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Director, Bibliotheca Alexandrina
General Supervisor
Ismail Serageldin

Editor-in-Chief
Khaled Azab

Managing Editor
Ayman Elsherbiny

Staff Writer
Sarah Elhaddad

Contributing Writers
Kholoud Said
Dina Elodessy

Proofreading
Publishing Department

Photographs
Media Department

Graphic Designer
Kareem Magdi



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Kindly send your feedback, and contributions to ayman.elsherbiny@bibalex.org

Bibliotheca Alexandrina
P.O. Box 138, Chatby 21526, Alexandria, Egypt
Phone: + (203) 4839999; Ext: 2271
E-mail: ayman.elsherbiny@bibalex.org
Website: www.bibalex.org

CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Dr. Ismail Serageldin



“In its rich diversity, culture has intrinsic value for development as well as social cohesion and peace. Cultural diversity is a driving force for development, not only in respect of economic growth, but also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life.” UNESCO

In order to sketch out some of the challenges facing cultural diversity, and suggest some questions for readers to consider, I must bring in a viewpoint that has not been sufficiently dealt with in many proceedings up to this moment. It is the viewpoint of the enlightened Muslim and humanist Arab, who finds the foundations for that attitude in the tradition that is presently identified by some who want to promote the clash of civilizations as the source of instability and the fount of intolerance, not to say terror.

Scientific historical analysis, and factual information regarding the Muslim heritage, present it as a heritage that enjoys an open

attitude to knowledge and learning, and respect to other cultures. This rich heritage created Andalusia, promoted science and learning during the dark ages of Europe, and allowed such brilliant non-Muslim thinkers as Maimonides to flourish.

The Muslim and Arab Heritage

Andalusia was a marvelous mix of different communities, where Jews, Christians and Muslims consorted together and produced great poetry, architecture, science, philosophy and literature. This contrasts with the conditions imposed by the Catholics after the defeat of the Arabs in Cordoba (1492), not to mention the infamous Spanish inquisition set up by King Ferdinand in 1478; the Roman Inquisition, set up by Pope Paul III in 1542, which supervised all the inquisitions against heretics; and the most famous trial of Galileo in 1633.

Arabs and Muslims reacted differently to Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and science. They did not declare scientists as heretics and did not burn their books. Instead, they translated their works into Arabic and wrote exegeses about their theses, and referred to Plato and Aristotle as *Al-Hakimain*, or the two wise men.

Arabs recreated the great tradition of openness that prevailed in the ancient Library of Alexandria, and helped the intermingling of cultures. They also laid the foundation for the Renaissance, and helped bring numerals and the “zero” from India to Europe (where they were called Arabic numerals).

Indeed, contrary to general perception, it was the Arabs and Muslims who defined the modern scientific method, and who created the climate of openness and tolerance that allowed science to flourish during the Middle Ages. Muslims and Arabs carried the torch for

centuries, and if today the torch has passed to the West, we should be proud that we have done our share and more in earlier times, and should strive to take our place, by dint of hard work and innovation, alongside our western colleagues at the forefront of the global endeavor to create a knowledge-based, just and tolerant society.

To understand the state of the Muslim and Arab World today, we need to acknowledge that we all belong to multiple groups and multiple realities, or what can be described as “variable geometry”, i.e. the complexity of the society which is simultaneously local, regional, national and transnational, and even transcendental, across time and space.

Yet, today, in many of these societies, people are not feeling secure and want to find security in asserting their identity in the most narrow and exclusionary ways. In addition, they feel victimized and are excessively concerned with defending that identity against any and all threats, real or unfounded.

Clearly, the Muslim and Arab World we see now do not reflect their glorious past, and today, the Muslim World is riven with strife. Intolerance rules. The Muslim and Arab World feel dominated and victimized by a hegemonic West, as well as resentful of its leaders, and insecure in its self-image. Indeed tolerance requires security; only when people feel secure are they tolerant.

Security, Terrorism and Globalization

The problem of security can be translated in many actions taken by some governments along the years. For example, after the horror of 9/11, the USA—which has long prided itself on its profound commitment to the bill of rights—has suspended due process.

Mentioning the 9/11 attacks, it is very likely that technology, globalization and other forces

will make terrorism an issue to contend with in the future, as it was in the past. Terrorism is not new, but the increasing damage that can be done by terrorists today is being enhanced by a number of objective reasons, including the conditions of failed states or conditions of widespread anarchy, and the increasing density of human settlements.

In this regard, we need to have a strategy to ensure that the march towards inclusion, the commitment to human rights and the advance of democracy are not jeopardized by the presence of terrorism. We have had examples of democratic governments coping with terrorism without losing sight of their obligations to their citizens; Italy dealing with the *Red Brigades* (who murdered Prime Minister Aldo Moro), Germany with the *Baader-Meinhof* gang, the *ETA* in Spain, the *Corsicans* and the *OAS* in France, and the *IRA* in the UK.

We need to have a proper theory of societal interaction that defines the parameters of state action, the public space and the role of the civil society. It is not enough to say we espouse the values of the Enlightenment. Long after the Enlightenment, slavery continued, and so did colonization. Entire groups of people were subjected to genocide, and others, to the systematic destruction of their cultural identity, by these same western cultures that had produced the values of the modern Enlightenment.

Today, immigration makes racism rear its ugly head again in Europe, and insecurity in most of the Muslim and Arab World has escalated. Some would blame this uncertainty on the problems of globalization and the dislocation that it brings to the nations of the world.

Various countries today are indeed undergoing enormous transformations, at an unprecedented rate, and thus, their tolerance level is being tested, and their fear finds in

immigration an easy target. Terrorism, having reared its ugly head, promotes suspicion of all who are different, and the enormous tsunami of globalization, seemingly unstoppable, uncontainable, and uncontrollable, has frightened people as their familiar moorings are being lost.

The pangs we are feeling today are remarkably similar to those felt in the industrial revolution two centuries ago. The question before us is whether we have learned from that experience to design a more humane way of dealing with the inevitable wrenching that accompanies such processes.

A Call for Action

Inter-culturalism: The general principle of representative democracy, or a federal system, whether in the USA or in Brazil, provides the possibilities of recognition of general laws to protect the minorities. Those laws, being enacted at the federal level, can prevent the oppression of minorities at the local level. This formulation ultimately helped the blacks in the USA.

Moving from egalitarianism to recognizing differences will make a big change in the policy of the integration. It underlines the problem of exclusion, but in many societies, the ethnic or sectarian lines of cleavage are the primary ones. We have to look at recognizing differences as the motivation for exclusion, which it frequently is, not just as an element of value. An approach that values individual human rights and underlines the notion of citizenship would be much commended.

Individual rights: Human Rights are generally defined as negative and positive rights, translated by a bill of rights for the citizen—the individual citizen, against the power of the state. A democratic system is one where the rights of the minorities are not being trampled on by the power of majority.

We must retain the four dimensions: the individual, the community (a matter of scale), the sovereign nation (where the authority for the rule of law is vested) and finally: humanity, which defines transcendental responsibilities including those towards future generations as was explained by Mireille Delmas-Marty. National law must conform to international law.

International law: There is a view among many in the Arab and Muslim World that the major powers use double standards in defending human rights. Yet, even though we call for inclusion and diversity; those who suffered in the past—those who must be included in that diverse community, with a broader recognition of their human rights and an enhanced participation in the pluralistic enlarged community, must somehow get over their grievances.

What we need is to guarantee all rights to all people in all places at all times.

Therein, lies the challenge before us. The time is for actions, not words. Together, we can create a united front of the caring. We can think of the unborn, remember the forgotten, give hope to the forlorn and reach out to the unreached, and by wise actions today lay the foundation for better tomorrows.

I remember, half a world away, half a lifetime ago, President John F. Kennedy spoke of world peace, he said: *“For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.”*

Those words are as pertinent today as they were half a century ago. In the post 9/11 world, it is important that we all remember that common humanity, and build a new basis for common understanding and mutual respect. This will not be easy to achieve given the circumstances in today’s world. But do it we must... And we will!

YOUTH “REWORKING” THE WORLD

Ayman Elsherbiny

When I was ten years old, the Liberian Civil War had started. My mother and I were forced to live in shelters with no access to food or water. People and children started to die, and eventually, I became so sick that I was pronounced dead, and my body was thrown over a heap of dead bodies. My mom went from heap to heap for hours trying to find me. That night I made a vow to spend the rest of my life trying to ensure that no child is left without food, education or water.

There are 20,000 children fighting as soldiers. Some of them are as young as six years old. So, we started what we called “The Children’s Disarmament Campaign”. Charles Taylor; former Liberian President, was outraged by this, and he wanted to have me killed. As a result, a friendly international government offered help, and I left Liberia with only the clothes I was wearing.

