



## FIJET UNKNOWN ALEKSANDRIA THE BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA

The 54th Congress of FIJET - International Association of Travel Journalists and Writers in tourism was held during September 2012 in Cairo and Alexandria. Participants visited Cairo, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the northern coast of Egypt. Museion of Alexandria, founded by Ptolemy I (311-283 BC), was inspired by Aristotle's Athenian Academy. It gathered writers and scholars, who meditated and studied.

But Alexandria Museum soon outgrew its original purpose as it contained the first and largest public library of the ancient world. Altogether it more resembled today's universities; still scholars were not obliged to teach, but just do their studies. By the middle of the first century AD it contained approximately one million documents. At the time of its prosperity, in accordance with the applicable law, any ship passing through Alexandria, had to allow each of their documents to be copied for the library. The complex was burned in 293, during the inter-religious wars.

But Alexandrian Museion is world famous not only for poetry and literature, but even more for the various flourishing branches of science, geography, astronomy, mathematics and medicine.

For example, even today, Euclid's "Elements" are being studied in geometry, Ptolemy's map of the world is still the main source of information about ancient geography <sup>1</sup>. Many medical terms assigned

by Herophilus <sup>2</sup> in the first half of the 3rd century BC and of Hipparchus, the father of astronomy, who also lived there and died about 125 BC <sup>3</sup>, are still being used ...

At the donors' meeting in Assuan in 1997, together with the UNESCO's funds, sufficient funds were collected (primarily from Arab donor countries) to build a new library.

Building began in 1988 and the new Library, with the capacity to store 8 million books, opened on 16 October 2002. The library should be a link to the temple of knowledge of the Ptolemaic capital. It is already considered the largest and most influential cultural center of the Arab world.

Though by the number of books and documents it is not yet the largest in the world, (because now it has 1.5 million books and documents), it stores everything published on the web, in any language, since 1966 until present day. To keep data constantly updated, they are being updated every 3 - 4 months. Among the books, there are also 500,000 books donated by Republic of France. Still, the books are not yet being lent.

The area of the complex is 36,770 m<sup>2</sup>. It is annually visited by about 1.5 million visitors. At the entrance, stands a colossus statue of Ptolemy II extracted during underwater excavations in the eastern harbor. It represents a link to the ancient library of which just a few of the mosaic were found.

<sup>2</sup>Herophilus was the first to announce that the vein carry blood and not air. He was also the first to announce the blood circulation in the body. His surgical researches centered round the brain, he nerves, the liver, and the lungs.

<sup>3</sup>Hipparchu studied the duration of the solar year, the equinox, the magnitude and distances of the heavenly bodies.

<sup>1</sup>Ptolemy was a mathematician, astronomer and geographer.

The complex houses 3,000 chairs - 1000 in the conference hall and 2000 in the reading area. It is the largest in the world in a public institution. The seats are located on ten levels below the inclined glass roof modeled after the solar circle. In this way everyone benefits from the use of daylight. The inventory is reviewed by 60 monitors.

The complex contains, in addition to mentioned library and the Center for Internet and its archive, six specialized libraries for audio-visual materials, the visually impaired users, children, youth library, microforms archives, rare books, and special collections.

This complex holds three museums: of antiquities, manuscripts and the history of science, a planetarium, ALEXploratorium for children's exhibitions,

two permanent exhibitions (The world of ShdI Abdel Salam and Impressions of Alexandria), six art galleries for temporary exhibitions, a congress center for thousand people, seven research institutes covering : Manuscripts, Heritage Documentation, Calligraphy and writing, Information sciences, Mediterranean and Alexandrian Studies, Arts center, Scientific Research and a Discussion Forum. One of the permanent exhibitions is dedicated to Anwar el-Sadat, President of Egypt 1970 to 1981. Exhibits are personal items and clothes donated by his family, as well as articles and film clips and parts of his speeches.

Maja Stanić