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 Alexandrea 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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Abstract: Since the year 45 B.C., Julius Caesar introduced, in the whole Roman world, the Egyptian calendar with 365 days and six hours i.e. 365, 25, adding the necessary days in the shorter months. It was also intercalated one day between the 23rd and the 24th of February every four years, which was called bissextile because the 6th day before the calends of March counted twice. This day gave the name to the year where it was included but it was not the 29th of February, which did not exist at the time. This calendar became known as the Julian calendar and lasted until the 1st of January 1582 when Pope Gregory VIII made its last modification, implementing what we know as Gregorian calendar, which has been in use till the present day. The adopted Egyptian calendar had a mathematical simplicity; it didn’t require any adjustments by means of intercalary days or months and was used to date every official or officious act, thus justifying Julius Caesar’s statement: «the only intelligent calendar of Mankind’s history». He had for advisor an Egyptian hemerologist, the astronomer Sosigenes from Alexandria, an Egyptian about whom we know little but who managed to impose his ideas about this issue to Julius Caesar not only because they were good but also because they were based on a millennial practice.

In the 1st century B.C., Alexandria was the most crowded urban area of the Ancient World, except for Rome. A myriad of races and cultures coming from the Greek world, Rome, Persia, Arabia, including a large Jewish community joined the indigenous popula-
tion of Egyptians and Nubians. There, the late Hellenistic culture flourished. It was through Alexandria that Egypt has opened itself to the Mediterranean world. In that same century Roman’s civil year was three months in advance in relation to the solar year thus showing the ancestral imperfection of the Roman calendar. After being sworn as Pontifex Maximus, Julius Caesar (100-40 B.C.) solved the problem, by adding the days required to set the dates. For that reason the year 46 B.C. exceptionally got 445 days, corresponding to the year 708 after the foundation of the city of Rome and it must have been the ultimus annus confusio-nis, according to the writings of Macrobius, a Roman writer of the beginning of the 5th century, in his book Saturnais.

From 45 B.C. on, the Romans adopted the Egyptian solar calendar of 365 days and six hours, adding the required extra days to the shorter months. They also inserted one day between February 23 and 24, every four years, which was called bisextile, since the sixth day before the calends of March was counted twice. This day gave the name to the year in which it was included, but it wasn’t February 29 yet, because it didn’t exist at the time. This calendar became known as the Julian calendar and it was used until January 1, 1582, when Pope Gregory XII made its last major reform, thus implementing the Gregorian calendar, as we know it, and which is now still in use.

The Egyptian calendar, which Julius Caesar had installed upon the whole Roman world, was of a great mathematical simplicity. It didn’t require any adjustments by inserting days or months and was used to date any official or officious act, religious or civil, leading to Julius Caesar’s statement «the only intelligent calendar that has ever existed in the History of Man».

On this matter, he was accessorized by the Egyptian hemerologist Sosigenes of Alexandria, an Egyptian about whom little is known but who managed to impose all his ideas to Julius Caesar, since they were based on a millennial practice which had already proved to be actually good.

THE RECKONING OF TIME
IN ANCIENT EGYPT

The Egyptian conception of time derived from the fusion of two complementary ideas: djet, a linear counting of times – which started whenever a new king ascended to the throne, one after the other in an irreversible way – it was linked to earthly items and to the ideas of lasting duration; and neheh – the cyclic time grounded on the periodicity of cosmic phenomena, particularly the movement of the sun, which reborns every day – it was linked to the ideas of «rebirth», «transformation», «becoming». The conception of History itself, in ancient Egypt, was a «celebration» of the eternal return to the «first time», the time when

1 SANTOS, 2006: 120.
2 POSENER, 1970: 40.