The cities of earlier Islam were enthusiastic consumers of marble, re-used in a restricted quantity of surviving buildings. But Cairo and Istanbul built proportionally many more buildings, and those on a much larger scale and with greater lavishness than previously. They are grouped here with Alexandria because her position on sea and river meant that she supplied marble to both, as she had done to earlier Europe, with whom (as with North Africa) her trading connections were many.1 There is less emphasis on palaces (few survive from before the 16thC) and a greater focus on mosques and madrasas which could bulk large and magnificently within the cityscape. In consequence, marble became ever more sought-after and ever scarcer and more precious, leading to changes in the way such resources were re-used. For those with eyes to read, the prestige of a building could be judged by the sumptuousness and rarity of the materials it employed. During the building processes in the new Cairo, the ancient remains of Alexandria and parts of North Africa were plundered. For the resurgent Constantinople/Istanbul, all Ottoman territories were scoured, and documents show that they were plundered with bureaucratic efficiency. Western travellers were fascinated by the Ottoman Empire (including of course Egypt), and their accounts contain valuable details about the re-use of the past in various ways.2 Moslems also travelled, storing up information about the wonders they saw so that they could themselves build as magnificently.3

3 Viguera, María J., ed., *Ibn Marzuq, El Musnad: hechos memorables de Abd al-Hasan, sultán*
Alexandria and marble for Cairo

Alexandria was an important port in Islamic times, in some eyes a great city comparable to Constantinople, and supplying old marble since late antiquity. It was surely the source of the majority of marble used by the Mamluks in Cairo and perhaps elsewhere in their domains (for they constructed some 2,279 projects between 1250 and 1517). It was still a source at the end of the 16th century. Given subsequent transformations to the city, travellers’ accounts are essential to our understanding of mediaeval Alexandria, as is the fact that earthquakes and landslides had left substantial sections of the ancient city ruined. In consequence, the Islamic city was of much smaller area than the antique one, the ruins of which were available for spoliation, which

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5 Hautecoeur, Mosquées du Caire, 136–7: 715 the historian of the Patriarchs of Alexandria records the order “d’enlever des eglises les colonnes et le marbre,” but provides no details.


7 Meinecke, Michael, Die mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien (648/1250 bis 923/1517), (Glückstadt 1992), II.VII–VIII: 915 in Cairo, 247 in Damascus, 235 in Aleppo, 150 in Jerusalem, and 96 in Mecca. There are also important works in Medina, Tripoli, Alexandria and Gaza—2279 in all, with substantial remains of 500, 217 of which are in Cairo.

8 Descrittori Italiani dell’Egitto, 460: Filippo Pigafetta (1533–1604) writes: “Al presente tutte le belle cose d’Alessandria portano al Cairo, come da poco tempo in qua si veggono assaiissimi di questi lavori, et nelle case, et nelle moschee, essendo cresciuto il Cairo in tanta grandezza per le rovine di Alessandria…”

