

THE GREAT LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA

The Great Library of Alexandria, one of the best-known libraries of the ancient world, was founded about 300 BC during the reign of Ptolemy II, in the city of Alexandria, in Egypt. The great library dominated the ancient world of learning from approximately the third century BC to the fourth century AD.

By decree of Ptolemy III, all visitors to the city had to surrender¹ all books and scrolls² in their possession; these writings were then swiftly copied by official scribes. The originals were put into the Library, and the copies were delivered³

to the previous owners. It was the first public library in the world.

West and east met in this great library through books and lectures that the library hosted and this was the first attempt for the modern concept of globalization. Its aim was to collect and store the knowledge of the whole world.

The Library's contents were probably distributed over several buildings, with the main library either located directly attached to or close to the oldest building, the Museum, dedicated to the Muses.

Some years ago a Polish-Egyptian team of archaeolo-



GLOSSARY

- 1 give up
- 2 ancient books or volumes written on rolls
- 3 given back
- 4 an elevated platform, as for an orchestra conductor or public speaker

gists claimed to have discovered part of the library. The archaeologists said they had found thirteen "lecture halls", each with a central podium.⁴ It is estimated that the rooms could have seated 5000 students.

One of the reasons so little is known about the Library is that it was lost centuries after its creation. During his invasion of Alexandria in 47-48 BC, Caesar set the enemy fleet in the harbour on fire. Some historians believe that this fire spread into the city and destroyed the entire library.

According to other historians, the destruction of the library occurred during a period of civil war in the late 3rd century AD – but we know that the Museum, which was adjacent to the library, survived until the 4th century.

The new library of Alexandria was opened to the public in 2001. The architect competition was held in 1989 and the planning and building period lasted for six years. The new library has a capacity of storing 8 million books. Postgraduate students can use the 2000 working stations under the big roof shaped like a solar eclipse.



READING COMPREHENSION

ACTIVITIES



● Answer the following questions.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ① When was the Great Library of Alexandria founded? | ⑥ When was the new library opened in Alexandria? |
| ② What kind of books did it house? | ⑦ How long did it take to build the new structure? |
| ③ Why was it so important? | ⑧ How many books can the new library store? |
| ④ What kind of building was it? | |
| ⑤ Who destroyed it? | |

MATCHING

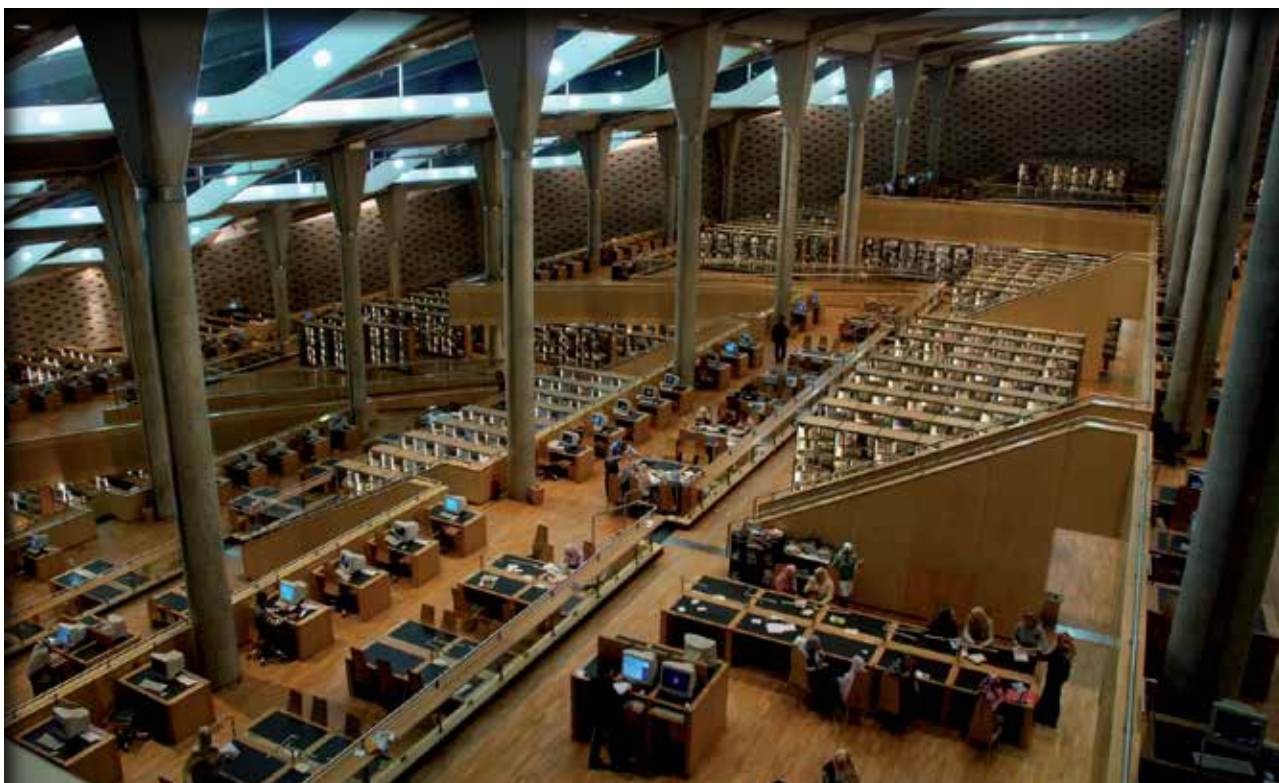
● Match a word in the first column with one in the second column, then provide the Italian equivalents.

- | | | |
|-------------|---------------|-------|
| ① Ancient | ① Stations | ..... |
| ② Public | ② War | ..... |
| ③ Architect | ③ Eclipse | ..... |
| ④ Lecture | ④ Library | ..... |
| ⑤ Enemy | ⑤ Halls | ..... |
| ⑥ Civil | ⑥ Fleet | ..... |
| ⑦ Working | ⑦ World | ..... |
| ⑧ Solar | ⑧ Competition | ..... |

VOCABULARY

● Explain in your own words the meaning of the following terms and expressions.

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|------------|-------|
| ① Learning | ..... | ⑤ Harbour | ..... |
| ② Approximately | ..... | ⑥ Adjacent | ..... |
| ③ Swiftly | ..... | ⑦ Capacity | ..... |
| ④ Several | ..... | ⑧ Entire | ..... |



The Great Library of Alexandria today.