**The Decline of the Library and Museum of Alexandria -** [**Ellen Brundige**](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/%7Esepdet) **December 10, 1991**

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"And concerning the number of books, the establishment of libraries, and the collection in the Hall of the the Muses, why need I even speak, since they are all in men's memories?"-- Athenaeus of Alexandria[[1]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html" \l "fn0)

**Introduction**

The Library of Alexandria, in reality two or more libraries in the ancient Egyptian capitol, has achieved an almost mythic stature in the study of classics from the time of the Renaissance. The apocryphal burning of the Library during Julius Caesar's occupation of the city has been described as the greatest calamity of the ancient world, wherein the most complete collection of all Greek and Near Eastern literature was lost in one great conflagration. In reality, the Library and its community of scholars not only flourished during the Hellenistic era of the Ptolemies, but continued to survive through the Roman Empire and the incessant turbulence of the Empire's most volatile and valuable city. For valuable indeed was the granary of the empire, which was also a prosperous trade center between east and west, linked to the Mediterranean and, not far to the east, to the Red Sea and Indian traderoutes via a canal. This cosmopolitan city drew Greeks, Egyptians, Romans, and Jews into a unique and not entirely harmonious coexistence. The Alexandrian Museum and Library, then, was an ideal place for scholars from these different cultures to meet and exchange learning, and was a repository for the literature and accounts of the Alexandrian intelligensia and the Roman Empire in general. However, while sources agree on the Museum's uniqueness and value, no surviving account of its activities actually exists, and modern scholarship has largely ignored this poorly-documented portion of history.

**Origin**

In order to discuss the history of the Library and Museum in the Imperial period, it is necessary to give a brief overview of their background. The first mention of the Library itself is found in a Jewish document of 180-145 B.C., *The Letter of Aristeas* , a propagandistic account of the translation of the Septuagint by the seventy-two rabbis into Greek. This translation was commissioned by the Museum's founder, Demetrius, under the patronage of Ptolemy I, Ptolemy Soter.[[2]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn1) The establishment of the Library was handed down to Ptolemy II, Ptolemy Philadelphus, in 283 B.C., and it was perhaps during his reign that the monarch began the practice of attracting scholars, housing and funding them in the Museum, and collecting the vast Library.[[3]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn2) The idea of a formal institution for scholars of all kinds, complete with a library, was a new one, and the Museum was modelled on the Lyceum of Aristotle in Athens; Demetrius himself, an exiled tyrant of Athens, was one of Aristotle's followers.[[4]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn3) Its immediate predecessors were the shrines of the Muses, which by this time were not only cult centers, but also foci for literary competitions, festivals, and literary societies.[[5]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn4) The Museum, too, was a shrine built for the glorification of the Muses, and from the outset contained lecture halls, laboratories, observatories, living quarters, colonnades for ambulatory discussions, a dining hall, a garden, a zoo, the shrine itself, and, presumably, the library, which most archaeologists and scholars conclude was housed within the shrine and not in a separate building.[[6]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn5) A priest was appointed by the Pharoah as the administrator of the Museum, and a separate Librarian was responsible for the collection. The physical building's whereabouts are unknown, although it is supposed to have been within the walls of the Royal Palace, whose grounds were in the Brucheion, the Greek sector of the city.[[7]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn6) Here 100 scholars lived, carried out new scientific research, published, lectured, performed the first systematic study of Greek literature (inventing the notions of accents and of grammar, a mixed blessing to some), edited, critiqued, and collected all Greek classics, and also gathered translations of Assyrian, Persian, Egyptian, Jewish, Indian, and other nations' literature, having nearly a million works in its holdings during the late Ptolemaic period.[[8]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn7) a second "daughter" library, the Serapeion, was soon established in the temple of Serapis, a popular god invented by the Ptolemies as a synthesis of Zeus, Pluto, Osiris, and the Apis bull. This library, found in the Rhakotis or Egyptian sector, was open to all, not just to royally pensioned scholars, and had copies of many of the Museum's scrolls.[[9]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn8) By the time of Julius Caesar's entry into Alexandria in 48 B.C. which heralded the end of the Ptolemies, the Museum had already seen centuries of civil unrest and produced much of the literature of the Hellenistic era.

