

Ancient Alexandria

by Donna O'Meara

1 Julius Caesar invaded the Egyptian city of Alexandria in 42 B.C. The library of Alexandria (Bibliotheca Alexandrina) was among the many battle victims. Thousands of precious manuscripts were burned. They made up the world's largest collection of classical texts. The Muslims invaded the city in A.D. 645. Any remaining texts were destroyed. **2** The library was erased from civilization—until now. Today, the Egyptian government, in cooperation with UNESCO, has built a new library. It is a memorial to the one destroyed long ago.

The library of Alexandria was founded around the 3rd century B.C. No one knows the exact number of manuscripts that were housed in the library. But historians estimate that 400,000 to 700,000 were held there. The texts were organized according to subject matter. They covered many topics. These include civil sciences, philosophy, and medicine. They include physics, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, mathematics, geometry, music, and languages. **3**

4 In ancient times, books as we know them did not exist. Texts and stories were written with dyes and inks on a long, flat piece of material called a papyrus (puh-PIE-rus). When dry, the papyrus manuscripts were rolled tightly. They were wrapped and tied with leather or linen. Then they were inserted into one of hundreds of thousands of pigeonholes cut into the walls of the library. Wooden racks held scrolls of lesser value. Unlike modern libraries, there were no shelves with stacks of books.

5 The library also had a museum and an institution for research. Scholars of the time went there to study, learn, and teach. Many famous scholars worked in the Library of Alexandria. Euclid, the father of geometry, worked there. So did Aristomachos. He was the first astronomer to measure the sizes of and relative distance between the moon and sun. Among the great achievements of the Library of Alexandria's scholars was the first translation of the Old

Testament from Hebrew to Greek. This translation is known as the Septuagint. It was used extensively by the early Egyptian Christians.

6 Ptolemy was one of the founders of the Library of Alexandria. He hoped to gather texts from all the various peoples in the world and translate them. Egypt was the heart of ancient civilization. It was a busy trade hub. Every manuscript on every ship that came into the harbor was copied. Then it was stored in the library. A fantastic wealth of information was amassed. Through the decades, many librarians were responsible for the collections. The librarians' job included editing, cataloguing, and classifying all new manuscripts.

Archaeologists have uncovered parts of the original library. They know it sat in the northeast sector of the city. Courts, gardens, a celestial observatory, and a zoo with exotic animals surrounded the library. Some modern-day scholars believe that monks saved some ancient texts and that they have been hidden for thousands of years. But it has never been proven.

7 The cost of the recent building project was hundreds of millions of dollars. But no amount can ever replace the value of those lost manuscripts. **8**

1. In "Ancient Alexandria," the first paragraph introduces the main idea. Which of the statements below best identifies the main idea.
 - a. Historians estimate 400,000-700,000 manuscripts were destroyed.
 - b. UNESCO and the Egyptian government have built a new library.
 - c. The library of Alexandria was destroyed by Muslims in 645.
 - d. Ancient Alexandria was a war hero.
2. *Memorial* as used in this article means
 - a. A tribute built to honor a memory
 - b. A tombstone
 - c. A scrapbook for memories
 - d. Egyptian hieroglyphics
3. Why was the destruction of the library a tragedy? Support your answer.

from **The Ancient Library of Alexandria**

by Anne Nolting

- 1 About 2,300 years ago, a great king ruled the country of Egypt. His name was Ptolemy I Soter. He was a wise and curious monarch with a deep longing for knowledge. His wish was for Egypt to become the most powerful nation in the world.
- 2 "You must read, great Ptolemy," his friend Demetrius urged. "This is the way to understand how to use power wisely."
- 3 Demetrius supplied Ptolemy with every document in Egypt. The books were written on thin, dried papyrus sheets and rolled into *big* scrolls.
- 4 As Ptolemy studied the Egyptian scrolls, he became more and more curious about the world outside his country. He realized that wealthy empires would trade their goods with Egypt if his country welcomed them with a safe port. In 300 B.C., the ruler ordered the building of a mighty fleet of ships to patrol the Mediterranean Sea. Within a few years, the beautiful capital city of Alexandria became the greatest center of trade in the world.
- 5 From his magnificent white marble palace, Ptolemy watched the ships from distant countries sail into port. The docks at Alexandria were covered with fabulous products from far-off lands. Tin came from the British Isles, silk from China, cotton from India. But it was in the captain's quarters of these great boats that Ptolemy discovered the most precious cargo of all. The ships carried scrolls describing life in remote lands.
- 6 Ptolemy addressed a letter to be carried from Alexandria on every departing ship. "To all the Sovereignities and Governors on Earth," he wrote. "Send me every kind of written work your country has to offer. I would like to read the words of your poets and historians, your doctors and inventors. I would like to study the works of your astrologers, mathematicians, and geniuses. Do not hesitate to send all of these!"
- 7 Ptolemy appointed Demetrius the first librarian of his collection of books. Demetrius organized the translations of the "ships' collection." The number of scrolls grew rapidly. Ptolemy erected a colossal building next to his palace in Alexandria. He called it the Mouseion, or Shrine of the Muses. He dreamed it would become a treasury that would store every document in the world. A branch was established at the temple of Serapis. Thus the first universal library was born.

