

For further investigation

Franck Goddio and Jean-Yves Empereur are marine archaeologists who have made some exciting discoveries at Alexandria.

- Visit Franck Goddio's Underwater Archaeology website to view the excavation reports and photos of his underwater discoveries for the years 1996–2005: <http://www.underwaterdiscovery.org/Sitemap/Project/Alexandria/Default.aspx>
- What do you consider to be the most significant discoveries?
- Visit this website: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sunken/mapping.html> to read about Colin Clement 'Mapping the Treasures' and an interview with Jean-Yves Empereur. Then answer these questions:
 - What methods do marine archaeologists use to locate, map and excavate underwater archaeological sites?
 - How is technology such as EDM (Electronic Distance Measurement) and GPS (Global Positioning System) being used in underwater excavations at Alexandria?
 - What new theories about the ancient Pharos of Alexandria have been suggested as a result of archaeological analysis of the underwater Pharos site?

Activity: Photo essay

Write an article (about 750–1000 words) for publication in your school's newsletter. In your article, describe the methods used by marine archaeologists to investigate underwater sites, and briefly explain the contribution made by Goddio's and Empereur's excavations to our understanding of ancient Alexandria. Illustrate your story with appropriate images from the website. (Make sure you acknowledge your sources.)

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE IN ALEXANDRIA

Early Alexandria was a Hellenistic city, ruled by the Ptolemies who had originated in Macedonia and who brought their Greek culture with them. At the height of this period, the city's inhabitants numbered over 300 000 in the centre, while 700 000 lived in the outer metropolitan area. The population was a cosmopolitan mix of Greeks, Jews and native Egyptians, as well as other foreigners like Phoenicians, Nabataeans, Arabs and Indians.

The upper class

The privileges of life in Alexandria were not shared equally. A strict hierarchy governed all aspects of social and political life. The Greek intellectual and administrative upper class was an elite group. They enjoyed special privileges such as exemption from costly civic duties and corporal punishment. Their wealth came from property ownership and sometimes money lending. In later times, they engaged in trade, business and religious leadership.

The lower classes

The lower classes consisted of the unprivileged Greek and Greek-speaking communities who formed the largest group in the city. This group included resident aliens, Jews and native Egyptians, many of whom belonged to craft or sporting associations called *collegia*.

At the bottom of the lower class were the poor. During the Ptolemaic period, they were supported by religious groups, but under Roman rule the government gave grain doles and established poor houses and hospitals.

Slaves belonged to this group as well. There is little surviving evidence for slavery in Alexandria, but it is clear that it existed. By law, citizens could not be enslaved, but non-citizens lacked this protection and could be enslaved as a result of failure to pay debts or for other similar reasons. Some Alexandrian slaves were prisoners of war, primarily from Syria, while others came from Nubia or the Sudan.

