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EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE

Culture and History



The Swedish chapter, Friends of Alexandria –
Föreningen Alexandrias Vänner - FAV.

*Short history and how the Nobel Section came to be
donated.*

The Swedish chapter, "Friends of Alexandria" FAV, was formed in November 1994.

The start

The initiative was taken by several actors; the Foreign ministry had an interest in the region, Swedish industry foresaw an increased market in Egypt, Ambassadors of Egypt to Sweden proposed increased contacts between Gothenburg and Alexandria ("Twin cities") where Gothenburg, due to its location on the west coast, was preferred to Stockholm. Also, Alexandria-born citizens (Helmy Loza), living in Gothenburg since many years, were interested. Ulf Tebelius, representative for large Swedish industries, with vast experience from the Middleeast and also living for many years in Alexandria, was very active.

Some students and dons at the University of Gothenburg expressed an interest; Departments of History, Antique history, Languages (Arabic), Biology, Geology, Natural sciences, Medicine, were eager to develop close collaboration with Universities in the Middle-East. Therefore, the pro-vice chancellor of Gothenburg University (Annica Dahlström) was sent to Ankara, Teheran, Cairo, Alexandria to investigate the interest in universities there for collaboration with Gothenburg University.

The society "Friends of Alexandria" was formally established during a meeting in the head office of the SE-bank, with representatives from the university, industrial partners, the Swedish foreign office and the Embassy of Egypt. This meeting took place in November 1994.

At that time the focus for members was to inspire curiosity and knowledge about many different aspects in the middle-east, especially Alexandria. Regular lectures given by different scholars in history (ancient and modern), nature, geology, culture, religions, animal life, geography etc. were presented to a slowly growing membership. For many new members, the name *Alexandria* held a special fascination, with reference to the ancient library and its global impact on different science disciplines. We heard about it at school initially, later during medical studies, where anatomy teachers reminded the students of anatomical discoveries made in Alexandria more than two millennia ago.

The focus for the initiators was initially to strengthen the ties between Sweden and Egypt by creating a Swedish Institute, with the same goal and intent as the Swedish Institute in Rome, i.e. focussing on ancient archeology and history. The location was the palace of von Gerber, a Swedish wood merchant and Consul General for Sweden, situated on the Corniche. (He was a strange personality seen parading on the streets of Alexandria and he fell offer for a murderer in his house in 1959.) After the death of von Gerber the Swedish Protentant State Church took over the magnificent house and used it as a sailors gathering room and church until the plans for the Swedish Institute were discussed. It indeed became the "Swedish Institute", but now under the Swedish Foreign ministry after 1997.

Now the Swedish Institute has regrettably moved to Lebanon and the beautiful palace on the Cornische is presently used by the Anna Lindh Foundation.

In the bylaws of FAV written in 1995 was included a paragraph that the society would support activities at the Swedish Institute and also assist in activities at the new library in Alexandria. Some message had reached us in Gothenburg with the fantastic news that the ancient library was being revived, exiting information! Of course our Norwegian Friends, whom we had not yet met at that time, had much more information!

FAV meets with the Norwegian friends

However, at that time nobody in or near the society in Gothenburg could inform us how to approach anybody responsible for this new library. Whom to contact?

Then something extraordinary happened in October 1998 on a flight from Arlanda (Sto) to Chicago. A heavy snow storm had hit Gothenburg that morning which delayed ADs connecting flight to Arlanda during several hours. She was early to board in Gothenburg and had therefore chosen a place in the very back of the flight (safest place according to some, in case of a crash!). Upon landing at Arlanda passengers destined to Chicago were told to move forward in the flight to contact the SAS-staff immediately at the exit of the Gothenburg flight and they would then be taken directly to the gate for immediate transport directly to the Chicago aircraft.

