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Annotation All 490 objects presented in the exhibition “Egypt’s Sunken Treasures” are listed at the end of this volume from pages 292 to 363 (V. Catalogue). The references (cat. #) in the body of the text refer to this catalogue. Readers will find more information here. Some objects, however, are presented within or at the end of individual chapters (blue pages). Notes marked within the texts are to be found at the end of the volume, from pages 376 to 378 (VI. Appendices).





I. THE REGION AND ITS HISTORY

FRANCK GODDIO

REDISCOVERED SITES

Alexandria is a spellbinding city. During the Hellenistic Period, its extraordinary influence spread over the entire ancient world. But the historical interest of this Egyptian region situated directly to the west of the mouth of the Nile's westernmost channel goes far beyond the field of and issues concerning Alexandrian studies to join Egyptology. Before the foundation of the city and its ports by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.E., the Canopic region for over four centuries was the main point of contact in the eastern Mediterranean between the Aegean world and the kingdom of the Pharaohs. Indeed, the Greeks and their products entered Egyptian territory almost exclusively by travelling up the western channel of the Nile to reach Memphis, the seat of royal power and riverine crossroads linking the channels of the Nile to Upper Egypt.

During the second millennium B.C.E., it seems that this waterway was not the usual pathway of communication. The Egyptians were content merely to prevent pirates from accessing it. At that time, the Pelusiatic channel, the easternmost, functioned as the principal axis of trade. It was used by Egyptian convoys heading to Asia and also by Canaanite merchant ships visiting the Two Lands. During this time, most Aegean luxury products passed via Cyprus and the Levantine coast. During the 8th century B.C.E., conquering empires arose in Asia: Assyrians, Babylonians and then Persians reached the Mediterranean and threatened Egypt at its eastern border by land and sea. At the same time, the geopolitical situation of the Levantine countries brought a new historical dimension to the Canopic region, which was directly accessible to sailors from the Balkan peninsula and Anatolia.

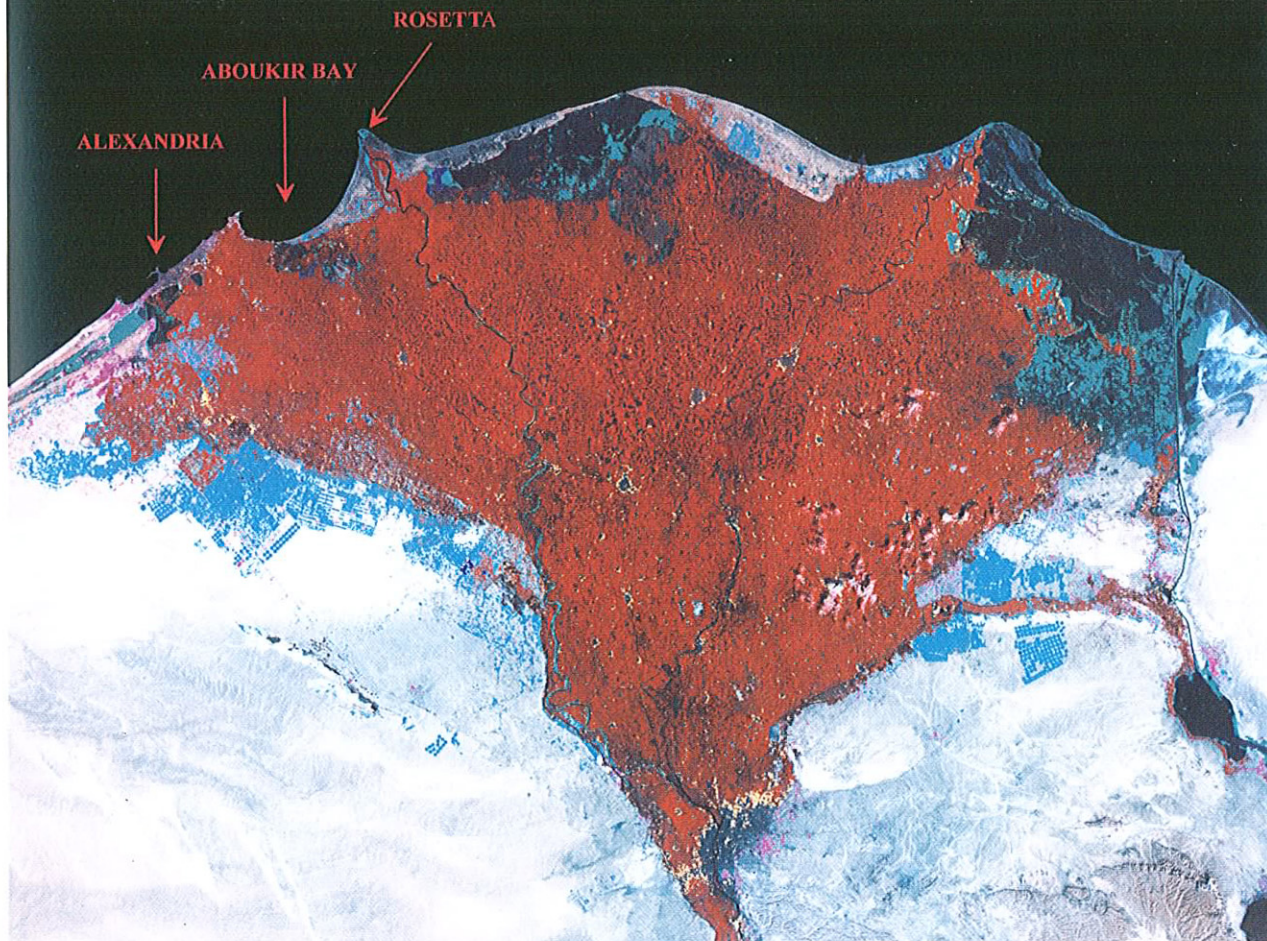
CANOPUS, MENOUTHIS, THONIS, HERACLEION, ALEXANDRIA: BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY

