What the Hellenism: Did Christianity cause a decline of Hellenism in 4th-century Alexandria?

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PO  Patrologia Orientalis
PG  Patrologia Graeca
Introduction

The year was 391. Alexandria *ad Aegyptum*, crown of all cities and eastern hub of the Roman Empire, was blessed with cool breezes and a cloudless sun.¹ For six centuries, from atop its acropolis a hundred steps high, the monumental columned halls of the Serapeum had towered over a city which “at times vied with the sky for beauty” (Achilles Tatius 5.2.1).² The Serapeum was not only the locus of Alexandria’s vibrant religious and intellectual scenes, but the most striking feature of the city skyline. This vast temple complex of porticoes and lecture halls was adorned with “almost breathing statues, and a great number of other works of art”, so that aside from the Roman Capitolium, remarked the historian Ammian, “the whole world beholds nothing more magnificent.” (*The History* 22.16.12). Yet beneath the splendour of the city’s sacred buildings, violence was brewing. Upon the issue of an order for the demolition of Alexandria’s temples by the patriarch Theophilus, a bloody riot broke out, ending in a pagan retreat and a Christian siege of the Serapeum acropolis. The ending is so well known as to seem inevitable. Christians stormed the temple enclosure, and an axe was taken to the head of the vast idol of Serapis. The temple’s statues, mosaics and red granite columns were “torn down and laid bare.”³ (Socrates, *Church History* 5.17). The reign of Serapis, the greatest Hellenistic god of Alexandria, was no more, and his followers were scattered to the winds (Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 6.11.1).

The 300s were a dramatic period of religious readjustment for Alexandria, and the transformation in Christianity’s fortunes over the one hundred year period were nothing short of momentous. Alexandrian Christians were a brutally persecuted minority at the opening of the century, and yet a mere eight decades later, received imperial sanction to raze one of the empire’s greatest temples to the ground. The repercussions of the Serapeum’s destruction

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¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *The History* 22.16.8, 12.
² On the acropolis’ height, Rufinus, *Church History* 11.23.
³ McKenzie, Gibson & Rayes (2004), 98.
reverberated across the Empire, and consequently, modern scholars for many decades interpreted 391 as Christianity’s defining moment of “triumph” over Eastern paganism. This tied well into traditional scholarly assumptions of a decline or ‘fall’ within urban life in Late Antiquity; across the East, Bell states bluntly, “Hellenism was dying”. However, more recently, the work of revisionist scholars has complicated this neat negative correlation between Christianity’s rise and Hellenism’s decline in Alexandria. Meanwhile, archaeologists and economic historians are challenging the notion of 4th-century decline in the East’s urban metropoles. This dissertation draws these strands together in order to readdress the following question: did the rise of Christianity really lead to a decline in Alexandrian Hellenism?

In order to answer this question, Hellenism itself must first be qualified. Hellenism is a modern term, denoting the diffusion of a Greek common culture within urban life in the Eastern Mediterranean from the days of Alexander to Late Antiquity. Alexandria was founded as a Greek polis, and although by the 300s its identity was also tempered by its Egyptian locale and three centuries under Roman rule, its urban culture remained fully Hellenistic in nature. Urban Hellenism, as in Alexandria, had four key expressions:

Firstly, religion formed the key basis of Hellenism. The Hellenistic pantheon of gods provided a lingua franca of iconography and worship methods, through which local religions were able to express themselves according to ideas universally accessible across the Greco-

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4 Kiss (2007), 193. See also Bell (1953); Murray (1955). “East” and “Eastern” will be capitalised when referring to the Eastern Roman Empire.
5 Bell (1948), 127. Cameron characterises the Eastern economy as a “general picture of contraction”, (2011), 151. See also notes 146 and 147 below.
8 Definition from Hornblower (2015). The term “Hellenism” is now securely defined, although its historiography is problematic, see Alexander (2001); Meeks (2001).
9 Bowman (1996), 204-205. Roman culture was itself shaped by Hellenism, thus the Empire did not greatly alter Alexandrian culture, see Bowersock (1990), 55-56, and Whitmarsh (2010).
Roman world.\(^{10}\) The assimilation of local deities with their Hellenistic counterparts was an association of names and attributes, rather than merging of identities, enabling Alexandria’s Egyptian cults to retain their original integrity beneath a Hellenistic veneer. Consequently, mutually tolerant polytheism and henotheism (co-existing monotheisms) were fundamental to Hellenistic religion.

For the sake of simplicity, ‘paganism’ will be used as a collective term for Hellenistic, non-Judaic-Christic cults. Although the term ‘pagan’ is a construction of contemporary Christian writers, it is preferable to ‘polytheist’ due to the monotheism of many pagan believers.\(^{11}\) However, as will be explored, the firm juxtapositions of belief implied by the terms ‘Christian’ and ‘pagan’ are reductive of the realities of 4th-century Alexandrian religious practice. Nonetheless, the focus of this essay will remain with the dominant Christian and pagan communities, as the concurrent developments within Alexandria’s sizeable Jewish, Gnostic and Manichean populations are unfortunately too complex to be considered within this paper.

Secondly, Hellenism was expressed through city topography. Hellenistic (and Roman) urbanism was typified by the provision of stylised, monumental elements through civic benefaction, within a flexible street plan centred around a core of public space, or ‘armature’.\(^{12}\) Under this metric, streets and agora were as significant as buildings. Alexandria’s city grid was traceable back to the Ptolemaic period, centred on the east-west avenue of the Via Canopica.\(^{13}\) Crammed with shops, its double colonnade served as a visual draw towards Alexandria’s core, the central agora.\(^{14}\) However, due to the strength of its Greek heritage, Alexandria’s topography remained a more concentrated distillation of

\(^{10}\) Bowersock (1990), 4-9.
\(^{11}\) Clark (2004), 35. Explored in Chapter 4.
\(^{13}\) McKenzie (2007), 20.
\(^{14}\) Haas (1997) 378.
Hellenistic urbanism than cities in the West. This was reflected by greater usage of peristyles and porticoes, and the later assimilation of Roman imports such as hypocaust baths and basilicas.

Thirdly, Hellenism was expressed through civic power structures. The Hellenistic city functioned as a relatively autonomous unit; as Alexandria had long been the capital of Roman Egypt, this was mediated by strong administrative links to the Roman centre. Civic life was organised and controlled by the aristocratic elites eligible to sit in the city council – the bouletic class – with the wealthiest and most respected taking on magistracies. Lower in the Alexandrian hierarchy, official citizens with Greek heritage were further distinguished from the rest of the metropole. Religion was institutionally decentralised but focused on temples, and the most significant temples of the Hellenistic pantheon were located in Alexandria. Here, priests and ceremonial officials were frequently drawn from the bouletic class. From the Roman period, imperial officials created a parallel administration to the Alexandrian magistracy, with the dux and the prefect as the highest ranking military and civil officials within Egypt respectively. By 300, the Christian patriarchs also increasingly played a role in governance, as they established leadership over the growing congregation, personnel and finances of Egyptian Church.

Fourthly, Hellenism was expressed through the classical Greek education system – paideia. Although recipients of paideia were overwhelmingly wealthy and male, a mastery of Greek literature, rhetoric and philosophy was more fundamental to elite identity than either

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17 Although provincial boundaries underwent several reforms during the 300s Alexandria remained the most powerful city within the region. For specifics, Palme (2007), 245-6.
18 Bowman (1996), 126.
19 Dunand (2013), 176-177.
20 Frankfurter (2012), 321.
21 Reforms within the imperial hierarchy have been simplified for the purposes of this dissertation; for specifics, Haas (1997), 69-81.
wealth or birth. Paideia was also the route to an administrative career; consequently, students travelled to study at the most prestigious schools, including Alexandria, forging life-long social bonds between the future political elites of the Eastern Roman world. 22

The effects of Christinisation upon these four areas – paganism, city topography, civic power structures, and intellectualism – will be the main foci of the four chapters of this dissertation respectively. In order to fully elucidate this picture, it has at times been necessary to consider evidence from beyond the temporal boundaries of the 300s.

As will be shown, the notion of a crushing end to Alexandrian Hellenism in the 300s is highly exaggerated and in several respects wholly inaccurate. In fact, 4th-century Alexandria was flourishing both economically and politically, and religious ferment turned the city into a hot bed of intellectual development. The notion of Hellenistic decline has been long-lasting due to the survival within modern scholarship of a false conceit, created by Late Antique writers, of Christianity’s rise as a socio-religious war. The ancient antithesis between Christianity and paganism in religious sources has exaggerated Christianity’s destructive impact upon urban topography and civic structures, but has belied fundamental elements of Hellenistic continuity, and Christian-Hellenic synthesis, within elite culture, intellectual life, and patterns of religious belief. Christianisation served not to end, but to transform, the quality of Hellenistic life, and Christianity ultimately became a vehicle through which Hellenistic ideals were preserved and embedded into Alexandria’s future, the intellectual “golden age” of the late 400s.23

23 Ward-Perkins (2005), 128.
Problems with Evidence

Finally, a word on the evidential problems which lie at the heart of this dissertation. The surviving literary evidence of 4th-century Alexandria is overwhelmingly Christian, which raises multiple issues. Christian literature is frequently concerned with the creation of a teleological, triumphalist narrative, emphasising episodic violence, and obscures the subtleties of religious exchange. The lack of material from Alexandria’s pagan community also risks conclusions on being drawn from silence, or being distorted by Christian sources which are keen to generalise about pagan groups. Furthermore, authors of ecclesiastical history tend fixate upon the powerful members of the community – especially the patriarchs – thereby reducing history a series of actions by individual figures. Additionally, the formidable literary output and shrewd self-fashioning of the patriarchs, most prominently Athanasius, comes with the risk of allowing them to command their own image. Therefore, a highly critical reading of the literature is necessary, in concert with careful use of archaeological evidence.

