Chapter I

Alexandria

Travelers reaching Alexandria look upon the sandy shores of Africa with sadness. Napoleon’s soldiers, too, lost heart as they went ashore on the deserted land of Egypt. And prior to Napoleon’s soldiers, the army of Cambyses rebelled against their commanders, who had brought them to this sun-scorched country; and prior to that, the slaves of the pharaohs cursed the land upon which they were building their pyramids—the pyramids that have since seen so many devastating epochs and so much great fame.

Alexandria made no extraordinary impression on me. The sight of palms, beautiful against the bright horizon, was familiar to me, coming as I had from Rhodes. A low, sandy shore appears too plain to an eye that, being used to Russian marsh banks, at times even gazes upon them with affection. As for the city itself, it is quite a decent sight not just by Oriental standards but indeed by Western ones. Alexandria is especially beautiful when viewed from the old port, where our steamboat was docked. On the left there are the palace of the Pasha, his harem, a garden, and a lighthouse; opposite to them are a fine arsenal building, some beautiful houses, a fortress, and more gardens. It is only on the right that a sandbar, protruding far into the sea, heralds the desert,
frightening to a traveler; scattered across it are some hovels, an unpleas-
ant disturbance to the eye, whilst a large number of windmills, their
wings spread, seem to be wishing to evict one and all from the place.

The port is excellent, whilst also being the only one along the entire
African shore, from Tunis to Alexandria. On the opposite side, there is
a new port, almost inaccessible to large vessels; the old one being so im-
mense, however, that it could accommodate the entire European fleet.
The founding of Alexandria, similar to the founding of Constantinople, was accompanied by a miracle. In the East, there are miracles wherever you look, and in this respect, time has not changed its mores. Alexander the Great was struck by the advantageous position of a small village named Rhacotis. Having gone to sleep with the thought of a world-celebrated trading city, whence his name would easily reach every corner of the universe, he dreamed of an old man engulfed in light and flames (Constantine the Great was visited by an old woman), who—speaking in a prophet’s voice, in the verses of Alexander’s beloved Odyssey—indicated a spot for such a city: the very same village of Rhacotis. On the morrow, Alexander and the learned Dinocrates of Rhodes\(^1\) commenced to draw a plan of the city which still bears Alexander’s name, even though the ancient city built by him is no more.

It is odd that people can never recognize genius in things that they themselves would be able to achieve. In order to explain a great deed, they are willing to concoct a fairy-tale, to admit the influence of chance, the unavoidable nature of fate—anything but the excellence of man. And yet Napoleon saw Alexander’s genius; the greatest of conquerors, he said that Alexander had covered himself in fame in the construction of Alexandria more than he had done in all his conquests. It is a pity that this marvelous idea came to Napoleon somewhat late. Like the ancient Greek hero, he, too—struck by the advantageous position of the city on the frontier of Asia and Africa, within sight of Europe—never doubted Alexandria’s capacity to be the capital of the world; however, we should add: it can only ever be so in the hands of a commander such as Napoleon, for Alexandria, deprived of natural defenses, can be and indeed has been captured by the enemy with little effort, from the land and from the sea. Not so with Constantinople. It has the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, spread like two mighty arms northward and southward—so as to join

\(\text{All notes, unless otherwise indicated, are by the editor.}\)

\(\text{1 Dinocrates of Rhodes (4th century BCE), a Greek thinker and architect; designed plans for Alexandria.}\)
together for peace and for trade, whilst also, like two mighty arms, always ready to defend it.

It was not until we arrived at Alexandria that we learned about a 10-day-long quarantine that everyone had to observe upon arrival here. You can imagine how the news affected us, having as we did so many reasons to hasten to our destination. We were separated from the other passengers and taken to a small palace, the residence of Ibrahim Pasha in Alexandria, where we were soon left quite alone.

A spacious cross-shaped room had windows facing in all directions, every spot providing a view of the calm sea and the sky, lucid and edged with the bright-red horizon where the sun had just set—a sky the similar of which I had not seen in a long time. The night fell suddenly, dark despite a myriad of stars scattered across the sky. My footfalls echoed hollowly on the marble floor of the deserted, dimly lit palace . . .

