

# TWO MEDIAEVAL CARTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTS AND THEIR RELATION TO AN UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY IN ALEXANDRIA

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## ABSTRACT

The proposed paper will present and interpret two mediaeval cartographic documents, the view of Alexandria annexed to the Latin Geography of Claudius Ptolemaeus, the *Codex Urbinatensis* 277 [1471], and the plan attached to the documents E1102-34/E1102-36 of the Archivos General de Simancas [1603]. Both documents are considered of great importance for understanding the topography of Alexandria in general and of its harbors in particular: the *Codex Urbinatensis* plan<sup>1</sup> because it is the very first reliable representation of the Great City<sup>2</sup>; the Plan of Simancas<sup>3</sup> because it is the only cartographic document preceding the map of the French engineer Razaud [1687] raised by a technocrat – a spy, probably an engineer – and not by a traveler presenting a fantastic city where past and present coexist.

The first document [the *Codex Urbinatensis*] is, as it will be proved, copied from a much older map. It contains several topographical and geological details that largely predate the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The second [from the Simancas Archives] has a documentary value because it accompanies two letters exchanged between the King of the Two Sicilies and the Marques de Santa Cruz [Naples, 1605] presenting plans for an attack prepared by the united Christian fleets against Alexandria. The attached map made by a spy, probably a Venetian, indicates in detail the fortifications, ports and buildings to be bombarded as well as others to be spared. So it can be considered as a document of some accuracy, well different from other contemporary or earlier maps that were drawn by artists sometimes never having set foot on Alexandrian soil.

The two plans studied, raised some 130 years apart, show differences and similarities; when compared with later maps and plans they help in understanding the rise of the Mediterranean Sea and the subsidence of the Alexandrian coast. In consequence, we can say that the cartographic documentation of mediaeval and later years have been of assistance to the underwater surveys of the Greek Mission carried out since 1998 on the eastern coast of Alexandria, eastwards of the Portus Magnus, the Eastern Port.

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1 Annexed to the *Codex Urbinatensis* 277, Vatican Library.

2 The map of Peutinger [1265], copying a document from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD, is only a roadmap where Alexandria is solely identified by a pictogram. The view of Alexandria, as drawn by Harmann Schedel for the Chronicle of Nuremberg [1493], shows a fantastic city rendered by an artist who had probably never seen Alexandria.

3 Archivos General de Simancas, Valladolid, Spain.