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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THE CULT OF ISIS IN ROME: SOME ASPECTS OF ITS RECEPTION AND THE TESTIMONY OF APULEIUS’ ASINVS AUREVS

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Abstract: After providing a brief summary of the most significant aspects of the reception of the cult of Isis in Rome and of its relationship with political power, this chapter focuses on Apuleius’ Asinus Aureus in order to analyze some aspects of the Isiac cult that may have justified its success among Romans: its universal character, its connection to justice, and its capacity to produce direct communication between individual goddess and religious institutions.

The cult of Isis seems to be, as a whole, one of the best examples of the connection between political aspects of religion and the lives of the individuals taking part in it. Its difficult reception in the Roman world, particularly during the first centuries of its implementation, can be seen as a typical case of action-reaction (action on the part of its coreligionists, initially restricted to the lower social classes; reaction by political institutions, which either allowed for the cult’s existence, or created limitations and prohibitions in accordance with the political interests that marked different periods). On the other hand, the growing popularity of the cult derived overall from the nature of the divinity and from its communicative potential. For the Egyptians, Isis was the goddess of life, protector and mother of Pharaohs, the protagonist in the story of Osiris’ resurrection, the mother of Horus and goddess of a thousand names. Isis embodied therefore a multitude of divine attributes and abilities. On

1 LÓPES SALVA, 1992: 163: «Isis (...) era una diosa universal (...) por su capacidad de adaptación a todas las circunstancias, y que además prestaba atención individualizada a sus devotos concediéndoles salud y bienestar». 

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