

# ALEXANDRIA



GREGORY NESS

ALEXANDRIA: BOOK TWO IN THE SWORD OF AGRIPPA SERIES

EBOOK EDITION

GREGORY NESS

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**Alexandria**

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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to the unknown heroes of mind and spirit.

# 1. MEMPHIS

“Without spirit there is no matter.”

- The Builders of the Adytum

The burst of hot air mixed with dust from the once-sealed temple eased into a mild breeze. Dancing shadows revealed a striking marble floor of etched lotus blossoms as the massive door rumbled open, leaving remnants of colored plaster and dust scattered alongside a clean, shallow groove cut into the floor to guide the massive block back and forth.

Slaves with torches gathered around Samia as Agrippa and Cleopatra tended to her. Cleopatra took a plant stem from the waist band of one of the decorated slaves, broke it, and held the exposed thick sap under Samia’s nose. Her half-sister awoke quickly and complained about the pungent smell which quickly filled the chamber.

The Queen returned the twig. “Slave, take this outside so we won’t have to smell it again, Isis willing.” Grimaces spread among the party.

The short, bald slave covered his nose and took the twig from her hand. He carried it with outstretched arm through the engraved stone entryway. Agrippa lifted the groggy Samia from the finely-etched marble floor and held her until she regained her footing. Rehotpe and a slave headed outside for fresh air.

Samia grabbed a torch and headed for the new opening that appeared after the massive stone door slid inside the wall. The team followed her into a rectangular foyer. The skeletal remains of four priests lay on the floor with surviving scraps of faded fabric, some pieces still held together by stone buttons etched with horizontal lines. Each priest had a Shield of Ramose medallion, identical to Samia’s. A small box and knife rested next to one of the skeletons, with the tiny, bony remains of a fish head.

“They took their own lives,” Samia picked up the box and noted the fish symbol on the top. “Left on their own terms, through the hall of masks.”

“You think so?” Cleopatra walked among the dead and inspected each corpse as Samia continued to share her opinion of events. “Look how they’re positioned. Three of them next to each other with their hands still clasped. The fourth killed them when they were out of their bodies so they could depart without pain. I suspect he took a slow poison before the fish.”

Cleopatra examined the plaster fragments scattered across the floor beneath the giant opening. Underneath the debris a field of lotuses etched into the stone led from the entry way into the darkness.

“Look at this floor. After thousands of years the detail is still preserved in the stone,” she said. “Every lotus is a perfect copy of the other. See the subtle pattern in each petal. If only we had masons of this quality today. The things we could build. The awe we could inspire.”

Agrippa studied the carved pillars that reached the ceiling with elaborate gold-inlaid pinnacles, some with missing flakes. A few of the pillars were cracked.

*Probably an earthquake or the weight of the Temple of Ptah built above. Or both.*

Etched across the ceiling above the pinnacles was a single lotus with more than a thousand petals, all etched in gold, surrounding a pyramid at its center with the eye of Horus.

*Cleopatra is right. I have never seen work of such quality. It appears rich and lifelike, even after dozens of centuries. Truly Amazing.*

Cleopatra glanced at Samia. “They were sealed in. They must have had some standing, to be sealed into the temple. Their medallions are exactly as yours, made out of the same benben rock. Look.” The Queen raised the stone off the ground.

“Don’t my Queen!” Samia rushed to her side.

Cleopatra dropped the amulet immediately. “What was that I just felt, my sister?”

“The soul of the priest. His name was Maya. He wants a proper burial.”

“He tried to violate me. This spirit you call Maya.”

“I suspect he wanted your attention before you violated him.”

“How sure of this are you? Could they simply be evil spirits that found this place suitable to inhabit?”

“There is no certainty in these matters my Queen. I can tell you I saw them as soon as the torch lit the room. I knew immediately who they were when I was overcome.”

“That is what caused you to faint?” She turned to face Samia.