AD struggled from the back to get her voice heard. "I am also going to Chicago!" But the body of the airplane was filled with a mass of standing passengers. The waiving passenger in the back was not noticed. When *finally* AD got out of the plane and got hold of a cabin steward panic almost broke out, (*another passenger to Chicago??!*) which ended with a transfer of AD with luggage across the snowy airfield in a jeep and climbing a ladder to reach the cabin of the flight that was

already in take off mode! Exhausted but happy to be on board, AD bumped down on the nearest available seat.

But, this "missing passenger" incident enabled Hans Kristian to board as an extra stand-by passenger. Consider this list of coincidences..... And more of that to follow....

AD was heading for a science conference in Los Angeles and was expecting a quiet flight with her many books. As soon as she was on board the Chicago flight the plane was ready for push. AD's seat was taken but she told the stewardess that it was "allright" and chose a vacant aisle seat in a 4 seat row. A polite Norwegian young man was sitting next to her. When he very friendly started a conversation AD initially felt quite irritated, but responded politely to the questions; why she was onboard and where she was going - "Los Angeles, scientific conference". The person introduced himself as somebody double working at the airports in Oslo and Gothenburg and added "I also work with the Alexandria Library". AD exclaimed "Are you serious!? I am the chair of FAV and we want to find a contact to connect with the new library!" Bingo!

The stranger next to AD was Hans Kristian Simensen (HK) involved by Snøhetta, the architects, to spread news and info about the new library that was being under construction in Alexandria. HK asked if AD had had contact with the Swedish Royal family (Yes), knew the photographer Lennart Nilsson (yes, indeed), had connections with the Nobel (yes, Karolinska Institute very well, started medical studies there), other university professors, (yes, in my capacity of pro-vice chancellor of GU and as science collaborator with many other).

Simensen was member of the Norwegian Society for BA and he had a mission, as special consultant of Snøhetta, together with Inger-Mette Stenseth and Mette Newth to find out more about the future interest the new library, and to support the Norwegian state institutions and NGOs in their intent to support the Alexandria Library after it was built. Thus, Dahlström's replies to his "interrogation" appeared to satisfy HK; Dr. Dahlström would be useful to inform possible collaboration partners in Sweden and also to link with the Egyptian Ambassador to Norway, HE Magdy Hefny, and Snøhetta. We agreed before parting in Chicago to meet after return to Gothenburg.

Back in Gothenburg we presented to the society in Gothenburg (FAV) this wonderful opportunity to support the new Library in Alexandria, according to the bylaws. AD and HK visited the Swedish foreign office in Stockholm December 29th 1998, meeting with ambassadors Lars Lönnback and Jan Nordlander, who gave support for the Swedish society. On the same date we also had a meeting at the Embassy of Egypt with H.E. ambassador Sameh Dherar, who expressed great interest in our society and underlined the importance of bridging between our cultures and personal networking to facilitate plans.

Next we visited the Norwegian Friends in Oslo in Februari 1999 and had a fruitful meeting at the embassy of Egypt where ambassador Magdy Hefny was our host. Here we met all the Norwegian friends, including Boel Hoem, May Person, Geir Riese, Kjetil Thorsen, Inge-Mette Stenstedt,

Steinar Brendan and others [Photo!](#)



In April 28th 1999 Mme Suzanne Mubarak visited Oslo. In the embassy of Egypt the Swedish and Norway friends of BA met together with the highest authorities of the BA-construction and with the architects of Snøhetta. At this occasion Mme Mubarak proposed that we would constitute the *Scandinavian Committee for BA (ScanCom BibAlex)*. During this meeting The Swedish National Gift, the beduin gobelain, from the Borås College, is proposed as well as a Norwegian Steering Committé for the Opening Ceremony. AD presented her personal interest of developing a brain/ mind resource center within the context of the research library, to recreate the spirit of the old library. HKS suggests that Nobel Laureates should be a part of the opening ceremony. After the second meeting in Oslo later that year (Nov. 12th) AD is voted as chair of the ScanComBibAlex via e-mail.

