

Archaeological Cases on Trial: Dueling Perspectives
(Aka... how *can* They Say That? or I Don't Believe it!)

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Topic:

The Library of Alexandria was considered one of the largest libraries, only to be destroyed alongside the knowledge and scripts.

Does the burning of this library signify an stop to academia during this time?

(Or was the destruction of the library external or internal?)

Was the destruction of the library an internal force to stop knowledge and religion or was it an external take over?

Possible Discussions:

- Education
- **How much Knowledge was Lost**
- **Archeological Site**
- The purpose of the library beyond storing books

Documentary on the Library:

The great library of Alexandria, located in Alexandria Egypt) was recorded and built to hold and store information within its confines. Built by Ptolemy 1 in 288 B.C., the great library strove to be an information hub. Working in tandem with the city, the library would take scrolls and any form of literature from visiting ships, transcribe them and keep the original, returning the copies to the visitors. It is within this library that basic form of organization began due to the excess amount of scrolls being pulled up on shelves. What makes this library unique, is not the

collection of information, but the story around its destruction. It has been widely accepted that in 47 B.C., Julius Caesar sieged the library and burned it to the ground, not only losing many valuable originals, but also destruction of the building itself. While the library was able to pick itself up, the loss of recorded data has been considered detrimental.

Much like invading nations, when taking control of a new nation, sieging was a common practice for some ancient civilizations. Among many ancient libraries, destruction was tandem with a new leader. In this regard, many people tend to dispute the claim of Julius Caesar's destruction as the most important circumstance, the library had dealt with many fires and an earthquake. However. It is also hypothesized that with the coming of Christianity, the change in religious beliefs and dissociation of a knowledged mass destroyed the library from within its own governmental system (“The Genius...”). Although, regardless of the method of destruction, a general indifference and neglect of these library systems is equally supported cause, by lack of use or funds, especially after constant sieges (40BC, 274 AD) and fires. During the civil war in the late 3rd century c.e., under emperor Aurelian, the daughter library was also noted to be destroyed again.

Among the destruction of the library, the contents within the library are also issue to controversy, as many “ethnic and religious groups were represented in the city”, having “the translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek” (Rawlet) : the Septuagint, which is the earliest known greek translation of the New Testament.

The use of the library was academic in that the primary focus on knowledge was known to its users. It is speculated that “over half a million documents from Assyria, Greece, Persia, Egypt, India and many other nations” were held in there, and many are believed to be original

texts from there. With the vast wealth of knowledge at this time, predating the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, another famous collection of knowledge, destroyed by .

Now although the Library of Alexandria was well known for its vast collection of knowledge from around the world, there was more to the library than just an enormous room filled with scrolls. The Library of Alexandria was part of a research institute known as the Musaeum, which also included another smaller library, known as the Sarapeteum; which also contained a number of study rooms.

While the exact layout of the Library itself cannot be documented. There are a handful of historians that think that in addition to the scroll's repositories the Great Library of Alexandria contained within itself a garden, multiple reading rooms, and several different meeting rooms for discussion, a few lecture halls, and a covered Peripatos (walkway). The most prominent was the bibliotheca (library) itself, a hall filled with shelves that stored the scrolls, all made of papyrus. Some estimates say that up to 500,000 documents were stored in the Great Library at its height.

With its quickly growing collection of the world's knowledge under one roof this also meant a growing number of government paid scholars coming to visit (Newittz), up to a few hundred at one time . Written on scrolls stored within the shelves of the Great Library were great works of astronomy, mathematics, engineering, medicine, geography, religion and other sciences. Which then supports the thought behind the historians that have to have thought the Library contained more than just one enormous room and the scrolls found inside of it. Then allowing scholars and scientists from all over the world to absorb the knowledge within the scrolls in the garden, reading rooms, and lecture halls.

Like both facilities, there were a number of scholars who participated in academic



advancement, living close by in the Museum of Alexandria, in which the library was a part of. Their role was to research, translate, copy and write with the information available. With a similar set up to the House of the Wisdom, it is also plausible that discussions were also happening between scholars who traveled to this library (Chesser). However, the House of the Wisdom also fell to outside forces when the mongolians came and destroyed the golden age of Baghdad

In drawing parallels through the House of Wisdom, outside forces came from war in the destruction of written knowledge. It is also speculated that a third attempt to destroy the library came when muslim nations took over Egypt, but these speculations come from source believed to be purely propaganda, as the dates of the event do not match up with the library, as the claims were written about the 12th century, but the library had been well demolished since the 7th century CE

Destruction in 48 BC

The siege of Alexandria is thought to be the main cause to the destruction of the great library. The siege took place between 48-47 BC where the Roman general, Julius Caesar would lead his forces into Alexandria, defended by the ptolemaic fleet. At the time the Pharaoh of Alexandria was Ptolemy XIII son of Ptolemy Auletes. However Ptolemy XIII was the puppet ruler as he was too young to lead at around ages 12 to 14. Many battles occurred between the Romans and Egyptians during siege at both day and night. However, to get the upper hand in battle, Roman soldiers set the docks of Alexandria and other



buildings to blaze which would eventually catch fire to the great library. The burning and destruction of the great library was not on purpose as the fires became uncontrollable.