Samia pointed to another of the dead priests. “The spirit of that priest came to me. He welcomed me to the Temple of Thoth. He said the four dead priests were part of a cabal. Each played a role in the return of Aton and rose to power under Akhenaten. They were exposed after the assassination.... of Akhenaten. Horemheb, who served Tut, had them sealed in the temple alive with their tablets and scrolls. The general had no

interest in Khemetian mysticism and the sacred histories. The leadership wanted to move on from the failed past of a Pharaoh he viewed as incompetent.”

“Horemheb didn’t destroy the temple.” Cleopatra said. “That is interesting in itself.”

“The young Tut ordered it secretly sealed. He favored Maya, who was close to his father. Years later, when Horemheb was away on campaign, Tut was killed. Another royal figure, Ay, then served without knowledge of the temple. He was not trusted by Akhenaten nor the cabal. So the temple was lost again to posterity.”

“Lost again?” Cleopatra continued to pace around between the flickering torches and the bodies. The remaining party slowly entered.

The pyramid at the center of the flower caught Samia’s attention. “When Menes founded his dynasty here in Memphis he built up the city to avoid floods. A new temple was constructed above this one. The Order of Thoth had many masons in their organization. They designed the door and original hidden switch that was eventually modified to be triggered by the newer table. They sealed the temple, with images from the life of Ramses. Its location and contents were kept secret until a pharaoh would come again to embrace the tradition of Thoth. Yet things didn’t go well. The other sects were too entrenched. Too threatened.” She turned to examine the walls, covered with images of a city of canals.

“Akhenaten discovered the temple after he converted. He and his young minister Ramose were the first to enter upon his discovery, according to the priest who came to me when I was overcome. Ramose served under Horemheb, who respected his leadership and wisdom. He befriended Ramses when he served the general.”

Samia approached the massive column where Caesar and Agrippa stood.

“All this from a few moments of a seizure?” Cleopatra examined the nearest wall lit by hand-carried torches.

The two Romans studied the etchings on the column, one of four in the alcove which opened up into another darkened chamber. A slave’s torch revealed a snake, eagle, lion and sun carved into the stone.

“Any idea what this means?” Agrippa pointed to the etched images while Samia approached.

“It explains the date when the temple was built.” His lover tried to get an angle with better light.



“When was it built?” Caesar stepped behind her to see what she studied so carefully.

“I am not sure. I would have to consult an astrologer, to find out how many years ago the sun rose at the sign of Leo. It was a long time ago, but I do not know precisely.”

“Would you offer us a guess?” Agrippa joined them to look at the images.

“More than five thousand years. Easily. Perhaps much longer.” She pointed to the Lion and the bold line underneath the paws. “See the line? It is a common symbol of the horizon.”

Caesar walked to the next column and raised the torch he took from a slave. “There’s more writing on this column. See. Right there”

The rest of the expedition entered the area with more torches and joined Caesar by the pillar. When they approached, another room came into view, illuminated by the growing light. Agrippa noticed the wall, framing more darkness around a dimly lit statue of a man with the head of a bird, the white stone softly lit within the darkness.

Caesar walked to the edge of the newly exposed room. The monument stood alone in the center with scattered offering bowls at the base. On each side was a large etched pillar. One was made of brick and the other a single block of stone.

“Before we go in there, what does this say?” Caesar pointed to writing on a gold plate built into the wall. “Is it a curse or warning of some kind?”

Samia examined the writing. “It is a famous story from Edfu.” She waved her hand toward the etched wall.

“A story?” The Roman leader moved closer to examine the writing. “Mother of Jupiter.”

Samia brushed the plaque to clear the dust. “See the image of the ship and the rock surrounded by water near the top? The two comets?”

“I see the ship. How do you know that is a rock in water?” Caesar pointed at the markings.

“It is a common Egyptian symbol for an island. In this case it is about people who came from an island after a great flood and settled here to start a new civilization.”

“Neptune.” He looked at Samia.

“No. Their names, according to myth are Horus, Osiris, Isis and Thoth, and others.”

“And that is all it says?” He leaned in to the writing closely.

“No. It says they built this adytum in less than a month, to hold Thoth’s sacred tablets and scrolls. The original library. Thoth came to Egypt because a rock had blown up in the sky and pieces fell to earth and melted massive walls of ice, causing a catastrophic flood. Their astronomers knew that more pieces of the rock would fall to earth again when a cycle was completed. So they set out with others to establish their civilization in many parts of the world. In safer places near water but away from the oceans. It was for the survival of civilization as they knew it.”