FIGURE 17.12 Social hierarchy in Alexandria

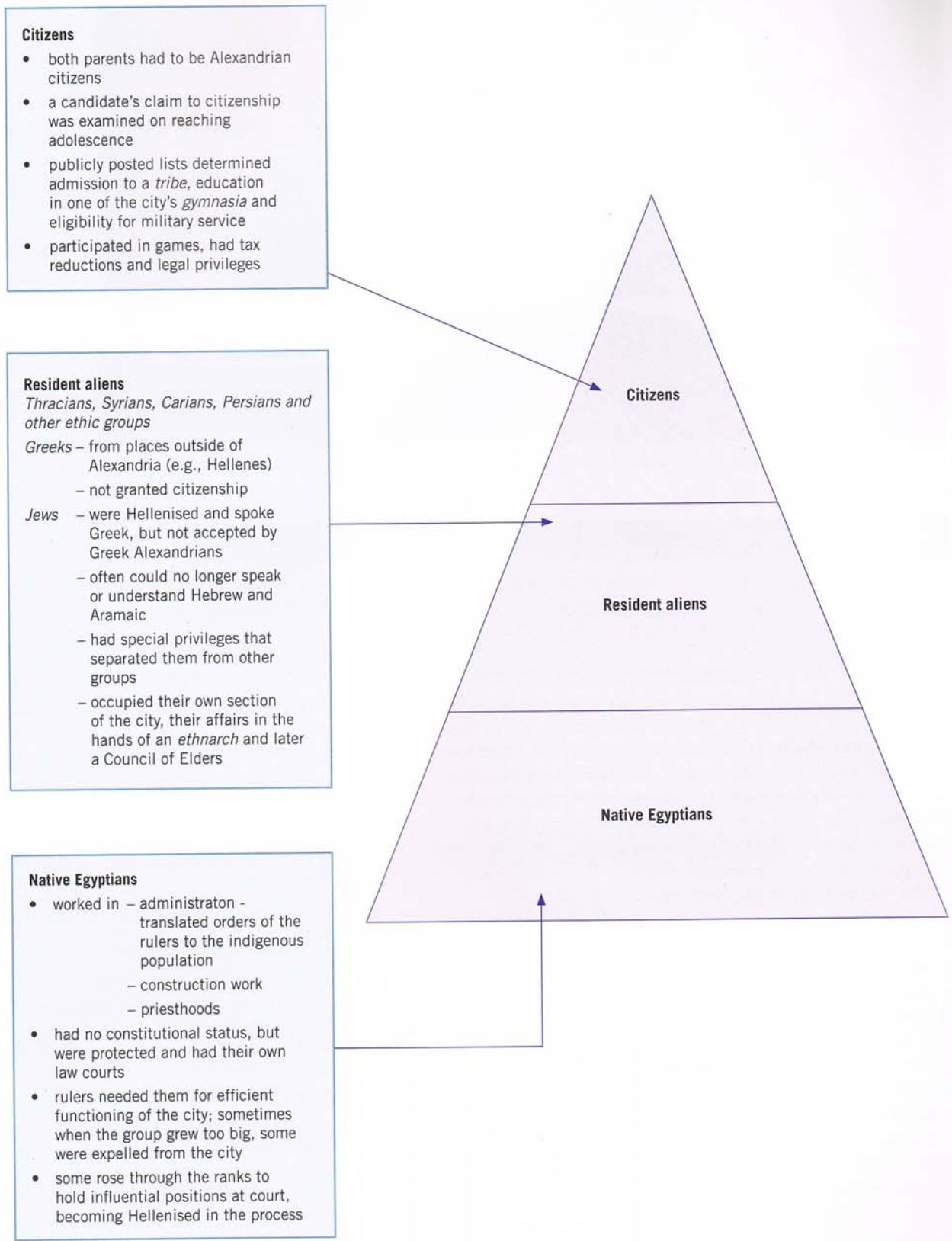




FIGURE 17.13 Terracotta lamps from the Graeco-Roman Museum depicting African slaves resting on lanterns

Activity: Role playing

In groups of four, construct a conversation between representatives of the social groups shown in Figure 17.12. Discuss your feelings about your treatment as residents of Alexandria. Topics to consider include rights, status, and occupation.

Political organisation

Alexandria was a *polis*, a Greek city-state, in which the citizens were organised in the traditional democratic way. Clear evidence of the political organisation of the city is no longer available; however, one surviving decree has enabled historians to identify some of the political structures from Ptolemaic times. It seems that Alexandrians were permitted a limited amount of self-government in the form of an Assembly (*Ecclesia*), a Town Council (*Boule*), and local courts (*dikasteria*) in which the upper class played a prominent role, as well as in the colleges of elected magistrates.

The roles of these magistrates probably included:

- maintenance of the roll of citizens
- presentation of city business to the Assembly
- administration of revenue
- organisation of games and public festivals.

It is possible that Alexandria also possessed a *Gerousia*, or Body of Elders, like other Ptolemaic cities.

During the Roman period, a Prefect was appointed as the chief administrator. The first Prefect was a soldier called Cornelius Gallus. Shortly after the beginning of Roman rule, the *Boule* was suspended, possibly because of the disorderly or rebellious behaviour of sections of the community. It was not until AD 200 that the *Boule* was restored by the emperor Septimius Severus.

Roman citizenship was a special privilege granted to Alexandrian citizens. Three Roman legions, each of 6000 men, together with several cohorts of auxiliaries, guaranteed the security of the city and maintained civil order when needed.