The chair for ScanCom Representatives of Denmark were invited, but their interest was not very high. However, HKs connection with the musician *Palle Mikkelborg* resulted in representation of Denmark during the inauguration in 2002.

AD and HK in the spring of 1999 visited the UNESCO office in Paris. The UNESCO delegate for Egypt, Mr. Richard Holmquist, listed the Friends of Alexandria as an officially recognized support organisation for the Bibliotheca Alexandria. There were presented ideas about the opening session, e.g. the Brain symposium, and the Lennart Nilsson exhibition.

Also we visited the Nordic Council in Copenhagen but they didn't know anything about the new library and asked us "Why are you here?"

Spreading information in Sweden:

We then needed to spread information in Sweden about the fantastic construction that was being erected in Alex. We visited the Embassy of Egypt, the residence located in Danderyd, just outside Stockholm, and were warmly welcomed by the Ambassador. In Sweden we celebrated the last year of the international "Decade of the Brain", with Prof. Jan Ekstedt (Umeå University) and AD as organizers of the Swedish programme. Maybe we could arrange a scientific program on the brain in Alexandria? Could we raise interest in the Swedish science community? AD contacted the

scientific colleagues involved in the Decade of the Brain, The Royal family of Sweden, Lennart Nilsson and members of the government. Would there be an interest for an international symposium on The Social Brain at the opening? An exhibition of Lennart Nilsson's world famous scientific photographs?

Late in 1999 we were offered the large roof floor of Dagens Nyheter (the biggest newspaper in Sweden) to hold two information dinners. (We thank ADs brother, then director for the PR department of the paper, for letting us use this grandiose space!). Invited were scientists from Universities in Sweden, representatives of the Royal Family of Sweden, Lennart Nilsson (photographer and scientist), architect Craig Dykers from Snøhetta,) photo!

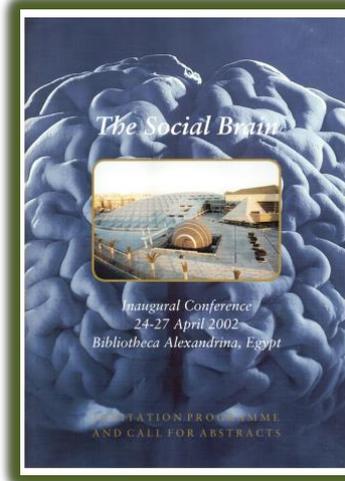


From the right: Amb. Magdy Hefny, Lennart Nilsson, Princess Lilian, Craig Dykers and Mrs Nilsson

The architect informed about the building, and ScanCom discussed how the new library could obtain international glory, and the prestige of the antique library. Yes, there was enthusiasm, but, in the Swedish way, a careful support.

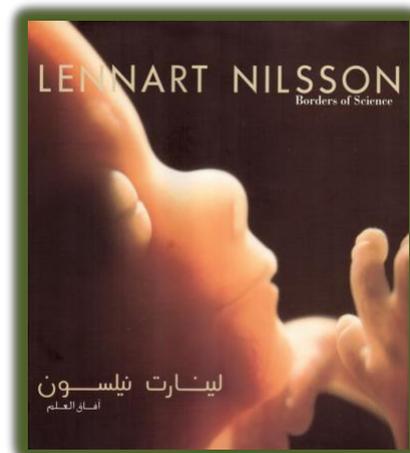
Proposed program items for the Inauguration:

Early in 2000, after the second information dinner, a symposium was being planned, The *Queen Silvia Symposium on The Social Brain* would take place during the Inauguration week in April 2002 and royalty from Norway and Sweden had planned to be present.



The programme was set, international speakers were invited, hotel room booked, everything was ready, organized by professor Christopher Gillberg (specialist in neurophychiatric disorders) and A.D.(basic neuroscience). The programme was set, international speakers were invited, hotel room booked, everything was ready, organized by professor Christopher Gillberg (specialist in neurophychiatric disorders) and A.D.(basic neuroscience) But this symposium never took place; The first date of the opening of the Bibliotheca Alexandria was postponed due to shooting and riots in Cairo and outside the Alexandria University. The Queen Silvia Symposium was cancelled the day before arrival of the 160 participants!