Youth Action International started when I was in the USA. We started to give American high school and college students tools to help the people in Africa. We established offices in Nigeria and Sierra Leone in the first year. Now, we are in six post-war African countries helping thousands of people. Five years after we started helping them, we went beyond just donating food to ensuring that people could feed themselves.

I know how to be hungry and sick, and that drives me to continue. More people need to get involved. The power of youth lies in their number. So, our generation can be the one to end poverty.

Kimie Weeks, Youth Action International, Liberia.

This was a story of inspiration that was shared during the opening of the 5th Global Youth Entrepreneurship and Sustainability (YES) Summit entitled “Rework the World”. The Conference was held in Leksand, Sweden, 2–5 June 2010. It was organized by Tällberg Foundation, and YES Inc., in cooperation with the Swedish Foreign Ministry, the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations, and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA).

One thousand seven hundred entrepreneurs, business profiles, investors, decision makers and ambitious young people, took part in “reworking” the world. Half of the delegates were women, and half were under the age of 35, and they all shared the same goal; to push forward one of the biggest community building projects, and create more sustainable green jobs for young people around the world.



*Kimie Weeks speaking during the YES Summit,
© Nathan Daniel Heller*

YES Inc. is an international network, launched from the BA in 2002, striving to build the individual capacity of youth in order to create sustainable livelihoods and to establish an entrepreneurial culture where young people move toward formal employment. The YES networks in 55 countries are unique platforms

from which to accomplish this goal, spanning many cultures, contexts and geographies.

Ulrika Liljeberg; Mayor of Leksand, Sweden, welcomed the participants in the Conference arguing that humans put up many boundaries: national, social, political and gender, while they should have borders and limitations for hate, violence and war. She added that most of the boundaries we have do not serve us good, suggesting that people should see each other as neighbors.

“As neighbors, we are all aware that our own actions affect the others. If we realize this, act upon it and help each other, I am sure the world will be a better place,” Liljeberg stressed.

Carl Mossfeldt; Executive Vice President, Tällberg Foundation, pointed out that jobs of tomorrow must be different from those of the past, and they need to be financed differently. He stated that something new can emerge out of the new generation that is growing up.

“We together have to make that world slightly different. We are bringing the world together in this Conference, because the world needs to be brought together. If we fail, it may fall apart in violence, conflicts, xenophobia and in selfishness. But we are also bringing the world together because we believe that the world is ready,” Mossfeldt added.

Telling her story, Poonam Ahluwalia; President of YES Inc., mentioned that she always thought about all the issues regarding poverty and hunger. She made it clear that change comes from within, not from the outside, as it is something that people have to seek for themselves. Giving an example, she referred to the 20 billion US Dollars that have been invested in Africa over the last 30 years, though developing indicators are going down.

Ahluwalia said that there are a billion youths on our planet, 850 million of which

are in poor countries, receiving minimum education, training, business development services, credit and many other services. Behind them are 1.5 billion children in and out of schools, again not being prepared for productive work.



Carl Mossfeldt and Poonam Ahluwalia,
© Nathan Daniel Heller.

From 1998 to 2002, Poonam and others had 40 consultations globally to understand the issues of poverty, to prepare for the First Global YES Summit, which was held at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in 2002.

“When I began ten to twelve years ago, people kept telling me that you cannot put youth employment and empowerment on the global agenda. We have to reject this, because it is only with the power of individual dreams and courage, that challenges can be met. Let’s rewrite our future and rework the world,” she proclaimed.

On the other hand, Mary Robinson; Former President of Ireland, shed light on the situation in Gaza. She condemned the blockade saying that humanity cannot accept having 1.5 million people in “collective punishment”, without having the possibilities that the Conference is discussing, knowing that half of the population in Gaza are children and young people, with 80% of them having no jobs. “We need to rework justice for Gaza, Palestine and the Middle East as well,” she stated.

Robinson asked for reworking the world, not with jobless growth, but with people-centered approaches to work and to social protection. She requested that participants try to force governments to implement what they proclaim, so they would practice what they preach.

She referred to the meeting of the Ministers of Labor and Employment of the G20 countries, which took place in April of this year in Washington. They endorsed the *Global Jobs Pact*, that came out of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June of last year.

“These are global commitments to put employment creation at the center of economic policy. But who knows about this *Global Jobs Pact*, and who is insisting at the local, regional and international levels that this should be the way that we rework the world?” Robinson argued.

In the same context, Juan Somavia; Director-General, International Labour Organization, Geneva, stated that there are 1.5 billion vulnerable workers, which is about half of the global work force. He added that the unfair and unbalanced globalization process was not capable of delivering decent jobs to the majority.

“For young people, jobs are key in defining their assessment of the present, their judgment of the future and their contribution to society. Collectively, we must be able to generate a sense of hope backed by real prospects of change,” Somavia affirmed.

“This summit,” he added, “gives hope and inspiration. It is an expression of youth as an asset, not a problem. The failure to realize the massive potential of young people is first and foremost a great human loss.”

Ismail Serageldin; Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, declared firmly that

we have to focus on youth, because as John F. Kennedy said “the future of a country is directly proportional to the prospects of its youth.”

He argued that youth are not just the future; they are the present, and they are the artisans of the transformation that the world seeks. Moreover, he stated that the current policies in the world are destroying the abilities and dreams of a whole generation.



*A Panel Discussion during the YES Summit,
© Ana Jelena Jungen*

Serageldin stressed on the need for a special outreach. “We started our journey in 2002 in Alexandria, then in Mexico, Kenya, Azerbaijan and Sweden, creating YES networks, and learning from YES leaders. Today, we are here to rework the world, because the world we currently live in is not worth keeping. It is an insult to our common humanity.”

He also raised the need for jobs that must be economically productive, socially promoting trust and cohesion, and environmentally sustainable. It must also be bottom up, but also top nurturing.

“Dare to dream, and dare to be bold,” was Serageldin’s advice to young people. “Working all together, I am sure that there is so much we can do for a whole generation, and for the whole world. In fact, if we look small without power today, and sometimes our opponents look big, I can tell you that from here we will surprise the world,” he concluded.

“ISLAM AND THE WEST” ... A FEW QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Sarah Elhaddad



Ferry de Kerchove, © cancham.org

“My own answer to the question about Islam as anti-West is a typical ‘no’, but...,” exclaimed Mr. Ferry de Kerckhove, Ambassador of Canada to Egypt, while addressing a number of intellectuals on 19 April 2010, at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), as he presented a paper entitled “Islam and the West: A Few Questions”.

At the beginning of his presentation, de Kerckhove said that in this day and age, where very few nations are ethnic monoliths, all countries are faced with a dilemma, which translates into a very critical question: “how far should a society go in taking into account the diversity of its population?”

He argued that while many leaders in the world talk about integration within their countries and societies, the word “integration” is somewhat harsh; as it does not impart a sense of desire on the part of the potential candidates to achieve integration, not even acceptance.

“My thesis is very simple,” he said, “rather than focusing on what separates

in differences, I call upon all of us to build synergies on those differences; whether inter-faith, inter-ethnic or inter-cultural. That should be the foundation of Islam’s relations with the West and the West’s relations with Islam.”

He also stressed that differences provide opportunities for mutual enrichment, “through mutual tolerance, we are able to create the conditions for a society, national and international, that not only reveres diversity, but also has enough common linkages to allow it to evolve, adapt, develop and prosper,” he added.

De Kerckhove affirmed that there is a need to address misunderstandings in the West about Islam, “but, of course, the alternate paradigm needs to be addressed as well, as there are legions of misunderstandings about the West in Muslim countries,” he explained.

“In so saying, I am reminded that my great late friend, the Indonesian religious scholar, *Nurcholish Madjid; Cak Nur*, once said that the West acts differently when it faces Islam than when it faces Hinduism, Buddhism or Confucianism,” he added.

He stated that the question “Is Islam ‘anti-West’?” is meaningless in absolute terms, as it opposes a religion to a geographic concept. “But I would argue that for a majority of Muslims, Islam still defines one’s life, twenty-four hours a day, and unless one is prepared to recognize that, the ‘West’ will fail to apprehend the true nature of Islam, and will confuse it with fundamentalist deviations,” he said.

“The next question often asked regarding Islam and the West is: are Islamic values compatible with Western or Christian values?” affirmed the Ambassador. He said that in order to answer this question, it would be hard not to recognize that Islam and Christianity have such a common heritage, that there are likely more points of convergence than of estrangement.

“However,” he added, “the social and political evolution of countries, nations and peoples, has undeniably led to a greater underscoring of the superficial or even deeper differences than the similarities.”

De Kerckhove argued that gaps in levels of economic development, legacies of the colonial past, and perceived injustice in the West’s handling of the Middle East, have been fodder for further fostering of the inescapable clash, making tolerance, or rather the lack of it, more the product of history than of faith.