While the city of Alexandria, founded by Alexander the Great, was marked for a glorious destiny, other cities of this Egyptian coastal region were the first to experience periods of glory and prosperity. The creation and development of the Ptolemaic capital would, however, have strong repercussions on all those cities' histories, as they were closely linked by geography, religion, politics and economics.

Taking ancient authors and the papyrological and epigraphical evidence into account, references, albeit brief, prove essential for understanding the region that extended just to the west of the mouth of the Nile's westernmost channel. Several cities were once located there: Canopus, Heracleion, Thonis and Menouthis. Coherent data on these cities' positions and history can be gleaned by comparing occurrences of these toponyms in ancient texts.

The name of Canopus appears in the first half of the 6th century B.C.E. in a poem by Solon. The adjacent channel of the Nile and the surrounding region would thenceforth be called 'Canopic'. At the end of that century, Hecataeus of Miletus, succumbing perhaps to a typically Greek mythographical tendency, revealed that the name of Canopus was that of King Menelaus' pilot, who died there¹. Aeschylus specified that a city named Canopus was located near the eponymous mouth of the Nile².

Herodotus recounts that he visited a temple of Herakles in the region during his stay in Egypt around 450 B.C.E. (*Histories*, 2, 113). He adds that this shrine, the existence of which he dates to the distant



Satellite view of the Nile Delta
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times of the Trojan War, conferred the right of sanctuary. The ship that carried Queen Helen and Paris towards their fate was said to have put in at this port. Finally, the Greek author associates the temple of Herakles with a certain Thonis, guardian of the Canopic mouth of the Nile. Indeed, the sailor and geographer Scylax and the historian Diodorus Siculus agree in situating a city named Thonis at the entrance to the Nile's westernmost channel, the largest and deepest of the seven. This city, a border post and a major port of entry into Egypt, was the required gateway for all Greek ships wishing to drop anchor in the kingdom and an important trading centre. The city was prosperous, and a Greek community lived there, centuries before Alexander the Great's arrival in Egypt. Its situation at the mouth of the Nile made it the ideal place for controlling maritime trade, with ships sailing upstream to the city of Naukratis.

The existence of the city of Heracleion, which takes its name from its principal temple dedicated to Herakles, as mentioned by Herodotus, is attested in particular by a text called the *Decree of Canopus* inscribed on a trilingual stele, of which there are several examples. It informs us, in its Greek version, that a synod of priests was held in the city of Heracleion during the reign of King Ptolemy I. Strabo situated the city of Heracleion to the west of Canopus, near the Canopic mouth of the Nile, and indicated that long ago there was a city called Thonis at this location (*Geography*, 17, 1, 18). While the existence of the cities of Heracleion and Thonis was thus attested by the written sources, uncertainty remained regarding their respective locations. They seemed to have

been very close to each other. The hypothesis was therefore put forward in 1958 by Jean Yoyotte that they might be one and the same³.

Moreover, in its hieroglyphic version, the *Decree of Canopus* identifies the city of Heracleion as containing "the temple of Amun-Gereb". Amun-Gereb was a particular form of the most important god of the Egyptian pantheon who bequeathed to the new Pharaoh the inventory of his earthly and celestial kingdom. This god's shrine was thus a place for celebrating the rites establishing the new Pharaoh's power over the created universe, thereby assuring dynastic continuity. The Ptolemaic kings, who claimed to be descendants "on the paternal side of Herakles, son of Zeus, and on the maternal side of Dionysus, son of Zeus," showered this temple with gifts. The shrine certainly had a special importance for these kings of foreign origin who had become Pharaohs. The city of Heracleion was also the site of the celebration of the 'mysteries of Osiris' each year during the month of Khoiak. The god in his ceremonial boat was brought in procession from the temple of Amun in that city to his shrine in Canopus. A mystical connection thus linked the two neighbouring cities through the worship of Osiris, identified with Dionysus. Devotion to this god could only strengthen the goodwill of the Ptolemaic rulers towards Heracleion.

However, from the very beginning of the dynasty they had dealt a rude blow to this city, the *emporium* of Egypt. Once Alexandria was created, it had to be populated and its inhabitants provided with lucrative activities. The transfer of commercial activities from Heracleion to Alexandria was therefore ordered. It took place under unjust conditions.