boy it would be called Dureid, and if a girl it would be called Daad. As Dr Mouron pulled out the child he said, "And here is little Saad", so the boy became Dureid Saad. Then he pulled out another and said, "And here is little Safia", and the twin girl became Daad Safia. It was the doctor who gave them the names Saad and Safia.

My parents had an active social life. They mixed freely with members of other communities. Going to the cinema was an important occasion. Women had to wear their furs and full make up. There were also charity balls. In summer they went to the beach. In addition, women had what was called *moqabla*, a bit like the “at home” day, an afternoon meeting in one of the homes. The hostess would provide entertainment for her guests, which would be a singer or a *noud* player. If it was a man, he would be seated further off, behind a screen. If it was a woman, she would sit among the guests.



Azza, Tomader and Omayma with Stanley Bay beach in the background



Fatma Azza Sabry



Hala Hafez



LAILA ORFALI

From Constantinople on her father's side, now living in Brazil. She describes her nostalgia for Alexandria.

The origins of the Orfali family are in a Turkish city called Orfa, now Odessa. They left around the end of the nineteenth century. One branch went to Lebanon, and the other to Alexandria. Of course I belong to the branch that came to Alexandria. My mother is a Delmar, an Italian family. During World War II she was in the Red Cross, and my father had had an appendix operation, and that's how they met each other. My mother's father was a Jew, but he converted to Catholicism to marry my grandmother, who was a Catholic from Florence. She was born in Florence, not here. My father was Orthodox, so I was brought up in a house where both rites — Catholic and Orthodox—were practiced.



Darwish Building, designed by W. Orfali

ALEXANDRIE Info **No 33**
Décembre 2009

Bulletin semestriel de l'AAHA - Amicale Alexandrie Hier et Aujourd'hui
 "Dépassés, mais unis; unis, mais divers."

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"Quand on aime la vie, on aime le passé parce que c'est le présent tel qu'il a survécu dans la mémoire humaine." Les yeux ouverts" Marguerite Youriène.

"Mostachefa El Talaba", ancien Hôpital Israélite, situé à la rue d'Aboukir, en face du Sporting Club.
 Photo prise par Olivier Guignard en 2009

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The newsletter of the Amicale Alexandrie Hier et Aujourd'hui published by Sandro Manzoni

We left in 1964. I came back in 1991, then again in 1997, with the Amicale Alexandrine [Amicale Alexandrie Hier et Aujourd'hui]. I had been living in Athens, and once a young salesgirl who was also from Alexandria told me, "You know, there's somebody in Geneva who puts ex-Alexandrians in touch. Do you want his address?" And I said, "Yes, why not?" So that was how I got in touch with Sandro Manzoni in Geneva. And that's how I came on that second trip, and I went to Geneva a few months later. The Amicale Alexandrine have a lot of events. First I went on that beautiful trip with them, then I met school friends, childhood friends, even members of my family whom I had not seen for a long time.

I don't know how to explain it, but all those born in Alexandria have that particular something which people in other countries, or other cities, don't have. A Cairene for example, would say, "No, that's it. One is no longer amused. Things are not what they used to be". And he wouldn't come again. The Alexandrian would return. I don't know why. Perhaps it's something in the air. But the Alexandrian is more attached to his/her city of birth than a Cairene is. Every time I come here, I feel the same emotion that sometimes makes me want to cry.

THE SPACES

It is evident that the ghosts are still there: in the air, perhaps, or within me. I meet them in the streets, and in certain shops that have kept their old names.

Laila Orfali





HOSNI AHMED EL TURKI, MOHAMED HASSAN MOHAMED, AND GALAL MAHMOUD SAID

Being from Bahari district in Alexandria, they talked about the Square of the Mosques.

It's called the Square of the Mosques because there are twelve sheikhs buried here. They are Sidi Abu Al Abbas Al Mursi, Sidi Yakout, Sidi El Abassiri, Sidi Aboul Fath, Sidi Nasr Eddin, Sidi El Haggari, Sidi El Mawazini, and Um Sidi Ibrahim El Dessouki is buried above Sidi Aboul Fath behind the Abu Al Abbas Al Mursi Mosque.



Sidi Abu Al Abbas Al Mursi Mosque

This was one of the best squares in Alexandria, in terms of its mosques and the *moulids* that were held here, and also because it is in Bahari which is one of the oldest quarters in Alexandria. It is an old, popular neighborhood and full of local people, while a place like Ramleh is aristocratic. The inhabitants of Bahari were all one family, hand in hand in joy and sorrow. They were friendly people who loved each other. The three of us are originally from Bahari and we're still here. But other people have moved out, and gone to other places, like Wardian and Amriya and Qabbari. This was when the cemeteries and houses, which were in the place of the square, were demolished. The original inhabitants of Bahari are now the oldest, in addition to the newly arrived ones, who have come from the countryside and Rashid (Rosetta).



The shrine of Sidi About Fath

Because of the number of shrines in this Square of Mosques, in Bahari, *moulids* were held here that lasted for fourteen days. They would chant religious songs and praise God Almighty and the Prophet Mohamed, peace be upon him, all day and night. On Fridays, after the noon prayer, there would be *zikh* until



The domes of Sidi El Abassiri Mosque

the afternoon prayer. People sang the praise of the Prophet, peace be upon him. We used to serve them and see to their needs, since we were the sons of the neighborhood. We were seven or eight families, and we gave what we could: beans, tea, all for the guests who were doing the *zikr*. Hosni used to make *sherbet* and pass it round, at 6 am after the dawn prayer, after the *zikr*. They would all drink it as if it was a wedding. They used to call it the *sabahiya*, “the morning after”, just like a wedding. We would go on chanting and praising the holy men. The *moulid* of Sidi Abu Al Abbas was, for us, like a wedding. We’d start preparing for it fifteen days in advance. It was like somebody was getting married and this was the big night we’d celebrate till morning, drinking *sherbet* and distributing *bon bon*.

This Sidi Yakout el Arsh was a great man. His *moulid* was the eve of 27 Ramadan. Rice pudding and rice with honey had to be made. His offering was known: rice and honey. Everyone going into the mosque of Sidi Yakout had to eat rice and honey. On the day of the *moulid*, after the dawn prayer, our mothers—*not* our wives—had to clean and sweep the mosque. The mosque was built by private efforts, and the donations of the good people. We all did our bit. If we could contribute by providing a brick, we did. Others from outside Bahari also made contributions. Some would bring a car-load of sand, others of iron or cement. They knew that Sidi Yakout was well loved.

Honestly, this commercial project they set up in the square—the people of the neighborhood were unhappy about it. Before this project, we used to stand by the sea and see all this square, and whoever was stressed out would feel tranquil when he saw the square. But now it's an evil place. It's full of cafés and girls sitting smoking *shisha* (narghile). There are sorry disrespectful sights that do not go with this holy pure place, which contains the greatest number of mosques in Alexandria. And that wedding hall they set up. You would have the call for the evening prayer going on in the mosque, and people on the other side banging away on drums and ululating and dancing. That is most sinful and unholy. When there used to be a *moulid* people would come in their thousands, and the people of the neighborhood would be thrilled with all these people, but now they aren't anymore. It is only the Maamoura Company that is making any use out of this project. There's this shop of Osta Saber, facing us. It used to be open twenty-four hours a day for the people who used to come to the square, and offered water and *sherbet*, and he had a tap outside the shop for water. He used to work very well in the past, but now he doesn't work as he used to. We've heard that the governor wants to demolish this project and that he's not satisfied with it. We hope so. It looks really bad.