The role of the ruler

At first view, there would seem to be a contradiction between the outwardly 'democratic' constitution under which Alexandria operated, and the fact that it was ruled by a monarch throughout the Ptolemaic period. The Ptolemaic kings were the heads of government and played an active role in governing Egypt. Even though Alexandria possessed a constitution, the king could override it at any time. Although we do not possess very much evidence, it seems that the king did not usually interfere in the governing of the city, but allowed the citizen Assembly to handle its own affairs.

The Ptolemies appointed a 'General in charge of the city', whose duties may have included general supervision of the city and liaison between the civilian government and the king. They also added a third area of law to the existing Egyptian legal system and to the laws of the *polis* of Alexandria. This was the 'king's law', which included edicts passed by the king on issues of his choice. As one might expect, royal law outweighed the other sections of the legal system. No Alexandrian was exempt from these laws. When the Romans came, Roman law replaced the existing legal system.

Roman rule also brought changes to the role of the ruler. The emperors took a keen interest in the city. Vespasian, Titus, Hadrian, Septimius Severus and Diocletian all made the journey to see the sights of the city, to receive and maintain the loyalty of its populace, or to impose administrative reform. Vespasian chose to be proclaimed emperor in Alexandria following his success against the Jewish rebellion in Palestine. The Emperor Diocletian's visit followed the suppression of an Alexandrian revolt after an eight-month siege. He brutally punished the city by a vengeful slaughter of the population. The Roman prefect of the city erected a pillar near the city centre to commemorate the victory, the so-called 'Pompey's Pillar'.

Social control

Life in Alexandria in both late Ptolemaic and Roman times was often marked by street violence.

Ptolemaic governments were more interested in exercising control over the economy than over their subjects. So when relations between the rulers and the people broke down, the results were often violent. The problems faced by the Ptolemies in the period of their decline were made worse by the actions of the Alexandrian mob.

Comprised of people from all walks of Alexandrian life, the mob initially concerned itself with small affairs like fires and rough justice. For example, a member of the Roman embassy was attacked by the mob when he accidentally killed a cat, a sacred animal in Egyptian religion. However, in time the mob contributed to local and national instability. When Ptolemy IV died, for example, his minister Agathocles, his relatives and associates were murdered by the mob, which supported Ptolemy V Epiphanes as successor. Polybius gives the following account of what happened.

SOURCE 17.6

It was not long before Agathocles was led in in fetters, and as soon as he entered, some people ran up and at once stabbed him, an act of benevolence rather than enmity, for they thus saved him from suffering the fate he deserved. Next, Nikon was brought there and after him Agathoclea stripped naked with her sisters and then all her relatives. Last of all they dragged Oenante from the Thesmophorium and led her to the stadium naked on horseback. All of them were delivered into the hands of the mob, and now some began to bite them with their teeth, some to stab them and others to dig out their eyes. Whenever one of them fell they tore the body from limb to limb until they had thus mutilated them all. For terrible is the cruelty of the Egyptians when their anger is aroused.

Polybius, *The Histories*, 15.33

Numerous events demonstrate the Alexandrian mob's view of themselves as king-makers. In 80 BC, they took revenge on Ptolemy X for murdering Cleopatra Berenice, his stepmother, whom he had recently married. She had been a favourite of the mob, so they dragged Ptolemy from the palace to the *gymnasium* and assassinated him.

Under Roman rule, steps were taken to control Alexandria's mob. The geographer Strabo describes these measures in Source 17.7.

SOURCE 17.7

Three legions are stationed in Egypt, one in the city of Alexandria, the rest in the country. Besides these, there are also nine Roman cohorts quartered in the city, three on the borders of Ethiopia in Syene, as a guard to that tract, and three in other parts of the country. There are also three bodies of cavalry distributed at convenient posts.

Of the native magistrates in the cities, the first is the 'Expounder of the Law'—who is dressed in scarlet. He receives the customary honors of the land, and has the care of providing what is necessary for the city. The second is the 'Writer of the Records'; the third is the 'Chief Judge'; the fourth is the 'Commander of the Night Guard.' These officials existed in the time of the Ptolemaic kings, but in consequence of the bad administration of the public affairs by the latter, the prosperity of the city of Alexandria was ruined by licentiousness. Polybius expresses his indignation at the state of things when he was there. He describes the inhabitants of Alexandria as being composed of three classes, first the Egyptians and natives, acute in mind, but very poor citizens, and wrongfully meddlesome in civic affairs. Second were the mercenaries, a numerous and undisciplined body, for it was an old custom to keep foreign soldiers—who from the worthlessness of their sovereigns knew better how to lord it than to obey. The third were the so-called 'Alexandrines', who, for the same reason, were not orderly citizens; however, they were better than the mercenaries, for although they were a mixed race, yet being of Greek origin they still retained the usual Hellenic customs.