**Alexandria in the Time of Caesar**

Alexandria became the second stage for the civil wars of Caesar; here the double drama of Antony and Cleopatra, then Caesar and Cleopatra played before the skeptical populace. During the latter, Julius Caesar supported Cleopatra against her brother Ptolemy XIV, and was besieged by the latter's army and fleet in the Royal Precinct where was the Museum. It was at this moment, in 48 B.C., that the most well-known "burning of the Library" occurred, although many subsequent disasters would later be hailed as the final destruction of the Library. The legend apparently rose from Livy's account of the Alexandrine war, now lost, but quoted by all subsequent scholars dealing with the topic, including Seneca. Apparently, Livy stated that 400,000 rolls were destroyed when, after Caesar set fire to the docks to block Ptolemy's fleet, the flames consumed some nearby warehouses in which scrolls as well as grain were being kept.[[10]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn9) Scholars have debated hotly over this conflagration since Roman times, disputing whether an actual library was burned or whether these rolls had anything to do with the Museum. Fraser is one of the most pursuasive advocates of the theory that the Library, being in the Royal Precinct, was near enough to the docks to be ignited. He suggests that the loss of 40,000 volumes also explains why the Museum's library appears to gradually lost prestige to the younger Serapeion.[[11]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn10) Others assert that the fire was apocryphal, or confused with later fires. Still others suggest that these books were in fact copies waiting to be shipped to private collectors or other libraries. Since, as Fraser points out during his discussion, Didymus, Tryphon, and Theon researched in the Museum not long afterwards, I lean towards the common theory that, if any books were lost in this fire, copies of important works must have survived and the library's collection not significantly damaged by the incident. At any rate, Caesar was relieved by the arrival of the Roman fleet, and crushed and killed Ptolemy XIV in the battle of the delta, effectively conquering the kingdom.[[12]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn11) Julius Caesar himself probably spent time in the Library during this period, since the Julian calander which he adopted, with twelve months, 365 days, and a leap year was identical to the Alexandrian Aristarchus' calandar of 239 B.C.[[13]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn12)

**Imperial Alexandria**

Now we turn to Alexandria at the beginning of the Imperial period, when for a while, the infamous Alexandrian mob was relatively peaceful. Strabo, the geographer who based his studies on his research at the Library and who lived in Alexandria from 25-20 B.C., witnessed Caesar's "conquest" of Egypt and subsequent changes made in the Ptolemaic state. Strabo's description of the Library is the most detailed until that of a 4th century scholar, Johannus Tzetzes, and by its brevity shows just how little actually was written about the institution:

The Museum is part of the Royal Quarter and it has a cloister and an arcade and a large house in which is provided the common meal of the men of learning who share the Museum. And this community has common funds, and a priest in charge of the Museum, who was appointed previously by the kings, but now by Caesar.[[14]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn13)

**The Roman Library**

The Library probably gradually developed similar practices to those of Roman collections, or, perhaps, the other way around; at any rate, in addition to the old divisions set up by Callimachus in the 250's B.C., with its ten halls each devoted to a branch of literature, science, or philosophy, contemporary libraries were now divided into Greek and Roman sections. Manuscripts, which had increasingly been made on parchment rather than papyrus since the days when Ptolemaic Alexandria had cut off its papyrus shipments to spite the library at Pergamon, started to be kept in *armaria*, wooden chests, in addition to the pigeonholes or shelves of earlier times and linen or leather jackets for the more important scrolls. These *armaria* continued to be used throughout the Middle Ages.[[15]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn13) The only other significant change brought to the library by Imperial rule was that, since the Royal Precinct was no longer a restricted area, the Museum was now available to the public.[[16]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn14)

**Political Climate**

Such was the library; the rest of the city continued its business of trade and bickering as usual. Even the toppling of the good god Pharoah could not dissuade the Alexandrians from the latter; the infamous mob merely turned from sniping at their rulers for conniving with Roman foreigners, and began directing taunts at the Roman immigrants themselves. For while the Egyptians had partially accepted the Ptolemies, who had created a prosperous city, had shared a common enemy (the Persians), and, when they had conquered the latter, even returned all the Egyptian treasures and sacred objects stolen by Persia to Alexandria, the Romans had done little to endear themselves to the Alexandrian populus.[[17]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn15)

