

"The Rise and Fall of Alexandria", Howard Reid and Justin Pollard

Post by "Joshua" of November 19, 2020 at 10:30 PM

Quote

Joshua what / who do they focus on instead? People like Pythagorus and Plato? Or do they just generally give little attention to philosophy?

I would say that the book focuses on the city itself in its several social and cultural dimensions;

-geopolitical—Alexander the Great, the Ptolemaic kings, Cleopatra and Caesar, etc

-philosophical—Empedocles and Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle, Archimedes and Euclid, Eratosthenes, Aristarchus, Ptolemy, etc (the book is very heavy on philosophy)

-cosmopolitan—nexus of all trade between India, Africa and Europe; civil strife between Greeks/Egyptians, and between Pagans/Christians/Jews

The 'conceit' of the book as outlined in the beginning is to let the ancients speak for themselves, as if one were walking through the great Library itself and pulling scrolls off of the shelf.

I did learn one fascinating thing! It was the law in Alexandria that every ship in the port would be inspected upon arrival and before departure. If the inbound ship was found to contain any books, they were seized by the port authority for copying. After the book was copied, the *original* would be sent to the Library, and the copy returned to the ship. Outgoing ships containing books not copied, or not catalogued for export, could be punished accordingly. This really was an entire city devoted to the project of compiling a collection of every book ever written by man. Epicurus was prolific and widely popular. His books *must* have been there. The thought of such a place makes me unreasonably giddy—and sad, for what we've lost.