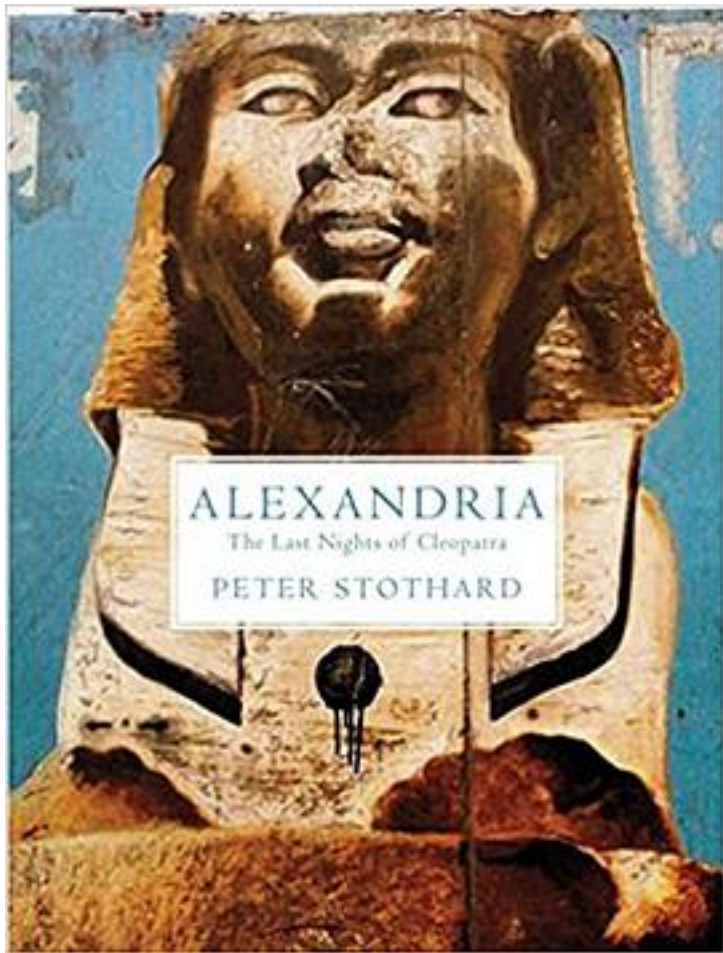


Alexandria



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The book is a literary, social and political portrait of Alexandria during the first half of the twentieth century when it was one of the liveliest and most prosperous ports on the Mediterranean. Drawing on diaries, letters and interviews, the now vanished

cosmopolitan European city is recalled. Particular attention paid to the communities which most gave Alexandria its flavour, the Greek, the Italian and the Jewish. No other such account of Alexandria exists, which itself makes it of interest; while as background it provides an invaluable context for understanding Constantine Cavafy, E. M. Forster and Lawrence Durrell, who certainly in the case of the last two are presented here in greater and more authoritative detail than in the standard biographies. Forster came to Alexandria as a Red Cross volunteer during the First World War and soon came to know Cavafy, the Greek poet who was born and later died in the city. Lawrence Durrell was posted to Alexandria as British Information Officer during the Second World War. Refounded on the African littoral and on the verge of an alien culture, yet rich in historical associations central to Western civilisation, Alexandria epitomised for Cavafy, Forster and Durrell the vulnerability of their worlds. The city haunted each of them, that cosmopolitan Alexandria whose roots were the fragile memory-traces of its past, and it became a model for each of them, a microcosm and a mirror.

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