There were lots of games during the feasts, like shadow plays, football, swings, puppets. We would be so happy to see so many people coming from all over the country to play. The guy who used to do the puppet show was called Houda el Esh and used to sit at the Mawazini Café. He used to imitate Shoukoukou and for us it was more fun watching him than going to the cinema. We didn't like going to the cinema, because we always had feasts and weddings, like Fridays and the *mouliids* of Sidi Abu Al Abbas, Sidi Yakout El Arsh and El Abassiri, and *leylet el qadr* [the eve of 27 Ramadan]. These were our feasts in the past, but now, sadly, our happiness has gone.

There was never a single foreigner living here. Neither foreigners nor Christians. This is the only area where there isn't a single Christian here in Sayala Street, and there isn't a church either.



Moulid sweets



Moulid games

Sometimes we get foreigners like tourists who want to go into the mosque, or stand outside and just watch. Sometimes they have a little booklet on the mosques of Alexandria or its sights, and among them is the mosque of Sidi Yakout. I take them inside the mosque, because we are proud of our religion and want to show them how great and beautiful it is. Sometimes the female tourists are dressed in short clothes and their hair is uncovered. That's why I get them a head cover and a long *abaya* to cover up the body so they can go into the mosque.

We're still living here. If we left this neighborhood and lived somewhere else, we'd die. All the inhabitants of Bahari, and especially El Sayala, would die if they left it.



The swings at *mouliids*



SAID MOHAMED SALEH

Barber in Sayala, spoke about the profession and the feasts, or *moulids*, that used to take place around the mosques.

The profession of “health barber” (literal translation from the Arabic) was common in the countryside, Upper Egypt and poorer quarters of cities. The barber functioned also as a doctor, and was responsible also for male and female circumcisions. While male circumcision was cause for great celebration, female circumcision, because it was not always hygienically or professionally done, sometimes led to mutilation or serious infections. The profession survives in the countryside and Upper Egypt, but has died out in Alexandria. Today, the barber only cuts hair.

I was born in 1935, in El Sayala, Alexandria.

This barber's shop belonged to my father. There was also Haj Mohamed Salit, who had a barber's shop, and he was like a health barber because he used to treat people and do circumcisions. The profession was widespread in the past. There weren't many doctors, so there were special shops.

I learnt the profession and when my father died in 1949 I took over the family business. Work is not what it used to be. In the past the customer would shave his beard every other day in my shop, but now they shave at home, and here only at the beginning of the month when they cash their salary. What can we do? Life has changed and become difficult and salaries are low. In the past everything was cheap. I've started to teach my son. He's a fast learner because he's educated and he understands quickly. One is not going to live forever. If I die the shop will remain open after my death.

When I was young I used to play around Abu Al Abbas Al Mursi and watch the people singing in praise of the Prophet. Every Friday there would be people praising in front of Sidi Yakout, and others in front of Sidi El Abassiri. Most of the people came from the countryside and Upper Egypt. Everybody used to come and there was a huge activity in buying and selling. Then the government did this market project, and now nobody comes for *zkr* or praise anymore. This project has killed the street, and closed it because the market is like a circle. Ramadan and feasts are peak times. Up till now there are swings behind Abu Al Abbas. People still come on Thursdays and Fridays and create a bit of an atmosphere in the area.

Abu Al Abbas was built on the actual coast, and all the area between Abu Al Abbas and the sea was sand. It was paved in the days of King Fouad. The tram road was called Sheikh Mohamed Korayem, or Tatwig Street. That's the street where all the pashas lived: Fahmy El Nadouri, one of the Tarabolsi family, and lots of pashas. They lived in villas. But now all these villas have been pulled down and there are apartment blocks in their place. When you go out to the tram road, on the left, you'll find all those apartment blocks that have replaced the villas between the sea and the tram. That's Tatwig Street.

The *magazeeb* who sing praises and follow the Sufi and Shazly ways come to my shop. Some of them grow beards, some grow their hair, while others like to shave bald, here at Abu Al Abbas, because some people consider the area blessed. And sometimes they'd bring their newborn babies and shave them because they believed that the "tummy hair", the hair the baby is born with, had to be completely shaved to grow again. These were certain beliefs.

There were no foreigners living in Sayala. There were only Alexandrians here. But there were some Greeks who were connected to the sea. And now there are Upper Egyptians and peasants and it's heterogeneous.

There was a guy called Yanni, who had a grocery at the top of Fahmy el Nadouri Street. He used to organize cock fights here. They used to get these big cocks to fight, and people would watch. The contests were held every Sunday and all the people in the neighborhood would bet.

During feasts and moulids, the whole area would be like a fair. Apart from the swings, there was something called the Shika Bika. There were stages, and puppet shows and games and things like gambling too. This was before Sidi Yakout was demolished. Then, when it was rebuilt, these things took place once or twice, then the sheikh of Sidi Yakout refused and told the governorate that this was a religious square and that such things couldn't take place there. But these celebrations used to draw people. Throughout Ramadan people used to stay up all night and they all played and celebrated and watched the puppets and all. There was the shadow play, and the electric bulb, and the six-legged cow. Everybody loved the puppet show.

The sheikhs came from the Maghreb. Sidi Yakout was one of the people of the step. It means that he could go where he wanted, with God's wisdom. Like Sidi Khedr in the past. That's why they called him Sidi Yakout El Arsh: because he used to hear the call for prayer from the throne in the sky. He was a black slave and he came with Sidi Abu Al Abbas from the Maghreb.



ADEL EL BANNAN

The keeper of the Abul Dardar shrine spoke of the two stories that have survived in the collective memory of Alexandria about the place.

My father was the “servant” of the shrine of Abul Dardar, and when he died in 1968, I was appointed by the Supreme Sufi Council to take over his responsibilities, although I was still a child.

Sidi Abul Dardar, may God be pleased with him, is a revered *Sahabi* (Companion of the Prophet Mohamed), and he came during the Islamic Conquests with Amr Ibn El-Aas. He saw Alexandria, and “opened the gates of Alexandria” (to the Arab armies) from this area.

When the authorities wanted to remove the shrine to pave the road for the tramway, nobody wanted to do the job. I hear that the arm of the engineer who was in charge of the demolition got paralyzed. In the end the shrine was not removed, and the tram goes round it.

During World War II, they dropped a bomb on the shrine. But Abul Dardar rose, dressed all in white, and pushed the bomb all the way to the Police Headquarters. He detonated it and there was no explosion. This was during my father's time.