He also mentioned that the long-established secular traditions in the West, have led some Westerners to believe that there is a greater threat from Muslim communities than others, in terms of the imposition of precedence of the religious over the temporal.

“There are also cultural habits which are often defined in religious terms, although, to the outside observers, they appear to stem from traditions more than anything

else, and these require explanation and understanding,” he said.

“As for the issue of modernity, the myth would have Islam being allergic to modernity, while Christianity, as embodied in the West, would define itself through the pursuit of scientific knowledge and adaptation to technological change, Galileo notwithstanding.”

“I think that while within some quarters of the Islamic world there seems to be a problem of adaptation to modernity, which is too readily equated with Westernization, the history of Islamic scholars’ contributions to science clearly shows that this problem is one of mindset and not of philosophy,” he declared.

Back to the relationships between Islam and the International System, de Kerckhove mentioned that he senses that over and beyond common values, including human rights, freedom and democracy, there is a need to better understand the underlying social structures of Muslim countries, if the two sides are to penetrate deeper in their mutual understanding.

He also believes that Islamism and Islam should not be confused. “However, Islamism should not be ignored and, however difficult, some form of political space should be provided to its non-violent adherents, so that they can carry the fight for their vision of reform in the open, and thus, channel their discontent within the existing social, economic and political order of the day,” he added.

“The West, therefore, needs to strengthen links with Muslim organizations, to ensure full representation of all currents, and reduce potential conflicts. In addition, Islam’s beauty as a religion based on revelation should be recognized, extolled and explained,” concluded de Kerckhove.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD!

*Maissa Azab**

How amazing it is to be able to take a break from everyday life and step, for a little while, into a world of adventure and amusement. It is still our world though; yet, it cannot be seen this way anywhere else. It is the world as seen only from inside a full-dome planetarium theater.

In this world, and this world alone, when the doors are closed and the lights are dimmed, we feel like our seats have turned into magical carpets right out of our childhood fantasies. While we remain seated, we zoom through time and space on unique expeditions to explore the universe as Man cannot do in real life ... not yet anyway!

We journey to the past to see how our ancestors saw the universe at the dawn of time and discover man-made wonders that vanished from the surface of the Earth thousands of years ago. We dive to the depths of the Earth's oceans and seas ... climb to the tops of its mountains and volcanoes ... peer inside our own bodies to see every-day miracles unfold before our eyes ... we search in and out for answers to the endless marvels of this unique planet we inhabit.

Our curiosity drives us even farther... beyond our planet ... through our Solar System with all its different celestial bodies, each with its own endless secrets, and into a vast universe of countless exquisite constellations and galaxies that seem to have no end, no matter how hard or deep we look.

Indeed, it is a fascinating world that the Planetarium at the New Library of Alexandria offers its public. Since its inauguration in October 2002, the Planetarium has dazzled the public with various technologies, the most outstanding of which—up until recently—has

been the large format IMAX film projection system with its massive images.

As of August 2009, thanks to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, the Planetarium now also operates a cutting-edge full-dome Digistar 3 projection system with a rich set of real-time 3D astronomy features and a wide database of celestial bodies that enables the audience to explore the universe as never before. The new system will also enable the Planetarium specialists who have already succeeded in producing the first Egyptian planetarium show—also the first to be produced entirely in the Middle East—to build shows from a simple touch-screen interface and watch their creations in the star theater.



The BA Planetarium

In addition to this, the BA Planetarium Science Center recently re-opened the ALEXploratorium to its visitors after being completely renovated.

The ALEXploratorium is a leading hands-on edutainment facility that offers visitors an amazing adventure to reveal some of the wonders of science in an atmosphere of amusement.

After renovation, the new ALEXploratorium area has increased from 558 m² to 785 m². It has been designed to reinforce the discovery

**The BA Planetarium Science Center Publications Coordinator*

concept though three zones: Discover Yourself, Discover Your Environment, and Discover Your Universe. Each zone includes many experiments related to its topic, and has a color theme that stems from a certain natural phenomena with a more attractive floor design.

Visitors can try out various experiments related to the human body, Solar System, Earth, action and reaction, and much more, not to mention experiencing numerous interactive exhibitions, contests and an all-new giftshop.

The upgrading of the Planetarium, and the renovation of ALEXploratorium renovation were well-timed with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina hosting the 20th International Planetarium Society (IPS) conference in June 2010, after winning the bid over China and France. The IPS conferences are the largest and most significant events in the world of planetariums, where nothing but state-of-the-art technologies are exposed.

Egypt is the first country in Africa and the Middle East to host this conference, which is held every two years. More than 200 eminent scientists and specialists from around 30 countries; representing about 700 planetariums, participated in the conference this year.

The IPS2010 was entitled “Back to Alexandria, the Cradle of Astronomy” in acknowledgement of the important role the Ancient Library of Alexandria played in enriching all fields of science, especially astronomy. IPS2010 represented a milestone for the new Library of Alexandria that aspires to be a center of excellence in the production and dissemination of knowledge, and to be a place of dialogue, learning and understanding between cultures and peoples.

The overarching theme of IPS2010; “The History of Astronomy”, also resonated with the

conference’s location, Egypt—a country that has significantly contributed to the human heritage.


The Conference revived the role of Arab astronomers recapturing the recognition their ancestors received during the golden age of Islam, in addition to raising the awareness of decision makers and the public as to the essential role of planetariums in informal science education.

Founded in 1970, the International Planetarium Society, known as the IPS, is the global association of planetarium professionals. Its nearly 700 members come from 35 countries around the world.

The primary goal of the IPS is to encourage the sharing of ideas among its members through conferences, publications and networking.

The first IPS conference took place in October 1970 at the Abrams Planetarium in Michigan, USA. 11 IPS conferences out of the 19 that followed took place in different locations in the USA. Other IPS conferences took place in Canada (1982 and 2000), Mexico (1984), Sweden (1990), Japan (1996), England (1998), Spain (2004) and Australia (2006).





2010: A YEAR OF ACHIEVEMENTS FOR THE BA LIBRARY SECTOR

*Ayman Elsherbiny
Sarah Elhaddad*

“I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.” —Jorge Luis Borges

An international cultural complex. A center of excellence in the production and dissemination of knowledge. A hub for dialogue and understanding. A learning space.

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) offers information in all formats, and provides customized services to its readers and visitors. The year 2010 marks a year of achievements for the BA Library Sector, with highlights on receiving and processing the greatest gift in history, inaugurating a Map Library, and launching several initiatives and projects.

THE LARGEST CULTURAL GIFT IN HISTORY THE BA RECEIVES 500,000 BOOKS FROM FRANCE

The Ancient Library of Alexandria was one of the most ambitious and exciting intellectual ventures in the history of humanity. For the first time in history an earnest attempt was made to collect, codify and organize universal knowledge and open-up cultures to each other through learning.

This ecumenical spirit, with its commitment to tolerance, diversity and openness to the other, was accompanied by a strong commitment to rationality, truth, honor, tolerance, debate and the method of scholarship. These values were well in evidence in the Ancient Library, as scholars from all over the world debated on all conceivable topics. This great adventure produced some of the most notable breakthroughs in the history of human thought.



Egyptian and French intellectuals celebrate the generous donation at the BA

The Ancient Library of Alexandria disappeared slowly; suffering a gradual decline from the time of Caesar and Cleopatra. By 400 CE, the Library had vanished, and the era of Alexandrian scholarship came to an end a few years later. However, sixteen-hundred years later, it came back to life.

The new Bibliotheca Alexandrina provides a haven for inter-cultural dialogue, through embracing universal values that transcend differences and highlight our

essential humanity, under the banner of love of knowledge.

Standing almost at the very spot where the ancient beacon of learning and culture once stood, the new Bibliotheca Alexandrina symbolizes all that is best in the human mind, in a manner compatible with the needs of our times.

The spirit of international cooperation in which the library was conceived, designed, funded and implemented has been maintained in its vision, mission and goals, to create an institution that is truly global in its outlook.

Believing in it, the National Library of France, *Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF)*, offered the BA a generous donation of 500 thousand books, which is considered the largest book collection ever given to a library, and the largest cultural gift in history.

“2000 years ago, the Ancient Library of Alexandria was the recipient of what was then the greatest book gift of history; Mark Antony’s gift of 200 thousand scrolls. Here is the new Library of Alexandria receiving an even bigger gift; 500 thousand books from the National Library of France (BnF),” said HE Suzanne Mubarak, Chair of the BA Board of Trustees.

Mrs. Mubarak expressed her profound thanks to the BnF for its magnificent gift, and extended her thanks to the government and people of France for the “most generous gesture of friendship that they are making, and for the confidence that they are showing in our abilities to manage a donation of this magnitude.”

“We are the artisans of a better future built on cultural dialogue, cultural diversity and common humanity. Let us by our example continue to emphasize the values we hold so dear.”