Cleopatra looked condescendingly at Cesar before smiling. She waited for him to speak.

“More thoughtlessness about the earth circling the sun.” He spoke loudly, in a voice that echoed through the chamber. “Have any of you Egyptians watched the sun rise and set? How do you explain away such evidence! These ideas tire me. Let us look further.”

A slave with torch escorted Caesar and Agrippa into the next room, which had a circular ceiling covered with a painted map, that appeared faded but was still readable. More torches were brought in and mounted on stone brackets. The team found four braziers, one by each pillar. Cleopatra followed as flames illuminated the room.

“Bring some of the royal coal and lavender seeds. Fill any vessels with oil. The heat and smoke from all of these torches is making it difficult to concentrate.” Cleopatra turned to the slaves and waved at the stone braziers etched with suns, moons and stars surrounding the images of unknown faces. “Let’s get more light in here. Keep the door to the outside open. I suspect this temple was sealed tightly by masons to protect it from flooding. That is why we see so little dust except where we removed the plaster.”

“It is a map.” Caesar looked to the ceiling. “Unlike any I have ever seen. Agrippa, I would like your opinion. What do you see on this colorful... map?”

“Quite strange, Imperator.” Agrippa circled as he inspected the ceiling and pointed to notable features. “You can almost make out the sea and the area now covered by the Roman empire, yet the coastlands are malformed. See there. There is no Gulf of Persia and the Gates of Hercules are closed. Brittanie is connected to Gaul. There appears to be a great land with islands across the Atlantic, including an island with a row of large monuments of some kind.”

“I confess that I have trouble seeing what you describe yet I trust your mastery of geography.” Caesar narrowed his eyes.

“Thank you sir. See the Nile here flowing north, and the six pointed star here at the malformed Nile delta? Next to it are the three stars and a lion head.” Agrippa continued to walk under the map and point to more features.

“Yes. I see it.” Caesar nodded. “Amazing.” We should have such a map of the empire. Let us discuss when we return to Alexandria. I know a pair of Greeks who could assist you. They are great map men, like yourself.”

“These are the pyramids, the Sphinx and the waterways. Note that they are large enough to be seen, even at this scale. I read a scroll on our trip to Antioch that described how the ancients used vast waterways to transport large stones and quarry gold. When the waterways fell into disrepair it forced Akhenaten and later Pharaohs to build with smaller stones. Construction techniques shifted. Did you see the massive blocks at the outer wall? Note their differences with the stone used in the upper Temple structure.”

“I can help you with this,” Samia stepped between them and pointed toward the flat lower surface of the ceiling. “See the writing around the cupola? It says that this is how the world looked before the second flood. A great mariner civilization ruled the world from a great island in the Atlantic. There... see the rings of walls and waterways.”

“A second flood.” Agrippa glanced at his lover.

“The legend tells of two massive floods, about two thousand years apart. The first flood was damaging, but it cooled the hot areas and produced more than a thousand years of abundance for people around the world, especially the Atlantian civilization. Science and technology and travel flourished. There was great peace enforced by the civilization until it was corrupted by its own success. The far north was still covered in vast mountains of ice.

“The second flood was far greater,” she stepped towards Agrippa. “Some high priests knew that the rocks from the sky would return. So before the rock from space orbited the sun again they built massive ships and carefully watched the skies for the return of more pieces of that first rock which exploded as it crossed our sky thousands of years sooner.

“The second time the rocks fell they melted many of the ice mountains and broke ice that held the water back. When the deluge released its torrent it produced storms and earthquakes and a greater flood followed by the fire and brimstone that ended the Atlantian civilization. Twelve ships left Atlantis as the waters rose. Each set out to take their knowledge and start over with sets of tablets made from emerald.” She pointed to the area of the Nile.

“The Atlantian’s studied the earth and the primitive peoples, for a very long time. The watchers recorded ideal locations for a new start. Areas that would be harder to flood yet connected by great rivers to the oceans. Memphis was one of the twelve new cities.”