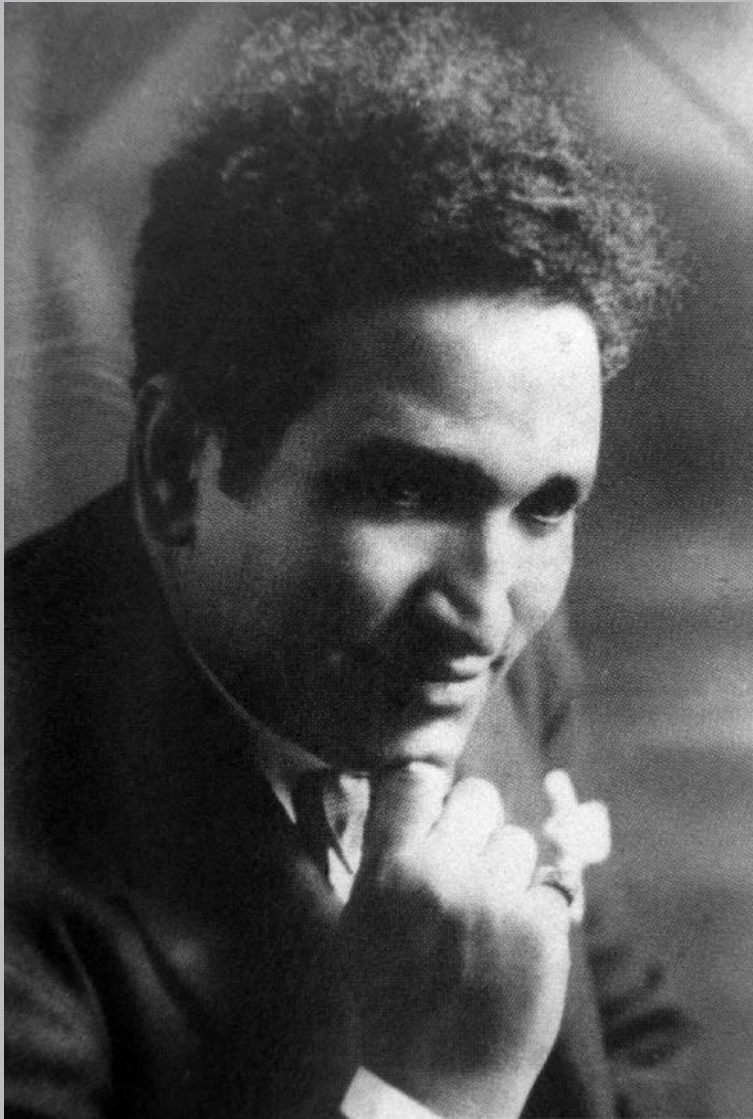
The shrine at Abul Dardar



HAJ MUSTAFA EL MULLA

A tailor in Kom el Dikk spoke of his memories of the neighborhood.

I was three or four years old in 1935, when I became conscious of living in Kom el Dikk. There were just a few residents. They were all originally Alexandrians, around ten families living together: the Hawawis, the Deebs, Sayed Darwish, and others. The families all lived in harmony together, and never had the kind of problems that would lead to police stations, and solved their problems internally, among themselves. They were like a tribal or Bedouin society. There was an elder who solved their problems, whether individual or collective.



Sayed Darwish

At first, there were only the local Alexandrians and foreigners, Greeks, Italians, French and Germans, living in Kom el Dikk. It had all the nationalities, just like any aristocratic quarter. Those foreigners stayed till the war in 1940 until 1945. They lived with us like family, just like common people, and their kids played with ours.

The Jews who were here worked mainly in commerce and pawnshops. There was a Jewish tailor called Salamoni, who had a shop at the far end of Kom el Dikk. We never felt he was a Jew. He employed Egyptians. He was a kind man who minded his own business, and left when the Jews departed in

the 60s. He came back for a visit fifteen or twenty years ago, to see all the people he had missed, the people he had lived with. There was no difference between Jew and Muslim, or intolerance. Kom el Dikk was full of Copts. We were neighbors and never felt they were Copts. And also in the same house: the Christian woman would send food to the Muslim woman, and all lived together as one family without any difference between Muslim, Christian or Jew. There was an innocence, a kindness, between people, not like today. There was no racism.

But the British were occupiers, and walked around in military uniforms not in civil clothes, and so they were treated differently from the ordinary foreigner. We hated them. We never wanted to see them. When they walked into the neighborhood we gave them a hard time. It was difficult for an Englishman to enter our neighborhood. People were very bothered by the occupiers. They were posted in Kom el Dikk Fort, where there is now the Roman theater. It was a hill around forty or forty-five meters high, and there were asphalt passageways up and down which they would climb. There were also cannons and batteries on the hill, for the planes during the war. All these things were on the hill. The British soldier was hated. Wherever he went he was beaten or killed, and his uniform would be stripped off him and sold.



Kom el Dikk

I personally don't have feelings of intolerance. For instance, in our café the French sit with us as if they were Egyptians. They are the people of the excavations and deep sea and sunken archeology. They sit with us and try to talk to us in Arabic, and some of us teach them Arabic words. The men and women sit with us, this one playing dominos, that one playing backgammon, and each doing his or her own thing. The small girls and boys just tell them "Hello".

We were eight brothers and each had a trade or craft. This was the community of Kom el Dikk. Our parents made sure that each one of us learned a trade or skill.

Sayed Darwish was very nationalistic, though he was young and died young. He also had this song, "Oh, Zaghoul dates, beautiful dates", which was really about Saad Zaghoul. He composed it to sing to Zaghoul when he came back from exile. He made an indirect reference to Zaghoul as if he was talking about the dates not the man, so that he wouldn't get arrested. But he didn't have the chance to sing it to him, because he died before Zaghoul arrived, or on the day of his return. Of course we wish there would be a Sayed Darwish Museum in Kom el Dikk. The neighborhood has acquired a lot of fame because of him, and the fame would have increased if there had been a museum here. It would have revived and activated the place and made it better.



MOHEB MAWHOUB

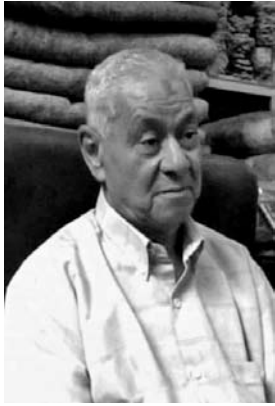
A photographer in the neighborhood of Labban reminisces about how he started in this profession.

I worked in a photography shop called Studio Kiriani. Kiriani was a Greek *khawaga* and I learned photography from him. I was young and went to work there as an apprentice. He was a good man. I worked with him and his brother, they were both good people. He was working very hard because he was quite famous as far as the popular neighborhood went. There was a section in the shop where he had a fake plane, boat, yacht, motorcycle, a fight with a lion, and all those things for people to be photographed on. His was the only studio that had those “tricks”. He was very famous in that area, and people came to him from all over to have their pictures taken in these tricks.

Then in 1949 when I was able to fend for my own, I came here and opened my own shop. It was a good season for work. It was the age of the revolution, and everything was photographed and photographs were everywhere, so there was a lot of scope for work. The revolution led to a boom in photography. We developed and printed in black and white. We did the whole process. But now, we neither develop nor print nor is there black and white, because there is no black and white film. It is not available because it is not in demand, nor is the black and white paper. Also, all work today is in color or digital, fast and on the spot. We didn't go into that business. We preferred to stay right where we were until our work froze.

There were loads of foreigners living here in Labban and Attarine. This area was full of foreigners, three quarters of it were foreigners. Armenians, Greeks, Syrians and Lebanese (Shawam), and there were some French people too. They had their photo taken many times. The relationship between Egyptians and foreigners was very good. Everyone respected everyone else.

Take me for example. I am a simple man. I am Christian and next to me is the milkman who is Muslim. The rain falls on both our ceilings and we cooperate because harm befalls the both of us, and good fortune also befalls the both of us, we both rush off to fix it, so the matter really does not come down to being Muslim and Christian, it is more general than that, we are all one, but everyone has to understand that.

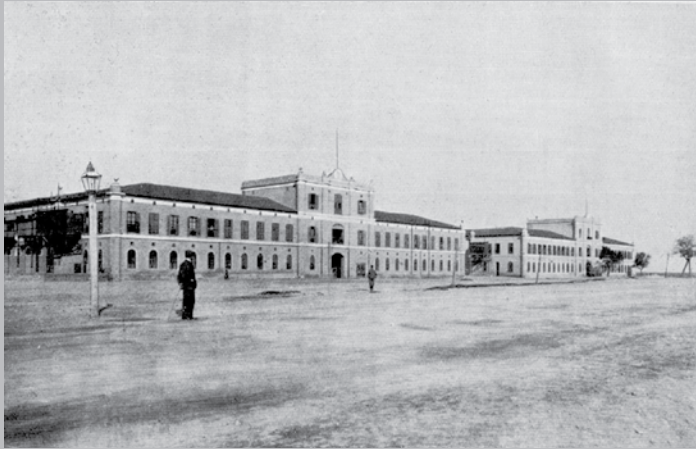


MOHAMED IBRAHIM ABDEL SAMAD

Spoke about his experience as an Egyptian living with foreigners in Attarine.