**Religion: Serapis and Sophia**

The old gods, meanwhile, had not died out, but merely been woven together with the pantheons of newcomers. Strabo's contemporary, Vitruvius, describes a festival of the Muses in Alexandria, almost certainly based at the Museum, so it seems that the religious aspect of the institution continued to play an important part in Imperial Alexandria.[[18]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn16) By Roman times, the worship of purely Olympian gods had altered as the population had become a Greek-Egyptian mix, and all the gods were now worshipped as their Egyptian counterparts with Greek attributes.[[19]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn17) Bsides the Egyptian Greeks, the Jews accounted for a significant amount of the population, living in their own quarter, governed by an ethnarch, and originally exempted from many of the taxes; their ethnarch was replaced by a Council of Elders under Augustus.[[20]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn18) An intriguing dialogue between Pagan, Jewish, and, later, Christian thought developed among the scholars of Alexandria,[[21]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn19) as religious thought was refined and ideas adapted not only from the other theologies common in Alexandria, but from the Zoroasterism of Iran, and even, through the founder of Neoplatonism, Ammonius Buddhism and Hinduism from India.[[22]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn20) Thus, Jewish theologian Philo could discuss a mother goddess figure, Sophia, spirit of wisdom, the messenger from Jehovah, whose *logos* or existence would otherwise be incomprehensible to humanity. Neoplatonism, itself invented at the Museum during the Hellenistic era, portrayed the world as a flawed copy of its ideal, and thus sought to avoid the material world and concentrate on the perfection of the soul, which could be successively reincarnated, until it at last achieved a Buddha-like Enlightenment. God itself was made up of a trinity, and, again, conversed with man through Sophia. Some Neoplatonist thought would later be incorporated into Christianity.[[23]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn21) This religious dialogue was never the main thrust of the Museum, but probably did involve it even more directly with much of the social strife of the city.

**Augustan reform of the city's laws and government**

This gives a general idea of Alexandria at the beginning of the common era. Augustus, knowing the city's reputation for unrest, founded a new town, Nikopolis, to the east in which he stationed a large garrison. He pronounced an edict that no Roman patrician could visit Egypt without his permission, ostensibly to protect the nobles from Egyptian corruption, but also to insure that no one could covertly gain control of the Empire's grain supply and thus bring Rome to its knees.[[24]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn22) At the same time he installed a prefect, abolished the city Council, stripped all the Ptolemaic magistrates of powers (thus forming a class of wealthy nobles living a life of leisure who had no duties any longer), granted Jews the right to govern their own affairs, curbed the priests but not religious practices, and filled the Roman treasury with provincial taxes.[[25]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn23)

**Civil Unrest and Evolution of Pharonic to Imperial Veneration**

While Strabo saw the Roman occupation as a stabilizing influence which brought peace, prosperity, and growth to Alexandria, this was not entirely true. The mob rule cited by earlier historians, which had been a major problem for most of the Ptolemies until very late, had been weakened but not eliminated. Fraser points out that many philosophers from the Athenian Academies, refugees of Mithradates, had immigrated into Alexandria during the last fifty years (Diodorus for one), and, as clients of the last Ptolemies, had not participated in anti-Ptolemy nor anti-foreigner sentiment, and so were set apart from the animosity of the masses.[[26]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn24) Thus their accounts of the city tended to underplay civil unrest. Yet social friction did exist, not only between Jews and Greeks, who had been at loggerheads in the city for several generations, but also between old and new. Nikopolis, for one, was growing, attracting both trade and worshippers from older shrines. For another thing, the Greco-Egyptians, most recent representatives of a 4000-year-old civilization, were used to the Ptolemaic pomp of their ruler, and were neither satisfied with worshipping an Emperor across the sea nor, on the other hand, with a prefect who put on no public displays whatsoever.[[27]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn25) Perhaps this is why they so eagerly welcomed Germanicus, a new Alexander, who claimed to be abashed at their worshipful reception.[[28]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn26) Without a Pharoah, Egypt lacked the living representative of her sovereignty, and was keenly resentful of the Roman fleet, partially consisting of Ptolemy's old ships, filling the harbor. The abolition of the Council was also a bone of contention, as well as the new general taxes replacing the Ptolemaic tax, which had been levied in proportion to the productivity of one's property.[[29]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn27) While previously priests, respected members of the community, had been tax collectors following ancient Egyptian tradition, now hired third parties levied a foreign tax and pocketed some of the profits.[[30]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn28) Augustus made some gestures aimed at appreasing the city, including redigging the Red Sea Canal and the farmers' irrigation ditches, as well as erecting new buildings (many only known through commemorative Alexandrian coins), establishing the Imperial agora, and giving the Jews greater freedom. The erection of the Caeserium, however, introduced the controversial idea of worshipping the Emperor, and the empowerment of Jews was not exactly comforting to the prejudiced natives.[[31]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn29) The Caesarium itself would eventually become yet another Alexandrian library, and so brings us back to our main subject. An influx of new ideas, brought about by the comingling of new cultures and the increased prosperity of the cirty, lent renewed vigor to the Museum.