Unfortunately, however, Alexandria’s ancient topography is notoriously poorly preserved. The archaeological record suffered from regular earthquake activity during the 1200-1300s, and tsunami activity from the 300s onwards which led to the eventual submersion of much of the port. More problematically, modern construction onwards has sealed the vast majority of the old city beneath the new, at a depth of 10-12m. Fortunately this issue is being addressed by the uptake in Alexandrian archaeology in recent decades, notably from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology at Kom el-Dikka, the results of which have been incorporated into this dissertation.

24 Bowersock (1990), 63.
27 Lawler (2005), 1193.
Pagan Topography and Demography

In 313, Constantine granted Christians in the East the legitimacy they had sought for almost three centuries, thereby completing his extension of religious toleration across the Roman Empire. While the Christian community of Alexandria rejoiced, Hellenistic worship yet dominated city life; its people were pious, believing Egypt’s capital to be favoured by the gods. Yet by the end of the century, a mixture of temple destruction and new building programmes had left Christianity’s presence undeniably stamped upon the Hellenistic cityscape. However, the significance assigned to the destruction of the Serapeum has led to serious overestimations of both the extent of damage suffered by pagan architecture, and the extent to which Hellenistic pagan beliefs declined over this period.

Within the Christian writings which dominate the narrative sources of this period, the destruction of idols is a rhetorical motif expressing spiritual zeal, rather than practical action. Constantine’s general Eulogius, en route to Alexandria, is said to have announced to his troops that “as they burned the bodies of the martyrs, so I will burn their flesh, their temples and their idols.” Likewise, Athanasius’ writing abounds with statements that Christianity will “destroy” and “overthrow” idols. This language originates in several Biblical verses, such as “You shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars” (Deuteronomy 12:2). Yet the sources fail to corroborate that these bold claims were put in to action, and in the 300s, Alexandrian temples thrived. According to one visitor, the city was full of “temple keepers, priests and their assistants, diviners, devout worshippers”, with altars “constantly ablaze and piled high with sacrifice” (Expositio Totius Mundi 36.23-27), in clear disregard of

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28 Following Barnes, labelling this decision the “Edict of Milan” is inaccurate, see Barnes (2011), 93-97.
29 Expositio Totius Mundi 36.23. Tradition dates the Alexandrian Church to St Mark, see Jerome, On Illustrious Men 8.
30 Martydom of St Macarius of Antioch 82.
31 Athanasius, On the Incarnation of the Word 20, 33.
Constantine’s sacrificial ban. Destructive pronouncements were thus not primarily intended as instructions but as metaphors, to ignite religious fervour and cast Christianity’s rise as a spiritual “battle against all idolatry” (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 53). From a practical perspective, without strong imperial and local backing temple destruction was difficult to implement, and conducive conditions did not exist until the late 300s. Athanasius wrote much of his theological corpus whilst in exile from seat of power, and was thus in no position to engage in literal idol overthowing. Likewise, Constantine’s interest in pagan artistic heritage makes it unlikely that Eulogius would have been permitted to wreak destruction upon the world-famous sites of Alexandria.

The most significant Christian disturbances to pagan topography attested prior to 391 were temple conversions, rendering the destruction of the Serapeum an isolated incident. Constantine’s movement of the Nilometer water gauge from the Serapeum into a church in the 330s was a clear demonstration of symbolic capital but did not alter the temple itself, and his decision was reversed by the emperor Julian. Likewise, the patriarch Alexander smashed an idol of Saturn outside the Caesarion prior to 350, yet the complex was converted into a church without the temple itself being destroyed in the process. The Arian patriarch George attempted to convert the Mithraeum in 361; although it has been argued that he aimed to destroy Alexandria’s temples, simply “cleansing” and “clearing” the Mithraeum was enough to see him lynched by a pagan mob, and the abandonment of his project (Socrates 3.2). It is not until four decades later that Alexandria finally sees a prominent pagan temple destroyed; destruction was rare because it was not the result of organised Christian conviction, but of

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32 The ban’s existence is contested by Drake (1982) and Curran (1996). However, following Barnes (1984), its firm attestation in Eusebius, *Church History* 2.45.1, 47-61 is considered reliable, and following Bradbury (1994), 133-6, its repetition in the *Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.2 is evidence of lax enforcement.
33 On a temple kept open “for the value of its art”, see *Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.8.
34 Rufinus, *Church History* 11.30.
35 Eutychius, *Annales* 433-5. For discussion on whether Constantine or Constantius II completed the conversion, see McKenzie (2007), 406 note 34.
36 Socrates, *Church History* 3.2.
attempts by patriarchs to increase their political power. In Alexandria, no temple destruction is evidenced that was not instigated by the patriarch. George’s act came at a crucial juncture in the Arian crisis, at which his reputation was in tatters amongst Christians and pagans alike; therefore, the conversion of the Mithraeum may have been a misjudged attempt to reunite the citizen body under his control, thereby staving off the popularity of his exiled rival Athanasius. It is not until the patriarchs finally have the backing of a homoiousian emperor, that Theophilus is able to follow through with destruction programmes. In fact, contemporary legends claim that Athanasius’s spirit inspired Theophilus to do so; this story may have been the shrewd creation of the Theophilus himself, as by co-opting the legacy of his already legendary predecessor, he was able to bolster his own reputation.

Furthermore, Theophilus’ campaign proved to be the peak of Alexandrian temple closure, and was not followed by further destruction. Rufinus asks, “After the death of Serapis, what temples of any other demon could remain standing?” (11.28), and Socrates claims that Theophilus had the city’s temples “razed to the ground…almost column by column” (Church History 5.16). Yet to what extent even the Serapeum itself was ‘destroyed’ is questionable, as its colonnaded court remained standing in Arab times. As for the city’s other temples, the bishop Synesius mentions the Poseidon temple at Pharos as still standing a decade later. Similarly, although Palladas laments the conversion of the Tychaion into a tavern, it is attested as a famous tourist destination as late as the 7th century. The distorted significance given to the Serapeum incident is due to the establishment’s particular size and fame, and consequently, the temptation for Christian writers to cast it as the moment of

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37 Saradi-Mendelovici (1990), 77.
38 Sozomen, Church History 4.10, 30.
39 Later referred to as “Nicaeans”, homoiousians aligned themselves with the Nicene Creed, whereas Arians objected, see Gwynn (2007).
41 Hamarneh (1971), 82-84.
42 Synesius, Letter 4.
victory within their triumphalist narratives. Generally, patriarchs preferred temple conversion and the funding of new buildings over temple destruction, as these carried positive political capital with a lower risk of stirring up pagan resentment.⁴⁴ Even Theophilus chose to convert rather than destroy the temple of Dionysus, and Isis at Canopus.⁴⁵ Therefore, whilst successive patriarchs showed clear desires to Christianise the major temples of Alexandria, destruction was utilised as only the most extreme of tactics; consequently, the complete demolition attested by Christian sources is a significant exaggeration.

The emphasis given to idol destruction in Christian writings furthermore belies the strong desire amongst elements of the Christian community to preserve Hellenistic heritage. Theophilus and the monks he persuaded to help destroy the Serapeum were heavily criticised by other ascetics for their shameful behaviour.⁴⁶ While this distaste of Theophilus’ actions was likely motivated by politics rather than concern for architectural heritage, nonetheless, it is clear that Christians were flexible in their attitude towards temples. Even Theophilus’ contemporaries, the other major bishops of Empire, were not necessarily hostile in their attitudes, and the canons of the 401 council of Carthage set a precedent for official Church protection of temples.⁴⁷ Furthermore, contemporary imperial policy consistently advocates for temple preservation, which is decreed in new laws as late as 346.⁴⁸ Consequently, Theophilus was forced to request special permission from Theodosius himself in order to resolve the Serapeum siege.⁴⁹ The first decree explicitly giving permission for temple destruction is not granted until 407, and still is only in cases of temples which continue to hold banquets (Codex Theodosianus 16.10.19).

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⁴⁵ Rufinus, Church History 11.22; Haas (1997), 148.
⁴⁷ Canons 57-65, in Hefele (1872), vol.2 125.
⁴⁸ Codex Theodosianus, 16.10.3. The Codex also protected specific temples, see note 33 above.
⁴⁹ Sozomen 7.15
Acknowledgement of the cultural value of temples in fact enabled Christianisation to become a method of conservation of Hellenistic architecture. Many rural Egyptian temples had faced economic decline during the 3rd century crisis, as their imperial subsidies were cut.\textsuperscript{50} This coincided with a rise in church usage of Romano-Hellenistic spolia – motivated not by a dearth in expertise or material, but by the Egyptian tradition of valuing spolia as material heritage.\textsuperscript{51} Modern notions of heritage, which stress preservation in situ, should not be backdated to Late Antiquity; the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, for example, was praised due to the illustrious provenances of its various spolia columns.\textsuperscript{52} Similarly, stone blocks from the Serapeum were recarved into a chancel screen for the church which replaced it.\textsuperscript{53} Nonetheless, we should not be hasty to apply the economic situation of rural sites to that in the provincial capital. Alexandrian temples, well-funded by their prospering metropolis, did not suffer the economic isolation of their rural counterparts, and retained tax immunity until at least 361.\textsuperscript{54} Although Socrates writes that by 361 the Mithraeum had “long been abandoned” (Socrates 3.2), Mithraism was anomalous. As a mystery cult it had never been afforded legitimacy or funding, and had already faded away in the East prior to the 300s.\textsuperscript{55}

Within Christian narratives, the fall of Serapis is the death knell of paganism in Alexandria. “After the death of Serapis,” Rufinus asks, “what temples of any other demon could remain standing?” (\textit{Church History} 11.28). This position has frequently been taken for granted by later historians, for whom paganism was roundly “conquered”.\textsuperscript{56} In fact, the twin conceits of Christian dominance as an inevitability, and overemphasis on specific events as turning points, obscures both the long-term survival of paganism and the real, gradual

\textsuperscript{50} Bagnall (1993), 265-70.
\textsuperscript{51} Foss (1996).
\textsuperscript{53} Discussed in McKenzie (2004), 108.
\textsuperscript{54} Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.11.6.
\textsuperscript{55} Clauss (1990), 24, 32.
\textsuperscript{56} Bell (1953), 105. On the dangers of this attitude MacMullen (1981), 134; Brown (1964), 109.
processes of religious assimilation and change. Although Christianity’s increasing imperial backing and a series of influential patriarchs had helped tip Alexandria’s religious balance in Christianity’s favour during the latter half of the century, it seems unlikely that the dominant religion was wiped out over the course of two generations. Although pagans with means and connections may have taken the opportunity to flee Alexandria in 391, for the majority those who frequented Alexandria’s shrines and whose meagre livelihoods relied on the city, flight would not have been an option. 57 Where, then, did the pagans go?