I was born in 1930 in Attarine. I know everybody and everybody knows me.

My father, may God rest his soul, used to trade in clothes and British army rejects. In the past the army used to sell clothes, not the Egyptian army—there was an Egyptian army but it was very simple. We used to go and take things from the Egyptian army in Mustafa Kamel and there was a huge camp and barracks



Mustafa Kamel, British barracks

there, where the army apartments are now. The place was empty, and there used to be dormitories and blankets and all sorts of clothes: trousers, suits, coats, socks and woolen suits. They used to auction them off in the Egyptian army but it was a very small army. It was the British army that used to sell clothes in the camp in Mustafa Kamel and Kom el Dikk. This used to be a very high hill, and the British forces had their dorms underneath. We used to go and buy things there. The clothes we bought from the British camps were new things. Britain was a rich country and had lots to wear and sell. When the army moved it would sell all the stuff and not take anything with it. So if they moved from one camp to the other, they would go in new clothes, and the old clothes they'd leave behind to sell here. And they weren't really old clothes, they were good. Some were in wooden boxes that had not been opened, each containing fifty or a hundred pieces of cloth. And we'd go and buy the old things.



Mustafa Kamel, 2006

The British were occupying us but they used to want to please people so that people would be grateful to them and thank them. We used to go and beat them up in Ramleh Station. We'd divide into groups, like those of Palestine, and their camp was in Ramleh Station, where there was a large square. We'd go to that camp and throw stones at them. They were brave kids, like the *fedayyeen* of Palestine. We were like that here. Why else did they leave the country? Weren't we the ones who liberated the country?

Midan el Soureyyeen [Syrians' Square] was famous for the Biyassa and Khawaga Elias, who had a quail restaurant. He was from Lebanon. He and his son George were very famous. They'd sell the quail, salads, baba ghanouj, oregano, lemons, and beautiful things like that, all for ten piasters. He was my neighbor. I was in the shop next door. This man would see me come down from my house in the morning, and he'd come down too to help me open the shop. Then he'd go in and make two pies, one for me and one for him. We'd eat those pies, and not have lunch. See, those Shawam, the Syrians, they cooked really well. See how neighborly and kind. Our local quails aren't very good. But when the migrating ones start arriving on 5 or 10 September, he'd prepare a meal for us of twenty quails or so, and send them round to the house before even taking any money.

Everybody used to come here. From Karmouz, Moharrem Bey, Pharaana, El Labban, Ragheb, Bab Omar Pasha, Ramleh Station, Anfoushi, Bahari, everywhere. Because Attarine was full of foreigners. They weren't foreigners, they were colleagues. There were Egyptians and Syrians and some Australians and Italians. The foreigners were living with us in safety as neighbors. We'd ask about them and they'd ask about us. They'd eat our food and we'd eat theirs. The Jews were good, they were not bad. They'd help us out.

Most of the foreigners were employees, not merchants. Whether they were Italians or Greeks or Australians, they worked in the water and electricity companies. The foreigners were in charge of all positions, because the companies all belonged to them, and there was no public sector. Only a commercial sector. They were in charge of it all, whether the small or big shops. And the water works and electricity and the railway. They earned well and lived much better than us. The Arab Alexandrians led a very bad life, because they were not educated. They were helpless and were not in commerce and employment. And who would employ them? The foreigners owned all the organizations, and they employed only foreigners like themselves. Even the railway, which was in the government public sector, employed foreigners. The Egyptians would only sweep the floor.

They used to call Attarine the foreigners' quarter. There were very few Egyptians there. Our house was full of Greeks, and this house and this house. I was a stranger among them. We, the Egyptians, were the strangers, not them!

GOMA'A ALI ABDEL RAZEK AND MUSTAFA HAMIDO

The first is the owner of the Sheikh Ali Bar, formerly known as the Cap d'Or, and the second is former captain of the Olympic Club. Both spoke about the history of one of Alexandria's landmarks.

Goma'a Ali Abdel Razek



My father went to the *kuttab* [Koranic school]. He was quiet and kind, and that is why they called him el Sheikh Ali. We bought this place for 500 pounds in 1958 from its Greek owners when they decided to leave the country because of the nationalizations. But my father didn't work here before we bought it. He used to sell books and newspapers. We left it as it was, with its *khawagas* who used to work in it. But it was bigger then, because it was divided into two parts, a grocery and a bar. The taxes foreclosed on the shop and divided it. We bought the bar, and another company called the Textile Company bought the grocery.



The Cap d'Or, better known now as el Sheikh Ali



In the past, I saw Soliman Ezzat, Ghaith Abdel Nasser, Mazloum Pasha, Farghali Pasha and Bassili Pasha here. All these were our customers. Also the cotton exchange people used to come, because the exchange was near us, here. Our customers came from the rich classes only and the sons of pashas. In 1979, with the Open Door Policy and the appearance of banks and maritime agencies, the ordinary Egyptians began to come for working lunches and dinners. Youths and employees began to come after 79.

Mustafa Hamido (Bouri)



I've been coming here since 1964, that is for over forty years because this place is good and peaceful, even though it is a bar. I like sitting here and I need not drink alcohol. I used to like el Sheikh Ali, Goma'a's father, and he used to like football and support the Egyptian national team. It was my honor to be the captain of the Egyptian national team for a while, and of course a lot of our football stars used to come here with me, and a lot of artists too. The Sheikh Ali restaurant is also famous internationally. Sometimes when I used to travel abroad foreigners (Italians, Greeks, Czechs, even Egyptians) would ask me, "Do you know the Sheikh Ali restaurant in Alexandria?" I used to feel proud to say, "I always go there." When I used to travel by boat I'd find that the captain and the crew knew Sheikh Ali well.

All the stars come to this place because it is an artistic place. It is full of inspiration and leads you to be creative and innovative. Sheikh Ali Bar is a school in itself. I derived part of my general culture from Sheikh Ali Bar. The design of the bar is foreign and wonderful and old. It was the foreigners who designed it. There's a saying that goes, "If you don't have a past you don't have a present or future." This bar is our past. The sons of Sheikh Ali are trying to preserve the old heritage of the bar.



Mohamed Farghaly Pasha, the pasha with the famous carnation buttonhole

Sometimes it gets very crowded and people stand waiting for an empty table or seat. The place is open for rich and poor alike. You can order something for ten pounds or for five thousand pounds. It's the only bar or restaurant where there is democracy, because the someone who has ten pounds is like someone who has ten thousand: they're both sitting in the same place.



AHMED ABOU ZEID

Internationally known anthropologist spoke about Qabbari, where he was brought up, and cosmopolitanism in several areas.

I was born in 1921 in Alexandria, as was my father and my grandfather before him.

The families that were in the cotton export business were all foreigners, unlike those who were in the onion export business, who were mostly Egyptian. A few Egyptian families were involved in the export of cotton, along with the foreign families, like the family of Mohamed Farghaly Pasha and the family of Yehia Pasha, but there were only a few Egyptian families who were in the cotton export business. The import business was managed by two Egyptian families: ours, or actually, my father, and another Egyptian family. They used to import coal and there was fierce competition in the business of importing coal with the Jewish merchants who were mostly from Belgium.

The inhabitants of Qabbari lived together in a sort of harmonious manner. They all belonged to one class—the middle class—and they were in the import/export business. The Qabbari community was made of families who shared the same values and bonded together in friendship. They were mainly Muslims except for a couple of Coptic families. The intermingling between the Muslim and Coptic families was very strong. We never felt any difference between a Copt or a Muslim. To give you a good example, there was a Copt called Baskharon: I ate at aunt Demyana's (his wife) more than I did at home. I had very friendly relations with his children. There was also one Jewish family, in one of the neighboring houses, somebody who worked at the Water Company or the Electricity Company, I cannot remember which. His name was Bakhoum and he had many friends and strong relations with all the families in the neighborhood.