The donated collection is part of the BnF's legal depository and includes a wide range of subjects varying from arts to zoology. The books are also available in different reading levels for users of all ages. They are mostly recently published books, issued during the period from 1996 to 2006.

"We are extremely grateful to the Republic of France and its President; Nicolas Sarkozy, for their generosity and commitment to cultural exchange," said Dr. Ismail Serageldin; Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

With this gift and the current BA French material holdings, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina becomes the 6th largest francophone library in the world outside France. The BA also becomes the main depository of French books in the Arab world; surpassing Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, in addition to being the main French Library in Asia and Africa.

Serageldin also mentioned that the BnF leadership believes deeply in the power of libraries and the mission of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. He affirmed that while this gift will improve access to modern French language output, it will also help bridge the gap between information-poor and information-rich societies.

The BA librarians began processing the book collection and integrating them into the current BA collection, so that the Library's patrons can have immediate access to it and benefit from its outstanding value.

Bruno Racine; President of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, stated that this gift is a new step in the partnership and cooperation between BnF and the BA, in addition to being a contribution to the dialogue between cultures and civilizations. "I believe the French intellectuals and writers will continue donating books to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, so that this gift become vigorous," he added.

Commemorating this occasion, the BA hosted in April 2010 a roundtable discussion entitled "Ecrire la Méditerranée", organized by the Mediterranean Prize (*Le Prix Méditerranée*) and the Mediterranean Center for Literature (*Le Centre Méditerranéen de Littérature*).

Writers from the two shores of the Mediterranean were invited to write a short text about the Mediterranean cultural identity. Over two days, they exchanged their testimonies, expressed their nostalgia, discussed their Mediterranean identity and its effect on their writings, and the role of literature in the well-being of the Mediterranean peoples.

The sessions featured talks by Robert Solé, established Egyptian/French Writer and Columnist in *Le Monde*; Nedim Gurcel, the Turkish Writer who received several international literary awards, Research Director at the French National Center for Scientific Research and Professor of Eastern Languages; Khaled El-Khamissi, Egyptian Writer, Journalist, Director and Producer, and Author of the bestseller *Taxi*; Vénus Khoury Ghata, Lebanese Poet and Novelist; Leila Marounane, Algerian Writer based in France; and Takis Theodoropoulos, Head of the Greek National Writers' Center.

Participations were also witnessed from Kebir Ammi, author of several novels about people who were expelled from home; Paula Jacques, French/Egyptian Writer, Journalist and Producer; Waciny Laredji, Writer and Literary Critic from Algeria and recipient of several awards; Alexandre Najjar, a Lebanese Writer who devoted his career to defend values of justice, and promote richness and diversity between Lebanon and France; Sherif El-Shoubashi, Egyptian Writer, Journalist, former Under-Secretary for Foreign Cultural Relations at the Ministry of Culture, and former President of the Cairo International Film Festival; and finally Antonio Tabucchi, the Italian Expert on Portuguese Literature.

THE BA MAP LIBRARY: A UNIQUE COLLECTION OF MAPS

With a collection that encompasses more than seven thousand maps, 420 atlases and 11 globes; the Map Library was inaugurated at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in April 2010. The Map Library is the latest specialized library at the BA, following the *Taha Hussein* Library for the blind and visually impaired, the Children's Library, the Young People's Library, the Rare Books and Special Collections, the Arts and Multimedia Library, and the Microforms Library.

"The Map Library is designed to fulfill the needs of the readers and visitors, especially researchers interested in geographical types of research," said Dr. Ismail Serageldin; Director of the BA. He added that the Library enhances the role of the BA in supporting scientific research in Egypt, and serves as a center for maps in general, with special focus on Alexandria, Egypt, the Arab World and the Mediterranean region.

Dr. Sohair Wastawy; former BA Chief Librarian, affirmed that the Map Library houses a collection of maps of general as well as research interest. "The collection contains maps of various types, including topographic, thematic, geologic, as well as world maps, street maps, estate maps, contour maps, transportation maps and facsimile maps, in addition to atlases, nautical charts, aeronautical charts, satellite and serial images, and globes," she added.



Manuscript Chart of the Gulf and Mesopotamia at the Map Library

The Map Library collection was acquired through procurement and donations, where the Library Sector corresponded with national and international mapping agencies and other organizations in order to assemble this collection. Such agencies include the Egyptian National Authority for Remote Sensing and Space Science, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Egypt, the Saudi Geological Survey, the Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre and the Syrian General Organization for Remote Sensing.

"One of the most important maps in the collection is *Al-Sharif Al-Idrisi Map of the World*, a map drawn by *Al-Idrisi* for King Roger II of Sicily in 1154, and donated to the BA by His Highness Sheikh *Hassan Bin Mohammad Bin Ali Al-Thani* of Qatar," stated Wastawy. *Al-Idrisi* was an Andalusian geographer, cartographer, Egyptologist and traveler who lived in Sicily, and is considered one of the most important geographers in the world.

The original manuscript of *Idrisi's* map had seventy sections and seven climate zones of equal horizontal width, divided by ten equal parts of longitude. Although *Idrisi's* map was drawn upside down, it is considered a very prominent contribution in the knowledge available about medieval cartographers.

Another valuable addition to the BA Map Library is the facsimile edition of the *Manuscript Chart of the Gulf and Mesopotamia*, which is among the oldest examples of topographical maps of the Arabian Gulf and Mesopotamia, donated to the BA by Ambassador *Medhat Kamel El Kady* and *Mrs. Heidi Farouk* of Egypt.

The map covers all the territories of the Turkish Empire during the Ottoman rule of Arabia. It depicts the area extending from the upper Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the Turkish territories, Iraq, *Shat al-Arab* and the Arabian

Gulf in its confluence with the Arabian Sea in the South. The map shows navigation routes on one axis; a method which is considered an important breakthrough in map-making during the first third of the 17th century.

The BA Map Library also houses a significant number of globes. Among them is a gemstone globe adorned with Abalone shells, mother of pearl and turquoise, in addition to 25 different stones representing different countries. Another globe is one with three built-in instruments in the base; a thermometer, a barometer and a hygrometer to monitor the weather. In addition, the Map Library holds a physical globe that shows true-to-life color illustrations of mountains, deserts, forests, grasslands and oceans. The globe collection also includes a political globe that contains more than 4,000 places, names and distinctive political boundary markings.



The Map Library Globes

The Map Library also facilitates the process of search for maps and other materials through a number of computers which operate the OPAC system; the BA Online Public Access Catalog, allowing an easier search for materials that can be found by just typing the name of the map, its author or the region it covers. The Library also houses a NASA (The National Aeronautics and Space Administration) computer which contains a program that provides information on the solar system, in addition to the “Google Earth” program.

In order to accommodate the needs of the readers, the Map Library is equipped with special furniture, including map-reading tables, large map-cabinets, cabinets for displaying folded maps, chairs and large map/atlas reading tables. The Library also contains a small exhibition that displays a number of rare maps, donated maps and mapping devices including the *Photogrammetry* device; a manual stereo plotting instrument manufactured in the 70s of the 20th century and donated to the BA by the Cairo Engineering and Manufacturing Company.

ARABIC-LANGUAGE LIBRARY SERVICES AND TOOLS

The recent opening of the Map Library is yet another milestone accomplished in the BA Library Sector’s set of goals for 2010. The Library Sector has published the first part of the *BA Manual of Style*; the first ever Arabic manual of style, making the BA the first library in Middle East to set the standards for Arabic bibliography.

“The Manual will be a great resource for researchers in the Arab World and those who conduct research in Arabic around the world who never had a single source for Arabic citation until now,” affirmed Dr. Wastawy. She added, “In this regard, the BA is preparing to publish the *Manual of Style* in three languages; Arabic, English and French, in order to make Arabic bibliography knowledge available for all.”

The first part of the *BA Manual of Style* handles the different variations of citing formats in the cases of books, journals, theses and websites. The second part shows additional formats such as multi-media material, manuscripts, microforms and more; while the third part covers notes related to all bibliographic formats of the first and second part.

The Library Sector has also achieved a tremendous progress in the *Arab Union Catalog* project, which is conducted at the BA in cooperation with major libraries and

information centers in the Arab World, and aims at making international cataloging tools available in Arabic. The Library Sector has translated 25% of the *Machine-Readable Cataloging* (MARC) format into Arabic, and is expected to complete the entire translation of the *Dewey Decimal Classification* (DDC) into Arabic before the end of 2010.



This year will also witness the beginning of a new phase of the *Big Read Egypt/US*; a project that presents American literature to the Egyptian reader in Arabic, and Egyptian literature to the American reader in English, and introduces various cultural and historical aspects of each country through literature. The project encompasses numerous activities including lectures, discussions, film screenings, play readings, essay and art contests. Activities are divided into phases according to the selected books.