Firstly, it is highly likely that many individuals turned to more private forms of devotion, as indeed suggested by the pagan figurines discovered in the Alexandrian housing block R4 as late as the 500s.58 A lively Isis cult at Menouthis, merely twenty kilometres from Alexandria, became a rallying point for the city’s pagans, and was not forcibly closed until the late 500s.59 Additionally, pagan Nile festivals and other rites are attested up and down Egypt well into the 6th century.60 The strength of paganism just outside the capital makes it highly likely significant groups of worshippers still existed within Alexandria, and learned to remain inconspicuous; this is compatible with the dearth of pagan sources, as private worship is less likely to have impacted the literary record.61 What pagan literary perspectives do survive – albeit second-hand in Christian sources – suggest pagans did not view their situation as irreversible; even in the 500s philosophers believed in a time when Christianity would “collapse and pass away” (Zacharias, Life of Severus 54). The local pagan rituals about which Coptic authors frequently complain suggests this was more than wishful thinking.62

58 Haas (1997), 205.
59 Epiphanius, De Fide 12.1-4; Zacharias of Mytilene, Life of Severus. Frankfurter (1998), 40-41, 71; on its closure, see Wipszycka (1988), 138-142. Another surviving Isis cult was paganism’s regional hub at Philae; Priscus fragment 27; IGPhilae 188-189; Frankfurter (1998), 64-65.
60 P. Oxy XLIII.3148; Theophanes AM 5928; Pseudos-Nonnos, Mythological Scholia 27.
61 Enduring paganism in Alexandrian intellectualism is examined in Chapter 4 below.
We may speculate that a strong pagan ruler with wide military backing and a long-term programme of religious revitalisation might have checked the Christianisation of Egypt; however, following Julian’s short-lived attempts, such conditions did not materialise.63

Secondly, 4th-century pagans lacked the collective identity necessary to mount a firm opposition towards Christian actions either in action, or in literary production. Although Alexandrian Christianity was dogged by the Arian controversy, three centuries of persecution had given Christians a strong concept of self-identity. By contrast, Hellenistic religion was intrinsically decentralised and heterogenous, and the very term ‘pagan’ was coined by Christian polemicists who needed a collective noun for the cults they wished to distinguish themselves from. Consequently, controversies surround the religious identification of all but the most outspoken pagan authors, and other factors relating to pagan literary survival, such as the precedence given to Christian writings by later copyists, must not be overlooked.64 The mushrooming of Christian polemic such as Athanasius’ Against the Heathens, as well as incidents of inter-communal violence in the 300s, certainly catalysed increasing pagan self-awareness.65 Nonetheless, pagan mobilisation remained rare; the ‘pagans’ who looted Alexandria’s Great Church in 356 were simply a small band of wealthy youths known for brawling.66 That Alexandrian pagans lacked a leadership hierarchy is clear from the multitude of representatives, “senators and heathen magistrates and wardens”, whom Constantius was forced to call upon to ensure the loyalty of the overall pagan community (History of the Arians, 54). Within this context, Julian’s inability to standardise and centralise the pagan religious community in the 360s reflects not a decline of the pagan community, but the lack of such thing as a pagan ‘community’. Creating an argument of

63 Wardman (1982), 149-61.
64 Hunt (1985), 185-7.
65 Maxwell (2012), 862.
pagan decline from silence therefore fails to engage with this fundamental quality of Hellenistic religion – its nebulousness.

Thirdly, there was simply continuation of the long-term coexistence and gradual assimilation which characterised overall pagan and Christian relations in Alexandria. Christian hagiography relates stories of the mass conversion of pagan witnesses to miracles and idol destruction, which is echoed in the claims of later scholarship that Christianisation succeeded because pagans were unfulfilled in their own beliefs.\(^67\) In reality, conversion was slow, syncretic, and followed the fundamental premise of Hellenistic religion – assimilation. Epiphanius describes a 4\(^{th}\)-century hymn vigil in Alexandria during which Dushares, the patron god of Petra and associated with Zeus, is born of a virgin-goddess with cross upon its forehead.\(^68\) Adonis with Osiris, Isis with Demeter, and now Jesus Christ with Dushares; Christianity was the latest in a long history of cults to be adapted by the lay peoples of Alexandria. By the 300s, inscriptions studies from Anatolia prove unable to distinguish between the religious views of Christian and pagan families.\(^69\) That paganism was changing upon its own terms is reflected in the pagan community’s rejection of Julian’s attempts to revive blood sacrifice.\(^70\) Likewise, the growth of pagan monotheism centred on Alexandria’s neo-platonic school during the 3\(^{rd}\) century paved the way towards acceptance of Christian beliefs.\(^71\) Christianity was therefore not an enemy of paganism until it attempted to define itself thus; Athanasius disparages pagans who were flexible enough in belief to be ordained as Arian bishops.\(^72\) Perhaps the most striking indicator of the continued dominance of the Hellenistic model of religious conversion in Alexandria is the fact that in 391, pagans

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\(^{67}\) History of the Monks of Egypt, 8.26-9, 10.30-33, 29.9; Athanasius, Life of Anthony 70; Sozomen 7.15; Theodoret 5.22. Smith (1970), 295.

\(^{68}\) Epiphanius, Panarion 51.22.11

\(^{69}\) Mitchell (1999), 112.

\(^{70}\) Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.12.6–7. Libanius Orations 12.80, 18.170 appears critical of sacrifice; this is discussed in Eckhart (2014), 255-256, and Bradbury (1995), 342.

\(^{71}\) Maxwell (2012), 854.

\(^{72}\) Athanasius, History of the Arians 73.
disagreed as to whether their fallen Serapis had been a representation of Jupiter, the Nile, or
the biblical Joseph. Throughout the 300s, for the population outside the circle of
theologically and literarily engaged elites, conversion to Christianity was not a foregone
collection, but a natural, long-term process of selective acquisition.

Whilst Christian theologians were keen to differentiate their followers from the
“heathen multitude” (Athanasius, *Circular Letter 3*), assimilation is a two-way process, and
majority Christian practice was often as syncretic as paganism. As pagan priests and shamans
began to co-opt Biblical rhetoric in their rituals, and transcribe these into Coptic grimoires,
pagan magic became instrumental in the development of Gnostic mysticism. Due to the
resulting overlap between the rituals of Gnostic shamans and Christian holy men, lay
Christians did not distinguish ‘true’ Christianity from paganism; for example, the owners of
the Coptic Nag Hammadi library considered themselves devout Christians, yet would be
classed as Gnostic by modern theological standards. Establishment concern for this pagan
influence upon Christianity is highlighted by the fact that magic was made punishable by
death. Nonetheless, an abundance of 4th-century Egyptian prayer and curse tablets call upon
both Judeo-Christian and Hellenistic deities, and similarly, both Orpheus and Dionysus are
present in the sculpture of a 4th-century church at Heracleopolis Magna. All this points to
not only the impossibility, but the inappropriateness, of attempting to measure Egypt’s pagan
demography according to tightly defined modern religious categories; unsurprisingly
therefore, results vary widely.

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73 Rufinus, *Church History* 11.23
75 Bowman (1996), 200.
76 *Codex Theodosianus* 9.16.1-12. Celsus equates Jesus’ miracles with pagan exorcism rituals, Origen, *Against
Celsus* 1.68.
78 Maxwell suggests that fewer than 50% are Christian in Julian’s time; Maxwell (2012), 856. Bagnall finds 66% of
names in papyri sources to be Christian by 428; contra Bowersock, who considers an estimate of 75% Christian by
400 too conservative, cited by Bagnall (1982), 105.
attested by elite Christian writers, is not applicable to the syncretic practice which dominated the lives of most individuals.

In conclusion, the destruction of pagan monuments in 4th-century Alexandria was curtailed to a handful of isolated incidents, and there no co-ordinated or consistent programme of pagan temple demolition in Alexandria. Not only were destructive incidents incited by individual patriarchs, but divided Christian attitudes towards pagan architecture frequently expressed themselves through attempts to preserve Hellenistic cultural heritage. Furthermore, pagan belief did not undergo the dramatic decline suggested by Christian sources, but a natural process of assimilation and transformation.
Christian Topography

Alongside the alterations to Alexandria’s pagan topography, Christianity rapidly developed a topography of its own. In 300 Alexandria had merely two churches, yet by the death of Theophilus in 412 it had at least twenty, including the former site of the Serapeum. However, just as the de-paganisation of space did not result in dramatic alterations to the cityscape, neither did Christianisation, as Hellenistic civic space remained central to Christian topography. Furthermore, Christianity’s building programme grew from Hellenistic frameworks; far from stunting Alexandria’s cultural life, Christian developments served as a springboard for Alexandria’s flourishing architectural scene of the following centuries.

A fundamental feature of Hellenistic topography is the use of community space as a stage for religious expression, and Alexandria’s armature – the Via Canopica and agora – had served as the setting for religious and imperial ceremony since the city’s founding. The Ptolemaic Via Canopica cut the breadth of the city, and was twice the width of other major streets (Fig.1). In the 300s, it was still used for pagan processions, and a procession for Serapis is evocatively described by Achilles Tatus: “it was as though another sun had arisen, but distributed into small darts in every direction.” (5.1.2).