There was one Greek family to the south of Qabbari, living in front of the fields. These Greek families considered themselves Egyptians. When I was a little child, a Greek quarrelled with an Egyptian because he called him Khawaga. The Greek asserted he was just as 'Egyptian' as the Egyptian. "I am not a 'foreigner', my dear chap, I am an Egyptian, just like you." This shows what close relations the foreign community had with the Egyptian community and how loyally affiliated these foreign communities were to this place—there was a sense of belonging to the place. Even the storehouses that were found in this area had a large number of foreign workers. A large number of Italians, Greeks and British capitalists and businessmen who worked in this field formed strong ties with the families of the area. We visited them in celebration of their feasts and they, likewise, visited us in celebration of our feasts. There was a kind of harmony, a blending, despite the difference of nationality, religion and language.

There was never a group asking to be separate or independent. There was never any great enmity. There was of course animosity between individuals or families, but never between communities or groups of people. I think that the unity and bonding between Egyptians and foreigners is evident among the lower classes, some of whom survived by bullying others. The Egyptian and foreign—whether Greek or Italian—bullies joined hands in crime and

burglary. I personally saw this phenomenon during the war. The convoys that used to carry food and ammunition to the British soldiers used to dock in the Libyan port, and move by land to Alexandria. Here, gangs of Muslim and Coptic Egyptians, Greeks and Italians would attack the convoys, loot them, and sell the stolen goods in the market. This is an example of unity and integration among diverse cultural elements, where all differences had dissolved because they all felt they belonged to this country.

The foreigners respected the month of Ramadan. They neither smoked nor ate in public. Ordinarily, their meals were delivered from their homes during the work day in a kind of multi-layered or towered metal utensil or lunch-box. But these never seemed to appear in the month of Ramadan. This shows compassion and respect for our customs and traditions.

There was also a great sense of sympathy and compassion between the families. Qabbari was closely knit. The families would share any special meal they cooked with the neighborhood. When any family had prepared or cooked some speciality for a special occasion, you would see dishes of these special treats moving from house to house, especially when it was the first time for some



Rumi cheese

vegetable to be cooked at the beginning of its season, such as *molokheya*. The first household to cook it must make every house in the neighborhood taste it. They called this *el-bashayer* meaning the first sign of good things to come, or good omen. This happened with the foreign families as well, the Jews and the Greeks. There were a number of grocery shops on the road to Mex. They were mostly owned by Greeks and they used to sell alcohol. The families in the area and the shop owners maintained strong friendly relations. These families used to offer the shop owners, their specially prepared treats as well as *el-bashayer* too. And the shop owners did likewise when the occasion arose. When they got new kinds of cheese they sent some, as a gift, to all the families in the neighborhood. Of course, there were also commercial reasons—if their neighbors liked the taste of these sample gifts they'd buy these different kinds of cheese.

In Ramadan, Qabbari became a theater area, like Emad El-Din in Cairo. Alexandria had theatrical troupes like those of Eid Khamis Sukkar, Mustafa

Hammam and El Messiri. They had their theatrical activities all year round, but in Ramadan, in Minet El Bassal they evacuated the place. I do not know why. Was it because it was the end of the onion season? Or, was it because they put up large tents? There were not only theatrical companies from Alexandria but famous companies like that of Ali El-Kassar also came to put on their performances. The theater companies came during the summer months and in Ramadan, be it summer or winter, and spent fifteen days in Qabbari and fifteen days in Bahari.

I used to go every now and then with my father to the Commercial Café. That is why I got to know the merchants. They used to order tea, coffee and *shisha*. But my father used to order a piece of cake for me, because I was only a kid at that time. The waiters were all Greek. The Egyptians came to work as waiters in the café business only after the war. Women also used to go to cafes. And it wasn't only the foreign ladies who went, there were also Egyptian ladies. But there was a general air of decency and a sense of modesty. This sense of modesty was not only limited to the attitude of Egyptian Muslim women. The foreign women also respected the customs and traditions of the local culture. Women went to *Délices* and *Trianon* or just went for walks and strolled down Fouad Street in front of the present Palace of Creativity. It used to be called the Mohamed Ali Club frequented by royalty: princes, pashas and ministers gathered there. The women who frequented these places were definitely cultured, of course, and belonged to a certain class—the middle class—and that was a cultured class, or they belonged to the upper classes which were in trade, or they were the wives of foreigners.



Délices Patisserie



Trianon Café

Alexandria was a cultural center in the true sense of the word, an international and multicultural one, of all the different nationalities. You could hear all languages spoken especially in Manshieh. We picked up many Italian and Greek words as children. Manshieh and Ramleh Station were highly cultured, cosmopolitan areas.

The city center was metaphorically referred to as the “navel” of the city. It attracted the members of the royal family who were interested in high brow culture and who sponsored cultural and artistic activities and functions, like Prince Mohamed Ali, Princess Chevikar and Prince Omar Toussoun who, from a historical point of view, generously did many kinds of services for Alexandria. There was a house



Mohamed Ali Club

on Saad Zaghloul street that became La Maison du Français or the House of French. I saw Princess Chevikar when I was in the senior school. She invited Jean Cocteau to Alexandria and he gave a lecture when we were at the senior school and we went to meet with him in person. Taha Hussein invited André Gide and Georges Emile and I saw them at the House of French. This feeling of a senior school pupil sitting with those great people was the greatest motivation to become cultured.

The bookshops were located more or less in the same place that they occupy now. There weren't any Egyptians who owned bookshops. Where Al-Maaref bookshop now stands, on Saad Zaghloul Street, there was a bookshop called Victoria. It was owned by a Greek. When we were at secondary school, we used to come from Ras El Tin—because I was a student at Ras



Al Maaref bookshop

El Tin School in both the primary and secondary stages—to visit the bookshop. We used to read an English book for about five piastres, or ten piastres if it was an expensive one. The bookshop manager was called Mishinikoura. I want to point out that we were a group of three or four students who regularly visited his bookshop to buy books. The man told us because you are poor students, instead of coming to buy books, come and read the books here at the bookshop and only buy the book you would wish to keep after having read it. He then provided us with a table, especially for us, in the Arabic section of the bookshop. We made full use of the table and this opportunity and we read all the books we could lay our

hands on and only bought a book every now and then. This shows what the cultural environment of Alexandria was like, then. The bookshop owner played a cultural role. Nowadays, bookshop owners are only salesmen.



107 ALEXANDRIA. — Mehemet-Ali Place and French Garden. — LL.

Place Mohamed Ali, now Manshieh Square



Prince Omar Toussoun

When I enter a bookshop, nowadays, I'm straight away asked, "What do you want?"—"What do you want to buy?" and if I wish to browse the book shelves, I'll find someone following me.

The shop owners were all foreign, and the majority were Jews. The Jews played a very important and positive role in Egyptian cultural life. They always felt they were Egyptian. And after the 1952 Revolution, when most of them left Egypt, they were literally in tears because they were leaving. Some of them returned to visit Alexandria, after a long absence, to see the changes that had taken place.

When we were at university, there was a French professor who formed a classical music band from the students of the Faculty of Arts. He used to teach in the French Department and lived in Shalalat district. He used to invite us every Thursday at his place at five o'clock—we were a group of ten to twelve people—to introduce us to classical music and the history of music. He always offered us rose syrup and *petits-four*. He used to talk to us about famous composers like Beethoven. At first the records were heavy and then they were the plastic ones. The professor had another mission besides education which was to nurture us musically. He first lived in Cairo, then moved to Alexandria and died in Alexandria. This shows the strong sense of loyalty and belonging the foreigners had towards our land.

