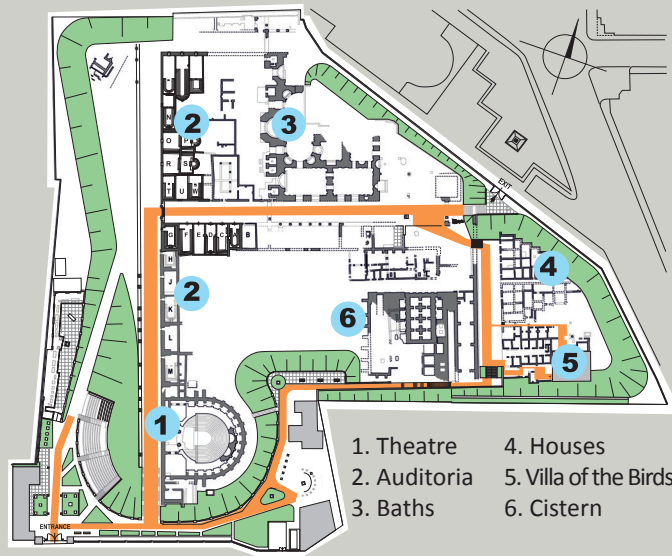




A major part of the Kom el-Dikka Project is the ongoing extensive restoration process, carried out by Polish specialists and aimed at ultimately transforming the entire site into an archaeological park. Over the years Polish restorers have imbued new life into several magnificent public buildings, such as a theatre which was also an assembly hall, an imperial bath, porticoes, auditoria and Roman houses resplendent with beautiful mosaics but also smaller artifacts: sculpture, coins, glass and pottery.



HEART OF AN ANCIENT METROPOLIS

Downtown Alexandria is the location of the Kom el-Dikka archaeological site, one of the few places where the grandeur and glory of a historic Greek and Roman city, one of the power centers of the ancient world, can be experienced in full. An entire urban quarter has been revealed by the archaeologists' spades, comprising an imperial bathhouse and the oldest known "university" a rich urban landscape knit together by a network of streets and majestic porticoes.

More than 50 years of excavation by archaeologists from the **Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology University of Warsaw**, working in close cooperation with the **Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities**, have uncovered many secrets of the ancient town, from its topography and architecture to the manifold manifestations of a resplendent ancient lifestyle. The archaeological remains showcase the rise and fall of this great metropolis, spanning more than a millennium, from the 2nd century BC through the 12th–13th century AD.

POLISH-EGYPTIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CONSERVATION PROJECT



KOM EL-DIKKA ALEXANDRIA



The Embassy
of the Republic of Poland
in Cairo



UNIVERSITY
OF WARSAW

Polish Centre of
Mediterranean Archaeology





Large urban residences sprawled across the site in the first three centuries AD. They were embellished with fine mosaic floors and sumptuous architectural decoration, adorned with wall painting and marble statuary. This was the Alexandria of the wealthy upper class, accustomed to a life of prosperity and opulence. It is best exemplified by the "Villa of the Birds" ⁵, a modern shelter housing a unique set of colourful mosaic floors presenting exquisite geometrical and figural motifs. Destruction in the end of the 3rd century AD was total. The entire urban quarter was left in ruins, following a period of political unrest, rioting and bloody pacification carried out by the Roman emperors, first Aurelian (AD 272) and later Diocletian (AD 298). Life returned after this catastrophe, but without the earlier opulence: smaller and simpler, sometimes multi-storied houses providing lodgings for several families and accommodating small workshops specializing in glass and bronze production ⁴.

The opulence of the city and the wealth of its inhabitants are best seen in the numerous works of art and handicraft uncovered by archaeologists in the ruins, from veritable mosaic „carpets“ on the floors, to exquisite wall painting and statues that once decorated the living space. Not the least among these were portrait images of the city's founder, Alexander the Great.



Marble cornice found in the theatre

In the 4th century, when the Empire was ruled by Constantine and his sons, the area became one huge construction site. A visionary urban master plan engaged substantial public funds and the best architectural minds of the empire, creating a zone that must have been the centre of social life in the Late Antique city. A monumental complex of public buildings was constructed around a grand Imperial bath complex ³ that was one of the finest edifices of its time. The bathing halls could have welcomed hundreds of bathers at any given time. The complex included also palaestrae for physical exercises, colonnaded passages, and such amenities as public latrines. Water was supplied from a huge masonry cistern ⁶ and heated by a complex system of furnaces and pipes.



Site view

A wide colonnaded portico framed a complex of 22 lecture halls ² from the times of Justinian that formed a learning academy— after all, Alexandria was one of the most renowned centres of learning and education, the "Oxford" of Late Antiquity. The auditoria with their stone benches lining the walls and the elevated chair for the professor give an idea of what higher learning was like in the very heart of ancient Alexandria.

The biggest hall of this complex was a large theatre-like structure ¹ situated at the southernmost end of the colonnade portico. This landmark structure must have originally operated as an odeum, where the social elites of cosmopolitan Alexandria enjoyed musical performances.



Late Roman auditoria

In the 6th century the theatre was refashioned into its current horse-shoe shaped form and covered with a dome, thus becoming an auditorium maximum for the nearby academic complex. The collapse of Alexandria in the late 7th century was catastrophic: the buildings were deserted and devastated. In the coming ages, the area was turned into a large cemetery — a truly symbolic end to a great ancient town.