Alexandria! Egypt! . . . What ample food for thought they provide. Alexandria, a source of enlightenment, wisdom, faith, and beliefs to the Greeks, who bequeathed them to the world. Egypt, a land abounding with Biblical deeds, drenched in the blood of the early martyrs, one which was among the first to receive the legacy of the Christian teaching . . . The land of the Nile and the pyramids, the land of fertility, abundant and evergreen! . . . What a wealth of memories, what a wealth of expectations, many of which, alas, were never to be fulfilled! Childhood beliefs are the brightest, the most radiant of all beliefs! Happy is he who will never part with them, whose bitter experience will never extinguish them along the way, nor replace them with another light, one in which things and people appear in a different guise! . . .

We were received with rare welcome and hospitality. In spite of that, our imprisonment was becoming ever harder to bear, and when the day of liberation came, we set off for the city ere daybreak.

In the time of Pliny, Alexandria had 600,000 inhabitants, of whom 300,000 were citizens and 300,000 slaves. Upon capturing Alexandria,
Amr⁴ related to Omar⁵ that there were 4,000 palaces, 4,000 baths, 400 theaters, and 12,000 shops in the city. At the time of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt,⁶ Alexandria lay in ruins, the latter providing shelter to pirates; nevertheless, it had as many as 8,000 inhabitants. Apart from building some fortifications, Napoleon managed to do nothing for the city. Mohammed Ali⁷ found Alexandria in a most miserable state; there were barely 4,000 or 5,000 people left there. Having learned his lesson from the landing of the English, still fresh in memory,⁸ the Pasha hastened to restore the ancient wall that Saladin's⁹ successors had built with a view to defending the city from the crusaders, and he also erected some new fortifications. Having completed the first of his tasks, he then turned to the city that was put on the map of the world by Alexander and Napoleon!

These days Alexandria resembles a European city not just from without but also from within, tinted with a dark Oriental hue that does not quite become her. It is clean and tidy, like most cities in Egypt, which is bound to catch the eye of any traveler, especially one familiar with Turkish cities. The original impelling reason for such a state was this. Unaccustomed to opposition, Mohammed Ali was defeated, time and time again, by the plague, which he fought most desperately. He put quarantine cordons not only along the shores but also around the inland areas of the country; he brought European doctors and inspectors there; he took the strictest measures—but all in vain: the plague kept recurring in Egypt, reaping a rich death harvest. Finally, one of the Europeans, I forget the name, gave him an idea, bearing in mind the mores of the East in general and, particularly, Mohammed Ali’s own disposition. The European put his suggestions in the form of a well-known fable, in which a shepherd, having herded his sheep

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⁴ Amr ibn al-ʿAs (585–664 CE), Muslim military commander in charge of the conquest of Egypt.
⁵ Omar (also Umar) ibn al-Khattab (584–644 CE), Mohammed's companion, caliph; presided over a rapid expansion of the Arab caliphate.
⁶ 1798–1801.
⁷ Mohammed Ali (1769–1849), the founder of the Khedive (viceroyal) dynasty ruling Egypt under the nominal suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire.
⁸ Alexandria expedition, led by General Alexander Mackenzie-Fraser in March–September 1807 as part of the Anglo-Ottoman War.
⁹ Saladin (An-Nasir Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, 1137–93), the first Ayyubid sultan of Egypt and Syria; led the Muslims against the crusaders.
behind a solid fence, stands by the gate and guards them day and night, while the sheep keep perishing, for a wolf had got inside the pen even before the shepherd took his guard.

“So what is one to do?” Mohammed Ali asked. “Should one wait for the wolf to kill the shepherd himself!?”

“No, one has to destroy its lair completely.”

“And where is it?”

“In the dirt that is piled up on the streets of every city, so much so that one cannot pass through.”

That was enough for Mohammed Ali to set to work with all the energy which he alone possessed. Not only have the cities, whatever you say of them, been cleaned and swept ever since, but they have also been daily sprinkled with water, and so the plague, touch wood, has not returned to Egypt for nearly 10 years now!