The *Big Read Egypt/US*, which was expected to come to an end after the completion of its third phase in December 2009, will be extended for one more year due to the success it achieved. The *Big Read*

Egypt/US partners include the US Department of State, the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest, the US Embassy in Cairo, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Egyptian partners include the American University in Cairo, the Egyptian Association for Educational Resources and the BA.

As for BA library services in the Arab region, the BA was denoted as the International Federation of Library Association's Center for Arabic-Speaking Libraries (IFLA-CASL), placing the BA librarians as the go-between for IFLA—the global voice of the library and information profession—and all other Arab libraries.

The Center conducts many activities at the BA and during IFLA international events, and began many initiatives towards setting standards for Arabic librarianship. IFLA-CASL works on promoting IFLA in the Arab World and encouraging Arab librarians to engage in professional activities and become IFLA participants.

The Center is currently preparing a fundraising leaflet to allow the creation of an Arab fund for young Arab librarians to attend IFLA annual conferences and fund IFLA Express translators. IFLA-CASL is also in the process of completing the project of creating Arabic Library Standards in cooperation with the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information Institutions (AFLI).

The BA Library Sector has completed a number of projects in 2010 that enhance the unique role of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina as that of a great Egyptian Library with international dimensions. In this regard, the BA Library Sector continues to develop its collection and improve its services and tools, as it strives for richness in its intellectual wealth, while trying to meet the specific needs of its patrons.

“ARTIST’S BOOK”: WHEN ART AND THOUGHT ARE BROUGHT TOGETHER

Kholoud Said

“I was reading a book searching for answers and I forgot my questions.” —Isidro López-Aparicio

Human’s quest for knowledge is as old as mankind. Adam was exiled from Eden because he ate from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, and this pursuit has not ended since. The history of books; the emblem of knowledge, is thus the history of humanity.



*Eric Massholder, La Diane Française,
(Letters of Vincent to his brother Theo)*

A massive annual event with international acclaim, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina International Biennale for the Artist’s Book is a case to ponder on. With a futuristic perspective, it brings together art and thought, the pen and the brush, the book and the painting, the author and the artist.

Held by the BA Arts Center, the Artist’s Book Biennale exemplifies art as a means of communication and dialogue, as part of the BA mission to be “a center for learning, tolerance, dialogue and understanding”.

Biennale has attained an international level among contemporary artists, critics and scholars of the artist’s book. Artists meet in Alexandria to exchange ideas on the values and concepts of the artist’s book where artistic, literary and philosophic expressions merge.

The Biennale also serves as a catalyst for the creativity of the artists who deal with intellectual texts in artistic ways. It was formally comprised of the Artist’s Book and Imagining the Book biennales. In order to focus efforts, it was decided this year to combine both of them in the Artist’s Book Biennale; an art form which has enriched contemporary art since the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Dr. Ismail Serageldin; Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, views the Biennale as “bringing back to plastic art its close relationship with human thought and communication, and opening the way to reconsidering mankind’s documentation, contemplation, analysis and criticism, since the invention of writing and developing means of preservation throughout historical transformations.”

The theme of this Fourth Round of the Biennale is “Nomadism”, also reflecting the BA interest in dialogue between cultures. This theme was also considered by the Italian Art Theorist, Achille Bonito Oliva—coiner of the term “transavantgarde”—as an essential component of any transavantgarde artist.

The General Commissioners; Dr. Fernanda Fedi and Professor Gino Gini, have added the four directions: East, West, South and North, being the domain of nomadic wanderings; and human, cultural and economic interaction in the age of globalization, where people share

their ideas, creations and feelings. Hence, two contradictory forms become evident in this context: globalization and entrenchment.

Globalization nearly dictates predefined systems and unified frameworks, refusing differences and rejecting varieties. On the other extreme, stand pity systems which adhere to their traditions and customs, and remain deaf and blind to whatever goes on in the outside world.

“The artist goes beyond ... the artist wanders ... the artist has found a third pathway; cultural nomadism, which allows the artist to be a citizen of the world. [...] The artist moves physically but above all, with his mind, independently, ready to pick up those signs which urge him on in unusual and creative ways”, in the words of the General Commissioners, thus functioning as the “golden mean” in the words of the classical scholar H.D.F Kitto.

The artist is influenced by the past and transcends the present with an eye on the future. In its very nature, the artist’s book is a unique undefined free space, when compared to “traditional” forms of art. It has the sky as a limit and the heritage of the whole world as a range, with innovation and creativity as key requisitions.

The Biennale was held from 22 April to 25 May 2010, with the participation of 43 artists from 23 countries. Interestingly, the Book and Copyright International Day was commemorated on the second day of the Biennale in a worldwide tribute to books and writers.

The Biennale included a valuable donation from the Milan Artist’s Book Archive (Archivio Libri d’Artista). In addition, the reputable publishing house *La Diane Française* has seven artist books and the complete collection *Musée de Poche* (Pocket Museum) encompassing 22 illustrated works, with four original prints each.

As the Biennale is not just an exhibition for the artist’s book, an artistic workshop preceded it at the Alexandria Workshop Center, 15–19 April, with the participation of 13 artists from 12 countries, in addition to 16 art students and young artists nominated by the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Alexandria, who joined artists in producing artworks, hence benefiting from working side-by-side with established international artists. All these pieces of art will remain to enrich the BA Permanent Artist’s Book Exhibition.



Islam Aly – Egypt (“Orientation”, 11*15 cm)

Last year, the Town Hall of Cartagena, Spain, hosted a BA Exhibition displaying selected works from the previous round of the Artist’s Book Biennale. A concert featuring Cartagena Symphonic Orchestra conducted by Maestro Sherif Mohie El-Din; Director of the BA Arts Center, was held on the fringe lines of the event, also comprising cinema and visual arts, especially works by famous Egyptian filmmaker Shadi Abdel-Salam.

It is now the turn of Cartagena to display publications of the Culture Councilor Department, and the valuable cultural treasures of a three-thousand-year-old city in the Biennale, with the aim of strengthening cultural ties and enriching both Mediterranean shores.

IT'S A DATA DRIVEN WORLD

Dina Elodessy



Rick Rashid lecturing at the BA

Ever since the world began, there was born with Man the drive to know, record and reap from the growing pains of knowledge further fruits. There have been a few major revolutions in the history of mankind that affected the course of civilization, amongst which the most significant were agricultural, industrial and technological advancements. However, we are now living in the wake of the latest and most dramatic one; namely the Information Technology revolution. Computer-based information systems have practically and literally stormed into our lives, leaving their mark on our daily routine and automating the miracles of the human brain.

From cell phones to towel-folding robots, and from wallet computers to text-to-speech recognition facilities, it appears that the computer is becoming far more intelligent than one assumed it to ever be. Certainly, there is more to it than meets the eye!

Well, on the fringe between imagination and scientific truth, Rick F. Rashid; Senior Vice President of Microsoft Research, delivered an enlightening lecture in the BA, on May 18, under the title "It's a Data Driven World".

In his speech, Rashid not only introduced the latest innovations brought up by Microsoft and their impact on research activities worldwide but also demonstrated how far-fetched ideas have turned into reality, recalling how some science fiction movies from the 50s envisaged data crystals as well as communicator devices where people could suddenly be able to talk to anyone, anywhere.

Art is truly then a slice of life, for what was once a figment of an inexhaustible imagination, is now a reality. Those mindboggling communicator devices are nothing other than cell phones, while data crystals were transformed into the much-loved USB memory stick that is "enough to store every conversation you have had from the time you were born to the time when you will die".

But not all predictions moved to the future. "Technology does not always move in a straight line... it is hard to predict how people and cultures will react to technology," Rick Rashid asserted, further explaining how the future can take even very smart people by surprise. There isn't a more famous historical example other than Alexander Graham Bell's famous understatement of the popularity of the telephone: "One day there will be a telephone in every major city in the USA."

Well, as genius as he was, Bell could never have imagined there would be a couple of cell phones for every citizen of the world, that possibility never even crossed his dream-weaving subconscious at its most ambitious moments. Such is the magnificence of the progress achieved and the borders crossed to reach this era of information. Dear citizen of the world, data is the key word!

Humans have always treasured books as traditional and long-standing knowledge repositories. Well, besides these lovable

page-turners, another media may have evolved to include small chips that carry gigabytes and terabytes of memory. In actual fact, throughout his lecture, Rashid thoroughly explained how enormous amounts of data are being employed in problem-solving, and how handcrafted algorithms are being replaced or augmented by solutions learned from data, critical for all natural user interfaces “NUI”. He also shed light on the shift to data-driven Machine Learning, which is basically the study of computer algorithms that improve automatically through experience. Applications range from data-mining programs that discover general rules in large data sets, to information-filtering systems that automatically learn users’ interests.