When somebody died in the family of our foreign neighbors, they behaved the same as the Muslim lower class. There was a marked change in the way they dressed, generally speaking. They need not wear black—but there must be a change in appearance—like not shaving their beards. At that time the foreign men did not shave their beards as an expression of grief. The Greeks did not take a full bath for forty days. They cleaned themselves by wiping their bodies with a damp piece of cotton wool but did not take a bath or wash themselves fully. It was a way of changing life style due to bereavement, and the change that this loss had brought about in their lives. Someone was alive and died. So what they ordinarily did must change as an expression of their loss and sorrow.

The Alexandrians were sort of 'civilised' and had a sense of dignity. They accepted jobs that needed craftsmanship but avoided menial jobs, like loading and unloading products such as cotton or coal. In the past the loading of products was very primitive and intensely laborious, needing a high degree of fitness and strength. The population was also relatively small in number, about three hundred and fifty thousand only, which barely kept up with labor demands. Most of the labor force were skilled craftsmen, whether apprentices in the workshops owned by foreigners or trained in the technical Institute Don Bosco, whose trainees are highly skilled. That is why the harbor attracted labor from the countryside or Upper Egypt.



IRENE KARAM (NÉE CAMILLERI)

She spoke about the Karam home, now the Sacred Heart School.

I am Italian. My grandfather was working in Malta, then he was transferred to Alexandria and we've been here since then. My father, Pietro Camilleri and my uncle Luigi Camilleri imported iron. My mother was Greek. The Greek colony was the biggest in Alexandria.

I was married twice. The first time was to the British Vincent Corbes, a naval attaché in the royal Italian marines. I met him during the war. Then I married Georges Karam a few years after I got divorced in the early sixties. The Karams were big importers of timber. They had a depot of 36,000 meters in Wardian.



Linda Karam's bedroom

And this immense villa of Linda Karam's. She was called the "Châtelaine d'Alexandrie"—the Lady of the Manor of Alexandria. In fact there were two ladies of the manor. Linda Sursok was the Lady of Lebanon, and Linda Karam was the Lady of Alexandria. Linda Karam was very beautiful. Very beautiful. To the end of her days she was extremely grand, and very blond. Her jewels were very famous, but

unfortunately, hers and mine were lost when we were in Beirut and the banks were robbed during the civil war.

I am told that the life they led in Alexandria was brilliant, with all those masked balls at the Finney house and the grand evenings. I know that Linda Karam brought the *maîtres d'hôtel* from Cairo for her balls and garden parties. The house was extraordinary. There were fifty-one rooms, with outbuildings in the garden for stables, garages and that sort of thing. There were four or five salons and a huge ballroom which was extremely beautiful. Now the house is the Sacred Heart School. There was also a little church. But the sisters have sold all the land and now there's only the house.



Linda Karam

Georges was sequestered in 1962. They took everything: the lands, the farms, the depot. Georges used to do the timber related business in Wardian from Monday to Thursday, then Friday, Saturday and Sunday he went to the farm because he was a cotton planter. Every year he would sell the cotton to Farghaly and Hafez, who would export the cotton.

I love Alexandria. I wouldn't change it for the world. I like traveling here and there, but I always come back to Alexandria.



Linda Karam



MIGUELLE YANSOUNI (NÉE DEBBANÉ)

She spoke about the Debbané family and church.

My great grandfather was originally from Saida [Sidon] in Lebanon and his father came to Egypt when my great grandfather was twelve. That was Count Miguel Debbané but he wasn't a count then. So Miguel Debbané came to Egypt when he was twelve. He was a Neapolitan citizen and a large part of his family was already established in Alexandria, while he stayed in Damietta for ten years. He was consul general of the ancient Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in Egypt. As he didn't want to become a subject of the new realm of Italy, he obtained Brazilian nationality because he was very attached to Princess Marie-Thérèse Christine of the Two Sicilies who had married the Emperor of Brazil, Don Pedro II. So my great grandfather and uncle worked for them and traveled with them to Brazil. He was given the title count. When he came to Alexandria he was appointed Consul General of Brazil in Alexandria. That was in 1867.



The Debbané Church



Count Ferdinand Debbané

He made a lot of money and the consulate was established on most of rue Falaky. He wanted to build a church with his own money, so he built it in the garden, his garden, the garden of the Brazilian Consulate. Then he took a part of the garden and built two buildings in the vicinity of the church. The revenues of the buildings went towards the upkeep and maintenance of the church. Any surplus money went to the poor. It is a Brazilian church that follows the Greek Catholic rites because he was a Greek Catholic.

Count Miguel Debbané did not have children, so he adopted my grandfather, who was an orphan. He became the consul after Count Miguel Debbané, and was appointed Plenipotentiary Minister of Brazil.

There are now executors of the estate and administrators of the church. At first there was Count Miguel Debbané, the founder of the family and of the church. Then there was Count Joseph Debbané who was my grandfather, and who died in 1914. He was succeeded by the eldest son, Nicolas, my uncle. When Nicolas died in 1937, he was succeeded by my father, and when he died, he was succeeded by my

husband. Now it is me. What I mean to say is that the church depends entirely on us and has nothing to do with the Greek Catholic community. It is a private Brazilian chapel, established by decree and permit, and it carries the name of the emperor.

There are no more Brazilians in this family. My brother was born in England, so he is English. And he has no sons. I have a cousin who is still alive, but he doesn't have sons either. The family has died out.



NAYLA BASSILI

Spoke about the family home. She lives abroad but comes occasionally to visit Alexandria.

The family originated in the Greek island of Chios. Our ancestor had a merchant vessel and used to ply the route between Chios and Tripoli in Lebanon. He fell ill in Tripoli, married a Lebanese, and eventually died in Tripoli. They had one son, Yacoub Bassili, who is the ancestor of the whole family. So originally the name was Vassili, and it became Bassili.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, around 1900, there was a famine in Lebanon and many Lebanese migrated. Among them was Assa'd Bassili, who came to Egypt. He found there was no timber here, so he started importing it. That's how the timber business started, and it became the Assa'd Bassili Pasha Timber Company. The business continued until it was nationalized by Nasser.

I was born in Alexandria, in this house, which has now become the National Museum of Alexandria.

I do have recollections of the house. As soon as I stepped into that museum, I recollected a heap of things, the arrangement of the house and who had which rooms. I can see once more my grandmother in her bed in the mornings, when we children ran to embrace her. She had a splendid bathroom.

Before the house was turned into a museum, it had been the American Consulate. One day, when I was in Beirut, I met the consul of the United States, who had previously been posted in Alexandria and had been in this house. He and the G.I. had seen the ghost. It was a gentleman wearing a tarboush, but nobody really saw his face. What is interesting is that the consul himself, not just the G.I., saw the ghost. He always felt there was a presence in the house. The only male who died in the house was my grandfather, so it can only have been him.



The parents of Nayla Bassili



The Bassili house, formerly the American Consulate, now the National Museum of Alexandria



THE CHANGING TIMES

That life is over. It will never return. It was a mythical Alexandria. The circumstances that led to its rise no longer exist in the world.

Omar Koreich



WORLD WAR II

ESTHER ZIMMERLI HARDMAN

(Swiss)

I remember the war years very well. In 42, when Rommel was so close, we used to spend the nights in the shelters. I also remember very well that there were sandbags in front of all the buildings. I also remember mornings in the Swiss School, when we used to run into the garden and collect shrapnel, and compare what each had found. Some of the bombs fell pretty close, especially the German ones. The Italians bombs usually fell far wide of their target. There were those machines like locomotives which used to produce a lot of smoke in the port, so that the German planes couldn't see where the ships were.

I used to ask why we were no longer getting any potatoes, and was told that they were all taken for the English.