The fall of the the great library was known as the biggest event to come out of the siege of Alexandria. Before the fall, it was known for its enormous stache of books ranging nearly up to 800,000 volumes written in Egyptian under the rulings of the Ptolemy Kings, from its beginnings in the 3rd century BC till the siege. Along with the loss of the library, the ptolemaic forces would lose the battle to the Romans and the death of the Pharaoh Ptolemy XIII as well. After the battle the crown would late be passed down to share between cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy XIV.

Destruction in 273 AD, 298 AD

However, the library is noted to have withstood the destruction and survived for another three centuries after Cesarean fire. In 273, Aurelian had just conquered Zenobia, queen of Palmyra, which resulted in a civil war in Egypt, as Palmyra had taken over Egypt when the previous roman emperor died. Aristarchus had recorded a civil war that led to the destruction of the library as citizens were angry at the quick change of government, against those loyal to Zenobia and those who prefered Aurelian, Rome, to lead them. Those were angered and affected most by the shift change in rulers were the paid scholars of the library, as Aurelian closed the Museum for foreign scholars and effectively cut their stipends, while Alexandria continued to be places of military control and persecution (Phillips). With the amount of pressure coming from a

seizure of war, destruction of the library occurred after a three year political shift from Palmyra back to Roman rule.

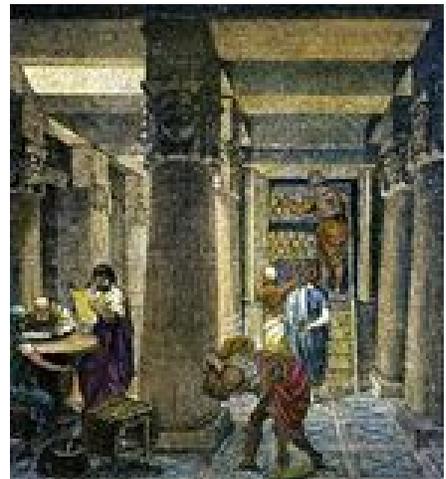
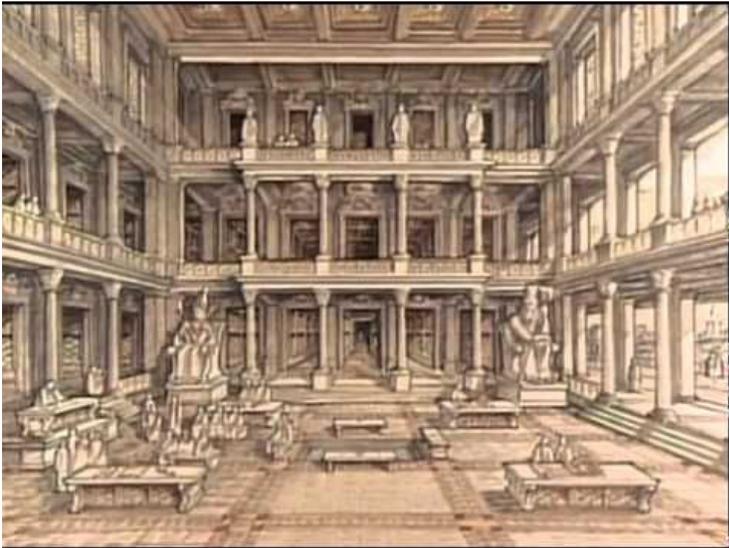
The library is also recorded to be bombarded by Bruchion 25 years later in 298 A.D. He was attempted to remerge himself as a powerful figure and led to destruction in violent path. During an eight month siege, the sister library, the Temple of Serapeum was ultimately destroyed, a section of the once great library.

Although these sieges occurred at a much later date than Julius Caesar, Egypt has always been in constant struggle with other nations, often times a prize to be won and conquered because of their fertile farmland in the Nile. When Aurelian had taken control of Rome, the great empire had dissolved into a variety of nations, open for other nations to attack or split off entirely. Egypt had been lost to Palmyra, effectively cutting off one major source of food for the Roman Empire. In this invasion, control Alexandria, and ultimately Egypt, was important not only for land, but for food and resources. Having a strong shift in governments, 270 AD from the fall of Roman Emperor Claudius, to 273, to control of the Roman Emperor Aurelian, sets up grounds for disagreements on how Egypt should be run.

The fate of this ambitious library is obscured by historical myths as Greek supremacy gave way to Roman dominance. Legend has it, however, that the library and its collection were burned when Alexandria was besieged by Julius Caesar in 48 B.C. Although the library suffered some damage during the battle, its demise was probably gradual and much less dramatic. As the Roman Empire expanded across the Mediterranean, the center of culture and intellectual life shifted to Rome, and the rise of Christianity brought with it a suspicion of secular knowledge and the "pagan" scrolls held in the library. Most historians agree that the decline of the Great Library of Alexandria was due to what endangers libraries of the present day -- general indifference and bureaucratic neglect. ("The Genius...")



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