True, Machine Learning is undergoing a revolution. Scientists and researchers have been working on formulating a set of algorithms and rule-based systems that could encapsulate “intelligence” and capture the underlying structure of language. Rashid showed in Machine Translation, for example, how large volumes of existing parallel text are exploited for systems to improve by learning from human-produced translations. Significantly, he announced that Microsoft will soon launch the Bing Speller program, which will ensure linguistic accuracy, edit and correct grammatical structures.

Rashid then brought to the audience’s attention how this new research paradigm that has evolved in the last few decades; namely data-intensive eScience, has also tackled societal challenges with Machine Learning. Research groups managed to identify genetic and environmental causes of disease and achieve some discoveries in the fight against HIV/AIDS, H1N1 and so forth. He also referred to Phylo D. Net as one of the innovative programs devised by Microsoft to analyze the medical conditions of patients based on given facts and information.

Applying statistical Machine Learning to a broad range of fields has thus proved effective, as Rashid explained. NUI tasks (language, speech and vision) are not the only ones susceptible to data-driven approaches. Some Machine Learning scenarios include social networks that promote and make use of shared tastes, playlists, ratings and recommendations. By logging on to Facebook, we transform our clicks into data. In fact, every single day we open our email inboxes, we are saved from billions of redundant messages. However, such unwanted emails do not sporadically find their way into your Spam folder as a happenstance. Have you ever wondered how this is smoothly done then?

Well, Rashid shed light on how Microsoft Research invented the first machine-learning-based spam filter in 1991. “We’re winning the war” Rashid said, further claiming that the “percent of the average user’s inbox that is spam has been about 5% for about two years now, down from well over 30% early in the fight.” Technology now is also being used for anti-phishing, family safety, and pornography filtering. On the other hand, search and Ad relevance, traffic analysis and prediction, interactive games and 3D maps are among the popular work fields of eScience.

In 1970, Marvin Minsky; the American cognitive scientist in the field of artificial intelligence, predicted that “in from three to eight years, we will have a machine with the general intelligence of an average human being.” Although Minsky was not completely off the mark; Machine Learning, in the words of Rashid, still has to face many challenges; some of which are hundreds of thousands of variables, as well as new analysis algorithms and graphical models.

No matter what the challenges are, the promise of artificial intelligence is becoming more and more promising since natural intelligence is capable of wonders in a world that is fortunate to be data driven.

BIOVISIONALEXANDRIA 2010: FUTURE PROSPECTS

Kholoud Said

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina provides students and researchers with an opportunity to meet eminent scientists, stay updated with the recent discoveries and share experiences. This would perhaps be the highlight of BioVisonAlexandria 2010, that took place at the BA from 12 to 15 April 2010.

The Fifth International Biennial Conference, BioVisionAlexandria 2010, was held as a continuation of the tradition that started in BioVision 1999 in Lyon, France. The BA holds BioVisionAlexandria every even year, alternating with the World Life Sciences Forum held in Lyon every odd year.

The theme of BioVisionAlexandria 2010 was "New Life Sciences: Future Prospects". It aimed to identify the new frontiers in life sciences that will vastly serve humanity and provide hope for solving the world's most pressing issues. The Conference focused on three major themes: Health, Food and Agriculture, and Environment. Each of these themes was addressed by representatives of the greatest minds in industry, science, policy-makers and civil society fields.

The Founder of BioVision Lyon and Chairman of World Life Sciences Forum; Philippe Desmarescaux, spoke about the fast-paced technology in life sciences, the new opportunities in healthcare and environment, and the new obstacles and greater risks resulting from these advances. Desmarescaux highlighted the efforts undertaken by the French government in this regard, and emphasized that this is not enough, since there is an urgent need for global consensus on new measures to tackle these issues. These measures should include new ways of living adapted to each country, scientific and technological progress, and

a more bio-diverse society for sustainable development.

On the Japanese strategy for life sciences and research, Koji Omi; Founder and Chairman of the Science and Technology in Society (STS) Forum, spoke. He mentioned that Japan lacks natural resources and thus human resources are key to the process of change. He emphasized that promotion of science and technology leads to industrial competencies. On the issue of health and medicine, Omi called for bridging the gap between basic research and clinical needs, exploring the new field of personalized medicine, and drug development.



Dr. Hani Helal; Egyptian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, at the BioVisionAlexandria 2010

Dr. Ismail Serageldin; Director of the Library of Alexandria, spoke about the knowledge revolution and the phenomenal speed of change. He called for wisdom in dealing with technological advances, and stated that out-of-control financial markets, new lifestyles, destruction of natural resources and pollution are all practices that call for immediate action. Serageldin reassured the

audience that a better future is attainable and highlighted the new opportunities for the South if they master science education.

On the new challenges facing the world as a result of the knowledge revolution, Serageldin spoke about food insecurity, threats to global agriculture and water scarcity. He called for a second generation of bio-fuels, raising agricultural productivity, improving nutritional content, developing outreach programs for the ultra-poor, and empowering women as a driving force for sustainable development. He also shed lights on bio-robotics, synthetic bio-fuels and artificial intelligence, which in turn raise some ethical issues. Serageldin warned the Arab participants that the Arab World is falling behind in the field of science and technology, which requires more focus on public education and engagement of scientists in policy making.

He also asserted the importance of cherishing dreams and hopes for a better future. "Had it not been for dreams, humans would have still been living in caves," he said. Serageldin demonstrated that we do not lack resources to face current challenges; but lack the will to eradicate hunger, poverty and inequality, and to save the Earth from environmental threats caused by human beings.

In keeping with the tradition of BioVison, the Conference hosted five Nobel Laureates who addressed a large group of students, professors, young people, mid-career and established researchers, business and media people, and the public at large.

Peter Agre; Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 2003, stated that scientific discoveries are vital, but what is even more important is their applications for the benefit of humanity. He stressed that science knows no boundaries or conflicts; it is one common unifying language. Eric Maskin; Nobel Laureate in Economics, 2007, discussed the advantages

and disadvantages of patents. He believes that patents are not always a good option, especially in fields like programming, in which every scientist helps push science forward and in that case patents would lead to limiting creativity and innovation.

Dr. Kurt Wüthrich; Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 2002, discussed his research on proteins, and his long journey in studying genomes. He explained how the sequencing of the DNA would lead to great feats in the study of proteins. Dr. John Robin Warren; Nobel Laureate in Medicine, 2005, explained his work on the discovery of gastric bacteria.

Richard Roberts; Nobel Laureate in Medicine, 1993, emphasized the importance of studying the human genome in Biology, which could lead to producing more food, developing effective anti-bacterial medicine, and producing new and effective therapies.

Over a couple of days, participants discussed pressing issues related to health, food, agriculture and the environment, including fair distribution of knowledge, electronic bridges between the developed and developing world, the human genome, Molecular Biology, biodiversity, the food crisis, bio-fuels, water scarcity, medical ethics, scientific research, climate change, clean energy, biotechnology, bio-robots, translational medicine and geo-engineering.

The closing session of BioVision Alexandria carried messages to young scientists—50% of the Conference attendees were university students and fresh graduates. Richard Roberts encouraged them to foster their desire for knowledge and never take things for granted. His advice was to be skeptical, have a sense of curiosity and use the rational scientific methods of thinking.

"Science may set limits to knowledge, but should not set limits to imagination."
—Bertrand Russell

ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY: A FORM OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

José Ignacio Tejedor



In my personal approach to Arabic and Islamic culture from Spain; a country which had a clear bond with both, I discovered, as many other people did, that Arabic calligraphy can be a source of personal creativity. At the same time, I have learnt that it entailed the expression of feelings of affiliation to a community and belonging to a culture.

When I think about the possibilities of using Arabic calligraphy in Intercultural Arts Education, as an art used for many people, deep in meanings and developed by centuries to-date, I see it as a bridge among cultures.

For Spanish people, it is a great surprise when calligraphy is shown as part of our artistic legacy, not only in Cordoba, Granada or Seville, but in almost all the country. On buildings, sculptures, paintings and objects of all kinds, we find calligraphic inscriptions, existing but invisible because we do not understand them; we admire them, but we do not even distinguish Arabic script from other decorations.

If we carefully read the Suras in the Holy Quran, present on walls and objects, the visual forms disappear to give way to the

meanings of the text. The text surrounds us, yet it seems invisible.

The reason for this “calligraphy shyness”—if we may call it so—is the fact that the Quran is written in Arabic. And because the Quran is the most powerful and enlightened expression of Allah in Islam, Arabic writing becomes the carrier of a sacred scripture. The main reason several people use its alphabet, and transcribe its sounds in their own languages (as in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan or Turkey until the reform of Ataturk in 1929) is its essential presence in religious and social life.

Historically, Arabic calligraphy was highly admired, and that has led it to grow as an art. Arabic calligraphy, as the waters of a river that adapts to all the lands it passes through, and the stroke of the pen, designing creative and suggestive models at all times and places, which have been passed on to other sites. Calligraphy was a contribution of the Arabic language, but has been stylistically enriched by many people, from China to Spain.