The Lennart Nilsson exhibition was, however, safe. It arrived and was curated a few days before opening with the help of Hasselblad Center in Gothenburg. His book "A child is born" was translated into Arabic and sold during the opening and during three following months.



The Swedish National gift was a fantastic bedouin carpet, woven by three old beduin women near Marsa Matruh in the desert. Professor Christina Rinaldo, then head of Borås Textile University College, and a frequent visitor to Egypt, was contacted. She was expert in ancient textile art and by chance discovered, in a bazaar in Cairo, a newly fabricated carpet in a technique thought to be extinct.

She located three of the bedouin women who agreed to weave each 4 by 1 meter long carpets, woven in the ancient pharaonic technique and mounted them together to form the beautiful warmly red woolen carpet to be hung on the wall at the entrance of the

library. This became the Swedish National gift, following a historic thread from ancient eras to modern times!



Prof. Christian Rinaldo presenting the Swedish National gift in the Mediterranean Museum in Stockholm before its departure for Alexandria.

The Nobel Section

Early in 2000 ScanCom was invited to inspect the construction site in Alexandria, and also to a meeting in Heliopolis with Mme Mubarak. Attending this meeting were Prof. Annica Dahlström, Mr. Hans Kristian Simensen and Mr. Ulf Tebelius, Sweden, and Inge-Mette Stenseth and Steinar Brenden, Norway.

When arriving in Alexandria we were greeted by the governor of Alexandria, who awarded us a large brass plate with the coat of arm of the city. Then we were taken to the office of Dr. Zaharan, followed by at our around the construction site.



During the meeting with Mme Mubarak in her office in Heliopolis Mme Mubarak, to our surprise, expressed a wish to get a connection with Nobel, (in fact mentioned by HKS on the flight to Cairo!), to create a *Nobel section* in the BibAlex. "Do you think you could bring the Nobel to the BA?"



There, in Heliopolis the "Executive Committée for ScanCom BibAlex" was appointed by Mme Mubarak: Annica D; Ulf T; Inge-Mette S; Steinias B and Hans Kr. S.

How to create a Nobel Section in the BA?

So, we felt rather eager to try and fulfill this simple (!) request from the first lady of Egypt. AD and HK visited the head offices of the Nobel in Stockholm (27 March 2000), then together with Ulf Tebelius drove to Oslo, to apply for permission to create a Nobel section in the BA. The ScanCom did receive the solemn permission to use the name NOBEL in Alexandria, and it was pointed out that this would be the only place outside Norway and Sweden that was given permission to use the name Nobel for an institution! (The name Nobel can however be found in Turkey, in Baku Azerbaijan, for the house where Alfred Nobel and his family lived during the great oil days in the late 1800 when the great fortune foundation of the Nobel Prize was created). However, as emphasized out by the directors Michael Sohlman in Stockholm, and Geir Lundestad in Oslo, we could not expect to get economical support from the Nobel Foundation.

Now the Executive Committee for ScanCom BibAlex had got big problems regarding a) finance and b) how to furnish a Nobel section in the BA? On a flight to Oslo in 2001 HKS met Klas Roséll, economic adviser to many companies. During a brain storming session in Klas Roséll's office later, AD and HKS were advised to contact Prof. Bo Ralph, member of The Swedish Academy (selecting Nobel price winners in literature). AD, UT and HKS also visited the Royal Academy for Science and Technology (selecting the Nobel Prize in Physics and Chemistry) and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm (selecting the Prize in Physiology or Medicine), and met with the Swedish Academy (via Prof. Bo Ralph), to inform about the BibAlex and to obtain support for its scientific ambitions.

