

Roman governor, and because she was a symbol of learning and science, which were largely identified by the early Church with paganism. In great personal danger, she continued to teach and publish, until, in the year 415, on her way to work she was set upon by a fanatical mob of Cyril's parishioners. They dragged her from her chariot, tore off her clothes, and, armed with abalone shells, flayed her flesh from her bones. Her remains were burned, her works obliterated, her name forgotten. Cyril was made a saint.

The glory of the Alexandrian Library is a dim memory. Its last remnants were destroyed soon after Hypatia's death. It was as if the entire civilization had undergone some self-inflicted brain surgery, and most of its memories, discoveries, ideas and passions were extinguished irrevocably. The loss was incalculable. In some cases, we know only the tantalizing titles of the works that were destroyed. In most cases, we know neither the titles nor the authors. We do know that of the 123 plays of Sophocles in the Library, only seven survived. One of those seven is *Oedipus Rex*. Similar numbers apply to the works of Aeschylus and Euripides. It is a little as if the only surviving works of a man named William Shakespeare were *Coriolanus* and *A Winter's Tale*, but we had heard that he had written certain other plays, unknown to us but apparently prized in his time, works entitled *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*.

Of the physical contents of that glorious Library not a single scroll remains. In modern Alexandria few people have a keen appreciation, much less a detailed knowledge, of the Alexandrian Library or of the great Egyptian civilization that preceded it for thousands of years. More recent events, other cultural imperatives have taken precedence. The same is true all over the world. We have only the most tenuous contact with our past. And yet just a stone's throw from the remains of the Serapeum are reminders of many civilizations: enigmatic sphinxes from pharaonic Egypt; a great column erected to the Roman Emperor Diocletian by a provincial flunky for not altogether permitting the citizens of Alexandria to starve to death; a Christian church; many minarets; and the hallmarks of modern industrial civilization—apartment houses, automobiles, streetcars, urban slums, a microwave relay tower. There are a million threads from the past intertwined to make the ropes and cables of the modern world.

Our achievements rest on the accomplishments of 40,000 generations of our human predecessors, all but a tiny fraction of whom are nameless and forgotten. Every now and then we stumble on a major civilization, such as the ancient culture of Ebla, which flourished only a few millennia ago and about which we knew nothing. How ignorant we are of our own past! Inscriptions, papyruses, books time-bind the human species and permit us to hear those few voices and faint cries of our brothers and