“Great Caesar, Plato spoke of this as well.” Agrippa moved closer to her while studying at the rendering of the Nile.

“And the myth aligns with the legend from Edfu,” Cleopatra joined them at the center of the room.

Caesar turned to address Cleopatra: “The amount of water that would be needed to flood the world’s coastlines would be beyond imagination. Incomprehensible volumes. All from falling rocks you say. Barbarian myth I say. I have been to Britannia. I saw no Egyptian scientists while there, only longhairs in animal skins. A primitive people who bathe and shit in rivers.”

“The northernmost point of the earth to the shores of Britannia were thick with ice, per the legend,” Samia raised her arm toward what would eventually be called Britannia. “Only a portion of the ice melted. That was yet enough to raise the oceans and flood the cities of the world in days. The skies were filled with all matters of cloud and storm for decades.”

“There looks to be land in the south as well,” Caesar looked at the southern portion of the map. “South of Africa. Another Egyptian myth.”

“An entire continent hidden under ice in the South,” Samia looked at Caesar. “That is what we have been taught.”

“And India stretches farther into the sea than today,” Agrippa walked under the eastern lands. “So this map is consistent with your myths. Is that correct?”

“Yes,” Cleopatra watched as the slaves supplied and lit the last brazier, the flames revealing ancient soot staining the stone above it. “It brings clarity to what we were taught in the Museum. The great cities of ancient India in the northeast and northwest you see there and there are now underwater. The island near Greece was sunk by earthquake and not flood.”

“The door to another room is ajar.” Samia walked deeper into the darkness as the braziers lit the room. “Bring the torches.” She pointed to the glyphs above the framed opening of polished granite. “This reads, ‘Without Spirit there is no Matter.’”

“Blessed Isis! It is a tablet room,” Cleopatra added when the rest of the group entered. The light from the torches revealed walls of tablets stored vertically in heavy

stone shelves, grouped by color. “I did not think I would ever see one of these. Amazing. Do you think, Samia, this is the Library of the Ages?”

“It is very possible. The emerald tablets are probably from the voyage of Thoth,” Samia turned around and signalled the rest of the group forward to the shelves of tablets. “The others were likely created after he arrived. Those three rows of green stone tablets over there are said to be the original forty two decans plus an index tablet. They likely contain the wisdom of the ages from Atlantis. Everything from astronomy and astrology to sacred plants and geometry. Knowledge that has been hidden since before Menes. Look. There are three tablets for each sign of the zodiac as you can see from the images on the outward facing edges. We had some of these in the Museum. The writings discovered in Hermopolis.”

Cleopatra walked to the row of emerald tablets and had a slave pull out what appeared to be the index tablet, a record of the collection. “I gaze back to the ancient times when the gods lived among mortal men. Samia, can you help with this? I do not recognize the writing.”

“Most certainly my Queen. It is not an index tablet at all. It is the *Poimander*. A sacred text about a divine spirit explaining nature and man. ‘Truth starts with a mystical vision’ the writer says.”

“So this is the Corpus Hermeticum,” Cleopatra ran her hand along the top shelf. “An original set.”

“Very likely,” Samia approached her in front of the carved tablets and accepted one for translation. “The quality of the stone and the engraving is beyond our masons. Look at the subtle pattern lightly etched behind the words. The Eye of Horus and the Lotus.”

“I have not seen a tablet so grand, my sister. Even among those in the Life Tree Room.” Cleopatra smiled. “Even Alexander would be overcome by such a find.”

“The world is composed entirely of matter and light.” Samia pointed at an inscription. “God is light. Omnipresent light which permeates all space and matter. The seen and unseen. Spirit created man from mere matter. Seven planets exert forces on man, along with the fates. God created man in his image, to navigate the worlds of matter and spirit. It is the sacred duty of every man and woman to discover their spiritual essence.”

“You studied Thoth teachings at the Museum, correct?” Cleopatra put her arm around her sister.