**Roman scholarship**

The first century A.D. saw many fine Alexandrian scholars. Strabo, as already mentioned, was not only a geographer, but also a Stoic philosopher, and in addition dabbled in science, becoming fascinated with the inexplicable flooding of the Nile.[[32]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn30) Didymus, the son of a fishmonger, showed by his humble birth that natives now had a chance to become accomplished scholars. He wrote some 3,500 commentaries on most of the Greek classics, including Callimachus the poet who created the world's first known card catalog for the Royal Library in 250 B.C. In addition, Didymus published an authoritative text of Homer based on the Hellenistic Aristarchus' version and his own extensive analysis, wrote a critical commentary *On Demosthenes,* which included edited versions of now-vansihed Phillipics,and created several Greek lexicons of tragedy, comedy, and unusual Greek vocabulary.[[33]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn31) His two younger contemporaries, doing much of their work during Tiberius' reign, were the grammarian Tryphon, and Theon. The latter was a literary commentator who not only wrote literary analyses of authors such as Homer, Pindar, and Sophocles, he was also the first at Alexandria to comment upon Hellenistic literature, which was only now starting to be regarded as classical. He was also the first to deal with contemporaries, and with the Pergamum school of scholars, for in Ptolemaic times Pergamum had been the Museum's chief rival.[[34]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn32) Some medical studies were also pursued at the library, namely that of Heraclides of Tarentum and the surgeon Celsus. Much later, Galen would become the foremost authority on medicine, basing his researches on the literature of the Library as well as his own experiences. Research in science had largely drifted to Pergamum and in mathematics to Rhodes, but the Museum continued to pursue the forefront of philosophy, with Neoplatonists and the Cynics who held popular appeal in the masses.[[35]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn33) Meanwhile, Museums built on the Alexandrian model sprung up all over the empire.

**Civil Unrest in the First Century**

By the time Caius (Caligula) succeded to the principate, the novelty of having an Emperor was starting to wear thin, and Alexandria was once more embroiled in civil unrest. There was extensive rioting between Greeks and Jews, an old Alexandrian problem which had resurfaced. This was, perhaps, partly due to Caligula's appointment of Herod Agrippa as King of Judea, who was a debtor to many Alexandrian moneylenders, and who unfortunately stopped at the city en route to Jerusalem. The Jews themselves were annoyed at his appointment, and the Greeks were even less pleased. Furthermore, the Jews were refusing to erect or worship statues of Caligula. Tensions and riots multiplied. The Jewish historian Philo recorded these events and his own participation as an envoy to Rome in 38 A.D. in his *Delegation to Caius* and *On Flaccus* , the latter referring to Caius' anti- semitic friend and replacement for the previous Alexandrian prefect. In addition, an anonymous first and second century *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* , a text of uncertain origin composed in the form of dialogues between anti-semitic envoys and unsympathetic emperors, presents a fictionalized opposing view.[[36]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn34) Unrest over the Jewish-Greek struggle continued through the next several emperors, as well as general anti-Roman disturbences and protests concerning the abolished Council. The only mention of the Museum in this period is that Suetonius says that it was substantially enlarged by the Emperor Claudius, as appropriate for that misunderstood scholar of the Julio-Claudian family.[[37]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn35)