By coincidence, we met Mr. Leif Hjärre who presented a small musical show at the Mediterranean Museum in Stockholm. Some months earlier we had bumped into Leif at the ISIS society in Helsingborg where he gave us his business card (that was stuck in the mirror at A.D's house for

months). It informed that Leif was the owner of the furniture factory "Gärdsnäs". Aha furniture! So, when we received an invitation from Leif Hjärre to his show in Stockholm we decided to try our luck and presented to him the idéa of a Nobel Room at the new BA.

Leif was immediately enthusiastic and said "This is remarkable! It is my company that delivered the furniture to the Nobel Forum at Karolinska Institutet, the furniture in Rosenbad (the government palace in Stockholm), the Parliament in Canberra and most Swedish embassies abroad!" The following morning we met outside the Nobel Forum and could inspect the furniture. Magnificent! Perfect for the BA! Leif Hjärre was made a member of the ScanCom executive group!

Mme M. had in 2000 appointed Dr. Ismail Serageldin as responsible for the final construction, replacing Dr. Zahran as the immediate organizer under the First Lady. AD and HKS had the pleasure of meeting him in Stockholm, for discussions with departments (SIDA) at the Foreign office. It was a rainy autumn day when we met him on the way to SIDA, and he looked just like any busy Swede on his way to office, with documents safe in a plastic bag. We had time to present our organization and plans for the Nobel section and ideas for the inauguration programme, including the Brain Symposium, that Queen Silvia had agreed to open. Dr. Serageldin met Queen Silvia later that day, and in that evening, when we met at a dinner at the Egyptian Embassy, Dr. Serageldin said "I spoke to the Queen and she confirmed your story!"
(Always check your sources!)

The Nobel book collection

Next we had to start thinking about the Nobel section, furniture, location inside th BA, internet connections etc. As soon as we got an OK from the Nobel offices in Stockholm and Oslo Ulf Tebelius started the book collection. Before retirement from his international position in the ABB concern he could buy books in book stores and fairs all over the Middle East. Now books are purchased via the internet, and has continous contact with the Nobel Institute in Stockholm, who every year sends the important summaries "Les Prix Nobel" of last years winners and of the ceremonies. However, 2004 the printed version of this summary was sadly ended. Ulf also found a company that could make elegant brass stands for each laureate, with name, country of origin and year of the award. Since then everyone who visits Alexandria brings several kgs of books to the Nobel section*. The original language, translations into Arabic, English, and French are collected. Up to date more than 2.500 volumes have been donated.



These books were carried as hand luggage by visitors from FAV to Alexandria every October since 2002 to be donated at the donation ceremony in the main hall of the conference center.

Of course since the beginning of the pandemy we could not travel with books, but UT organized a DHL transport, described in a seperate text by UT in a previous newsletter.

Location of the Nobel section in the BA

At the end of 2001 AD and HKS asked Prof. Bo Ralph to travel to Alexandria, where Leif Hjärre joined them. We stayed at that time at the Swedish Institute. Prof. Zahran showed us around the nearly finished Bibliotheca, Dr. Serageldin joined us and we inspected different options.



Searching for the best site for the Nobel Section. From the left Bo Ralph, Ulf T, Dr. Zahran, A.D., Dr. Serageldin and a thoughtful Leif Hjärre.

Finally we came to two rooms with view over the sea. We all agreed, including Dr. Zahran and Serageldin, that one of these rooms was the right location. Leif Hjärre then suggested: "Why not propose the use of both rooms so we can do something properly?" Three different parts were allotted the Nobel Section: The Nobel room with the book collection, the Auditory, and the Söderberg Lounge. The book cabinets, lining the walls in the Nobel room and in the Gad Rausing auditory, are made in cherry wood, with tight closing glass doors to prevent sand entering during not rare sand storms in the area.