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80 The Via Canopica (L1) is 14m wide; so is the major N-S crossroad (R1); Mahmoud-Bey (1872), 22.
The patriarchal adventus merged seamlessly into the ancient processional tradition. In 362, Athanasius’ return from exile was met with “universal cheers” and “nightlong festivities” (Gregory Nazianzus Orations 21.28-29) in a manner highly reminiscent of Alexandria’s imperial triumphs and ancient religious processions, such as that of Ptolemy Philadelphus as Dionysius in the 3rd century BC. The agora was likewise put to use for Christian ritual, as Theophilus had images of Theodosius and other favoured emperors carried in procession along the Via Canopica, and installed in the midst of the marketplace. From here, the images were said to protect the whole city (Theophilus, A Homily on the Virgin 90, cols. 1-2). Likewise, the broken cult statue of Serapis was turned into cross and placed in the city centre (Eutychius, Annales 433-35). Just as pre-Christian ritual had been shaped by the Hellenistic city armature, so Christian ritual remained inextricable from the city’s Hellenistic core.

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81 On a triumph of Severus, see Malalas, Chronicle 12.21. On Ptolemy Philadelphus, see Callixenus, quoted by Athenaeus 197c-203b.
Another key theme of Hellenistic religious topography is the clustering of monumental religious buildings upon key civic and economic nodes, and the careful integration of buildings within a broad visual setting. In the 300s, churches maintained these two themes, by co-opting the civic and economic hubs about which Alexandria’s temples clustered – the armature and harbour respectively. Agathos Daimon and the Tychaion stood at the agora, while Isis, Serapis, and Rhea Kybele had temples upon the Via Canopica. As the Serapeum’s acropolis served as the city’s backdrop in the south, so Poseidon’s temple and the imposing walls and twin obelisks of the Caesarion, dominated the northern harbour front. One by one, Christianity encroached upon these spaces. In 351, the Great Church was built in the Caesarion precinct, the grounds of which were extended down to the Via Canopica (Athenasius, *Defense Against the Arians* 14-18, 56). Also in the harbour area was the Hadrionon, converted to a church following a long previous history as both a gymnasium and a palace (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69.2.2-3). Athanasius’ most impressive church was constructed at the agora itself. Finally, a church was built just to the west of the Serapeum at the close of the century (John of Nikiû 78.46). In this way, Christianity maintain the Hellenistic principle of focusing religious architecture around the economic hubs and visual foci of Alexandria’s city centre.

Nonetheless, the twenty churches named by Theophilus’ death in 412 pales in comparison to the 2,393 temples listed in the *Notitia Urbis Alexandrinarum*, an inventory of Alexandrian buildings, although this number is likely bolstered by the inclusion of neighbourhood shrines. Thus Ammian, visiting in the 380s, describes Alexandria as a city not of Christianity, but of “temples pompous with lofty roofs” (Ammianus Marcellinus

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82 Winter (2006), 208.
84 Kiss (2007), 191.
86 That the figure is not unfeasible is suggested by P.Teb.88, which lists 13 shrines for a village of 1,500, see Bowman (1996), 164.
22.16.12). It is interesting that both Ammian and the Notitia fail to list any churches at all; however, it is possible that the Notitia is of a relatively early date and a pagan authorship which selectively ignores church buildings. This would also explain why no synagogues are mentioned, despite Alexandria’s large and active Jewish population. Compounded by a lack of archaeological sources, the Notitia likely restricts our knowledge of the true extent of church building. However, the evidence that church building was extensive in the Egyptian hinterland in this period does not necessarily provide an accurate reflection of the situation in Alexandria. As pagan beliefs remained of substantial importance and the cityscape was already crowded, church building may have been less feasible. Major early Constantinopolitan churches – such as the Hagia Sofia and the Holy Apostles – are relatively few in number, but of considerable beauty and striking style; it is thus possible that 4th-century churches in Alexandria likewise emphasised quality over quantity.

In fact, archaeological remains of basilica churches from Egypt suggest that church building in Alexandria adapted and developed Hellenistic modes. Traditionally it has been assumed that Late Antique Alexandrian architecture differed to the Coptic architecture of the Egyptian hinterland; however, this distinction relies on presumed divisions between orthodox Christianity and Copticism. As shown in chapter one, such strict delineations did not exist in the 300s. In fact, during the late imperial period, there is a clear consistency in the Corinthian column capital style used throughout Alexandria and Egypt, typified by simplified motifs and use of hardstone, in contrast to the ornate wider Eastern style. The stylistic unity during the imperial period therefore provides reasonable grounds to use the archaeological

87 The Notitia has a likely terminus ante quem of 391 and terminus post quem of 272, see Fraser (1951), 107.
88 Philo, On the Embassy to Gaius 20.
89 Cameron (2012), 20.
90 McKenzie (1996), 120.
remains of northern Egyptian churches as speculative guidance for Alexandrian churches in the 300s.

The remains of a contemporary basilica church at Pbow (modern day Faw Qibli) may typify the Alexandrian situation (Fig. 1).

Figure 2: Church at Faw Qibli (Pbow), plan of phases 346 - 459.

Whilst basilicas originated in the imperial West, by the 300s they had long been staple features of the Eastern cityscape, and quickly became the iconic 4th-century church style across the East. The basilica’s strength lay in that it was an existing, well-understood form of public architecture, which would easily hold a congregation and could therefore be quickly co-opted for a Christian purpose.92 It is therefore likely that a number of churches in Alexandria followed the Pbow model, and indeed, the Church of Theonas is explicitly referred to as a basilica.93

92 Krautheimer (1965), 41.
93 Athanasius, Festal Index 2, in PG 26, col. 1356D.
The 4th-century phase of Pbow was later developed into a five aisled nave, similar to St Peter’s Basilica in Rome. However, Pbow maintained the shape of ancient Egyptian temples by having a straight east wall without an apse, thus incorporating both local and Hellenistic architectural trends. As the greatest port of the eastern Mediterranean, Alexandria was the key link between the Egyptian hinterland and the wider empire for both trade and cultural exchange. Consequentially, Hellenising features which filtered through to church architecture of the Egyptian hinterland, such as at Pbow, would most likely have appeared first in Alexandria. Initial Alexandrian churches were thus not a dramatic departure upon Alexandria’s cityscape, as they fit neatly into the long term Greco-Roman tradition of classical, monumental public building.

Pbow’s second and third phases are impressively large, and Alexandrian churches are similarly likely to have been monumental in size. Monumentality represented both institutional power and regional pride, and was thus a fundamental expression of both Hellenistic urbanism and traditional Egyptian religious architecture. Indeed, John of Nikiû describes the octagonal church built at the Serapeum as vaulted, and massive (78.46). However, within 4th-century church architecture across the empire, the importance of the classical structural order was increasingly complemented by a new visual order, focussing on the lighting and colour of the interior, as reflected in the martyrium at Golgotha. This change of priorities has sometimes been interpreted as a sign of economic and urban decline, as the decoration of interiors was less costly. Yet, the churches of northern Egypt are ultimately larger than those anywhere except Rome and Carthage; church basilicas at Abu Mina and Hermopolis Magna have mid-5th century phases well over 100m in length.

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95 MacDonald (1986), 134
96 Krautheimer (1965), 68.
concentration of wealth and power from the combined imperial, religious, and local administrations makes it likely that Alexandrian churches would have been even more monumental and impressive than examples such as Pbow from the Egyptian hinterland.

Furthermore, 4th-century Alexandrian churches played a role in the development of new styles which both incorporated and departed from long term trends in Hellenistic architecture, thereby enabling the city to maintain its status as a source of artistic inspiration across the Late Antique world. It has traditionally been assumed that Constantinople was the leader of 4th-century architectural innovation, as Rome politically declined and the centre of imperial power moved east. By contrast, Alexandria has variously been described as having “no style” and as being an architectural “backwater”. Yet this assumption has been based purely on the comparative lack of surviving 4th-century architecture in Alexandria. In fact, Alexandria’s ecclesiastic power was stronger than Constantinople’s, which unlike the well-established Alexandrian Church, was not an independent religious diocese until 339. This comparative weakness is reflected in the successfully outmanoeuvring of a series of Constantinopolitan bishops by Athanasius, Theophilus, and Cyril. Furthermore, Alexandria was the only major Eastern city with uninterrupted legacy of artistic and scholastic development traceable back to the Hellenistic period. The expertise of Alexandrian architects is known from the surviving writings of mechanoi such as Heron’s *Metrica*, with Pappus noting that this expertise was still widespread in the city in the 300s, as evidenced by Theon. Therefore, we might expect Alexandria’s church architecture to be as innovative as that of the fledging capital.

That the 300s established a solid basis of Christian architectural innovation in Alexandria, is suggested by the innovations in 5th and 6th-century Constantinopolitan

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99 McKenzie (2007), 230
architecture which have recently been shown to have earlier counterparts Egypt. The South Church at Bawit contains impost capitals believed to have been first developed at Constantinople under Justinian. Likewise, the church of St Polyeuktos has puzzled scholars for decades, due in part to striking ornamental oddities, such as palm leaf motifs on column capitals, and decorated niche heads upon semi-domed exedras. Yet not only are palm leaves a frequent motif of Late Antique Egyptian textiles and column capitals, but architectural precedents are found at Egypt’s Apa Shenute (White Monastery) in the 400s. The desire of St Polyeuktos’ patroness to make her church reminiscent of Solomon’s temple may have inspired the use of such exotic, luxurious motifs, and a turn to Egypt for inspiration. Apa Shenute also contains a broken pediment motif, and a triconch sanctuary and extra room on the south side, the same combination of which may be found at a church in Cyrenaica. As Alexandria is the major centre linking all of these locations, whether or not these features were invented in the city itself, it is clear that they were spread along the economic arteries which it controlled.

Most impressively, the vast, vaulted dome of the Hagia Sofia appears to have been based directly upon an Alexandrian predecessor. Hagia Sofia’s dome, built between 352 and 357 under Justinian, incorporates pendentives – an innovation to protect radial cracking – and is generally considered to be architecturally unprecedented. However, mosaics at the churches of St John the Baptist and St Peter and Paul in Jerash, Jordan, dated to 531 and 535-550 respectively, depict the city of Alexandria dominated by a monumental dome with pendentives (Fig. 2).

