A Message from Bibliotheca Alexandrina Director
Dr. Moustafa El Feki

These are unprecedented times, when the world at large is witnessing global lockdowns, restrictions of movement, and lack of familiar means of connecting. Never before has the value of “virtual” connections been so prominent. But it is equally a time where countries have shown perhaps the utmost unity in the struggle to combat a truly common threat, regardless of color, race, creed or ideology.

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina, since its birth, has also had the valuable, unified support of many countries and friends from around the world. In ancient times, the Library of Alexandria was a haven for intellectual thought and new discoveries – many of which affected the understanding of its surrounding world. Philosophers, scientists and poets alike, travelled from afar to add their contribution to the depository of knowledge at the ancient Library. Those who were unable to journey, were strong supporters and waited anxiously for news of enlightened theories that came thereof.

And so, the new Library of Alexandria, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, continued its tradition of global enquiry and support. The network of the International Friends of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (IFBA) was a natural continuation of ancient traditions – a gathering of professionals from around the world culminating in their thirst for promoting common goals of intercultural dialogue; producing and disseminating knowledge; and connecting with the like-minded wherever they may be and regardless of any physical constrictions. The IFBA have been helping in supporting the BA’s pillars many years before the physical columns were erected within its halls.

The launch of this newsletter will provide an extra opportunity to shed light on the numerous activities and types of support that each of the IFBA chapters do individually, and collectively, to be the world’s window on Egypt. They provide donations; books, collectibles and monetary. They provide access to training opportunities and internships. They provide ideas for new collaborative projects. But most of all, they provide momentum, enthusiasm and their time for the love of the BA.

I look forward to these regular updates, and hope that they bring with them the impetus for more avid supporters to join this ever-growing network, and hope that we will overcome this current crisis that is keeping us apart, in order to reunite once again at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

Editor’s Message
Tharwat Abouraya

We are all still struggling with this most devastating event for the nonprofit community globally. My experience in past crises has convinced me that we have a natural optimism that enables us to persevere through these challenges. And that optimism and perseverance will get us through this global pandemic as well.

Our wings may be folded, but we will emerge - and through it all, we must nurture our support for the BA and the multicultural excitement which is the focus of our IFBA.

The virtual platforms and IFBA newsletter are excellent opportunities to connect with Chapter members. It is an
opportunity to embrace technology more than before. We must engage all our chapter members and connect with those members who aren’t connected; be active - reach out to them, tell them that they’re valued and missed. Provide them with mentorship, if needed. Winston Churchill once said: “Never waste a good crisis:** we have to maintain our services by continuing to support the BA during these difficult times, like the goodwill message we sent in 14 languages to the BA staff & employees. IFBA collectively has specialists with expertise in business operations, marketing, and public relations to support your Chapter activities as needed. We hope some of these experts will come from your Chapter - and we urge you also to nominate members who deserve special recognition in this regular newsletter. I am also interested in receiving short articles about your activities and news. To quote Pope Francis, “Rivers do not drink their own water; trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves. Living for others is a rule of nature. We are all born to help each other. No matter how difficult it is…Life is good when you are happy; but much better when others are happy because of you.”

Alexandria’s destruction in 365AD:
an eye-witness report

By David Wardrop – President of the UK Chapter

The protection of Alexandria’s archaeological treasures has always concerned IFBA members as the city authorises construction of new buildings on the footprint of the ancient city. But how did the city come to be destroyed on 21 July 365AD, leaving a megaturbitide, a metres-thick deposit of ocean silt? For an eye-witness report, the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus tells us in detail, distinguishing the three main phases of a tsunami, namely an initial earthquake, the sudden retreat of the sea and an ensuing gigantic wave rolling inland:

“Slightly after daybreak, and heralded by a thick succession of fiercely shaken thunderbolts, the solidity of the whole earth was made to shake and shudder, and the sea was driven away, its waves were rolled back, and it disappeared, so that the abyss of the depths was uncovered and many-shaped varieties of sea-creatures were seen stuck in the slime; the great wastes of those valleys and mountains, which the very creation had dismissed beneath the vast whirlpools, at that moment, as it was given to be believed, looked up at the sun’s rays. Many ships, then, were stranded as if on dry land, and people wandered at will about the paltry remains of the waters to collect fish and the like in their hands; then the roaring sea as if insulted by its repulse rises back in turn, and through the teeming shoals dashed itself violently on islands and extensive tracts of the mainland, and flattened innumerable buildings in towns or wherever they were found. Thus, in the raging conflict of the elements, the face of the earth was changed to reveal wondrous sights. For the mass of waters returning when least expected killed many thousands by drowning, and with the tides whipped up to a height as they rushed back, some ships, after the anger of the watery element had grown old, were seen to have sunk, and the bodies of people killed in shipwrecks lay there, faces up or down.”

In the 1990s, extensive excavation in the harbour commenced, coinciding with initial groundwork for the new library, a matter of controversy at the time. But could there be a better way to ensure all treasures could be retrieved? In the next Newsletter, I will report on proposals at the time to speed up excavations by draining the Eastern harbour.