Up until this year, Alexandria was believed to have 80,000 inhabitants; however, according to a census that is coming to a conclusion all across Egypt now, and which should give us a chance to obtain correct information about the country’s population, there appear to be 145,000 people in Alexandria.

The city has a square, a fairly spacious one, with a fountain in the middle—albeit with no water, but one has to accustom oneself to such oddities in the East—and a very beautiful fountain it is. The square is laid out with the houses of European consul-generals: some owned by themselves, others by their governments, yet others rented from Ibrahim Pasha, for one side of the square is almost entirely taken up by his houses; there are also houses of rich merchants, built in the Italian taste, and a number of shops, hotels, and coffee houses. One has to note that consuls and rich merchants constitute Oriental aristocracy.

The square brings to mind squares in Italian cities: the same crowd of people, constantly moving and hustling, the same costumes, the same language, the same energetic, fitful manner in which people move when they walk or talk, very much like timid little animals rushing around ere the onset of a storm.

We visited the dutiful T., who had stayed behind as the deputy of the Russian Consul General, the latter having gone to Cairo, where the
Pasha’s court also was. Accompanied by T., we set off to visit Artim Bey. Artim Bey is the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Commerce, which title obliges him to live permanently in Alexandria. Of Armenian descent, he was brought up in France and is very well educated. Having replaced Bogos Bey, the renowned figure who had for many years been a confederate and the closest aide of Mohammed Ali, at his post, Artim Bey, in his turn, had managed to win the confidence of the old Viceroy, who was not too easily swayed by new people.

To find the East in Alexandria, reader, you have to go to her bazaars: they are as variegated, crowded, dark, and mysterious as the fairy-tales from One Thousand and One Nights. You shall be amazed by women’s heavy clothes, each of them being shrouded, in all senses of the word, in a black satin habara and a black veil, tarkha; withal, falling across the bridge of her nose, a burqu12 covers her face, shaped as a triangle, also of black fabric. The nose appears to be sunken; the cloth is not draped; the woman cannot control the veil lying upon her, as heavy as the burden of marital restraint. It is quite different in Constantinople. Light and snow-white, the veil is graciously wrapped round the wearer’s head and face, and as her hands hold it from below, it parts slightly, as if stirred by an unconscious movement, so that you can frequently see not only her jet-black eyes but also her ivory cheeks and extremely well-shaped nose. Plain women pride themselves on never breaking Mohammed’s commandment, and right they are to be proud, whatever the reason for their behavior.

Suburban houses, drowning in their gardens, are beautiful, especially along the Mahmoud-iya Canal;13 not far from them, upon a hill, rises a magnificent pillar crowned with a capital in the composite order. We shall not dwell on the precise dedication of this pillar,

10 Artin Bey (1800–1859), Egyptian politician and scholar; minister of Foreign Affairs and Commerce under the Khedive dynasty in 1844–52.
11 Boghos Bey (Yusufian, 1775–1844), Egyptian politician; minister of Foreign Affairs of the Khedives.
12 Al-habara is the Egyptian form of the niqab; Kovalevsky refers here to the traditional long dress. Tarkha is the head cover, and al-burqu is the face cover worn by women.
13 Mahmoudiya Canal, constructed by Mohammed Ali between 1817 and 1820 to bring fresh water to Alexandria.
named after Pompey\textsuperscript{14}—whether it be to himself, or to Diocletian\textsuperscript{15} (whose name is on its top), or to the founder of Alexandria, as others believe; suffice it to say that the tomb of Alexander was not situated here, as many claim, and it was not his grave that this pillar stood over. Here they had a royal palace, temples, perhaps even the Temple of Serapis,\textsuperscript{16} and the priests’ dwelling. The body of Alexander is known to have been placed in a coffin of pure gold and transported by Ptolemy I\textsuperscript{17} to the capital of his kingdom. Ptolemy Cocles\textsuperscript{18} happened to be in need of gold, so he moved the great conqueror from the golden coffin to a crystal one and installed it at the opposite end of the city. We shall devote to the subject an article apart, in which we shall attempt to justify our words.

