

1. Introduction: Entombment and Apotheosis

The conquests of Alexander the Great loom among the towering events of world history. The story has launched a thousand books in a hundred languages. Yet this account will instead focus on Alexander's no less eventful afterlife and the enduring mysteries of his lost corpse and vanished mausoleum. The aim is significantly to elaborate and extend my previous book, *The Lost Tomb of Alexander the Great*, published in 2004, which was the first book length account of the subject in English, since the appearance of the dissertation on *The Tomb of Alexander* by Edward Daniel Clarke in 1805. Not only has Clarke's tome become an expensive rarity, but it is also hopelessly out of date and even *The Lost Tomb* has edged towards obsolescence through the pace of developments. Therefore it is the purpose of this new version to update the quest and enthrall its readership with fresh revelations and novel propositions. More clearly than ever, it will be demonstrated that a detailed knowledge of Alexander's afterlife is integral to a proper appreciation of his impact on history.

This book takes up the tale where conventional histories of Alexander close with the events surrounding his death in Babylon late in the evening of the tenth of June 323 BC. It describes the preparation of the catafalque meant to return his body to his homeland of Macedon, but diverted to Egypt by Ptolemy, who was acting, it is argued, to fulfil Alexander's own wishes. It is shown that Ptolemy's hijacking of the corpse was probably the decisive reason for the subsequent attack on Egypt by Perdiccas, the Regent, who was assassinated there by his own men, having twice failed to force the crossing of the Nile.

Ptolemy's initial entombment of Alexander at the old Egyptian capital of Memphis is investigated with regard to the iconography and possible location of this sepulcher and it is demonstrated that, contrary to previous scholarly opinion, the Memphite tomb very probably existed for three or four decades. Ptolemy's son, Philadelphus, eventually relocated the tomb to Alexandria. There Alexander achieved the apotheosis he had consciously pursued in life. An enormous temple precinct was established at the heart of the city and a high priest was appointed annually to orchestrate his worship.

The tomb returned to the centre-stage of world history in the time of Cleopatra as the Romans embellished their nascent empire through the acquisition of Egypt. For Caesar's faction Alexander was an icon of successful kingship and his tomb a place of pilgrimage. It was correspondingly reviled by the Republican opposition, who resorted to assassinating the populist Caesar in an ultimately vain attempt to ensure that government of the Senatorial class, by the Senatorial class, for the Senatorial class did not perish from the earth. Cleopatra still dreamt of re-establishing Alexander's empire, through the pliable medium of Mark Antony and his military prowess, but Rome would not brook a rival near her throne, so the lovers perished by suicide in the ignominy of their defeat.

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The Roman emperors saw in Alexander an exemplar for their autocratic rule, so the tomb basked in their patronage for several centuries more. However, in the late third and fourth centuries AD Alexandria suffered a series of violent upheavals, in one of which the mausoleum overlying the tomb was destroyed. A case is made that almost the last of these shocks, a devastating earthquake closely followed by a roiling tsunami in AD365, is the most likely culprit. Any restoration of the tomb was precluded by the growing political power of the Christian church, which could only see in the deified Alexander a potent pagan rival. The erstwhile famous tomb and sacred corpse vanished mysteriously from history; seemingly at the same time that Christianity finally outlawed paganism.

The forces of Islam secured Alexandria in AD642 and inaugurated a lingering decline of the greatest of Greek cities. For nearly a millennium almost nothing was said of the tomb in the written sources. By the late medieval period the urban area of the city had shrunk to less than a third of its extent in the time of Cleopatra and almost all that remained lay in ruins. However, from the early sixteenth century visitors began once again regularly to report the existence of a tomb of Alexander amidst the wasted vestiges of antiquity (Figures 1.1 & 1.2). Evidence is presented here, which firmly links this medieval tomb with a sarcophagus now displayed in the British Museum. Furthermore, there are intriguing connections between this relic and the Memphite tomb and also with the late Roman period when the Alexandrian tomb was destroyed.