103 Harrison (1983, 277.
These mosaics make Alexandria the earliest known example of a dome with pendentives, which as a result we may tentatively suggest were an Alexandrian invention. In fact, it is known that Justinian directly sought out Alexandrian expertise, as the Alexandrian architect Chryses worked for him.\textsuperscript{106} Alexandrian architecture also had a direct route through which to influence the capital, as Constantinople’s \textit{annona} relied on Egyptian grain, thereby establishing a trading axis which became the back bone of the Eastern Empire.\textsuperscript{107} An additional piece of evidence here is the long-standing association between Alexandria and domed roofs. The cupola is arguably an evolution of the skene motif, first found within Alexandria’s Ptolemaic Ipsium tomb as a representation of Alexander the Great’s sacred tent.\textsuperscript{108} Significantly, cupolas are used to symbolise Alexandria in Pseudo-Methodius’ \textit{Alexandrian World Chronicle} of 400, making it almost certain that monumental domed buildings, likely churches, existed in the city by this time.\textsuperscript{109} In this case, the momentous role

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Procopius, \textit{Buildings} 2.3.2
\item Alexandria’s \textit{annona} is attested in the \textit{Chronicon Paschale} 332. On trade links, Isaac (1992), 290-1; Goddio (2011), 124-135.
\item Smith (1956), 62-4.
\item McKenzie (2007), 62.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Alexandria played within 6th-century Christian architecture was the results of a creative Hellenistic legacy upheld via the Christian building programmes of the late 300s.

In conclusion, the 300s was a point of transition for Alexandria’s religious topography, as the fruition of Romano-Hellenistic urbanism could be viewed in concert with the emerging architectural style of the Church and monuments of the city’s Ptolemaic past. Yet the developments brought by Christianity served not to undermine, but entrench fundamental principles of urban Hellenism; firstly, that religion is inextricable from the civic and economic topography of the city, and that secondly, religious topography be of a monumental nature. Thirdly, Christian architecture in the 300s developed not as an antithesis, but as an extension of Hellenistic forms. Finally, this groundwork ensured that even as Christian architecture eventually moved beyond its Hellenistic roots, Alexandria would remain a centre of architectural inspiration to the Empire.
Civic Power Structures

As the growing might of Christianity transformed Alexandria’s cityscape, it likewise transformed the city’s governing institutions. However, the picture painted by scholarship has traditionally been bleak; the Church is seen as exacerbating a decline in Hellenistic city autonomy and identity, with Liebeschutz going so far as to say that “monotheism was the death of citizenship”. In reality, the emergence of the patriarch undermined, but did not overturn, the power of the Hellenistic civic elites. Furthermore, patriarchal consolidation of power over the growing ascetic movement, and mitigation of the centralising influence of imperial governance, maintained the urbanisation which characterised Alexandria’s Hellenistic religious institutions. The death of Hellenistic identity owes more to rhetoric than reality, as tangible shifts in urban demography are absent, and Hellenistic euergetism maintained its role as a key social institution.

The focus on Alexandria’s homoiousian patriarchs – particularly Athanasius, Theophilus and Cyril - within Christian sources, has obscured the enduring power of the old civic elites. The council seem absent from key events in the Arian crisis, and appear powerless to prevent imperial interference, such as the forcible appointment of an Arian patriarch in 339. This has been linked to an increasing monetary burden of magistracies, as bemoaned by Libanius, with the suggestion that elites began to avoid such roles entirely and thereby weaken the autonomy of the council. Yet this disappearance may not reflect weakness, but calculated efforts to maintain stability. As the highest representative body of the dēmos, and wealthy politicians with a lot to lose, it was politically and personally prudent for the magistracy to remain neutral during the violent religious crises around which sources

110 Liebeschutz (1972), 263, paints a grim picture for Syria and the wider East.
111 Athanasius, Circular Letter 2.
112 Libanius dubs magistracies “slavery” in Letter To Aristaenetus.
tend to revolve. As In fact, Athanasius bemoans the council for refusing to pick sides “so long as they …obtain the patronage of men” (*History of the Arians* 8.78). Likewise, a rural “flight of the councillors” is not likely to have harmed Alexandria, as elites tended to relocate to regional capitals where they had better career opportunities.\(^{113}\) Christian histories tend to build their narratives around the lines of succession of key bishoprics, providing a biography of each new patriarch, and giving these individuals disproportionate weight in comparison to other power groups. Even in the 400s, the prefect Orestes’ liaisons with Hypatia, leader of the elite pagan community and confidante of the magistrates, demonstrates the influence still held by the traditional administration.\(^{114}\)

Whilst patriarchs could be zealous theologians and ruthless politicians in equal measure, Alexandria’s Christians were a diverse, disunited community, and thus the patriarch’s position was more precarious than initially appears.\(^{115}\) Athanasius’ writings carefully construct his image as a champion of the people, but he was exiled no less than five times with Arian backing.\(^{116}\) Even in the 400s, as Arianism faded into memory, patriarchs could not count on unified support. Cyril’s bodyguard, the *parabalani*, began terrorizing councillors who disagreed with the patriarch, yet their murder of Hypatia backfired, receiving severe backlash from Christian parties.\(^{117}\) Socrates writes “Nothing is further from the spirit of Christianity” (7.15), and Theodosius even ordered an investigation. Thereafter, the patriarch’s unscrupulous tactics against the council were curtailed for good.\(^{118}\) It is furthermore inaccurate to characterise the religious administration as inevitably hostile to civic elites, and instances of respectful collaboration include council organisation of

\(^{114}\) Socrates 7.15; also Haas (1997), 313.
\(^{116}\) For example Athanasius, *Apology for his Flight* 6-7; *Apology to Constantius* 33.
\(^{117}\) *Codex Theodosianus* 16.2.42.
\(^{118}\) John of Nikiü 84.87. Watts (2017), 3, 87-89.
patriarchal burials. Although the council is often generalised as a pagan body, this is overly simplistic, as Athanasius’ concern for homoiousian councillors during the Arian crisis demonstrates. Ultimately, a symbiotic relationship between religious, civic and imperial administrations was the best method for peaceful and efficient government, and the city’s institutions were ran through collaboration, not just competition.

However, by the 400s, patriarchs proved themselves assets rather than threats to Alexandria’s Hellenistic city autonomy. For four centuries, Alexandrian magistrates had to contend with a powerful imperial administration, which increasingly used violence to impose its will. Alexandria’s Arian controversy played out as a power struggle between Arian emperors and homoiousian patriarchs. Under Constantius II, homoiousian magistrates and bishops alike were browbeat by imperial officials, and in 356, the dux Artemius conducted a bloody campaign against Alexandria’s homoiousians. Imperial military clout was thus a greater menace to civic autonomy than the patriarchs. Eventually, this conflict became redundant due to the ascension of homoiousian emperors, and at this point, patriarchal involvement in civic affairs was able to mitigate the centralising trend of imperial officials. Although it made Cyril unpopular, Hypatia’s murder forced Orestes into political obscurity, thus establishing a measure of patriarchal dominance over Egypt’s imperial administration. In this sense, the power struggle of the mid-300s led to the beginnings of a Church-led revival in the autonomy of indigenous Alexandrian institutions in the 400s.

Another factor which strengthened Alexandria’s governing autonomy and regional power was the fact that the Church had a singular, centralised institutional hierarchy unlike

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119 History of the Patriarchs 1.6;
120 Elite paganism is explored in Chapter 4. Athanasius History of the Arians 2.14.
121 Brown (2002), 85.
122 See Diocletian’s massacre of Alexandrian rebels in 298; Eutropius 4.24; Orosius, History Against the Pagans 7.25.
124 Haas (1997), 316.
anything seen under paganism. However, urban religion is sometimes seen to have given way to ruralisation in the 300s, due to the explosion of monasticism across Egypt following the first reference to a monachos in 324. Yet whilst scholars generalise asceticism as “violently” rejecting urbanisation, coenobitism was a prominent strand of monasticism. Athanasius’ correspondence with female ascetic communities in Alexandria displays concern for their engagement in trade, and frequent public appearances. Spiritual withdrawal did not necessitate social withdrawal, and for Alexandria’s Virgins and coenobites, integration into local communities was a financial necessity. According to the bishop of Oxyrhynchus, this smaller city sustained a grand total of 30,000 monks and 20,000 virgins. Had Alexandria even a fraction of this clearly exaggerated number, monks made up a significant proportion of the urban religious community. Even as the romanticisation of desert ascetics dominated Christian hagiography, isolation from urban institutions remained a theological ideal rather than practical reality. Macarius of Alexandria is praised as a “lover…of the desert, its ultimate and inaccessible wastes” (Rufinus, History of the Monks of Egypt 23.1), yet like many of his fellow holy men, remained in contact with a constant stream of curious travellers. Alexandria was a key station for monastic pilgrimages, and the housing block R4 contains almost 150 figures and pilgrimage flasks from St Menas. As a web of communication linked Alexandria to desert hermits, ascetic communities were not divorced from the Church, but extensions of religious life in the city.

By integrating ascetic values into the broader Christian hierarchy, patriarchs also played a role in sustaining religious centralisation. Athanasius’ Life of Antony carefully paints asceticism as an offshoot rather than antithesis to traditional orthodoxy, thereby shrewdly

127 Athanasius, Letters to the Virgins 2.4, 1.33.
128 Rufinus, History of the Monks of Egypt 5.6.
129 Oxyrhynchus’ total population was probably under 20,000; Alson & Alston (1997), 202.
130 Kiss (1989).
assigning himself spiritual authority over rural ascetics. 131 Influential monks were continuously assimilated into the Church by ordination into clerical positions, and although some monks resorted to cutting of their own ears in order to avoid this honour, dozens of successful converts are listed amongst Athanasius’ personal contacts. 132 Athanasius’ tour of Pachomian communities and Theophilus’ founding of monasteries at Canopus likewise encouraged direct contact between Alexandria and rural centres. 133 Although certain monastic elements aggressively rebelled from central authority, such as Theophilus’ dispute with the Tall Brothers, the patriarch was unafraid to quash this resistance with violence (Socrates 6.7). The co-option of ascetic support represents a major patriarchal success, by channelling a movement which could have resulted in a decentralisation of religious power into a bastion of urban institutions. As in Hellenistic religion, so in Christianity, Alexandria remained at the core of Egypt’s power hierarchy.