Such, then, if not worse, were the social conditions of Alexandria under the last kings. The Romans, as far as they were able, corrected—as I have said many abuses, and established an orderly government—by setting up vice-governors, nomarchs, and ethnarchs, whose business it was to attend to the details of administration.

Strabo, *Geography*, XVII.i.52–53, ii.4–5; XVIII.i.12–13

Understanding and using the sources

Source 17.7

- What changes did the Romans make to the Ptolemaic system of administration? Why were these changes considered necessary?
- What are the three 'classes' of citizens that Strabo identifies? How does Strabo rank them?
- How does this ranking compare with the information given in Figure 17.12? How would you explain the differences?
- What opinion about Ptolemaic kingship does Strabo offer? How reliable is he as a source for Ptolemaic Alexandria? Refer to the table of notes you made on these writers at the beginning of this chapter.

Persecution of Jews

Even the stationing of a legion within Alexandria was insufficient to prevent further violence. The target during early Roman rule was the Jewish population, in particular those who had become **Hellenised**. On many occasions, Jews were attacked, their houses looted and the occupants killed. The emperor Caligula stirred up trouble by issuing an edict ordering statues of himself as a god to be placed in the synagogues of Alexandria.

The Jews, who had previously been granted exemption from emperor worship by Augustus, refused to obey the edict and sent emissaries to Rome to protest. This aroused the hostility of the local mob and the Roman governor, Flaccus, who permitted general persecution to take place. However, after Caligula's timely assassination, the next emperor, Claudius, restored the Jews' former exemption from the practice of Caesar worship. Details of this period come from the Alexandrian Jewish historian Philo, who led the delegation to Rome seeking justice for the Jews.

Further conflict arose in AD 66 in the reign of Nero when the Alexandrian Jews rose up in support of the Jewish rebels in Judea. (See 'Masada' in Chapter 4.) The governor, Tiberius Alexander, himself of Jewish birth, called in two legions and reinforcements from Libya to quell the riot. Further revolts broke out and culminated in the great Jewish revolt under the emperor Trajan in AD 114–17. The historian Eusebius records that Alexandrians massacred the Jews, apparently destroying so much of the city in the process that Hadrian had to conduct substantial rebuilding.

For discussion

- Why were the Jews subjected to constant persecution?
- Why did the Alexandrian mob target the Jews?
- Why did the Romans take such violent reprisals against the Jews?
- Compare the treatment of the Jews in the Ptolemaic period with that in the Roman period. How would you explain the differences?

Persecution of Christians

Followers of the new Christian religion in Alexandria also found themselves victims of persecution. Beginning in AD 64, these persecutions continued well into the 4th century AD. Official persecution was carried out by the Roman authorities:

- Septimius Severus issued an edict in AD 202 that dissolved the Christian School of Alexandria and forbade the population to convert to Christianity.
- In AD 303, Diocletian ordered the demolition of all Christian churches, as well as the burning of sacred books and the enslavement of Christians. This ushered in a period known as the 'Era of Martyrs', a time when many Christians in Alexandria and throughout Egypt only survived because they were needed to work in the stone mines.

The Alexandrian mob frequently took matters into its own hands. Dionysius of Alexandria, a 3rd century Christian bishop, in a letter to Fabius of Antioch, described the persecutions of AD 249. The following account is from his letters as cited by Eusebius and St Athanasius.

SOURCE 17.8

The mob first seized an old man named Metras, beat him with clubs when he would not deny his faith, pierced his eyes and face with reeds, dragged him out of the city, and stoned him. Then a woman named Quinta, who would not sacrifice, was drawn along the rough pavement by the feet, dashed against millstones, scourged, and finally stoned in the same suburb. The houses of the faithful were plundered. Not one, so far as the bishop knew, apostatised. The aged virgin Apollonia, after her teeth had been knocked out, sprang of her own accord into the fire prepared for her rather than utter blasphemies. Serapion had all his limbs broken, and was dashed down from the upper story of his own house. It was impossible for any Christian to go into the streets, even at night, for the mob was shouting that all who would not blaspheme should be burnt.