**Slow and Uneven Decline and Ethnic Strife**

The city, meanwhile, prospered in spite of unrest, and its influence became ever more apparent, notablty when its Jewish prefect Tiberius Julius Alexander was instrumental in helping Vespasian gain the principate in 69 A.D. Titus, the emperor's heir, pleased the Alexandrians by participating in the sacrifice of the Apis bull.[[38]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn36) Later, Domitian (81-96 A.D.) encouraged the cult of Serapis to be revived after an imperial ban was lifted, and had temples of Isis and Serapis built in Rome. The prosperity of Alexandria was fickle, however. Due to more efficient storage techniques and a new harbor, Rome became less dependent on Alexandrian grain and, in the time of Trajan, actually sent shipments to the city to relieve a famine.[[39]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn37) That emperor also redredged the old canal, aiding Alexandria's faltering economy.[[40]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn38)

**Revolt Against Rome and the Founding of the Caesareum**

When the Jews in the East revolted yet again under Trajan in 116, Alexandria followed suit, beginning yet another ethnic and religious clash fueled by the grievances of the refugees from Judea.[[41]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn39) Roman troops helped Greeks in Alexandria's guerilla war that continued throughout Trajan's reign, but there is evidence that anti-semitism was sated with the many bloody massacres and began to turn once more to anti-Romanism.[[42]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn40) During this period, a historian Dio Chrysostom delivered *A speech to the Alexandrians*, which pointed out how disorganized and useless the rioting was, inducing the Romans to tighten their grip; and how Alexandrians had merely exchanged their dislike of the Ptolemies for a hatred of the Romans.[[43]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn41)

Hadrian finally crushed the Alexandrian uprising through the efforts of Quintus Marcus Turbo. During his visit to Alexandria in 130, the Emperor restored the city, founded a new library in the Caesareum, discussed philosophy at the Museum, and started a campaign to attract sophists such as Dionysius of Miletus and Polemon of Laodikeia to the Museum. This brought a minor second century revival of Alexandrian scholarship.[[44]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn42) His visit was later mimicked by Septimius Severus in 199-200, who rebuilt parts of the city and, at long last, reestablished the Council abolished by Augustus.[[45]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn43) More seriously, the mob made the mistake of satirizing his successor, Caracalla, when he staged a visit to participate in the worship of the Apis bull. Enraged, the emperor had the city attacked and plundered, and its youth massacred. He cut off the imperial revenue to the Museum and banished all foreigners from that institution, but it seems to have survived the sacking.[[46]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn44) After this, the city never fully recovered its previous prosperity.

**The Rise of Christianity**

**Martyrs Mixed Up in Ethnic Strife**

Several more wars did little to help Alexandria's stability, which was even more disrupted as Christianity grew in strength and began to challenge both Jew and Pagan. In 265 A.D., riots broke out in Alexandria merely over an argument between a slave and a soldier over the value of a pair of shoes, and in the subsequent chaos, Laelius Mussius Aemilianus, the city prefect, seized the granaries and declared himself emperor. The emperor Galliensus sent Theodotus, his best general, to besiege the rebel faction holed up in the Royal Precinct, and eventually put down the insurrection. Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, described firsthand the havoc wrecked by the siege, but mentions neither Library nor Museum, which certainly would have come under fire.[[47]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn45) Another war in the 270's between the desert oasis of Palmyra and Alexandria damaged both cities severely, when Queen Zenobia conquered the Egyptian capitol and declared herself emperor, eventually being defeated by the Roman emperor Aurelian. This war further seems to have damaged the Libraries' collection.[[48]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn46) Finally, Diocletian had to quell yet another revolt under the pretender Domitian, eventually destroying much of the Brucheion quarter. The Christian-Pagan religious clashes in Alexandria had by this time become as violent as the Jewish-Greek, and Diocletian issued an edict upon his abdication in 305 to destroy Christianity. He also ordered all the Museum's books on metallurgy to be burned, implying that at least part of the collection survived.[[49]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn47) Egyptian Christianity memorializes this half-century of persecution by beginning its calandar with 254 A.D., the start of their "Era of the Martyrs".[[50]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn48)