Meanwhile, the power of the bouletic class continued to be expressed through euergetism. Bestowing one’s city with architecture enabled Hellenistic elites throughout Late Antiquity to obtain socio-political influence, and the practice flourished throughout the Roman East. In the 300s, this was complemented by the growth of Biblical charity. In spiritual terms, “the bishop who loves the poor…is rich,” (Pseudo-Athanasius, Canons 14), and through the establishment of poor houses and the feeding of orphans and widows, the Alexandrian patriarch established himself as the ultimate urban patron. 134 Scholars have posited that Christianisation exacerbated a decline in euergetism, as the ethos behind charity was antithetical to Hellenistic civic benefaction. 135 Whereas civic munificence emphasised

131 Brakke (1995), 90-98. St Antony is deferential to Athanasius, or so Athanasius chooses to imply, see Life of Antony 67-71.
135 Veyne (1990), and Patlagean (1977).
the love of one’s city and fellow citizens, Christian charity emphasised love of all humanity, particularly the poor, as the metric for public giving. “Let us remember the poor,” (Festal Letters 1.11) writes Athanasius, reflecting the “cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7) oft found in Biblical gospels. Christian sources declare their moral high ground by accusing Arians and pagans alike of mistreating the poor, which Cameron takes at face value, remarking that Christianisation forced pagans to notice the poor “for the first time”. In fact, pagans were no aliens to charity; genuine philanthropy had always been a motive of euergetism. Furthermore, traditional benefaction continued; the lay elite embraced Christian building as new form of euergetism, as demonstrated by the Alexandrian church patronised by “Mother Theodora”. Meanwhile, the panis aedium encouraged euergetism by providing free bread for individuals who financed grand buildings within Alexandria. Moreover, Christian patrons used charity as a means to accrue glory no less than their pagan counterparts – for example, Basil of Caesarea made sure to name his massive poorhouse after himself. Ultimately, by existing as a means of legitimising the social status of the elite, almsgiving grew from the same fundamental functions as Hellenistic benefaction.

Furthermore, almsgiving failed to erode the traditional exclusionary boundaries of the Hellenistic city body, even as the dēmos was rhetorically expanded to encompass the traditionally marginalised poor. Charity theoretically empowered the needy to bypass traditional hierarchies in order to appeal to Christian magnanimity, and certainly, genuine elite concern for the destitute fed many. However, just as eligibility for the annona was decided on the basis of citizenship rather than need, Alexandria’s ‘order of widows’ consisted

137 Libanius, Orations 2.30.
138 Coptic Synaxarium 11th of Barmoudah, in PO 16.301.
139 Martin & van Bercham (1942), 5-21.
140 Sozomen 6.34.9.
141 Leontius of Neapolis, Life of St. John the Almsgiver 21.
of respectable matrons from established families. Charity was a useful political tool enabling patriarchs to keep supporters of all financial backgrounds in line, and a significant proportion of those receiving alms were the ranks of the clergy themselves. Finally, the most disenfranchised of all – slaves – saw their social position go entirely unchallenged. The socio-economic basis of traditional citizenship thus continued to affect one’s importance in regards to munificence. Indeed, Cyril’s casual interchange of the Coptic “poor” with the Greek “dēmos” within his sermons suggests the Hellenistic citizen body had not been eroded, or even truly expanded, but simply given a new label.

The rhetorical rise of the poor has furthermore encouraged assumptions that rising poverty levels shattered Alexandria’s urban identity, as influxes of migrants transgressed the boundary between the city and the countryside. Yet this is predicated on an outdated picture of rural poverty in the East, and the uncritical transposition of Libanius’ dreary economic outlook onto Egypt. Increasing papyri tax records reflect not economic hardship, but growing local officialdom, in fact tax levels overall remained fairly constant. It is furthermore false to presume that the Hellenistic dēmos was ever a static body. Firstly, the strict Ptolemaic legal distinctions between Alexandria’s Greek elite and the Egyptian masses were eroded long before the 300s. Secondly, population transfer was fundamental to the demography of Eastern cities. Rural migrants, traders and travellers constantly slip in and out of urban life, with the risk of migration due to poverty a mainstay in the lives of most

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144 Brown (2002), 63.
145 Papyruscodex 9.8.
146 On poverty and population growth, Bolkestein (1937), 484; Patlagean (1977).
149 Bowman (1996), 125.
individuals. In fact, the countryside sustained rising population levels, as archaeological evidence shows settlement in the Alexandrian hinterland peaked in the 300s. The real change was rhetorical; the masses whom elites had previously characterised as an active body of citizens were now constructed as a passive group of destitutes in need of religiously sanctioned protection.

The uptake in inter-communal violence surrounding Christianisation has occasionally been cited as evidence of a decline in Alexandria’s city cohesion. Alongside the friction between homoiousians, Arians and pagans throughout the mid-300s, the brutal 415 murder of Hypatia resounds strongly in scholarship and the popular imagination, which obscures the fact that this incident marked the peak of Alexandria’s pagan-Christian violence. Narrative history’s focus on violent events makes it easy to overlook the fact that Alexandria contained myriad overlapping religious communities, and the majority of daily inter-communal relations were necessarily peaceful. We see the mundane in glimpses, such as from a fragment detailing the tenancy of a Jew lodging with Christian nuns. Communal boundaries were also flexible; pagans joined Arians in attacking homoiousians, and were known to take up Arian bishoprics. Nonetheless, the 300s did not see a decline in cohesion relative to other periods, as mob violence in Alexandria was common enough that by the 400s it is a literary cliché. Turbulence was frequent at times of change, and Alexandria was the setting of some of the biggest doctrinal conflicts of the 300s. Within this melting pot of

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154 Gibbon martyrises her, setting the tone of future scholarship, in (1781), Chapter 47.5. On Hypatia’s historiography, see Watts (2017), 135-148.
155 Haas (1997), 50.
156 P.Oxy XLIV 3203.
religions and cultures, violent incidents are not symptoms of decline, but growing pains of a metropolis coming to grips with readjustments to its power hierarchy.

To conclude, Christianity’s burgeoning administration was a significant new player upon the governing field of Alexandria, yet by no means singlehandedly caused the downfall of the Hellenistic city’s institutions or elites. Religious centralisation and urbanisation were both solidified by the rise of the patriarch, but the relatively precarious position even of the century’s most famous figures meant that they did less to undermine the position of the bouletic class than their writings would suggest. Additionally, citizenship did not die, as the growth of Christian almsgiving grew from civic benefaction, rather than in opposition to it; in the same way, Christian self-fashioning, rather than genuine changes to city demography, is a significant factor in the apparent decline of the dēmos as a marker of identity. Finally, inter-communal violence was not an omen of decline, but a regular feature of dynamic religious life in Alexandria.
Intellectualism

19th-century anti-Hebraic historians frequently characterised Alexandrian Christianity as an elevation of Hellenism; this problematic standpoint was rejected by later scholars who viewed Hypatia’s murder as a watershed marking the long-term demise of Alexandrian intellectualism. Within the latter narrative, Alexandria’s flourishing philosophy of the 500s simply “rises from the rubble” following a century-long post-Hypatia nadir. However, this chapter intends to dispel the narrative of early 5th-century decline, by tracing the sustained vitality of Alexandrian philosophy from the 200s onwards. Alexandrian intellectualism ultimately thrived due to continuing elite reliance on paideia, which encouraged both Hellenistic-Christian, and purely pagan philosophy. Together, these overlapping narratives catalysed Alexandria’s intellectual renaissance of the late 400s.

The elites of Late Antiquity retained their identity as a socio-cultural class in spite of diverging religious views, through the endurance of Hellenistic paideia. “Those without a share in culture were no better off than slaves,” states Libanius bluntly, vocalising the ideal of the learned man shared by Greco-Roman elites throughout antiquity (To Italicianus 2.1). The intellectual credentials of Alexandrian schools were second only to Athens, and consequently, it became commonplace for Alexandrian Christians to be praised for their secular learning. Origen, an influential leader of the Catechetical School in the 200s, is gifted with understanding of geometry, grammar, rhetoric and more (Jerome, On Illustrious Men 54). Likewise, the 4th-century leader Didymus the Blind is “educated in poetry, rhetoric, arithmetic… the logic of Aristotle, and the eloquence of Plato” (Theodoret Church History 4.26). That paideia remained the core of elite identity is further shown by the endurance of

159 Martin (2001); see note 154 above.
162 On education, see Morgan (1998); Cribiore (2005), 3.
163 Alexandria’s famed Catechetical school existed from late 100s, Eusebius, Church History 2.16.1.
hellênikos as a cultural identifier for educated Alexandrians, regardless of their religious beliefs. *Hellene* and *hellênikos*, meaning both ethnic Greeks and those of Greek culture – that is, the Hellenised – took on the double meaning of pagan by the 300s.¹⁶⁴ Yet Julian’s attempt to co-opt the term by banning Christian teaching of *paideia* was met with angry resistance by elite Christians who considered themselves *hellenes*.¹⁶⁵ Ultimately therefore, elite Christians were just as keen as elite pagans to partake of *paideia*.

This small pool of elites increasingly produced the Church’s most influential leaders, and the Hellenising influence of these figures upon Alexandrian Christianity cannot be underestimated. The upper echelons of the Church were a small world, and Gregory Nazianzus describes with affection his childhood friendship with Basil of Caesarea during their Alexandrian schooldays (Gregory Nazianzus, *Panegyric on St. Basil* 18). By the time of Cyril, Theophilus’ nephew, it was normal for the Alexandrian Patriarchs to groom successors from a young age (Socrates 7.7), and Athanasius’ parents ensured he attained the highest levels of *paideia*, becoming “well educated, versed in grammar” (Sozomen 2.17).¹⁶⁶ Even lesser administrative members of the church hierarchy, such as Cyril’s notaries, would have received basic *paideia* in order to fulfil their duties. Due this predominance of classically educated individuals within the Church, a consensus emerged that the technical elements of *paideia* were crucial to the Christian thinker. Origen argued in favour of philosophy and rhetoric as a means to converting pagans (*Homilies on Jeremiah*, 15.2.8). Likewise, in the 300s, Basil of Caesarea passionately instructs Christians to “take the deeds of good [pagan] men to heart” (*Letter to a Young Man on How to Derive Benefit from Pagan Literature* 4.1).