Figure 1.1. Panorama across the Great Harbour of Alexandria in 1681: engraving after a sketch by Cornelius de Bruyn (author's collection)

In the modern era the search for the tomb is inextricably connected with the struggle of the archaeologists to reconstruct ancient Alexandria from fragments in the dust. Progress is seriously hampered by the fact that the modern city has spread to encompass the entire ancient ruin field. Some of the best evidence was gathered in the mid-nineteenth century just barely before the developers sealed over the deeply buried foundations of the Roman and Ptolemaic cities. Through integrating the archaeological material with information from written and cartographic sources, a new hypothesis for the nature and location of the

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Alexandrian tomb has been formulated. If this fresh theory is correct, not only may it provide the key to comprehending the detailed layout of the ancient city, but it also implies that a substantial fragment of the wall that surrounded the precinct of Alexander's tomb has survived unrecognised to the present day.

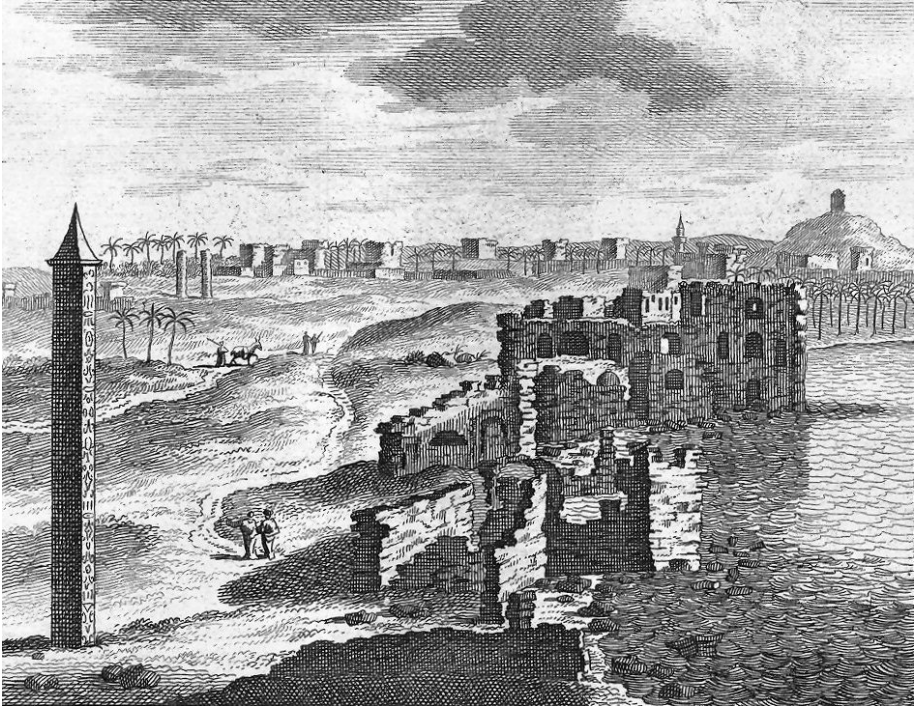


Figure 1.2. View of Alexandria looking west past Cleopatra's Needle from the Tower of the Romans in 1681: engraving after a sketch by Cornelius de Bruyn (author's collection)

The history of Alexander's tombs is a complex and intricate tapestry, for the threads of evidence are fragmentary, diverse and interwoven through twenty-four centuries. But to unravel the mystery is a thrilling experience, offering as it does glimpses of the vanished glories of the ancient world together with telling insights into the minds of Alexander, the people who followed him and those who succeeded to the kingdoms of his empire. Some admired and worshipped him, whilst others detested and denounced everything that he stood for. The polarity and strength of opinion many centuries after his death is the most impressive testament to the enduring potency of his influence. What though, we might wonder, would Alexander himself have made of the reactions he has stirred?

I should like, Onesicritus, to come back to life for a little while after my death to see how men read these present events then. If now they praise and welcome them, do not be surprised, for they think, every one of them, that this is a fine bait to catch my goodwill.

Alexander quoted by Lucian, *How to Write History*, 40