Some say that the original shape of this and many other similar pillars is borrowed from the cypress; others give a poetic interpretation to the ancient tale of closed lotus leaves, which they take for the prototype of the capital. In my opinion, columns with capitals have been revived as an imitation of the palm-tree with its flopped crown, whilst the minaret imitates the cypress. The first column ever was erected in the land of palms; the first minaret, in the land of cypresses.

On the embankment of the new harbor, near the gates, there are two obelisks, both brought from Memphis by the Greeks during their reign in Egypt. One stands on a slightly carved plinth, the other lies in the dust; both, however, have been seriously damaged, most of the hieroglyphs on one side of the standing obelisk rubbed off. They say it has been battered by sand during the \textit{khamasin}\textsuperscript{19} blowing in April and May, which is hard to believe unless you have yourself experienced the effect of the wind, and that is something still awaiting me. The hieroglyphs on the other sides, especially on the opposite one, are quite intact and very beautiful.

\textsuperscript{14} Pompey (Gnaeus Pompeus Magnus, 106–48 BCE), Roman statesman and general.
\textsuperscript{15} Diocletian (244–311 CE), Roman emperor.
\textsuperscript{16} A Greek-Egyptian syncretic deity of abundance.
\textsuperscript{17} Ptolemy I Soter (r. 305/304–282 BCE), the first ruler of Egypt and the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty.
\textsuperscript{18} Kovalevsky is mistaken. There was no ruler in the Ptolemaic dynasty named “Cocles.” Kovalevsky likely relies on another Russian travelogue, A. S. Norov, \textit{Puteshestvie po Egiptu i Nubii v 1834–1835 gg.} (St. Petersburg, 1840), 48.
\textsuperscript{19} Khamsin, the hot and dry wind in the spring.
The obelisk is known as Cleopatra’s Needle.

Both monoliths have been presented by Mohammed Ali, one to France, the other to England; but how magnificent soever they may be, neither country has taken them away yet, for transporting them would be extremely expensive.

From these obelisks on the embankment, one can look toward the sea and toward the city, including her dead part, the necropolis—a view so fine that one forgets what is behind: hovels inhabited by soldiers’ wives and half-naked children, who cry for bakshish, or alms.

There are catacombs in Alexandria or, more precisely, beyond Alexandria; a traveler, unless he loses his way or suffocates in them, shall be extremely happy to emerge into daylight and breathe in fresh air. There are also the so-called Baths of Cleopatra, although why those creep-holes are called baths, let alone the Baths of Cleopatra, is a mystery to me.

Social life in Alexandria, like anywhere else in the East, is a thing unknown. There is theater, but it is poor and not attended by polite society; two or three houses open their doors to travelers.

Now, reader, you are cognizant with present-day Alexandria: one might even say, with her best aspects. We shall presently turn 2,132 years back and see what was here then. I shall not describe its buildings and monuments for you, as those dead signs are not as clear, their language not as comprehensible to the soul as life itself, the inner life of the city.

Alexandria is celebrating: Ptolemy Soter declares his son, Ptolemy Philadelphus, his co-ruler.20 They are presently in a pavilion built for the occasion, a pavilion gleaming with gold, silver, Persian and Indian fabrics, precious stones, and rare minerals from every land. Finally, the procession commences to move. Marching at its head are flag-bearers of divers corporations. They are followed by Greek priests, lined up according to their hierarchy. The celebration is mainly Greek, expressing

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20 Author’s note: Kallixeinos of Rhodes.

Editor’s note: Callixeinus of Rhodes (also Callixeinos or Kallixeinos), Hellenist author, contemporary of the first rulers of the Ptolemaic dynasty. His works are no longer extant, but citations are collated in Felix Jacoby, “Kallixeinos von Rhodos (627),” in Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker Part I–III, ed. Felix Jacoby, accessed May 10, 2019, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1873-5363_boj_a627.
the most significant myths of Bacchus, and therefore innumerable priests take part in it, all riding in ornate chariots, performing various scenes from the god's life.