¹⁶⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 18.52; Ammianus Marcellinus 22.10.7.
¹⁶⁶ Cribiore (2005), 2.
However, it is true that the religious aspects of the *paideia* were controversial. Zacharias Scholasticus considers them frankly dangerous, and much of the *Life of Severus* is devoted to a moralising tale of a converted Christian student’s brutal harassment by his pagan classmates. Concern also pervaded that philosophical learning distracted from the wisdom of Christ. According to Cyril, philosophers “revel in bombast of language… but of the truth they reck full little.” Yet even theologians who openly disparaged *paideia* ultimately operated from within its technical framework. The patriarchal sermons to which Alexandrians flocked relied upon the same rhetorical forms as pagan oratory. Ascetics proclaimed the superiority of their unlettered ideology, ironically through eloquent theological tracts, and travelled into Alexandria to engage in rhetorical sparring with philosophers (*History of the Monks of Egypt*, 20.15). Shenoute, the Coptic nemesis of paganism and the patriarchate alike, disparaged Hellenism in rhetoric which shows clear signs of Greek training. Christian rhetoric in the 300s could not escape the *paideia*, as it was to a large extent formed by the *paideia*.

Furthermore, by the 400s, Christian intellectualism in Alexandria was wholly Hellenistic in character. Daily interactions between students of Alexandria’s Neoplatonic and Catechetical schools in the 200s and 300s served to entrench Hellenistic philosophical values within Christian theology at its formative moment. Neoplatonic montheism saw philosophy as a method to understanding the divine “One”, which easily leant itself towards Christianity through the work of Clement and Origen, 3rd-century leaders of the Catechetical school. Origen’s hierarchical holy Trinity is built upon pre-existing Platonic concepts (*On First Principles* 1.3.5), and Clement sees philosophy as a necessary “handmaiden” to theological

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167 *Life of Severus* 22-24; see Watts (2010), 11-70.
168 See also John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 19.1.
169 Emmel (2007), 91.
understanding (*Stromata* 5.1). Although Inge considers Neoplatonism to have been “plundered” by Christian theologians, these developments were part of a natural cross-fertilisation, as overlapping circles of pagan and Christian intellectuals mixed together freely; Origen for example worked as a grammar teacher. The legacy of Catechetical ‘intellectual pagans’ was carried forward by Alexandrian students of the 4th-century. Didymus, whom Socrates calls the “bulwark of true faith” (4.25) wrote several commentaries on Origenist theology, and his work may even have been used by the staunchly pagan Libanius. Even as Alexandrian patriarchs drew firm lines between themselves and the heathens, it increasingly became impossible to distinguish between the two philosophical traditions.

Whilst Christianity became a vehicle sustaining Hellenistic values into the future, ‘purely’ pagan philosophy also emerged from the tumult of the late 300s relatively unscathed. In the 380s, Ammian praises the medics, mathematicians and philosophers at work in Alexandria, remarking that “not even today…is learning silent” (22.16.7-15). Philosophical debate thrived, as a competing Iamblichian school emerged in the 300s alongside Hypatia’s Neoplatonists. However, it has been speculated that the Serapeum’s destruction caused the loss of the last surviving archive of the Great Library of Alexandria, thereby dooming the city’s learning to the “dark ages”. Yet the library’s mythical status has obscured the fact that its collection were most likely destroyed over several preceding centuries, and consequently, its loss was neither immediate nor devastating. Similarly, although it has been argued that the murder of Hypatia encouraged a student exodus towards Athens, this

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172 Inge (1990), 333-340. On Origen’s teaching career, Hodgson (1906), 116. For discussion of other individuals in these circles, see Watts (2006), 155-168.
173 Term invented by Frankfurter (1998), 35.
174 For this theory, see Gibson (1999), 179.
175 For example Cyril, *That Christ is One*; Athanasius, *Against the Heathens*. Frede (1999), 41.
176 In the tradition of Iamblichus, a Syrian Neoplatonist; Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 5.1-2.
177 Lloyd-Jones (1991), 117; Parsons (1952), proem, ix.
trend was in fact minimal.\textsuperscript{179} At the turn of the 400s Synesius already compares Athenian intellectual life to the skin of a burnt carcass (\textit{Letter} 136), and Athenian schools rapidly became a backwater, torn apart by internal divisions and an unfriendly political climate.\textsuperscript{180} Hypatia’s long shadow has obscured her key successors, who soon returned to Alexandria. Among these is the Neoplatonist Hierocles, who in the early 400s “adorned the schools” of Alexandria, and “everywhere astounded his hearers” (Damascus, \textit{Life of Isidore}).\textsuperscript{181} His legacy is mourned by the Aeneas of Gaza, a Christian, in his \textit{Theophrastus}.\textsuperscript{182} Other influential students include Hypatia’s pupil Synesius, who went on to become Bishop of Cyrene, and Syrianus and Proclus, later leaders of the Athenian philosophical schools (Marinus of Samaria, \textit{Proclus or Concerning Happiness} 8).

Cyril’s continued preoccupation with the “trickery”, “repulsive ideas”, and “utter lies” of paganism following Hypatia’s death is a key indicator that Hellenistic religion still lurked within Alexandrian halls (\textit{Commentary on John} 5.663-669). The fact that the most ‘extreme’ pagan practice, blood sacrifice, had long ago fallen out of favour, enabled Alexandrian philosophers to maintain pagan beliefs with more impunity than we might expect.\textsuperscript{183} Many, however, saw no need to be subtle. The philosopher Antoninus “devoted himself” to pagan rites in a Canopic temple filled with young pagan priests who “thirsted for philosophy”, (Eunapius, \textit{Lives of the Philosophers} 6.9.17), and Ammonius openly encouraged paganism within the classroom at least until the 480s.\textsuperscript{184} As late as the 500s, Zacharias Scholasticus bemoans the pagans who fill Alexandrian schools, in particular a teacher who took students on frequent school trips to an Isis house-shrine in Canopus (\textit{Life of Severus} 16-19).

\textit{Alexandrian paideia}, with the funds and pupils it brought, provided pagan philosophers with

\textsuperscript{179} Marenbon (2012), 20.
\textsuperscript{180} Watts (2006), 205-206.
\textsuperscript{181} Fragment 45A in Athanassiadi (1999).
\textsuperscript{182} On his trial see Damascus, \textit{Life of Isidore} fragment 106, in Zintzen (1967).
\textsuperscript{183} See note 70 above. Frede (1999), 40-67.
\textsuperscript{184} Fragment 117 in Athanassiadi (1999).
ample opportunity to promote their beliefs to young audiences, long beyond the turn of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century.

However, Haas argues that philosophers’ influence declined after the 300s, as their circles became exclusive, with Isidore visited only by elite “authorities” (Damascius, \textit{Life of Isidore}) in comparison to the masses who called upon Hypatia.\textsuperscript{185} Certainly, just as Christian history’s patriarchal focus is distorting, so we must be careful that the glorification of individual philosophers in various \textit{Lives} does not lead to assumptions that these few figures necessarily represented a wide community. Yet the notion that philosophical circles became cut off from organic tradition dismisses how reinterpretations and commentaries on the old masters had become the key premise of Late Antique philosophy since the 200s.\textsuperscript{186} Indeed, Hierocles’ \textit{Commentary on the Golden Verses} contributed to a new movement synthesising Platonic and Pythagorean traditions.\textsuperscript{187} Meanwhile, at Panopolis, a new literary genre emerged as Nonnus’ \textit{Dionysiaca} and Pamprepius’s poetry merged Hellenistic and traditional Egyptian forms.\textsuperscript{188} Haas’ argument also relies on a false dichotomisation between ‘true’ philosophers and Christian theologians, when as we have seen, many individuals unapologetically straddled both Hellenistic and Christian ideals. Thus, Christian theology ought itself to be seen as an organic development of Hellenistic philosophy. It was this synthesis which enabled Alexandria to become the Eastern capital of philosophy, under the diverse leadership of the pagan Ammonius, the Christian John Philoponus, and many others in the 400s and 500s.\textsuperscript{189}

The most persuasive evidence for the vigour of 5\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th}-century Alexandrian philosophy is the remains of a monumental academic facility at Kom el-Dikka. Built in the

\textsuperscript{186} Bydén & Ierodiakonou (2012), 30.
\textsuperscript{187} On Neopythagoreanism see Schibli (2002), 14-18.
late 400s, this complex spans two whole blocks of the city grid just south of the Via Canopica.\textsuperscript{190} Along a portico bordering the western side of the complex, twenty-two auditoria accommodate stone benches, and diases (Fig. 4).\textsuperscript{191} This layout is universally recognisable as that of a Hellenistic lecture hall, as described by Libanius (\textit{Chriae 3.7}). Kom el-Dikka thus served a large intellectual community in the very heart of the city, and anyone walking along the street adjacent would have heard snippets of philosophers and rhetoricians at work within. Not only was the philosophical community of the late 400s large enough to deserve a new, dedicated complex, but its scale makes it likely partially funded through imperial authorities. Theodosius’ grammar and rhetoric schools in Constantinople provide precedent for the imperial funding of academic institutions, and thus it seems certain that the synthesis of Hellenism and Christianity which had emerged by the 300s, was a key driver of Alexandria’s later philosophical community.\textsuperscript{192} Moreover, Kom el-Dikka may constitute the location of Alexandria’s refounded \textit{Museion}. This world-renown Ptolemaic institution of academic learning reappears in the 5\textsuperscript{th}-century sources following two centuries of silence, and if Delia’s hypothesis that the Great Library was traditionally housed with the \textit{Museion} is correct, both these institutions may have been imperially re-founded at Kom el-Dikka.\textsuperscript{193}

Christian Hellenism is furthermore apparent in the architecture of the complex. Unlike the other auditoria, halls P and S are rounded into apses which mimic \textit{synthronon}, the clergy stalls found at the back of Eastern churches. Meanwhile, the larger, adjoining rooms O and R result in a combined layout conspicuously similar to that of a church presbytery and nave (Fig. 4).\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{190} McKenzie (1996), 112.  
\textsuperscript{191} Majcherek (2010), 474.  
\textsuperscript{192} Codex Theodosianus 14.9.3. Lawler (2004), 296.  
\textsuperscript{193} Delia (1992), 1451.  
\textsuperscript{194} Majcherek (2010), 473-5.
This raises the possibility that Christian devotion occurred alongside philosophical studies, although the lack of altar remains suggests these too are lecture halls. In this case, we are viewing the fusion of Christian architectural styles into Hellenistic modes, creating a new expression of the traditional sophistic forum. Indeed, rounded auditoria are mentioned at Alexandria by Pseudo-Elias in the 6th century (Isagoge 21.30). Kom el-Dikka also includes baths, containing palaestras, a cistern, and public latrines, on a size comparable to the imperial thermae at Rome.