The Nobel bust



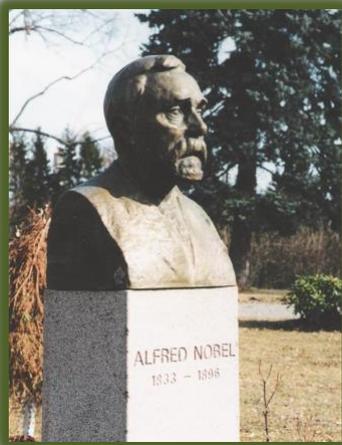
Rolf Lindelöf at the Nobel museum in Karlskoga, Alfred Nobel's home town contacted the ScanCom chair, AD, and invited her and HKS to a visit. He had learned about our Nobel plans at a meeting in the Egyptology society ISIS in Helsingborg in 2000 and was very enthusiastic

about the Nobel project in Alexandria. Money was collected for making a copy of the bronze bust of A. Nobel in the museum, and this bust is now placed at the entrance of the Nobel section in the BA. The Nobel museum also donated a brass copy of the *famous will* of A. Nobel (on the wall of the Söderberg Lounge) and a set of *framed posters describing Nobel's life and deed*.



An important member of FAV was Dr. Sune Persson, sadly late. Here studying the posters on Nobel's life in the corridor outside the Nobel library.

These are hanging on the walls of both side of the corridor outside the library and conference room. The text is in English, but it has been discussed with the Nobel librarians to add a translation into Arabic.



The Nobel bust in Karlskoga, Sweden. An exact copy of the bust was gilded in bronze and donated to the Nobel section in the BA.



In front of the newly arrived bust, we are unpacking the other gifts from Karlskoga Museum. From left: Hans Kristian, Anna Hjärre, A. Nobel, Annica D. and Leif Hjärre.

Also were donated 2 Nobeldiplomas, made by the famous calleographer Annika Rückert, who during many years created the Nobel diplomas.

(For details of the items please see www.scancombibalex.nu/the Nobel section) The creation of the elegant Nobel section is entirely the magnificent result of a grand interior architect, Leif Hjärre (also historian and egyptologist).

During our presence in Alexandria to plan for the Nobel section we had the great opportunity to stay at the Swedish Institute, von Gerber's old palace. Often the architects of Snøhetta were also staying there and we had a good time together.



On the balcony of the Swedish Institute after dinner: From the left: Leif Hjärre, Elaine Molinar, Kjetil Thorsen, Jorunn Sannes, HKS, AD and Robert Greenwood.

Financing

Now came the frustrating question of financing. We were invited to the soft opening in October 2001 and had receiving a plaque as sign of gratitude from Mme. Mubarak. But we still didn't have money for paying for any furniture. Due to several coincidences (again- such as AD's long hair drying before leaving Cairo) HKS and Leif Hjärre were strolling around in Zamalek to pass time. Leif suggested: "Let's go to the Swedish Embassy and cool down!" As HKS and Leif were about to enter the Embassy another person went in right before them. Since HKS does not believe in "coincidences" he presented himself and Leif to the stranger, telling why they were in Egypt. When Leif Hjärre heard that the person worked for the Tetra Pak he took over the conversation and told the stranger he had in fact met Gad Rausing (founder of the TetraPak industry) and delivered furniture to Tetra Pak. Business cards were exchanged and leaving the Embassy HKS said: "Now we will have our money!" Leif met later with the Director of Tetra Pak and applied for funding. Tetra Pak donated about half the sum that was needed, according to Gärdsnäs.