“Yes. Seeing yet another set of the emerald tablets in the original Temple of Thoth is something I never dreamed would happen. To be able to touch yet another stone from Atlantis, that made the voyage with Thoth to Khemet. These works can be the cornerstone of the new Museum.”

Cleopatra clapped her hands. “Slave, pull the next tablet. Have the first loaded into the cart. Be careful. These are sacred texts.”

One of the slaves departed with the tablet.

“Samia. What do you read from this tablet?”

“Let me see. It is the Treatise on Oneness and Human Dignity. Another key text.” Samia held the tablet carefully..

“And.” Cleopatra smiled and raised her eyebrows.

“Thoth speaks with high priests about how individual bodies die and spirits live forever. Man has two destinies. To till the earth and to acquire knowledge of God and our spiritual connection, including nature.”

“How close is this to what you were taught at the Museum, by the Essenes?”

“Very close. I might say identical except for some vocabulary. It may have been lost in translation. But it now appears we did study credible copies.”

Rehotpe, the archaeologist, returned to the group.

“Keep reading.” Cleopatra pointed at the text. “What does that say?”

“Let me read it through completely first. ‘Man has a unique duty to shape the world in the image of the heavens.’ To reflect spirit in matter. That is man’s unique power, as the higher angels of matter. It also explains, as our class was taught, that the land of Khemet will be abandoned by the gods and that only evil spirits will remain. ‘It will become a barren wasteland ruled by foreigners.’ And.... will be hit with one disaster after another until ‘the spirits return to the western lands.’”

“So we know that this is the Hermeticum. Look at those shiny tablets. They look quite strange.” Cleopatra nodded toward another collection in the shelves.

The slave returned and took the second tablet to the wagon as another grabbed a third.

“Can you read it?”

“Yes, your majesty. It is an introduction to the Mysteries of Thoth.”

“He sounds more and more like the figure the Greeks call Hermes and the Romans call Mercury.” Agrippa looked at Caesar.

“Correct.” Samia nodded. “He returns at least three times per the legend. To help guide man to the light of spirit. The Greeks call him the *Twice Great Hermes*.”

“And what does this say?” Cleopatra touched the tablet Samia held.

“Give me a moment. ‘You must live a pious life to experience the vision of a mystic.’ Interesting. ‘You must abide by God’s laws to acquire wisdom and truth. Here it is... the sacred name *Zozazoth*. It closes with a father and son talking about the inability to express a powerful vision in words. And the need for care in discussing with those who haven’t seen the light.”

“Is this also consistent... with what you have been taught?” Cleopatra looked back at the rows of tablets along two opposing walls.

“I have only heard of this text. I have never studied it. The Essenes do have some sacred texts that have not been shared with the Museum. I suspect they have this one.”

“Let us look at another.” Cleopatra signalled again. “Slave. Bring me another of the shiny tablets. The next one. Yes. That one. Samia?”

Cleopatra directed the slave to hold the text so Samia could read it under the torchlight. She moved her lips silently for a few moments as the group stood in anticipation. “This work is called ‘The Destiny of the Soul.’ Isis speaks with Horus. The spirit world is made up of sixty levels of souls. The lower souls, who rebelled, were sent to inhabit earth with man. They were powerful souls without awareness. If they became aware they could return. I am not familiar with this text.”

“What else does it say?” Cleopatra looked at Samia waiting for her to continue. The young priestess studied the tablet.

“If they digressed further they would become lesser animals. Isis and Osiris bring civilization back to earth to help it start again. Then there is a Hymn to God celebrating the rise of civilization. And another story about man being created to praise nature.”

“And what of these other tablets? Care to risk a guess?” Cleopatra pointed to the opposing wall.

“They could be anything. Let’s take a look.” Samia walked across the room as Agrippa, Caesar, Cleopatra and the archaeologist Rehotpe followed.

Cleopatra signalled to another slave. “Slave. Bring us one of those three blue stone tablets. The first one. There. Samia. What is this about?”

Samia accepted the tablet and scanned the writing. “This is The Book of Thoth. It is an amazing specimen. I have never seen such a beautiful blue rock carved like this.”

“Forget the quality of the stone. What does it say?” Cleopatra leaned in as Samia scanned the etchings.