Greek Chapter’s New President
“Exceptional Woman of Excellence”

C. Sofianou
President of the Greek Chapter

On May 12th, 2020, the Greek Chapter, coordinated by Emmanouil Giannakoudakis, organized a video conference call, which had on its agenda the resignation of our beloved President and former Minister, Mr. Andreas Zaimis, who proposed that Mrs. C. Sofianou should take over the position of President of the Greek Chapter of IFBA and the Secretary General E. Giannakoudakis should become First Vice-President. The rest of the members of the Board of Directors should continue to keep their current positions. Both proposals of our former President were unanimously accepted by all the other members of the Board of the Greek Chapter.
Also, Mr. Andreas Zaimis has been unanimously elected as “Honorary President” and has promised on my request to be present at the meetings of the Greek Chapter, as well as at the Annual Meeting of IFBA, which takes place every year in October.

As an invited guest, I was honoured to speak on the advantages of women as business leaders at the Women’s Economic Forum that took place in Cairo from March the 5th to March the 9th, 2020. I was also very glad to receive the Award of Exceptional Woman of Excellence.

Finally, I would like to share an optimistic message which resonated very much with me: if you want to change the world, go home and love your family (Mother Teresa). Thinking positive makes a big difference in your life...

Stay safe and think only positively!

**Criss-Crossing the Oceans Virtually**

*The Friends of the BA Maryland, Virginia, D.C. Chapter*

Karen Leggett, CO-President

For many of us, online meetings and classes and webinars are a new adventure necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For many others - including a large number of international NGOs – this type of virtual exchange has been happening in small and large ways for many years, especially at the university level but also for children and even families.

The BA’s Head of Children and Young People’s Library Section, Dalia Elkony, began the Dialogues for Peace several years ago with Cynthia Milani of the Italian and French Friends. Children in participating schools hold live conversations online and also share art, poetry and essays – much of it displayed during our last IFBA meeting in Alexandria.

The Friends of the BA Maryland, Virginia, D.C. (and its umbrella organization, Baltimore Luxor Alexandria Sister City Committee) is an active member of the Virtual Exchange Coalition, which meets regularly to share resources and ideas. A key participant is the Stevens Initiative - developed with the family of Ambassador Chris Stevens, who was killed in the Benghazi, Libya, bombing in 2012. The Stevens Initiative provides training and funding to make virtual, life-changing, cross-cultural experiences available to large numbers of young people. The Stevens Initiative works primarily in the Middle East but its training opportunities and resources are widely available to anyone. The next training program is available for free on June 17, 8-9am Eastern Time (US). Register here. This session, open to anyone but designed with MENA region audience members in mind, will address key virtual exchange elements, ways to engage, and opportunities and resources for support.

The most recent meeting of the Virtual Exchange Coalition included presentations on cultural humility, building trust, and communicating across cultures and indeed oceans. You may watch these interesting presentations here.

Other organizations with programs possibly of interest to IFBA members include World Learning, Global Nomads Group, iEARN, Learning Life, LearnSErve International, MapWorks Learning - Narrative Atlas online platform and Soliya.

‘On Rhetoric: the Link between Classical & Arab Rhetoric’

**Latvian Chapter IFBA**

Ilze Rūmniece, President

& Viktoria Moskina

Right now, as Covid-19 permits us, for the most part, to meet exclusively online, we can look back at the in-person lecture of the 25th of January in the National Library of Latvia (NLL) organised by the Latvian Friends Association of the Library of Alexandria with a certain feel of nostalgia. The theme was ‘On Rhetoric: the Link between Classical and Arab Rhetoric.’ The tradition of classical European culture of speech and conversation met with the classical principles of Arab art of speech.

Such a meeting and comparison of various examples was prepared by professors Ilse Rūmniece (Classical Philologist)
and Ingrīda Kleinhofa (Specialist of Arabistics and Orientalistics) of the University of Latvia.

Educational activities for young adults and other interested persons became an integral part of the Friends of the Library of Alexandria group in Latvia. January’s open lecture was a third event of ‘Alexandria readings’ cycle, and we hope to continue later this year.

The NLL was closed to the public for more than two and a half months, and gradually resumed serving readers in person on 26th of May. Currently, in the atrium of the ground floor is operating a temporary reading room with 50 workspaces, making the NLL a well-connected two-meter library. Visiting the library became a vital part of modern society’s life, so-called ‘third’ place; therefore, students and researchers who had long awaited this moment welcomed re-opening of the physical space. It is too early to dream of the good old times, but we hope that the Bibliotheca Alexandrina will have the opportunity to share this special moment with their readers soon. As Charles Dickens said – ‘The pain of parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again.’

IFBA Elections – 2020

- IFBA will elect new Officers at the next Annual Meeting. Details will follow but this summary will assist Chapters prepare:
  - Positions in the IFBA are: The Chair; Vice-Chair; and Secretary,
  - Only members of recognized Chapters are eligible, and they must have attended at least two Annual Meetings prior to nomination,
  - Officers will hold their positions for two years and may stand for re-election,
  - Nominations must be submitted 3 months before the meeting (c. 15 July) with confirmation that the nominee has agreed, and with a 100-word statement of intention in English.
  - Nominations will be published on the BA IFBA webpages and by email, enabling Chapters to consult their own members before they cast their single vote for each position,
  - The newly appointed officers will work with the outgoing officers and the BA during the Annual Meeting to ensure a smooth transition.

