The Alexandrian Library has always been a great, living legend that archaeology has tried vainly to come to terms with. Ever since Mahmoud el-Falaki began a comprehensive digging for ancient remains, the finding of the ruins of the Library has been a challenge, matching that of discovering the tomb of Alexander the Great, and emotions have invariably run high among scholars and the general public laity. Archaeology has proved almost completely powerless in the face of this myth, failing to keep step with changing reality. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina stands rebuilt in new form, as an ultra modern library, yet we are still looking for an answer to a couple of simple questions of key importance: Where was the original Library? And what happened to it ultimately?1

It is a great pity that efforts to resolve these two issues have ended in almost total failure for the moment. Neither excavations nor even the relative wealth of historical sources has brought us any closer to solving the mystery. Current views on the subject have never really passed beyond the stage of more or less unproved theories. A find that was the source of hope and controversy in equal degree, a find that had prompted even Mahmoud el-Falaki to suspect that the Ancient Library was situated in the spot where it was discovered, the stone block bearing an inscription of Dioscorides has been shown recently by Roger Bagnall not to have been a book container at all, but simply a base for a statue.2

The recent discovery of lecture halls at the Kom el-Dikka site, which has generated much popular interest, has been also hastily and erroneously linked by some journalists with the Library, again raising fruitless

1 On the fate of Library in general, cf.: Canfora, Vanished Library; El-Abbadi, Life and Fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria.
hopes that it could be found. But even if the discovery does not bring us any closer to determining the actual location of the Library, at least it throws entirely new light on the nature of academic life in Alexandria of Late Antiquity.

The excavations of the joint Polish-Egyptian expedition, working on the site for the past forty plus years, brought to light the only extensive section of ancient urban architecture to be seen in Alexandria to date. Most of the excavated area is occupied by public monuments of the Late Roman age with the bath constituting the main architectural complex. This large, symmetrical edifice designed on a rectangular plan was constructed most probably at the end of the fourth century as an imperial foundation. The huge elevated structure of the cistern that supplied it with water occupies the central part of the site. In the western part of the area, a residential district combining industrial and domestic functions was unearthed.

But perhaps the best advertised of the Kom el-Dikka discoveries was the theatre or to be more precise an odeum opening off a long portico, 180m of which have been explored on the site, running from north to south. It is in this part of the site that a set of surprisingly well preserved lecture halls was recently uncovered.

All of the newly discovered halls line the back wall of the portico, which is in itself a monumental setting for these structures (fig. 18). The halls are rectangular and follow the same orientation, differing only in size. Five of the halls (J-M) located directly to the north of the theatre are of approximately the same dimensions. Their length runs in the range from 9 to 12 m. Hall (H) is clearly different; at 7 m length, it is obviously the smallest of the lot (fig. 19). All five of the halls are bordered on the east by a long casing wall; as a result, all of them are slightly over 5 m wide. The wall separates the auditoria from an area that had already been abandoned in the period of their functioning.

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4 For the general topography of the site, cf. Tkaczow, Topography of Ancient Alexandria, 85–90, 94–102.
5 Kołataj, Imperial Baths at Kom el-Dikka.
6 M. Rodziewicz, Habitations romaines tardives d’Alexandrie.