**Alexandrian Christianity and Mysticism**

Christian thought was both refined and bizarrely altered during this turbulent era in Alexandria. Introduced by the Alexandrian St. Mark according to tradition, it was initially mistaken by the Emperor Hadrian as a troublesome offshoot of the cult of Serapis.[[51]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn49) Indeed, the Eucharist, resurrection, and reverence to the Mother were developed in Alexandria during this period, and seem to have echoes in the cult of Serapis, with its Dionsian-style feasting and resurrection, and his consort Isis/Cybele/Demeter. And while the religion had previously been a popular movement of the masses, it was at Alexandria that learned intellectual debate discussed the more philosophical parts of the religion and paved the way for Medieval theological debates.[[52]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn50) Branches of thought such as Arianism and Gnosticism were to be developed here, and, although later declared heretical, grew side by side with what later became Christian orthodoxy. Gnosticism continues to this day in Egypt; it held that the world was actually a mistake created by the Demiurge, son of the true God and Sophia, who was the Jehovah of the old Testament; God pitied humanity and sent Christ to help humanity reunite with Himself. Some held that Jesus had been a man, and the Christ His spirit after death. The Ophites, an offshoot of the Gnostics with Cretan influences, carried the religion a step further, worshipping snakes and the divine mother Sophia, who had actually sent the serpent of Eden to warn Eve and Adam that Jehovah was the Demiurge and that they should seek wisdom or knowledge to link with the true God.[[53]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn51) And, lest these heresies seem too wild, it should be remembered that the first patron saint of Alexandria for the orthodox Christians of the 4th century was St. Anthony, "who thought bathing was sinful and was consequently carried across the canals of the delta by an angel".[[54]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn52) The general tone of most Christian writings is encapsulated by E.M. Forster: "A feeling of joy inspired their interminable writings."[[55]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn53)

**Christians Retaliate**

It may well be imagined how Alexandria continued to be shaken by social strife during such a period. After a mere twenty years since the abdication of Diocletian, Canstantine became Emperor and declared Christianity Rome's official religion. By 391, the Emperor Theodosius had reversed Diocletian's edict and commanded all paganism to be stamped out, signalling the end of the Museum.[[56]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn54) For, throughout the fourth century the power of the church grew; an army of Gnostic monks became the main tool of the Patriarch of Alexandria and enforced his will. After the edict of Theodosius, the mob was led by the Patriarch Theophilus to demolish the Serapeum.[[57]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn55) Perhaps the library at the Caesarium survived; while references to Alexandrian scholars persist a little while longer, no sources actually mention its destruction. In 412 Theophilus' nephew Cyril succeeded him. The Patriarch exercised ever more control of the city, and the conflict between secular and religious authority was decided in 415, when the Roman prefect Orestes, officially still in charge of the province, objected to Cyril's order that all Jews be expelled from the city. Cyril's army of monks murdered the prefect and were cannonized by him for this deed; marauding through the city they came across Hypatia, daughter of the Museum's last great mathematician Theon. She was a Neoplatonist philosopher and astronomer whose teachings are partially recorded by one of her admirers and pupils, the Christian Synesius, and she was also supposedly an advisor to Orestes and one of the last members of the Museum. Driving home from her own lectures without attendant, this independent woman and scholar epitomized the suspect nature of Paganism and its heretical scientific teachings. She was dragged from her chariot by the mob, stripped, flayed, and finally burned alive in the library of the Caesareum as a witch. Cyril was made a saint.[[58]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html#fn56) After her death Alexandria became steadily less stable, overrun by the monks who evolved into the Copts, who incorporated the old Alexandrian prejudices towards foreigners with the new prejudice towards any scientific or classical knowledge. Too turbulent even to bow to the Emperor, Alexandria eventually revolted against Constantinople, wound up with two factions contending between two Patriarchs, and eventually fell to Arab conquerers, who had the last of the Library burned as fuel in the bath-houses of the city in 686.[[59]](http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/AlexandrianDecline_fn.html" \l "fn57)

**Conclusion**

Thus the Library of Alexandria and the Museum wended its way through the turbulent history of the Empire and outlived it by a short space of time, although paucity of sources makes it difficult to reconstruct an exact chronology of events. Its research probably reflected the foment of the times, and, while Neoplatonist in the main, also attracted other religious scholars, especially Jews, from Hellenistic times onward. Repeatedly rebuilt, modified, and burned, the few facts that can be determined about its long history justify its semi-legendary status. Haven for scholars of all kinds, its purpose as a center for learning was its eventual downfall. Enduring through Hellenistic civil strife, Dynastic war, the transition from kingdom to Roman province, and the abuses and good fortune it received through the sometimes capricious actions of successive emperors, it could not withstand the violent beginnings of Christianity which the city of Alexandria itself largely shaped.

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