“It is a conversation between someone who loves knowledge and ‘he who praises knowledge.’ It is about the afterlife and the evolution of the soul by way of experience in this world. Dialectics is the term often used.”

“Most of this appears to be about astrology and theology.” Cleopatra looked closely at the blue tablets still on the shelves.

“So far.” Samia ran her hand across the surface of the striking etched emerald.

“Slave. Pull a tablet from the normal stone shelf there and bring it here. You. Take this tablet to our stack outside the temple.”

“Why not remove all of these tablets to the safety of the palace grounds?” Samia shifted her attention to her sister.

“Great idea. Rehotpe. Please arrange for a contingent to remove the tablets and keep them in order for transport to the courtyard. Until we find the index tablet, the order will be important.”

“Will do my Pharaoh. By the way, have you noticed this doorway?” Rehotpe raised a torch underneath the entryway to another room to the right of the chamber. “It looks like a secondary room with more tablets. They look newer. Probably carved in Egypt after the flood.”

The group walked into the room behind Rehotpe. Smaller than the hall they left, the walls were lined with shelves. The sides of the shelves were marked with labels only Samia and Rehotpe could read.

Caesar and Agrippa stood speechless.

On the domed ceiling was a well-preserved etching of a pyramid with an eye at the top.

“Look above,” Rehotpe pointed to the ceiling. “The eye of Horus yet again. And the golden snake climbing from the entrance to the cap.”

Cleopatra looked up. “Beautifully rendered. Gold inlay. The rise of order out of chaos.” She gazed at the volumes in the new room. “Easily more than 120 tablets. “We could be here all night.”

Caesar pointed back through the larger room they just left. “Before we leave for the night, if it is night time, I would like to show you something else. We will probably need Rehotpe. I just observed it as you came in here.”



The Roman leader led Cleopatra and the group by torch underneath the statue of Thoth to a strange wall on the other side. The sound of coal being dropped into the braziers echoed throughout the complex. Within moments the central room with the statue of Thoth was fully illuminated and the light reached into the surrounding chambers. Some beetles scurried about, looking for a place to escape into darkness.

“Where does this door lead?” Caesar pointed his torch to another door opposite the entrance. “It is a pretty impressive piece of stone. Even more engravings than the entrance. What in Jupiter’s name does it say?”

The door was more than twice the size of the door they entered, and wasn’t covered with plaster.

“Do you think it will also have a secret switch?” Caesar asked.

Rehotpe stepped through the group and walked with him to the massive, single piece of stone.

“I think it is the Great Hall,” Rehotpe approached the magnificent door. “If it is the hall it will hold statues of all of the Pharaohs of Khemet from Thoth’s time until the Scorpion King or Menes, when the temple was sealed the first time.”

“And if it is not the Great Hall? Agrippa looked at Samia as Rehotpe examined the engravings on the door.

“Then it is likely a treasure room.”

Samia walked to the new door. “It is the Great Hall. I have been here before, in dreams.”

Cleopatra turned to her sister. “Are you sure? Then we must open it.”

“Any idea how we could open it?” Agrippa turned to engage Rehotpe.

“This will be tougher than the foyer entrance. Priests are always quite protective of their... collections. It is likely one or two of them would have to open a door such as this, from two different rooms. They might have to press two switches at the same time. Or this room may have to be clear of any weight. In Heliopolis we discovered a tile floor sensitive enough to lock a door if one stepped on the wrong tile.”

“What does the lion and the snake with the comet represent?” Agrippa stared at the symbols on the door. *Could there be traps?*

“I am not sure. The comet is likely related to the Edfu text. The lion, it might refer to the sign Leo and the sunrise. The snake could be anything. It could symbolize knowledge or the Nile. The head of the lion is also a symbol of Thoth. I will sketch these

out and share with a few experts. This appears to be the story of the Golden Age of Khemet, only Samia will know for sure. Or Nubia.”

“I think we have had enough for a day,” Cleopatra interjected before Rehotpe could answer more questions. “Slave, please request the guards. I do not want anyone to enter this temple without my permission. In person. No seals, passwords or priests allowed without my presence. Is that understood?”