HALA ABDEL HAMID HAFEZ

(Turkish)



Hala Hafez with a foreign governess in their garden, and sandbags

My father built a large shelter in our villa in Laurens, and placed beds in it. We would spend all night in that shelter, regardless of whether there was bombing or not. My father was so worried that we would not reach the shelter in time if the siren went off, that he made us sleep there every night.

ALESSANDRO MONTI (Italian)

When the war broke out, a lot of Italians here were surprised to find themselves on the wrong side, because Egypt was allied to England. Those Italians who had reached a certain age were interned in camps—not exactly prison—in Fayed on the Red Sea. I wasn't interned. Here, the Italians who reached the age of eighteen had to present themselves to the government to be taken to the internment camp, but my birthday was on 10 September and Italy signed the Armistice on the 8 September. In spite of the bombings and certain episodes, it can't be said it was a very difficult war. Here in Egypt, nothing was ever missed by the Egyptians. Naturally the Italian men were interned and their families went to visit them.

My father was not interned because he directed work at the port, which was in the service of Egypt, and so there was no reason to intern him. In general, the Italians led a normal life in Egypt. There was no xenophobia. Yes, the relations were bad with the Greeks because Italy had considered invading Greece, but the personal relations were always good. Also the relations were good between the two royal houses: of the kings Fouad and Farouk, and of the House of Savoy. That is why the exiled king of Italy and his wife came to live in Alexandria. He died here and is buried in the Church of St Catherine.



1940

EVANGELIA PASTROUDIS (Greek)

I fell in love with a German boy who went to the same school as me. He wanted to take me with him to Germany, but my father refused, so I had to obey. We went on communicating by letter until recently.

During the war, my family was obliged to sign papers that we would remain in Mex, because ours was the only bakery in the whole area, and so we had to stay open to feed the neighborhood.

One day a policeman took me to the police station. I discovered they had caught three German prisoners of war, and as I was the only one in Mex who knew German, they wanted me to translate for them. Although Egypt and Greece were on the side of the Allies, I felt pity for those Germans, who had been in the police station for days. I said they were tourists, and asked the policeman to let them go.

ANAHIDE MERAMEDJIAN (Armenian)

This is a terrible thing to say, but during the war we had to amuse the soldiers who had gone to Alamein. There were clubs like the End of 20 Club and Britannia Club where we would all go to work. I once cooked one hundred and fifty eggs in one day and handed out six hundred cups of tea. Everybody was trying to amuse the soldiers. We would take them out and give them lunches and dinners so that they would eat. The English were very young and were looking for families to whose homes they could go and feel they were back home. It was all very simple and there was no segregation of races: Greeks, Armenians, Muslims, Copts, Protestants, Catholics, all were the same and there was no discrimination.

ISABELLE TAWIL (French)

The war years were the great madness. We went out every evening. First it was the age of the Poles—because of the Polish contingents one saw nothing but Poles. Then we saw nothing but Greeks, and then it was only this and then only that. And always the parties and the dances, to distract those who had been at the front. Then there were the charity



El Alamein Cemetery



El Alamein Cemetery

dances organized by the different communities: the Greek, the Italian. It was very cosmopolitan. There was a lot of social activity, with dances left, right and center. It was incredible.

As the Germans advanced upon Alamein, which was only thirty kilometers away from Alexandria, those foreigners whose countries at war with Germany fled to Cairo. They were terrified. The Jews fled as far as Luxor.

LUCETTE DE SAAB (Syro-Lebanese)

Unfortunately I was not old enough, but my sister went out a lot. She went to the clubs of the English soldiers, and so did the governess. They cooked eggs for the soldiers. Then there was the Britannia Club and there was Mrs. Baker, the wife of Sir Baker Pasha, chief of police in Alexandria. She was a foreigner—Greek or Armenian—and every Saturday evening she would give a party, to which my sister went regularly. All the young women died of envy and would give anything to go and meet the English officers. There were lots of marriages. It was said that the ugliest girls, with the least chance of getting married, got married to the English.



Wedding of Paulette de Saab and British Captain Frank Turner

During the war our street, rue des Pharaons, was bombarded. One night, while my sister was out dancing, a bomb landed on her bed, on her pillow. It didn't explode. The servant carried it and rushed to the end of the garden, and put it there. Then Mani Horwitz, who was an air warden, came with his team and carried the bomb off. There were also many English air wardens, each in his neighborhood. There was Finney, for example. The principal families were charged with the civil defense of their city.

I loved the Italian chauffeurs. When we thought that the Germans were going to enter Alexandria, everybody cried, but not me. I was thrilled. I wanted them to come and liberate our two Italian chauffeurs and carry off my English governess.

We spent two summers in Mansourah, where my father had a house, to escape the bombing.

OMAR KOREICH (Arabian)

The decline of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism began with World War II, when the Italians were sequestered in 1942. In our profession there were huge auctions in 1948, when people started leaving Egypt. The Averinos, who had a superb collection, auctioned it in 1948. Then there were the Benakis; three quarters of their famous collection in Athens came from Alexandria.

HAI MUSTAFA EL MULLA (Egyptian)

The war began in November 1939, and at the beginning of 1940 we migrated, we went to Simbellawain. Only my father stayed in Alexandria, because of his job. We came back to Kom el Dikk six months later. When there were bombs or air strikes we'd travel again, and spend three or four months away. So we'd come and go, so as not to leave my father on his own. In the morning each one would go to his work, and after 6.30 each one would go to his village and hide there. When the air raid siren sounded all the people would go to the shelter underneath their homes till the raid was over. We would hear the bombs and raids, and the British guns that were near us in the fort. And one day the raid lasted six hours. We spent six hours in the shelter, to the extent that the Germans sent down lanterns to light up their targets for them. When we saw the lights in the streets we were amazed at who would have switched these lights on. And then we saw those lanterns dangling in the air lighting the place up for ten minutes. Those were very difficult days of the raids. Although today there is electronic warfare which is more difficult and dangerous, in the past it was more difficult the things we saw during the raids. We lived through the wars of 1956 and 1967 and 1973, but we didn't see the things we saw in the German war. And in the days of the Germans there wasn't the technological progress there is today. But the sight of their raids was worse than what happens now in wars.

JIMMY MAWAS (Egyptian)

I didn't do my primary education at school because of the war in 1939 and the bombardments. A judge lent us a house in a village and the whole family—mother, aunts and cousins—went there and we spent two years there. It was enchanting. My cousins and I became close to each other, like

brothers, and we had a happy time together. There was a dear teacher from the village school who taught us at home, and there was the governess or my mother who tried to teach us some reading and writing. But we were mostly playing or going on walks or visiting the neighbors, such as Mr. Nimr who had a huge agricultural property. There we learned how to make butter and bake bread—that kind of education. We returned to Alexandria in 1943.

NICOLETTE MAWAS (Italian)

As a child, Italy represented, for me, the possibility of not going to school because of the demonstrations. In 1945 and 1946 the school would close down when there were demonstrations, and we would stay at home.

AHMED ABOU ZEID (Egyptian)

I consider that World War II was the real beginning of change. The advance of the German military forces and their arrival at Alamein was actually the reason why the foreigners, especially the Jews, left Alexandria and Egypt—and this was the real beginning of change. The Italians and the Greeks and the Jews left Egypt and this exodus after the end of World War II affected cultural life and the economy. After that came the 1952 revolution and the rise of nationalism and affiliations that led to the dismissal of most of the foreigners from Egypt. Then there was the advent of 1956, the adoption of socialist principles, and the end of a capitalist regime at that time. That is why we should not claim that the revolution was solely responsible for the change that took place.

1952 REVOLUTION

LUCETTE DE SAAB (Syro-Lebanese)



Lucette de Saab with General Mohamed Naguib

I was engaged in those days, and used to go out every night with my fiancé. One night we went to The Ship, where the king always had a table booked and frequently went to play cards. That evening the head waiter told us that the king had been sent into exile in the morning. It was 26 July 1952.



