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 value 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 confirm 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 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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IDENTITY AND COSMOPOLITISM: 
THE JEWISH POLITEUMA OF ALEXANDRIA

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Abstract: Taking into account the well-known process of ethnic, cultural and linguistic fusion which constitutes the basis for the huge development of the city of Alexandria (and is in itself an impressive legacy of Alexander’s empire), it becomes important to understand up to what point it would be possible for a certain group to safeguard a distinctive identity – at a cultural, religious, and political level – within a space deeply marked by cosmopolitism and by the confluence of different sensibilities. The Macedonian and Greek communities, which were closer to the governing elite, would find a suitable formula of orienting their behaviour by using rules that derived from a common political and cultural identity – the so-called concept of politikoi nomoi. The Jewish community, which was as well important in the city, managed also to obtain, according to literary tradition, significant advantages from Alexander and the Ptolemies, especially the right to «live according to their ancestral laws». In this process of identitarian affirmation, a determinant role must had been played by the translation of the Torah by the Septuaginta, because it enabled the sacred text with the possibility of reaching a position comparable to the Greek nomoi, thus contributing to the establishment of a legal koine, which, even without ceasing to respect royal authority, would be central in daily life and in dealing with private conflicts.