Prof. Bo Ralph applied, with the support of the Swedish Academy, to Torsten Söderberg's foundation, asking for donation of the rest of the money needed for paying the Furniture. But the decision was delayed; on the day when AD, HKS and Leif H had to leave for Sweden, we still did not know. This was also the very last day Gärdsnäs needed to know, in order to start the process with the furniture, to have it produced, shipped and installed in the BA, in due time before the inauguration of the library. After long discussions with Dr. Serageldin – what would happen if Söderberg's Foundation did not give the needed support? – we travelled to Gothenburg with a cold hole of despair inside. We had given Gärdsnäs the clear go-ahead-sign they needed to start production, but would we, ScanCom, have to pay if Söderberg Foundation did not give the us the money? Dr. Serageldin gave AD a letter saying that "AD will not have to stay alone" (whatever was meant by this). We gnawed our nails, figuratively, before AD finally reached her home and found a telefax in her phone - the message that the foundation *had indeed given the money!!* (Before the time of mobiles!) *The Gods were still with us!*

The inauguration and Other initiatives by ScanCom:

The first date of the opening of the Bibliotheca Alexandria in April 2002 had to be postponed due to riots and shooting in Cairo and outside the Alexandria University. The Queen Silvia Symposium was cancelled (see above). At the opening in September neither Queen Silvia, nor Queen Sonia of Norway, who both had planned to be present for the Opening of the BA and for the Nobel Section, could unfortunately attend. However the Nobel Section was opened by Mme Mubarak.

During the inauguration of the library *Lennart Nilssons* famous pictures of "A Child is Born" and micro-pictures of insects and parasites was opened and remained exhibited during one year in the ground floor of the main building. The Hasselblad Center in Gothenburg was transporting and curating the pictures. Nilsson's book "A Child is born" was translated into Arabic and sold in the book store of the BA (see above!).

The idea of a formal **gift from the Swedish state** to the library was initiated by ScanCom, involving one of the members of the Swedish Friends, Professor Christina Rinaldo, Borås Textile High School. She was since long fascinated by antique textile and an internationally recognized expert (see above). The result is a unique carpet, woven by three Bedouin women (living near to Marsa Matruh in the desert), in the technique of the Tuthankamon age. This carpet, in shades of warm red, is exposed in the library with dedication from Sweden.

Another initiative from ScanCom was to exhibit "*Tuthankamon's wardrobe*" in the library. At the time of inauguration it was on a world wide exhibition tour but arrived the following year to the BA for exhibition during several months. This displayed reconstructions of various clothing items found in the tomb, scientific reconstructions based on many years of careful research, lead by Prof. Christina Rinaldo.

Finally I would like to show some pictures of persons, no longer with us, we had the privilege to meet, and who were greatly supporting us in our efforts with the Nobel section:



Dr. Serageldin presented us to his wife, Dr. Nevine Madkour, during planning for the Nobelsection, in the spring of 2000. Sadly, the next time we met her during the inauguration, she was in a wheelchair guarded by her husband. After some years she tragically passed away in a neurological disease.



The Ambassador for the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the late Dr. Taher Khalifa and the late great Mrs. Laila Dowidar, during the celebration of H. -C. Andersen in 2005.



The late Professor Mustafa El-Abbadi, the author of many books about the ancient library and the new library. We met him and his wife Dr. Azza Karara at a meeting in the congress hall of the BA in 2010.

The members of the ScanCom group:

Prof. Dr. Annica Dahlström, chair of ScanCom

Mr. Leif Hjärre, egyptologist, historian, former owner of Gärsnäs Furniture,

Prof. Bo Ralph, member of the Swedish Academy

Mr. Hans Kristian Simensen, consultant, ScanCom BibAlex

Mr. Ulf Tebelius, ScanCom, collecting books by Nobel laureates in Literature, contact person with Nobel Institution.

Dr. Hans Nyman, chair of FAV, joining in 2004, environmental science.

With great appreciation to the present chair of the IFBA, Tharwat Abouraya for introducing the IFBA Newsletters and allowed us tell our history "on the road" to the Nobel in Alexandria!

This is an important part of IFBA history. Last February the IFBA Digital Newsletter began dedicating a Special Issue for Chapter History every month. All you need to submit is a Word (there's no word-count limit) document along with high resolution digital pictures. Next issue will be in April 2021.

Norway Chapter - February 2021

Sweden Chapter - March 2021