This restaurant was first baptized The Ship, and was one of the most fashionable places of entertainment. It then became the Côte d'Azur, and then El Saraya, meaning "palace". It now lies empty and abandoned, awaiting a new name.

OMAR KOREICH

(Arabian)

All these clubs, Sporting Club, Smouha Club, the Yacht Club, were reserved for a certain class, and for the Europeans, naturally. They became more democratized after the revolution.

MOHAMED ABDEL SAMAD

(Egyptian)

After 1952, people's behavior changed, especially as liberty made us experience greatness and courage. This is our most glorious age. People say things have become expensive, but that's normal, things have got to get expensive. But we are much better off than we used to be in the past. Our life had been really bad. We would only wear new shoes and the striped caftans in the Eid. But now you can wear shoes for a hundred pounds and trousers for a hundred pounds. You need at least five hundred pounds to be presentable.

HALA ABDEL HAMID HAFEZ

(Turkish)

In 1951 my father bought two villas in Safar (Ramleh) belonging to Mr. Bacos. One he used as a residence, and the other he converted into a small hospital called El Dar el Khadraa, to be used only for the workers of the Combined Transport, that is, for the workers of the tramway and the buses. He was an exceptionally benevolent man and often gave out medication for free to the needy. In 1953, a year after the revolution, a law was passed forbidding doctors who owned hospitals from signing contracts with public companies for their patients to be treated in those hospitals. My father thus lost his patients and closed down the hospital.

AHMED ABOU ZEID

(Egyptian)

After the 1952 revolution, Nicola, the owner of Victoria Bookshop, sold it to Dar El-Maaref when he realised that the foreigners had no place in Egypt.

Though there was a large number of them still living in Egypt, they were no longer in business. These were the “Egyptianised” ones, who had Egyptian nationality. When I travelled abroad and went to Greece and Italy, I met many of them working in hotels. They were originally from Alexandria and had immigrated. I also met some of them in the big shops in Rome. I met someone who overheard me speaking to my sister in Arabic. He asked, “Where are you from?” I replied, “From Egypt.” He continued, “Where from in Egypt?” I replied, “From Alexandria”. He said that he used to live in Ibrahimieh, and went on to complain about how expensive life was in Italy, that he missed living in Alexandria and that he regretted leaving. Life in Italy was expressed in terms of money, food, outings, etc. This is just to show how nostalgic these foreigners feel and how loyal they are to Egypt and to Alexandria.

EDWAR AL KHARRAT (Egyptian)

The 1952 revolution, I believe, has destroyed the concept of Alexandria as the second capital of the country, neglecting and distancing Alexandria to some extent, economically, politically and culturally. It was difficult for a writer or a journalist, writing within the boundaries of Alexandria, to reach a large audience or a large readership. Writers had to move to Cairo in order to be read, to become recognised by an audience and to gain recognition and popularity. Alexandria was a kind of exile. Now I think things have changed to a great extent. That's why my basic point of reference was Alexandria, in addition to my love for it. It is still a beautiful city despite all the mutilations that have happened to it.

1956 WAR

VAHAN ALEXANIAN (Armenian)

A lot of Jews left in 1956. This was the bonanza period for the Armenians, who stepped in to take the place of Jews in banks and big institutions.

ISABELLE TAWIL (French)

As I was French, I couldn't leave the house without a permit. Anybody could ask me "Who are you?" With these documents I could say I'd been living here for x number of years.

ASMA EL BAKRI (Egyptian)



Notre Dame de Sion

I have memories from 1956 during the Suez crisis when all the parents came to take their children home, Roselyne, Suzanne (Jewish sisters) and myself remained at the boarding house. We had the whole school just to ourselves, all the toys and the bicycles were for us, and there were no studies. We had all the books of the library just for ourselves. They always taught us to love reading, whether at school or at home. It was in October, so the

weather was very nice and we didn't have to study or to do mathematics. This is one of the best memories I keep from those years.

OMAR KOREICH (Arabian)

I remember the Suez crisis of 1956 very well. We were terribly frightened and left for Damanhour to spend a few days there. There were bombings and everybody was scared in Alexandria. It didn't last very long, but sadly we lost a lot of friends. When we came back to the family home, there were a lot of tears. All our Greek friends, all our Jewish friends, all were gone. That was it.

JIMMY MAWAS (Egyptian)

In 1956 I was studying law in Paris. I'd arrived at the moment of the Suez crisis. I had to escape from France with an Egyptian passport and I could go to Italy where I had already started a little work and I had been going on with my music. Because there had been a reversal of fortune in our family, my father could no longer send me money, and I had to either work or starve. So I chose the easiest thing, which was to work as an interpreter, and which I did for quite a while. When I went to the consulate to renew my passport, they told me, "Return to Egypt." What could I do? It is a great regret, but what could I do? I could not return because I was scared. I was and still am proud of being Egyptian and I have never been deprived of my nationality. I am still Egyptian and I got my degree and I've never done any wrong.

NATIONALIZATIONS OF 1960s

VAHAN ALEXANIAN (Armenian)

When this nationalization happened there was no distinction between Armenian or Egyptian or anything. Anybody who was rich or had an impact on the economy was nationalized. A lot of people panicked and left. But business was going well for those who were not nationalized. At the beginning there was a year or two of difficulties, but those who were not nationalized were able to supply services which the public sector could not, and they were able to make profitable balance sheets at the end of the year, so we passed through that difficult period. In Nasser's time the private sector industry flourished. We were the first ones to print nylon in Egypt. Mr. Rayon did the yarn in Cairo, my Jewish friend did the weaving and I did the dyeing and printing, and we



The Alexanian Factory

were the first ones. This was to prove that there was a development in the textile industry and others under Nasser's regime. There was a big drive to try and do everything in Egypt at any cost. But there were some limitations to export. In Sadat's time it was more open door policy which increased commerce not industry.

ALESSANDRO MONTI (Italian)

I had just started in the textile industry, and had begun working with applying designs directly on the fabric. One of the early designs had met with great success here and abroad, and was exhibited in the Industrial

Exhibition in Cairo. Gamal Abdel Nasser saw it. I was standing next to him and he asked, "Is this made in Egypt?" And I said, "Yes, I made it in Egypt." I had a wonderful collaboration with the new Egyptian regime because at the beginning all the companies were nationalized. I had this office already and all my clients who used to buy the drawings from me and all those who would look at the textiles were the owners of big stores like Raymond Hannahux and Guy Circurel. They and the factories I used to work with were nationalized. I was summoned by the Filature and Textile Commission and was told that my office should have been nationalized as well. I protested and said that if everybody left the country, it would be impossible to survive, and that I was willing to collaborate with the government because Egypt needed it. They took possession of my office for a month, and learned the way I was working. They saw that it was technical work and that there was nothing to be nationalized. I was the official consultant of the Egyptian government for the Egyptian Organization for Filature and Textile for ten years.

ASMA EL BAKRI (Egyptian)

Changes did not happen immediately in 1956; they happened during the 60s after the nationalizations. Everybody was leaving the country one after the other. A lot of French people left after 1956, one of whom is a friend I met thirty or thirty-five years later. She is called Sabine Couturier. I can still see her coming into the classroom saying goodbye to each one before leaving the



Gamal Abdel Nasser in Alexandria

country after the Suez crisis, but the strongest blow was in the 60s when there was a real wave of people leaving the country, that was quite terrible.

OMAR KOREICH (Arabian)

A lot of our friends left during the second sequestrations of 1963. Intimate friends like André Moustaki and the Cordahis, and many others who were really intimate, left for good. Alexandria lost its charm and the last traces of its cosmopolitanism.

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The language in brackets denotes the original language of the interview.