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.

Gabriele Cornelli
University of Brasilia
TRADITION AND IDENTITY IN LYCOPHRON

JORGE DESERTO

University of Oporto. Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos (University of Coimbra).

Abstract: Lycophron’s Alexandra has been called an «obscure poem». Through the difficulties of an enigmatic text that raises questions about its author and date, this paper deals with two fundamental issues: first, if it is possible to call Alexandra a drama and set a parallel between this work and 5th-century Athenian tragedy. Second, how Lycophron deals with the long and well established identity of his characters, and in particular with the identity of Cassandra, whose words we hear throughout the poem. A long mythological tradition together with an enigmatic and elusive text – they both constitute a strange and challenging paradox. A brief analysis of Lycophron’s «odyssey» (ll. 648-819) shows how the poet manages to achieve equilibrium while dealing with these two themes: tradition and identity.

It is undoubtedly a challenge to write about a work that requires the use of an instruction book. Under normal circumstances, we find reasonable for this to happen with a domestic appliance: urban mythology is full of stories in which the act of programming a VCR dangerously resembles a descent in hell. But it will be reason to look with suspicion, and even fear, at a literary work that only can be clearly understood if we take into account the commentaries left by the scholiasts. Now this is what systematically happens with Lycophron’s Alexandra.

The Suda will call it «the obscure poem» (τὸ σκοτεινὸν ποίημα), and this is a label that has stuck to it. When we start reading any work about this poem, we often find, more