My memories of cooperation with BA

II- The construction period

In 1995, when work began to create the foundations for the library, the French government, responding to the request of the Egyptian authorities, seconded a library curator as scientific and technical advisor to the project director general, Dr Zahran. Madame Jacqueline Leroy was the first French advisor.
General curator of libraries with a great deal of experience, she set up a scholarship policy for the training of young French-speaking Egyptian librarians and began to build up the collection of books in French.

The training policy has continued to the present day. This is the main focus of the French Chapter’s action. In the form of grants for internships in France or to follow a diploma course at ENSSIB (Ecole Nationale Superieure des Sciences de l'information et des Bibliotheques) this policy has benefited 70 BA librarians. Distance learning has also been favored since 1999 and developed to date with the creation in 2018 of a fully online University Diploma, the DUSIB (Diplôme Universitaire en Sciences de l'Information et des Bibliothèques).

Jacqueline Leroy having had to leave her post in 1997 for health reasons I was called to replace her as an advisor to Dr Zahran.

I came to settle in Alexandria where I stayed from 1997 to 2001. I lived on rue des pharaons in a very beautiful 1931 “art deco” building and for almost five years I had one of the most beautiful professional and human experiences in my life. First of all because for a librarian, it is like a dream to work to rebuild the most prestigious of all the libraries that human history has known. Secondly, because I know nothing more exhilarating than following the progress of a large construction site. Finally, because of Alexandria, Alexandria the unique, the melancholy, the bewitching, Egyptian and cosmopolitan, Egyptian and universal.

Regarding construction, I had already followed the site of the new national library in Paris. This, of course, was very useful to me. But in Alexandria it was even more interesting. Firstly, because the project was smaller and more compact than in Paris and therefore easier to master. Second, because the architecture proposed by SNØHETTA and HAMZA Associates is truly extraordinary. Not only is it the largest single-unit reading room in the world, but it also has outstanding aesthetic and functional qualities. It is a kind of ideal library because it is very rare that aesthetics and functionality come together. Often, it must be said, architects impose their vision of a building without worrying too much about how it will work.

The opposite is true for Bibliotheca Alexandrina. And this was symbolized by the architect that the SNØHETTA cabinet had delegated on site for the daily monitoring of the site, Christoph Kapeller, with whom I therefore had the chance to work for four years. This architect gave me the chance for an ongoing dialogue. At each stage, for each major question, we debated, the project director, the architect and me. This is very rare. That’s why it’s an unforgettable memory. Added to this is the pride of having been able to work on what is today a library model. But, of course, there were other aspects to the French cooperation - notably the largest book donation the BA has received. It will be the next chapter.

The Centre du Cerveau/Brain Exploratorium

The Planetarium Science Museum at the BA, directed by Mr. Ayman Elsayad, is devoted to science, but it lacks anything about the human brain, which he told us would be an interesting addition. So the French Chapter has submitted a proposal to Mr. Elsayed. This is an area in which several of our members have expertise, and would be a way for those of us who are interested to contribute something of lasting value to the Library, even a legacy.
Our mission with the proposed “Centre du Cerveau” or “BrainExploratorium” is to provide a state-of-the-art innovative learning center to help BA visitors explore the basics of neuroscience and understand how the human brain works, and how healthy child development occurs.

Mr. Elsayed has very generously suggested the possibility of using 200 sq meters of exhibition space in The ALEXploratorium for this project. Activities would target children and youth, as well as their parents. Our team would help procure funding and materials for interactive exhibitions, workshops, “edutainment” games, video and digital support, books, and art projects. The goal is to allow visitors to explore the brain to better understand where emotions, decision making, language, even culture and bias, disabilities and genius come from.

With 1.5 million visitors to the Library every year, there will be very important exposure for any entity that would like to make a donation. The following is a list of possible donors (financial and in-kind) we could contact on behalf of the BA, which is our next step:

- IFBA members (to be discussed at our next meeting)
- Alexandria hotels, where visitors could stay
- UNESCO
- Science Organizations
- Centers for neurodiversity and neurological disorders
- Craftsmen and suppliers who provide assistance in the ALEXploratorium
- Libraries could provide materials
- Schools could provide learning materials

A plaque or other form of recognition could be placed in the center for donors.

We have had interest from Emmanuel Yannakoudakis to provide personality testing for children; Annica Dahlstrom to share some of her fascinating work on the male/female brain; Aida Khalafalla to provide much needed donations.

Mr. Elsayed has confirmed in a recent update that any donations or agreements will be handled by the BA, in accordance with their legal and financial procedures. They will be responsible for final implementation. Donations should be initiated via a letter to Dr Elfeky clarifying the project and purpose of the funds or donation, along with the names of anyone participating in the donation of time, money, or contributions.