The slave nodded, bowed and left the room.

Samia approached the larger door.

“It is more than the story of the Golden Age,” Samia stated. “It is a cypher.”

“A code?” The Queen looked closely at the engravings.

“Yes. In between the sections of the story dedicated to various kings and construction projects are cartouches that say *we are connected*.”

“We are connected,” Agrippa tried to look for the pattern. “That is the code?”

“Yes.”

“What if it is just a placeholder?” Caesar also looked at the ornate door.

“Egyptians do not use placeholders in sacred spaces,” Samia rubbed her hand gently along the golden snake. “Especially in stories like this. These cartouches have a purpose. I am just not sure what it is.”

Cleopatra turned to the archaeologist: “Now that we know what was behind the first door I think we can rest. This larger door will require more resources to open. Rehotpe, I would like your best theories by sunrise. Please sketch the door for our records.”

“My Queen, what of the bodies?” Samia turned to her sister.

“Let’s have them wrapped and brought back to Alexandria. They can share our Mausoleum or perhaps be buried in Alexandria beneath the new library. After rites of course. I do hope Maya heard that. I am not ready for another of his gropes.”

“I have an idea.” Samia smiled gently and looked at Agrippa.

“About the remains?”

“No. The door.”

“What are you thinking?”

“When we opened the first door we heard a deep rumbling inside the Temple.” She looked back toward the foyer.

“Yes. Probably the counterweight.”

“Perhaps.” Samia winked at Agrippa.

“You think it was this door sliding closed?” Cleopatra inspected the edge of the doorway.

“It is possible. Having the doors in complementary positions would protect the inner sanctum from outsiders. When the outside door is opened the inside door would be closed. Once the inside door is open no one could simply walk out with anything. The outside door would be closed. We saw this in Heliopolis, didn’t we Rehotpe?”

He had already departed with the first sets of tablets slaves were taking outside.

“How would someone get out once the inner door is open?” Agrippa turned to face Samia.

“Someone on the outside would be needed to press the switch the right number of times, unless there was a counter switch inside this other room. Added security for priceless artifacts.” Samia continued to smile, which confused Agrippa.

“If there is a switch in there the priests could have escaped before the wall was plastered shut,” Cleopatra ran her hand along the wall near the door opening. “They would not have died here.”

Samia studied the walls illuminated by the braziers. “Good point. So it appears that entrance and exit would only be granted by a priest who knew about the switch and was available to open and close the doors from the foyer.”

“I think I know where this is going,” Cleopatra smiled back at her sister.

“I am sure you do,” Samia said. “There is likely a signal switch or flame in the inner room that advises someone by the table that they are ready to depart. Unless the doors are opened and closed at regular intervals. Say every hour or for an hour a day, depending upon what is inside.”

“We would never know unless we left someone behind,” Cleopatra glared at her sister.

“Yes. Exactly.”

“Let me call a slave.” Cleopatra smirked sarcastically.

“No. That is not the answer. The slave would be ill-equipped to inform us. I am not sure we want what is in there known at this time.”

“We could kill the slave after we get the report,” Cleopatra continued to focus her attention on Samia.

“I have a better idea. Leave Marcus and I behind with two days’ worth of food and drink, oil and coal and some cots. We could study the internal chamber and look for the signal switch. Then you and Caesar could return and open the door.”

“We don’t know if the switch would work again.” Cleopatra did not express surprise with the suggestion. “We have not located the sand vessel. After thousands of years who could vouch for it working. Perhaps it requires a rare sand?”

“It might be inside. To protect it from the elements. We have seen both sides of the outer door. Worst case we could break it with a ram or break the upper floor and drop in. We have many options.” Samia’s smile was now gone.

“I will give it some thought tonight when we return. It will, of course, require Caesar’s approval as well, with Agrippa involved. Tonight we can review the texts. Samia, we will need your help for some of the evening, especially the Armana collection. Nubia can help us translate the older tablets.”

“Understood.”

The group left for the royal district of Memphis, leaving six slaves and four Roman sentries to guard the opening. Rehotpe stayed behind in a small triangular tent just outside the temple with two more sentries stationed near growing piles of tablets.