Catholic Encyclopaedia <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05011a.htm>

For discussion

Suggest reasons why paganism, Judaism and Christianity were incompatible in Alexandria.

Persecution by Christians

The tables were turned following the accession of the Emperor Constantine who converted to Christianity towards the end of his reign. Despite his declaration of freedom of worship throughout the empire in AD 313, non-Christians in Alexandria were subjected to intermittent persecution.

Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria in AD 385, began a program of persecution that destroyed non-Christian shrines in North Africa. With the blessing of the emperor Theodosius I, he converted the temple of Dionysus to a church, burned down the *Mithraeum* (sacred to the god Mithras), and destroyed the temple of Zeus. Pagan priests were stoned to death, while the mob—Christian this time—vandalised cult statues. Pagan Alexandrians revolted and after fierce street fighting they took refuge in the Serapeum. The Christians besieged and occupied the building, destroying its irreplaceable collection of classical literature. Stone from the pagan temples was used to construct new Christian churches.

Hypatia of Alexandria

A famous example of this persecution by Christians is the murder of the philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria in AD 415. She was one of the most learned thinkers of the time, and lectured in mathematics and philosophy in both Athens and Alexandria. It was her popularity and intelligence, as well as her lack of interest in Christianity, that caused her downfall. Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, launched a series of attacks on her that ended with her brutal murder by a band of fanatical monks.

Socrates Scholasticus, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, gives the following account:

SOURCE 17.9

On account of the self-possession and ease of manner, which she had acquired in consequence of the cultivation of her mind, she not infrequently appeared in public in presence of the magistrates. Neither did she feel abashed in going to an assembly of men. For all men on account of her extraordinary dignity and virtue admired her the more. Yet even she fell victim to the political jealousy which at that time prevailed. For as she had frequent interviews with Orestes [the Prefect of Alexandria who had fallen out with Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria], it was calumniously reported among the Christian populace, that it was she who prevented Orestes from being reconciled to the bishop. Some of them, therefore, hurried away by a fierce and bigoted zeal, whose ringleader was a reader named Peter, waylaid her returning home, and dragging her from her carriage, they took her to the church called **Caesareum**, where they completely stripped her, and then murdered her with tiles [roof tiles shaped like oyster shells]. After tearing her body in pieces, they took her mangled limbs to a place called Cinaron, and there burnt them. This affair brought not the least opprobrium, not only upon Cyril, but also upon the whole Alexandrian church. And surely nothing can be farther from the spirit of Christianity than the allowance of massacres, fights, and transactions of that sort.

<http://cosmopolis.com/alexandria/hypatia-bio-socrates.html>

For further investigation

There are accounts of Hypatia's death that differ from that given by Socrates Scholasticus. Some of them can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypatia_of_Alexandria. The version given by John, Bishop of Nikiû, in the 7th century AD draws different conclusions from the evidence, portraying Hypatia as a witch!

- Read as many versions as you can and decide for yourself what probably happened and why. Remember to assess the reliability of each source by considering who wrote it, when, why and for what audience.
- What does this event tell us about the politics of religion in Alexandria in the 5th century AD and later?

PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENT AND SPECTACLES

Alexandrians were very fond of entertainment, both private and public, as well as spectacles of all kinds. Such pursuits were cosmopolitan in nature, reflecting the varied interests and customs of the city's inhabitants. The theatre, hippodrome, stadium, amphitheatre and various *gymnasia* were all well patronised. Particularly popular with the Alexandrian crowds were the *citharodes*, poet performers who played the harp and sang.

Equally popular was the theatre, where audiences flocked to watch **mimes**. Herodas, writing in the early Ptolemaic period, devised a new genre of mime, using old material and presenting it in a new way considered to be wholly Alexandrian. These dramatic pieces characteristically dealt with marriages plagued by jealousy and adultery, the world of prostitutes and pimps, vulgar tradesmen and naughty schoolboys.



FIGURE 17.14 This **faience** statuette shows an actor wearing the mask of a comic slave.