

KYTHERIAN WORLD HERITAGE FUND

# 1916 Australian Hellenic book now housed in the BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA, Egypt

*In keeping with its policy of collecting unique publications from around the world, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) now counts, I ZOI EN AUSTRALIA (Life in Australia), amongst its collection. First published in Sydney in 1916, this historic book has been re-published, with a companion English translation.*



*The 12th annual meeting of the International Friends of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2009. The various heads of the Friends from all corners of the globe, meet in Alexandria on a regular basis. The enthusiasm of the individuals at this gathering radiates from this photograph. Dr Ismail Serageldin is in the centre of the photo. Australia's Ambassador to Egypt, Her Excellency Stephanie Schwabsky, is standing next to him. Chairs and Friends from countries from around the world industriously collect books to "gift" to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina on an on-going basis.*

This is the first time Australian Hellenic publications have been donated to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, a joint venture of the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt. Aside from being an important first chronicle of Hellenic involvement in Australian history and culture, it provides snapshots of life in Australia in 1916.

Dr Ismail Serageldin, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, gratefully acknowledged the donation of the historic books as a fitting tribute from the Australian Hellenic community. In particular, he noted *I Zoi en Australia* as being symbolic of the ties between Hellenism, Egypt, and Australia.

Ismail Serageldin, who is the Director of the Library of Alexandria, also chairs the Boards of Directors for each of the BA's affiliated research institutes and museums. He serves as Chair and Member of a number of advisory committees for academic, research, scientific and international institutions and civil society efforts which includes the Institut d'Egypte (Egyptian Academy of Science), TWAS (Academy of Sciences for the Developing World), the Indian National Academy of Agricultural Sciences and the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. He is former Chairman, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR, 1994-2000), Founder and former Chairman, the Global Water Partnership (GWP, 1996-2000) and the Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest (CGAP), a micro-finance program (1995-2000) and

was Distinguished Professor at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. Serageldin has also served in a number of capacities at the World Bank, including as Vice President for Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development (1992-1998), and for Special Programs (1998-2000). He has published over 60 books and monographs and over 200 papers on a variety of topics including biotechnology, rural development, sustainability,

couldn't put it down, once he began to read it. He described the book as "extraordinary".

The books *Life in Australia* were personally transported to Alexandria by the Chairman of the Australian Friends of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Mr. Lorenzo Montesini. He also gifted to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina the book *Τα Τεσσερα Σπιτια*, (*My*

universal center of culture, science and academic research for seven centuries. The Library, together with the Mouseion, served as the world's first university, attended by such luminaries as Euclid, Eratosthenes, Theocritus and Archimedes.

The reincarnation of Alexander's vision aims to be a meeting place for the culture of East and West, dedicated to recapture the famed Alexandrian spirit of scholarship and exchange. Although there is no exact record, the Library is believed to have housed some 700,000 scrolls. It catalogued all the works in its collections, and enjoyed 'legal deposit rights', being entitled to make a copy of every book that entered the country.

While the Library ceased to exist in the 400's BC, Alexander's city and its Library represented the point where the ancient civilisations of the East (Egypt and Mesopotamia) met those of the West (Hellas and Rome). Analogously, *Life in Australia* resonates with the odysseys of Hellenic migrants who created a bridge between Western European culture, and the "Antipodes", and the Asia-Pacific region. They created not only a new life in Australia, they helped, in the ensuring 93 years, to create a new life for Australia.



and the value of science to society. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering from Cairo University and Master's degree and a PhD from Harvard University and has received 25 honorary doctorates. (<http://www.serageldin.com/Index.asp>)

Also in attendance was the Former Foreign Minister of the Republic of Greece, Mr Andreas Zaimis, in his capacity as the President of the Greek Friends of the media release Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Andreas was absolutely captivated by the Greek edition of the book, *Life in Australia*, and

Four Homes) by Mr Jim Saltis. Very appropriately, this book, written in Greek, is an account by Jim Saltis of his formative years, growing up in the city of Alexandria, as a Greek-Egyptian, in the 1930's and 1940's. Jim is a resident of Randwick, NSW.

### The Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Generally known as the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, it is a revival of the famed ancient Library of Alexandria. Founded by Alexander the Great in the 320s BC, it was a

The idea of reviving the old library dates back to 1974, when a committee set up by Alexandria University selected a plot of land for its new library, between the campus and the seafront, close to where the ancient library once stood. The notion of recreating the ancient library was soon enthusiastically adopted by other individuals and agencies. One leading supporter of the project was current Egyptian President

Hosni Mubarak; UNESCO was also quick to embrace the concept of endowing the Mediterranean region with a center of cultural and scientific excellence. An architectural design competition, organized by UNESCO in 1988 to choose a design worthy of the site and its heritage, was won by Snohetta, a Norwegian architectural office, from among more than 1,400 entries. At a conference held in 1990 in Aswan, the first pledges of funding for the project were made: USD \$65 million, mostly from the Arab states. Construction work began in 1995 and, after some USD \$220 million had been spent, the complex was officially inaugurated on October 16, 2002.

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina now stands as a beacon of knowledge and enlightenment, beaming from Egypt around the world; a meeting place for dialogue between civilisations.

<http://www.bibalex.org/English/index.aspx>

The magnificent book, *Life in Australia*, in both a Greek and English editions, will be launched at MacLaurin Hall, Sydney University, on Wednesday 9 December 2009 at 6pm for 6.30pm start. Invitation open to all. Admission is free. RSVP Tuesday 1 December Kathy Samios phone: 61 2 9349 1849 or [info@kytherianassociation.com.au](mailto:info@kytherianassociation.com.au)

*Captions: (bottom left) Dr Ismail Serageldin, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Lorenzo Montesini, Chairman of the Australian Friends of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Mr Andreas Zaimis, President of the Greek Friends of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Dr Ismail Serageldin is holding the English copy of Life in Australia, and Mr Andreas Zaimis, "won't let go of" the Greek version of Life in Australia. (bottom right) The gifted books from Australia, Life in Australia, in Greek and English, and Jim Saltis's, My Four Homes, as they were first presented to Dr Ismail Serageldin, by Lorenzo Montesini.*