Alongside the theatre at the southern end of the complex, this speaks to the vitality of traditional Hellenistic leisure forms amongst Alexandria’s elite, despite objections from Christian sources to such immoral pastimes (Cyril, Sermon 67). Ultimately, Kom el-Dikka is clear testament to the continuing quality of Alexandrian urban life after the 4th-century; it was, in essence, the new civic centre of the city, and remained in use at least until the mid-7th century.

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196 On Christian attitudes to theatre, see Webb (2008), 197-216.
197 Majcherek (2010), 471.
In conclusion, in the 300s, *paideia*’s importance as a source of elite unity won out over the religious conflicts which sought to undermine it, and the synthesis of philosophy into theology in the 200s and 300s laid the groundwork which made the flourishing schools of the late 400s possible. Alexandria’s Christian theology was thus just as much a naturally occurring theme of the city’s long philosophical legacy as the pagan philosophy which endured the 300s. These two currents were by no means parallel developments, but overlapping and interweaving parts of a whole. In the 5th century Kom el-Dikka, with its syncretic architecture and as the site of Alexandria’s new *Museion*, was a practical expression of the “one river of truth” (*Stromata* 1.5.29), which Clement had envisioned as influenced by both pagan and Christian wisdom, in very similar halls two hundred centuries earlier.
Conclusion

Alexandria in the 300s appears within popular imagination as a city of violent change. From this perspective, the Christian community enforced a brutal demolition and restructuring of the physical landscape. Overbearing patriarchs swept the civic and imperial administrations along before them, stamping the authority of Christ upon Alexandria’s government and cityscape. The dēmos forcibly rejected their old piety and identity, opening up a vast chasm between this new city, and the old – an isolated and dwindling group of elite pagans, all eventually eclipsed by the rising tide of Christianity. Ultimately, socio-religious warfare culminated in two iconic battles: the destruction of Alexandria’s greatest pagan god in 391, and brutal murder of one of the civic community’s most important leaders in 415.198

Yet, in all of these ways, the 300s were much like any other century. Power-hungry politicians and philosophers had always grappled to shape the city’s institutions to their own ends. Christians, Jews, and other marginalised religious communities had long struggled bitterly to maintain their position upon the social map. Within a population seething with religious, ethnic, and socio-economic competition, the Alexandrian pressure pipe was always at the point of exploding into violence.

What is different about the 300s, is that its intercommunal struggles, in the long term, led to the replacement of the dominant religious community with another. It is partially because of this that historians are tempted to see in the 300s a teleological story with an inevitable ending, but this narrative is dangerously simplistic. Problematizing our view of history are the Christian sources, who, riding high upon their religion’s imperial legitimisation and the uncompromising, proletysing rhetoric of the Bible, already conceived of themselves as victors. Every victor must have an enemy, and theologians found one in

198 The two events are depicted as occurring almost consecutively in Alejandro Amenábar’s Agora (2009), an excellent if somewhat inaccurate film.
paganism. The broader culture which paganism stood for was constructed as antithetical to Christianisation, and, by doing this, ancient authors also constructed Hellenism’s historical downfall. Yet in the words of Peter Brown, the Empire in 400 was not yet Christian, rather, “pockets of intensely self-confident Christianity had merely declared the Christian religion to have been victorious.”199 Once we free ourselves of the false conceptualisation of Hellenism as antithetical to Christianity, the notion of Hellenistic decline as a requisite of Christianisation disappears entirely.

Therefore, the simple answer to the question of whether Christianity caused a decline in Alexandrian Hellenism in the 300s, is in certain areas not at all, and in all other areas, far less than is often assumed. As this dissertation has shown, behind the dramatic actions of large- looming, ultimately small groups of individuals exists a broader backdrop of religious change, which was organic rather than imposed, and dynamic rather than in decline.

The complex answer is that a question involving the word ‘decline’ is the wrong question to ask entirely. ‘Decline’ is a value judgement, which not only entrenches the dichotomy detailed above, but moreover, implies that Christianisation necessarily led to some sort of lessening in the quality of overall Alexandrian life. This too easily plays into the hotly debated binary of whether there was an overall socio-economic decline within the Late Antique East. Recently, revisionist historians have pushed against the classification of history into a succession of sharply defined epochs, by focussing upon the enduring strengths and continuities of economic markets – much like this dissertation has done for religious and cultural trends.200 However, just as the trends observable in urban Alexandrian do not necessarily hold water when considering other Eastern metropoles, Christianisation within Alexandria did not affect Hellenistic topography, civic institutions, education and religious

200 For a summary, and rejection of revisionism, see Ward-Perkins (2005), 170-179.
beliefs in the same ways. Nonetheless, since these four themes are ultimately different perspectives through which to frame and quantify the same phenomenon of underlying change, some common trains of development have been drawn out throughout this dissertation.

Alexandria in 300 began with a Christian population already larger than many other cities in the East, and imperial promotion of the religion allowed its congregation to grow quickly, and its institutional power to increase. Yet two things can be true at once, and whilst this was occurring, pagan cults remained vibrant, and Hellenistic religion of overwhelming importance to most individuals. Christianisation of these beliefs occurred on two levels, and excessive focus on the first form of change has obscured the second. Firstly, open hostilities between small groups of extremely ideological individuals, which frequently left great symbolic scars upon the physical landscape in the form of idolic and temple destruction. Secondly, and far more significantly in respect to long term change, was the slow, consensual syncretism of Christian religious practices within people’s daily lives. Consequently, the majority of Alexandrians lived between the boundaries between Hellenistic and Christian religion. This also meant that rhetorical changes to people’s Hellenistic social identities regarding the citizenship and the dēmos did not apply strongly to their everyday lived experiences.

Nonetheless, conflict between Christians and pagans did erupt at key moments. However, the individuals involved in these events were relatively few in number. Generally, only Alexandria’s most strident Christian proletysers, the patriarchs, instigated the most visually dramatic and therefore transgressive actions, such as the destruction of temples. The actions of the patriarchs and their followers represent the extreme; not only were many

\[^{201}\text{Alston, (2004).}\]
Alexandrian Christians ready to criticise excessive violence, but inter-communal violence in Alexandria actually existed within a broader context of legal leniency regarding pagan practices and the preservation of pagan temples.

The fame of the homoiousian patriarchs Athanasius, Theophilus and Cyril has not only done much to exaggerate their impact upon the city’s Hellenistic topography, but has exaggerated the impact Christianity had on the governing structures of the city as a whole. Hellenistic civic autonomy had not truly existed since the Roman era; nonetheless, the Church was not able to simply jostle the city council out of the way, but instead collaborated with it. Not only did the council remained a vital political player within the area of Alexandria’s religious, imperial and civic institutions, but neither were these institutions separated or antithetical to each other.

This overlap within elite institutions was to a large extent the result of enduring Hellenistic elite culture based upon the *paideia*. Alexandria’s bouletic class were increasingly Christian, but they were ultimately Christian Hellenes, and continued to express their socio-cultural power through means such as euergetism, albeit sometimes with a new Christian stamp of approval. Many elites felt no tension within this new order, as on an intellectual level, Alexandrian philosophers and theologians had been establishing a Christian-Hellenistic synthesis since the 200s. Kom el-Dikka, likely the site of a refounded *Museoin*, is clear testament to how an “imperial Hellenism, decidedly Greek in form and outlook,” became culturally dominant for elites.202 Hellenism’s mould is clear all over the nascent ideology and cosmology of the Christian faith, and consequently, Hellenism was key to the philosophical developments of the following centuries. Likewise, the synthesis of Hellenistic forms within Christian building practices of the 300s not only ensured the form of Alexandria’s religious

topography remained Hellenistic in nature, but laid the groundwork for exciting innovations in Alexandria’s religious architecture of the future.

The Alexandria which emerged in the early 400s was every bit the vital socio-economic and cultural metropolis that it had been for seven centuries; whilst its religious flavour was undeniably different, its urban life remained essentially Hellenistic in quality. Although the core of Hellenism – paganism – was no longer the dominant player within Alexandria’s socio-religious hierarchy, its cultural forms did not “die with a kind of mellow splendour”. Instead, Hellenism lived on within the religious and intellectual beliefs of thousands of ordinary Alexandrians, and within the cityscape and social hierarchies which structured the daily lives of these individuals. In Alexandria, the cultural legacy left by the rise of Christianity was bright, and by transforming itself into an indispensable element of this new religion, Hellenism had triumphed.

Wordcount: 13,977.

203 Bell (1953), 105.
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**Figure 3:** ‘Mosaics from Jerash: Yale University Art Museum’, http://users.stlcc.edu/mfuller/JerashMosaic.html (accessed 3.4.17).

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