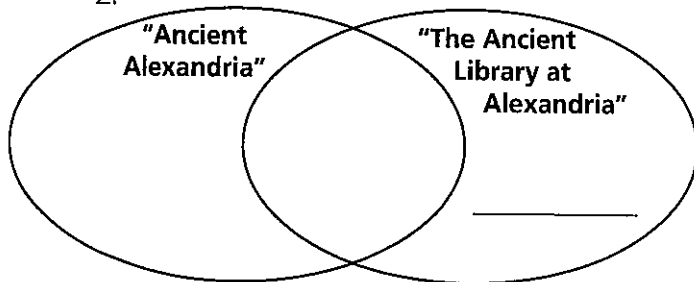
- 8 After Ptolemy I died, his successors continued to collect scrolls. The great library of Alexandria flourished. Under Ptolemy II, the priest Manetho wrote a three-scroll work on Egypt's history and religion. Ptolemy II also authorized seventy Jewish scholars to translate the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. All these works were deposited in the great library. Scholars from distant lands traveled to Egypt. They came to study, to teach, and to share their inventions. Poets, astronomers, physicists, mathematicians, zoologists, and doctors of many different races lived together at the library. They ate their meals in one gigantic dining hall. The high ceiling reverberated with echoes from the lively debates.
- 9 The chambers of the great library were spacious and bright. Visitors sat on luxurious couches to enjoy the lilting voices of the poets. They listened to the melodies played by musicians. Across the hall, doctors carried out research in vast laboratories and dissecting rooms. In still another chamber, inventors gathered to assemble their new contraptions. Day and night the library pulsed with activity. At dusk, astronomers met on the rooftop observatory to map the constellations. At dawn, botanists could be seen ambling through terraced gardens where they observed new varieties of fruit trees and crops. Behind the library walls, animal keepers tended the world's first known zoo.
- 10 Open walkways were bordered by lovely fountains and lotus flowers. They divided the courtyards from the library chambers. Along these walks stood the *bibliothekaei*. This is the name given to the niches, or cubbyholes, filled with scrolls. The library stored 500,000 scrolls. None of them ever left the library. Scholars sat on small stools near the niches to read, unrolling the papyrus sheets on their laps to view the columns of writing. Some of the scrolls were twenty feet long.
- 11 The most knowledgeable people in the world traveled to Egypt. They wanted to study and lecture at the great Library of Alexandria. The names of many geniuses have been lost. But the few men and women who have been remembered offer us a glimpse into the exciting life of research at this great library.

Ohio
Achievement
Practice

Use both passages to answer questions 1 – 6.

1. "The Ancient Library of Alexandria" focuses on the library under Ptolemy I and II, while "Ancient Alexandria"
- focuses only on the destruction of the library.
 - also includes information about events that happened later.
 - discusses only events that happened before Ptolemy I.
 - is concerned only with events today.

2.



Both "Ancient Alexandria" and "The Ancient Library at Alexandria" tell about the Old Testament being translated into Greek. Which of the following would correctly complete this Venn diagram?

- The Septuagint was used extensively by early Egyptian Christians.
- The priest Manetho wrote a three-scroll work on Egypt's history and religion.
- Ptolemy II authorized 70 Jewish scholars to work on the translation.
- The translation was among the greatest achievements of Alexandria's scholars.

3. Which statement **best** describes these two articles?
- "Ancient Alexandria" provides an objective look at the library, whereas "The Ancient Library of Alexandria" gives a more personal look at life at the library.
 - Both articles provide a very personal look at life at the ancient library.
 - Both articles have an objective tone and provide only facts and details.
 - "Ancient Alexandria" gives a close look at the life of the historians and librarians at the library, whereas "The Ancient Library of Alexandria" provides a fictional narrative.

4.

In "The Ancient Library of Alexandria," why does the author include Ptolemy's letter?

- to show that he was a powerful man
 - to show that he was a wise and intelligent ruler
 - to show that he could write very well
 - to show that he wanted to make other rulers afraid
5. Briefly compare and contrast the information in "Ancient Alexandria" and "The Ancient Library at Alexandria." Include at least two ways the articles are alike and two ways they are different

2
POINTS

Write your answer on a separate sheet of paper.