

Library of Alexandria Supercourse

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Dear friends of the Supercourse and the Library of Alexandria,

I have recently retired. I had a wonderful 38 years in the Department of Epidemiology. I have been planning my retirement. I would recommend retirement to most. Within the first week of retirement I lost in the back of my brain this pressure which I frequently thought my head would explode, you all probably have this right now! It is a nice life, getting up, drink coffee, read the NYTimes, go to the gym for an hour, eat lunch, and then spend the rest of my day working with the library of Alexandria to improve research productivity in Africa and developing countries. It definitely is not boring.

In my retirement we have shifted directions quite a bit. Our main effort is now at the Library of Alexandria in Egypt. I wanted to describe for you a little bit about this glorious place. About a decade ago, Jan (my wife) and I went to Egypt to give a series of courses on epidemiology. Course organizers kindly toured us throughout Egypt. On one of the last stops we went to the New Library of Alexandria before it was opened. I went into the library and told Jan, this is where the Supercourse must be. I then proceeded to write to Dr. Serageldin, the brilliant head of the Library. He must of thought I was crazy, but then invited me to the Library at the time of the opening ceremonies. We became great friends. Also the Supercourse became probably the first outside project at the Library in 2300 years.

“Your Library is your paradise” (Erasmus)

We have all heard about the library of Alexandria. I would highly recommend that you all go to visit and we can help with arranging a tour. I thought I would present to you in the next few newsletters a little about the ancient history, that Dr. Serageldin has summarized.

Ancient Library of Alexandria by Ismail Serageldin, Ph.D.

“The very name of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina conjures up the image of a glorious past, of a shared heritage, not just between Greece and Egypt, nor even of the whole Mediterranean, but a shared heritage for all of humanity. For it was indeed at the Ancient Library of Alexandria that the greatest adventure of the human intellect was to unfold.

2300 years ago, Alexander the Great, Aristotle's pupil, brought his dream of culture and conquest, of uniting the world and launching a new era to the timeless land of Egypt. Alexander selected the site for a new capital: Alexandria. His successors in Egypt, the Ptolemies, built Alexandria, and made it the intellectual capital of the world. Its lighthouse, the Pharos, was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. But a greater legacy was the Ancient Library of Alexandria. Launched in 288 BC by Ptolemy I (Soter) under the guidance of Demetrius of Phaleron, the temple to the muses, or Mouseion (in greek), or museum (in latin) was part academy, part research center, and part library. The great thinkers of the age, scientists, mathematicians, poets from all civilizations came to study and exchange ideas.

As many as 700,000 scrolls, the equivalent of more than 100,000 modern printed books, filled the shelves. The library was open to scholars from all cultures. Girls and boys studied regularly at the Ancient Library. On this very spot:

- Aristarchus was the first person to state that the earth revolves around the sun, a full 1800 years before Copernicus;
- Eratosthenes proved that the earth was spherical and calculated its circumference with amazing accuracy, 1700 years before Columbus sailed on his epic voyage
- Hipparchus established the first atlas of the stars and calculated the length of the solar year accurately to within 6.5 minutes
- Callimachus the poet described the texts in the library organized by subject and author, becoming the father of library science,
- Euclid wrote his elements of geometry, the basic text studied in schools all over the world even now
- Herophylus identified the brain as the controlling organ of the body and launched a new era of medicine
- Manetho chronicled the pharaohs and organized our history into the dynasties we use to this day
- Zenodotus and the grammarians established the basics of literary scholarship with their meticulous definition of the Homeric text for the Iliad and the Odyssey”

A book has a smell. A new book smells great. An old book smells even better. An old book smells like ancient Egypt (Bradbury)

(to be continued)

As you know our Supercourse network and library is perhaps the largest and most used in health. The BA Supercourse of science has 163,000 lectures and the Research Methods Library of Alexandria is the largest and most complete library for research methods, and statistics.

BA Africa: We have decided in 2015 to expand our efforts called BA Africa. The Library of Alexandria will be working to improve scientific training, research, and scientific productivity. Let me describe on very interesting project, which we would like to have you join, the BA Africa Health Supercourse.

About 3 months ago Eugene Shubnikov from Russia, Kammal from the Library and I decided to build a lecture library. This was the result of our Ebola Lecture which was developed by Musa Kana with help

from with Drs. Elegba, Bello-Manga, Adiri and members of Faculty of Medicine at Kaduna State in Nigeria. It was a wonderful lecture, and was unique as it presented Ebola looked at from an African Lens. We then thought it would really interesting to establish a library of lectures about global health from African scientists. We therefore developed the BA Africa Supercourse, which has 230 PowerPoint lectures on a wide range of topics such as AIDs, CHD in Africa, Ebola, etc. These provide a very unique picture of health in Africa, from the perspective of Africa. This is one of several BA Africa projects and it will be used quite frequently.

Historical Lectures:

In 2015 we will also be providing to you information about Historical Lectures: In the early 2000s we decided to teach the world about prevention. Faina Linkov constructed a “prevention lecture” in a very unique way. She used slides from many other lectures in the Supercourse to construct a composite lecture on prevention. This lecture has been looked at over 100,000 times. If you search on “Prevention Lectures”, it 56,000,000 sites are found, and her prevention lecture is Number 1. We urge you to share this with your students, all students and your colleagues

Please write to me (ronaldlaporte@gmail.com) if you have comments

Best regards from the Library of Alexandria Team

Ron, Ismail, Faina, Eugene, Vint, Gil, Francois, Malcolm, Mita, Nicholas, Musa, Michele, Mary, Shimon, Abu Zar, Hong Kyu, Hiryo, Eric, Rashid, Mita