There follows a four-wheeled chariot, drawn by 60 people, carrying an enormous statue representing the city of Nisa. This last—dressed in a yellow, gold-embroidered tunic with a Laconic cloak over it—is holding a scepter in its left hand, its head decorated with ivy and vine leaves made of pure gold and precious stones. Operated by a clever mechanism, the statue can get up on its own, pour milk from a full cup, and sit down again.

Behind the statue, 100 people draw a chariot carrying a press. Sixty satyrs, led by Silenus, press grapes to the sounds of singing and flutes, a stream of sweet wine running in their wake all along the way.

Next comes a whole section with vases, urns, priestly paraphernalia of every kind, tripods, crockery, kitchen utensils, &c.—all of pure gold, of fine workmanship and extreme value. I shall forego a detailed description of all those objects, omitting the size and weight of each.

One thousand and six hundred children, dressed in white tunics, wreaths on their heads, follow those precious objects, carrying divers wine vessels and jugs, golden and silver.

One cannot help mentioning an enormous cage drawn by 500 people. Pigeons and doves constantly fly out of it, and people catch them by long ribbons wrapped round them. Two fountains, one gushing milk, the other wine, stand on the chariot itself, the latter surrounded by nymphs with golden crowns on their heads.

A special chariot carries things that Bacchus used on his journey back from India. A statue of Bacchus—colossal in size, all in purple, a golden wreath on its head, and golden shoes on its feet—rides a lavishly decorated elephant. In front of it, on the elephant's neck, there sits Satyr, whilst 120 satyrs and 120 girls with golden crowns lead the way; another 500 girls, dressed in purple tunics belted with golden cords, bring up the rear; and behind that suite of Bacchus's innocent followers comes a crowd of silenuses and satyrs wearing golden crowns, riding upon asses, also decorated with gold and silver. There follow 24 elephant-drawn chariots, another 60 drawn by goats, and a great
many others, drawn by various animals, deer, wild asses, and finally, ostriches, all ridden by children in tunics, each chariot assigned a child playing the role of an assistant, holding a sword and a spear and wearing gold-embroidered dress.

Next come slow-moving chariots drawn by camels and, toward the end, by mules; there are enemy tents on them, and in those tents Indian women are kept, dressed as slaves. Next they bring various aromas: frankincense, iris, saffron, cassia, &c. Beside them walk Ethiopian slaves bearing divers gifts: ivory, ebony, gold-dust, &c. Hunters march in their wake, all gilded, with 2,400 dogs of various breeds; as many as 150 people carry enormous trees with a variety of animals and birds hanging from them: pheasants, pintados, parrots, peacocks, &c. Following numerous other departments, they drive along bulls and rams of divers breeds, which are, of course, intended to feed the people; they also lead leopards, panthers, tigers, lions, a polar bear, &c.

Women in rich dress, named after Ionia and other Greek cities, as well as a chorus consisting of 600 people, golden crowns on their heads, accompany a chariot with a colossal temple of pure gold, surrounded by statues and animals. Special chariots carry 3,200 golden crowns, one of them distinguished among the rest—a crown dedicated to sacrament and decorated with precious stones—as well as plenty of gold set into weapons and sewn into garments, two golden pools, jugs, cups, &c.

Finally, soldiers bring up the rear, among them 57,600 on foot and 23,200 on horseback, all in their finery.

Kallixeinos of Rhodes adds that he has described the most precious accoutrements of the procession only, omitting many other things, less significant in his view. In my turn, I have shortened the truthful historian’s description.

Ancient writers cry in surprise: Could any other city, be it Persepolis or Babylon at the height of her fame, or any of the lands irrigated by the blessed Patroclus, ever display such treasures? Of course not! Egypt was the only one to be able to do so.

As I was finishing these notes, a whip cracked outside, making me look out of the window. An out-runner ran down the street, waving
his whip this way and that, so that it touched pedestrians, many of them half-naked. He was followed by a small Viennese carriage, which halted at my entrance. Presently a man came in, dressed quite modestly, a *tarboosh*\(^\text{21}\) on his head: that was Artim Bey, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Commerce, the First Minister of the present ruler of Egypt, come to bid us farewell.

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\(^{21}\) Male headgear, similar to the fez, made from felt.