## Mapmaking

Caesar stood behind his desk in a royal office filled with artifacts, including a mosaic portrait of young Ptolemy 3 being ordained as a Priest. Agrippa entered and saluted. Caesar spoke first: “That was a pretty amazing discovery. Was it not? Between you and me it gave me the creeps.”

“I have never seen so many tablets. The place was remarkably clean for its age, or supposed age.” Agrippa nodded.

“What was the most impressive sight by your mind, Agrippa?”

“I cannot say. It was all impressive.”

“Think. As you walked through the temple, what struck you the most?”

“The map perhaps. An astonishing work.”

“Exactly! The map!” Caesar raised his hands emphatically.

Agrippa nodded. “It struck me how the land was shaped differently than what we know in the modern era.”

“And the explanation. A giant meteor passing the planet on regular intervals and ending an age of ice. I must say. It was captivating. I was rendered silent for the longest moments, just taking it all in while our women babbled on and on about Egyptian gods and the earth circling the sun.” Caesar approached Agrippa and stood so close that the

young engineer could smell Caesar's cologne. It smelled like a forest with hints of new leather.

*He's wearing myrrh. Lots of myrrh. Perhaps mixed with his favorite labdanum oil.*

"Let me get to the point, Agrippa. You did quite well in engineering and geography in school as I was informed by Agapito. He was a great teacher. Wasn't he?"

"You have a great memory, Emperor. Yes he was. The greatest."

"And you like to write. Agapito has delivered great poets and great commanders for Rome. All from a small school. He praised you like no other."

"Thank you, sir."

"I would like you to create a map of the Roman Empire at the center of the known world. As the Legion travels you will trace land and water and the boundaries of nations. I would like this map preserved, like the map on the temple ceiling, for an eternity, in a prominent location. Thousands of centuries from now, I would like people to see what was built within a world of barbarity. Centuries from now they will talk of the Empire of Rome as a shining city on a hill that kept the world from complete darkness. It is a grand vision, is it not Agrippa?"

"I am honored, sir."

"You honor Rome with your passions and fortitude young engineer. I sense a great destiny for you and my nephew. A great destiny. There are at least two and perhaps four Greek freedman that I have ordered to create such a map. I would like you to lead them in their effort. They need more guidance. You know those pesky Greeks and their mapmaking. They have no thought of usefulness. I want a practical map of great significance. A symbol for every citizen and slave to bear witness."

"Understand sir. I will connect with them when we return to Alexandria."

"I will include the orders tonight before our messengers leave for Alexandria. They will get there before we do. That reminds me. I have one other order of business."

Agrippa nodded.

"You were volunteered to be sealed into the temple with Cleopatra's half-sister."

"Samia."

"Yes. Samia. I must advise you to consider the request with utmost caution."

"I will."

"The gods of ancient Egypt that inhabit the temple may harbour some animosities toward Rome. You never know. Even when we walked in the open air at Troy I was mindful of the Greek Gods, they were such a temperamental lot. These Egyptian Gods, I

cannot fathom the resentments they might feel toward the presence of Roman soldiers desecrating their temple. Remember that ugly episode with Pompey in Jerusalem? If you choose to accept, be very mindful of the way that the flames move and stay close to Samia. Do not venture off. Egypt is a land of mysteries and poisonous snakes.”

“Yes sir.”

“That will be all.” The flame coming from the oil lamp on Caesar’s desk flickered with impurities.

“Thank you sir.”

Agrippa returned to his room.

*Samia must still be translating tablets.*

A bowl of apples and pomegranates resting on lettuce awaited his arrival. A red ribbon was wrapped around the lettuce and a note in Latin was attached: *An offering to your Ka, blessed by Min. May our love blossom and bless us for eternity. Samia.*

Agrippa finished the bowl and felt drowsy. He pulled the wooden scroll reader floor stand next to their bed and adjusted it so that he could read. He installed a scroll onto the reader and turned the handle to advance the paper.

He fell asleep about five panels into *The Lost History of Khemet*, by An Initiate.

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END OF SAMPLE

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