Alhambra de Granada is full of calligraphy with other decorations

For example, Al-Andalus, throughout eight centuries glowed with its own light and its influence developed this art not just in Maghreb, but in the heart of Christian courts.

In Spain, Islamic decorative elements are found on monuments, books and articles, sometimes mixed with figurative elements or Eastern Christian art. Of this blend was the birth of a completely Spanish indigenous style, which coexists with the Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance, known as Mudejar.



Alafias are imitations of Arabic calligraphy in Christian art

It uses phrases for decoration; such as the “Bismillah”, the “Fatiha”, the “Shahada” or any word about the Deity that artists found on coins and in books. For example, Fernando Yañez de Almedina; sixteenth-century painter and pupil of Leonardo da Vinci, painted holy figures and Biblical characters dressed in robes decorated with an imitation of the calligraphy known as “Alafia” or “Cufizant” script.

For all we observe, we would say that Arabic calligraphy is a part of history and belongs to the past. However, paradoxically, it has been influencing the minds and imaginations of calligraphers and other artists until our time. In the second half of the 20th century, there appeared a modern artistic movement that has for its inspiration an element of vanguard; the “Hurufiyya”.



Calligraphy arrived to the East at the Begijn's Jamaa from the 9th century

In this specific Arabic school, calligraphy has been observed from the perspective of modern art, and it has been discovered in its aspects of great plastic values: expressive, compositional and abstract.

At the same time, new technologies (media and design) have opened amazing new ways for the diffusion and formal development of this art in advertising, logos, posters and publications.



Hurufiyya brings calligraphy to Plastic Arts like this by Mustafa Rashad of Cairo

There has been a wide diffusion of calligraphy, in the urban space and the main areas of life, such as in education centers, exhibitions, international fairs and museums that provide today a cultural service, and oftentimes play an educational role for people.



Arabic calligraphy

Even some public and private institutions that promote artistic and intercultural education, prepare different activities with Arabic calligraphy. For example, the Library of Alexandria, with a clear objective to eliminate the barriers to knowledge and communication, holds workshops, lectures and meetings for Arabic, Coptic and Hieroglyphic calligraphies.

Arabic calligraphy links people and cultures when they use it to communicate and create. So, it works in two different ways: expressive and experiential. It can mix beauty with broad aspects of the visual culture, and its practice is an exercise in personal growth.

Since I began teaching Intercultural Art, I saw Arabic calligraphy as a major source of inspiration and growth for the students—connecting them with new realities, and broadening their comprehension and creativity. For me, it is the most powerful key to open the mind and heart to positive and significant experiences from Arabic and Islamic culture, very different from the distorted image transmitted by TV and the media.

People who learn this art realize that they possess a valuable and important tool of

creation, one of the best achievements of the Arab-Islamic civilization; a space where they can express themselves, and know their neighbors from other cultures and feel closer to them.

Calligraphy has in itself the strongest features of the human being: language ability, manual skill, aesthetic sensibility and a sense of transcendence. So, calligraphy is the most human of all arts and contains the essence of our humanity.

As a Hadith says: “God is beautiful and loves beauty,” and I propose to write a more beautiful and dignified world, to make us happier and better persons.

José Ignacio Tejedor studied Arabic Philology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, and obtained his MA in Immigration from the Universidad Pontificia de Comilla. He then worked as an Intercultural Mediator and Educator. In 1996, he began his career as an artist, and in 2003, he started teaching Creative and Intercultural Arts. He is currently working on his PhD thesis entitled “Arabic Calligraphy: Perspectives and Educational Proposals for the Intercultural Art Education” at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

A TASTE OF ALEXANDRIA: A COSMOPOLITAN FLAVOR

Sarah Elhaddad

The exciting study of food history often presents a fascinating buffet of facts and menus. For a city like Alexandria, the rewards of diversity and cosmopolitanism is experienced through the delicious journey of exploring the eating habits of its people, and the exquisite recipes of its rich cuisine, that makes developing a passion for its cosmopolitan flavor simply irresistible.

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center (Alex Med), tells the secrets of the Alexandrian cuisine in its recent publication *A Taste of Alexandria: A Cosmopolitan Flavor*, which is no less than a slice of Alexandria's modern social history, sampled through its gastronomy.

Savoring the Taste of Alexandria

Tracking the history of Alexandrian food, editors; Mohamed Awad and Sahar Hamouda, reveal that since its founding in 331 BCE, Alexandria has been associated with food and abundance, as food has been used as a symbol of the wealth and exoticism of the city. Cleopatra was always connected to lavish banquets, and her table

was an indication of the luxury Alexandrians enjoyed.

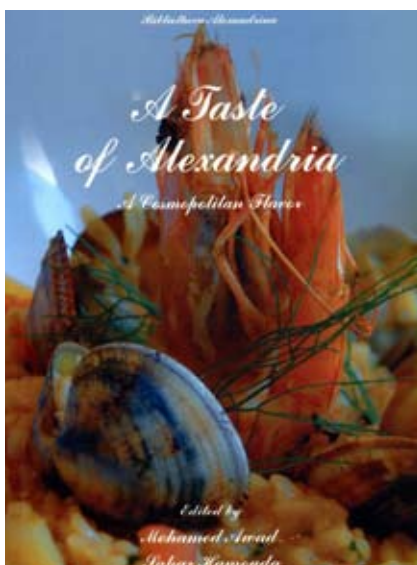
This perhaps was the greatest era of Alexandrian cuisine, for Egypt was then the wealthiest country in the world and its queen was erudite, sophisticated and sensuous. However, Alexandria sank into poverty and disease, and did not revive until the early 19th century. When Mohamed Ali became Wali of Egypt in 1805, he realized the strategic importance of Alexandria, as well as the need to expand the arsenal and strengthen the fleet.

Foreigners were encouraged to settle in Alexandria and people flocked to her from the four corners of the earth bringing with them cultural baggage, and wealth it had not seen for centuries. With this ethnic diversity and wealth came a cuisine that partook of all those cultures. Menus and eating habits became more elaborate, and dinners reflected the cosmopolitan nature of Alexandria, where cultures and cuisines mixed.

From *Alakefak* to *McDonald's*

In *A Taste of Alexandria*, editors introduce the existing as well as lost eateries of Alexandria, giving readers the opportunity to sail through a gallery of the most famous restaurants and patisseries, and surf a number of rare shots for such eateries, comparing them to their buildings and menus of today.

The earliest eateries still extant in the city were established around 1900, most were built in the European town, or the city center, and were the haunts of the foreign population and Westernized Egyptians. The Egyptian eateries were to be found around *Attarine*, *Rue de Bourse*, *Ramleh*, and *Bahari*; the Arab and Turkish parts of Alexandria. These served a different kind of food altogether.



In the present time, American fast food chains have invaded *Ramleh*, just as they have taken over the city center, and old Egyptian restaurants like *Alakefak* transformed into *McDonald's*. Sandwich joints have mushroomed all over the city, and while in the past having tea and cakes was a leisurely affair in grand patisseries like *Trianon*, today's famous patisseries, like *Delight* and *Pumpkin*, offer their cakes only as take-away.



Delices Patisserie now

Places including *Miramar Café*, *Café de la Paix* and *Athineos* were—and remain to this day—one of the most famous eateries in Alexandria, and a very important attraction in the city. Such venues became favorites among locals and foreigners from every social class. Union restaurant, for example, had a table reserved for famous Egyptian singers including *Abdel Halim Hafez* and *Om Kolthoum*. The wedding and coronation cakes of King Farouk were baked at *Delices*; a patisserie established in 1922 by Greek *Cleovolous Moustakas*.

Aklet Samak (A Meal of Fish)

As Alexandrian specialties attract people from all walks of life, *A Taste of Alexandria* reveals the types of food Alexandria is most

famous for, and tells the story behind each of them. Among them all, *Kebda Iskandarani* (liver) is the most famous Alexandrian specialty. Liver is cooked with thyme, cumin and chilipepper, and is served with green pepper, lemon and watercress, which makes it very special, and very Alexandrian.

Seesa, *Abo Gharib* and *Awlad El-Fallah* master the profession in Alexandria, expanding their business from a single cart to a series of branches across the city. "This is what the family has always done, and *El-Fallah* truly is part of the Alexandrian experience," says *Haj Wahid of El Fallah*.

Something quite known to Egyptians and locals is that Alexandria, being a Mediterranean city, is most famous for its fish and seafood, that can be bought in every shape and size, and in so many ways. Households in Alexandria are used to buying their fish fresh from several markets such as *Souq Shedia* or *Souq Zananairi*. However, nothing beats a meal of fish (*Aklet Samak*) in an open air restaurant facing the sea such as *Zephyrion*, *Qadura*, and *Hosni*, where customers are allowed to choose their fish, crabs, lobsters, shrimps and squid from boxes of crushed ice.

