



Summary :

City of Cilicia Campestris built on a hill. It secured control over the Syrian Gates and was the starting point for caravan routes to Syria. The city is identified with modern Iskenderun. It was founded in honour of Alexander III (the Great) and was given the description 'ad Issum' due to the neighbouring city of Issus. In the 3rd c. AD, the city was sacked by the Sasanids, while in the 7th, 10th and 11th century it came under the Arabs, the Byzantines and the crusaders respectively.

Other Names

Alexandria, Alexandria Mikra, Alexandria Kabissos, Alexandria Kambissou, Alexandria Kambiosa, Alexandria Scabiosa, Alexandria Minor, Alexandret(t)a, Scanderona, Aleksandria ze'ortha Qobiosa, (al-) Iskandaruna

Geographical Location

Cilicia Campestris

Historical Region

Cilicia Campestris

Administrative Dependence

Cilicia

1. Topography – History

The site of modern Iskenderun –or Alexandretta– was the location of ancient Alexandria ad Issum,¹ also known as Alexandria, Alexandria Mikra, Alexandria Kabissos, Alexandria Kambissou, Alexandria Kambiosa, Alexandria Scabiosa,² Alexandria Minor, Alexandret(t)a, Scanderona, Aleksandria ze'ortha Qobiosa or (al-)Iskandaruna.³ This city of Cilicia Campestris was built on the rocky hill of Esentepe, on a coastal valley of the southeastern corner of the Bay of Issus; the spot secured control over the Belen Passage, which leads to northern Syria. The city was founded by [Alexander III](#), or –most likely– [Seleucus I Nicator](#), and was inhabited throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods.⁴

According to [Strabo](#) and [Ptolemy](#), Alexandria ad Issum was a recently built city at that time.⁵ The only evidence indicating that the city was founded by Alexander is its name, which is first reported one and a half century after the death of the Macedonian king.⁶ The description 'ad Issum' was given to the city due to the neighbouring city of Issus situated 30 km away. Hierocles includes it in the cities of [Cilicia II](#).⁷ The corrupted forms 'Kabissos' and 'Scabiosa' are partially justified by the fact that Issus was soon renamed 'Nicompolis' and, as a result, the correlation between Alexandria ad Issum and Issus or the [Battle of Issus](#) was no longer obvious. In 260 AD, the city was sacked by the Sasanids, while in the 7th century, it came under the Ummayyad Arabs, who renamed it Iskenderun. In the 9th century, it was captured by the Abbasid Caliph Al Watiq, before it came under the Byzantines again in 968. Finally, in 1097, the city was captured by the crusaders of the First Crusade.

2. Economy – Archaeological Remains

The economic power of the city probably resulted from its position, which secured control over the Syrian gates and was the starting point for caravan routes leading to Mesopotamia. The fact that Alexandria ad Issum never played a key role, although it was included in the Roman road catalogues, is explained by the fact that [Antioch](#) and [Seleuceia](#) were founded by the [Seleucids](#) for the same reason.

Few remains of walls have been traced among the houses, while remains of the later city (parts of mosaics and reservoirs) are mainly preserved at the bottom of the hill near the Nosairis cemetery.⁸ Within 6 km from modern Iskenderun, at the point where Amanos Mountains meet the sea, is the so-called 'Gate of Jonas' (Bab Yunus),⁹ where the cetacean is said to have disgorged the prophet.



The gate is the only remnant of a triumphal arch constructed in the Imperial years, probably by [Septimius Severus](#), after his victory over C. Pescennius Niger in 194 AD. Various travellers have recounted that the arch existed until 1774, when it was ruined. The eastern column was destroyed before 1902, while the western ha survives until today. A quadriga was depicted on the arch, which was also called 'Pylai' (Gates) or 'Portella' in Italian. That particular site was to become a visible reference point for sea journeys. Its counterpart on the other side of the bay was a Roman arch called Karanlı Kapi, which controlled access to the valley of Issus.

1. Alexandria ad Issum: Ptol., *Geography* 5.14.2; *Stadiasmus* 476; Maricq, A., 'Classica et Orientalia 5: Res Gestae Divi Saporis', *Syria* 35 (1958) pp. 295-360, particularly pp. 311-313, 338, 340.
2. This name is found in Latin road catalogues. *Tabula Peutingeriana* reports the city as 'Alexandria catisson'.
3. Kambiosa: *Chronicon Paschale* 321. Kabissos: Hierocles, *Geogr.* 705.6. Kambissou: Malal., 297, 397.
4. Grainger, J.D., *The Cities of Seleukid Syria* (Oxford 1990) pp. 36-37. Grainger stresses that the city was of no military importance for Alexander and cannot have been founded in memory of the Battle at Issus.
5. Strabo, 14.21.676; Ptol., *Geography* 5.14.2.
6. Contemporary research supports that Alexander III (the Great) did not found any settlements in Asia Minor: Cohen, G., *The Hellenistic Settlements in Europe, the Islands, and Asia Minor* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - Oxford 1995) p. 19, note 9; Tscherikower, V., *Die hellenistischen Stadtegründungen von Alexander dem Grossen bis auf die Romerzeit* (Leipzig 1927) pp. 58-59; Grainger, J.D., *The Cities of Seleukid Syria* (Oxford 1990) pp. 36-37; see also Tarn, W.W., *Alexander the Great II: Sources and Studies* 2 (Cambridge 1948) pp. 237-238.
7. *Le synekdemios d'Hierokles et l'opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre*, Honigmann, E. (ed.) (Bruxelles 1939), p. 38 (705.1 - 705.2).
8. Dussaud, R., *Topographie historique de la Syrie Antique et Médiévale* (Paris 1927) from p. 446 onwards.
9. Jonas, 2.11.

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Malalas, 297, 397.

Strabo, 14.21.676.

Ptolemy, *Geography* 5.14.2.

Jonas, 2.11.