Alexandria endures in our imagination as the first model of cultural interaction – of cosmopolitanism, to use both classical and contemporary terminology – and as the cultural and intellectual capital of the ancient world. The intermingling of races and beliefs, and the exchange of ideas, undoubtedly produced the knowledge that modern scholarship still celebrates.

This book is a testimony that the values embodied by Alexandria and its Library continue to inspire noble-minded scholars whose pursuit for knowledge transcends boundaries and time. The breadth and scope of the papers presented do credit to the spirit of Alexandria – its multiculturalism, and its passion for science and scholarship. The book in our hands confirms that the multiculturalism of the Ancient World, rippling out from Alexandria to extend throughout the Hellenistic period and beyond, is as valid now as it was then – perhaps more so today, when globalization has given a new meaning to the internationalism envisioned by Alexander the Great centuries ago. Now, with the “clash of civilizations” dominating our discourse, it is pertinent to remember the lesson Alexandria ad Aegyptum taught us: that the interaction between cultures can only lead to the betterment of the human condition and carry us to heights unimagined.

Ismail Serageldin
Librarian of Alexandria

The excellent contributions gathered in this book dedicated to the city of books, Alexandria, are undoubtedly traced along the lines of Amr and John’s dialogue. Intolerance, which is borne almost always out of ignorance, threatens continuously the peaceful meeting and coexistence of peoples and cultures nowadays.

Alexandria, its people and books remind us that the search for dialogue, the reflection on the forms of unity in diversity are at the same time our greatest heritage and the most dramatically pressing agenda.

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AMIMETOBIOU, THE ONE «OF THE INIMITABLE LIFE»: CLEOPATRA AS A METAPHOR FOR ALEXANDRIA IN PLUTARCH

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Abstract: In Life of Antony, Plutarch builds one of the most relevant portraits of Cleopatra VII. However, Plutarch is far from being impartial, as one would expect in a «Historian». Quite the opposite. Plutarch defines the last Lagid Queen as an Alexandrian metaphor. At the same time, she represents the perception that the Greco-Roman mentality in the first centuries of our Era had of the Egyptian city: luxurious, lustful, lazy, exotic, exuberant, deceitful and tricky, as well as sapient.

In a Book originally published in the 1970s and more recently re-edited, E. W. Said recuperates the theme of Orientalism in western culture, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries¹. One of the salient elements stressed by the author is the frequent metaphorisation of the East as a woman whose personality is defined by sensuality and licentiousness as practically innate features.

Following a similar hermeneutical approach, in an article published in 1986, L. Lowe identifies those characteristics as the model used by the famous French novelist G. Flaubert to compose the character of Salammbo in his homonymous novel. Lowe explains how the representation of the East as the cultural opposite of the West in Flaubert’s novel is feminised and eroticised so that the Orient becomes a feminine object of devotion². In Flaubert,

¹ SAID, 2003: 187-188.