As people around the world gather around different forms of drinks, editors explain that coffee is the necessary accompaniment in any entertainment in Alexandria. The Egyptian coffee house *Ahwa* (called just like the beverage), became part of the Egyptian culture, with its simple wooden chairs, and small tables. "Coffee houses were not just places where idlers passed the time, they were places where one gleaned the news of the world."

Although *Starbucks*, *Cilantro* and *Beans* are all the rage now, the *Ahwas*, such as *Café de la Paix* and *El Ahwa El Togareyya*, remain institutions that will continue to reign supreme in Alexandria.



Café de la Paix

Frescaaa

Fresca—caramelized peanuts, or pistachios wedged between two wafers—is one of many foods which names vendors scream on the streets of the Mediterranean city, and which are all listed in *A Taste of Alexandria*, including sugarcane juice, tamarind, corn on the cob, sweet potatoes, *coloria* (*smeet bel doa'ah*), and cotton candy.

Food is also a main ingredient in most folk and religious occasions in Alexandria; most of them displayed in the publication. The types of food prepared on different occasions such as births, weddings and funerals are listed.

A Taste of Alexandria also tells the secrets behind the special food of *Sham el Nessim* (spring feast); Egypt's oldest feast, in addition to Christian fasting, *Eid el-Fitr* (smaller bairam), *Eid el-Adha* (greater bairam) and the Holy Month of Ramadan; the Islamic month of fasting.

In addition to the restaurants, patisseries and specialties of Alexandria, *A Taste of Alexandria* lists the most famous Alexandrian food-related industries and activities. One of the most famous factories built in Alexandria is the Royal Chocolate Factory founded by the Greek chocolatier Tommy Christo in the industrial district of *Hadara* in the 1930s, which was the first of its kind, not just in

Egypt, but in all the Near East. The book also reveals that Alexandria did not only excel at sweets and chocolates; it also boasts the first dairy plant in the whole of the Middle East; the SICLAM factory, which was started in *Mandara* in 1952 as “Mandara Farm” by Jan Landart; a Swiss national.

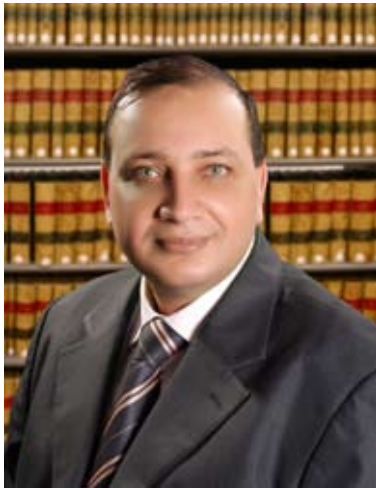
A Taste of Alexandria: A Cosmopolitan Flavor, gives readers a true taste of the city which was formed by the lively mosaic of races, languages and cuisines, by combining recipes from many different cuisines including the Alexandrian, Armenian, British, French, German, Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Libyan, Moroccan, Palestinian, Spanish, Swedish, Swiss, Syrian and Turkish. It is not a book full of recipes, nor is it a history of food in Alexandria. Rather, it is—as its title indicates—a taste of what cosmopolitan Alexandria was like, experienced through its food.



Fresca

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN PROMOTING ISLAMIC TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

Khaled Azab



The media is an important tool for communication, and should, therefore, be used in the promotion of traditional handicrafts, both locally and internationally.

However, before talking about promoting traditional handicrafts, I have to mention its current status, and I will use the Islamic World as an example. There is no doubt that it is deteriorating, especially after the invasion of forged Chinese replicas produced in huge numbers.

In this regard, perhaps the first thing that we should build upon is the need to register intellectual property rights concerning the reproduction of the reserved antiques in Islamic World museums, so as not to be reproduced by other States that do not have the right to do so.

It is also important to emphasize the distinction between the quantity of the reproductions of archaeological objects, and the quality of the handmade production created by someone's skills. Unfortunately, the Islamic World still relies on the second pattern only, which is very expensive, and

targets limited number of customers. On the other hand, the first pattern is still negligible; a matter that interests many groups wishing to obtain these holdings without paying a lot.

So, how can the media support the issues of preservation and promotion of traditional crafts?

There are few Internet sites that display Islamic traditional crafts. Therefore, multiple sites should be created on the Internet to introduce these crafts and their popular models, artists and centers of production in a way that will help promote this sector.



Decoration of Wooden Boxes

It also helps to have the craftsman's signature on the handmade pieces, and create records for them. This will facilitate tracking their dates of production after they are sold and circulated in the market. And here comes the role of the media in availing this information through the press, television and other kinds of mass media, raising the value of the products and informing the public. This system was applied in ancient Islamic arts, where the artisan recorded his works and signed his products. The signatures of many Muslim artisans, helped us today in dating some masterpieces and originating their inscriptions, affecting the value considerably.



Metal Crafts

The media should also prepare documentary movies in different languages, about these crafts; highlighting some crafts such as carpet weaving in Tunisia, Arabic calligraphy in Turkey and Iran, the “khayamiah” work in Egypt and ceramic industries in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. This will put the artists in the spotlight in an interesting and attractive way.



Innovation Forms in the Design of Wooden Boxes

We can also publish postcards and brochures to introduce the public to these crafts, and prepare catalogues that highlight the most important Islamic handicrafts.

But how can we develop an integrated plan to help and promote this industry?

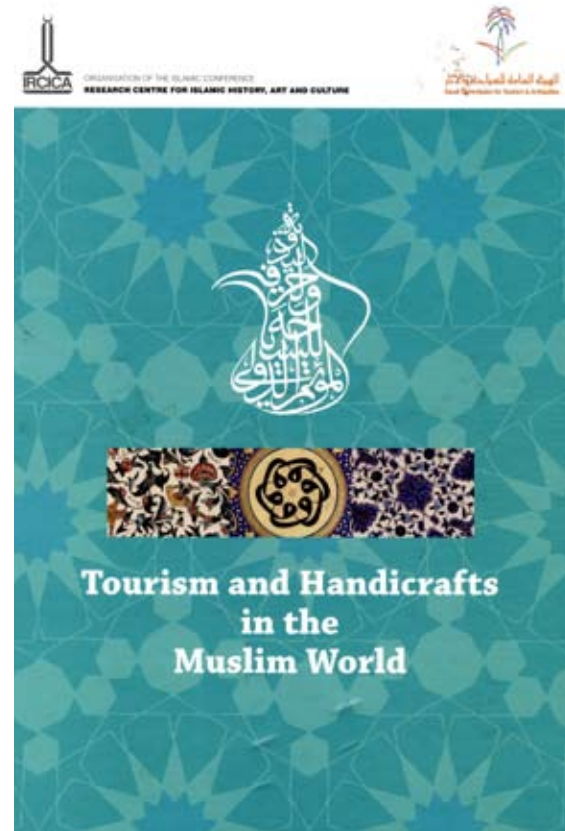
One suggestion is to develop this traditional crafts program by establishing a “fund” to support traditional crafts. This, which may be first financed by banks and companies, shall later generate “income” from the distribution of all the above-mentioned media products.

The profits should then go to the creation of educational and training programs for the craftsmen specialized in Islamic traditional crafts.



Variety of Displayed Craft Objects

This article was published in ‘Tourism and Handicrafts in the Muslim World’. The journal is published by the Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture; Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities.



Words to Remember

“If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity.”
—*John Kennedy*

“Despite the ethnic diversity within each nation, the social fabric of the region by and large is one.” —*Bashar al-Assad*

“Diversity in the world is a basic characteristic of human society, and also the key condition for a lively and dynamic world as we see today.” —*Jinato Hu*

“Diversity: the art of thinking independently together.” —*Malcolm Forbes*

“It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.” —*Maya Angelou*

“There never were in the world two opinions alike, no more than two hairs or two grains; the most universal quality is diversity.” —*Michel de Montaigne*

“What we have to do... is to find a way to celebrate our diversity and debate our differences without fracturing our communities.” —*Hillary Clinton*

“In a post 9/11 world, diversity has become even more important.” —*Jane Harman*

“Our cultural diversity has most certainly shaped our national character.” —*Julie Bishop*

“Rise above sectional interests and private ambitions... Pass from matter to spirit. Matter is diversity; spirit is light, life and unity.” —*Muhammad Iqbal*

“Mankind can find happiness only in unity, not in diversity.” —*Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

“The important thing is the diversity available on the Web.” —*Tim Berners-Lee*

“The war we have to wage today has only one goal and that is to make the world safe for diversity.” —*U. Thant*

“Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common. Celebrate it every day.” —*Anonymous*

“We have no hope of solving our problems without harnessing the diversity, the energy and the creativity of all our people.” —*Roger Wilkins*

