

## ★ **Alexandria: The City That Changed the World**

**Islam Issa**

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Islam Issa's *Alexandria* is an outstanding biography of a unique city, describing how the Egyptian locale changed from its founding by Alexander the Great into the modern day.

"Despite its classical renown and enduring impact, Alexandria is neglected in comparison to other centres of antiquity," Issa argues before seeking to correct the issue. The book starts with the iconic commander measuring the footprint of the future city and planning what it would become. It then tracks how his successor, Ptolemy, built Alexandria into the capital of his family's longstanding dynasty.

There are fascinating discussions of the city's Royal Library and of how it acquired books from far-flung empires; there's coverage of the Pharos of Alexandria, too, as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The story winds through the city's conquest by the Romans, the rise of early Christianity, and the city's destruction in the fourth century CE. Also covered are the Islamic conquest and the Fatimid caliphate. Every era receives its due, with events recounted in narrative form, embellished by historical anecdotes and memorable figures throughout.

Cleopatra and Hypatia are among those who played extended roles in Alexandria's development, and *Alexandria* weaves their stories into its pages well. And there's contemporary reportage on how the city still evokes specific events from its history and on how the myriad people and cultures who made their way to Alexandria over the centuries continue to define it. "Alexandria is a lens through which people, civilisations and ideas came and went," Issa says, "and yet the city still stands."

Conversational and rich with research, *Alexandria* is a fantastic history of a storied city that pays fitting tribute to its subject.

JEFF FLEISCHER (January / February 2024)

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