

Jurji Zaidan
Contributions to Modern
Arab Thought and Literature

Proceedings of a Symposium

The Library of Congress

(June 5, 2012)

Edited by
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and
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Preface

The essays comprising this volume were commissioned by the Zaidan Foundation for a Symposium on *Jurji Zaidan's Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature*. The Symposium was sponsored by the Library of Congress, the Kluge Center and the Zaidan Foundation and held at the Library of Congress on June 5th, 2012 in Washington DC.¹ The essays were prepared by a group of eminent scholars in literature, history and other disciplines in leading universities in the US, Canada, France and the Middle East working on the Nahda or Arab awakening² of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, in particular, on Jurji Zaidan's leading role in this movement.

The Zaidan Foundation was established in 2009 to enhance intercultural understanding. The publication of the Proceedings of the Symposium is part of its efforts to bring the thought and literary treasures of Jurji Zaidan to English-speaking readers. Jurji Zaidan was a well-known leader of the Nahda. His leadership derived from the many roles he played in that movement—as historian, linguist, novelist, journalist, educator, political scientist, social reformer and much more. The Foundation is promoting his contributions in many of these areas through various initiatives.

First, the Foundation has so far sponsored the translation of five of his twenty one historical novels into English. In the hundred years since they were written almost all these novels were translated into one or more languages—there were more than one hundred translations but surprisingly none into English. Of the five novels, two are set in Spain, two others are set during the 'Abbasid period and the fifth novel deals with Saladin.³ All the essays in this volume

¹ The Library of Congress webcast of the Symposium is in two Parts. Part (1) covers the morning session at: http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=5576 Part (2) follows and covers the afternoon session at: http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=5575. Press and TV coverage of the Symposium and many other details of this event are posted on the Zaidan Foundation's website at www.zaidanfoundation.org

² For more on the significance of this term see the last section of Thomas Philipps' Overview.

³ The five novels were all published by the Zaidan Foundation, Inc. in 2011 and 2012. They are available at www.amazon.com and are in historical chronological order:

1. *The Conquest of Andalusia* translated by Roger Allen, October 2011.
2. *The Battle of Poitiers* subtitled *Charles Martel and 'Abd al-Rahman* translated by William Granara, March 2012.
3. *The Caliph's Sister* subtitled *Harun al-Rashid and the Fall of the Persians* translated by Issa J. Boullata, March 2012.
4. *The Caliph's Heirs* subtitled *Brothers at War: The Fall of Baghdad* translated by Michael Cooperson, March 2012.
5. *Saladin and the Assassins* translated by Paul Starkey, March 2012.

reviewing Zaidan's contributions as a historical novelist were prepared by several of the translators of these novels—all eminent literary scholars in their own right.

Second, the Foundation is supporting a new evaluation of how Jurji Zaidan's approach to history and the Arabic language shaped Arab nationalism. The author is Professor Thomas Philipp, a leading expert on the thought of Zaidan. His book is entitled *Jurji Zaidan and the Foundations of Arab Nationalism*.⁴ It is the first to analyze Zaidan's thought on history, language and nationalism as an integrated whole.

The above initiatives leave several “gaps” so to speak in covering some of the areas that Zaidan influenced in important ways—in particular his role as journalist, political scientist, educator and social reformer. The essays commissioned for the Symposium on Jurji Zaidan and published in this volume cover some of these areas from a variety of different angles. Indeed, the aim of the Symposium was to bring together scholars with an interest in the intellectual and literary legacy of Jurji Zaidan and in his role in the Nahda. A second goal was to let this collection reflect the state of scholarship on Zaidan's works and thought in the various academic disciplines. Until recently the tomes of A.L. Dupont and T. Philipp were the only scholarly monographs⁵ on Zaidan. The response by scholars interested in the subject was most encouraging and revealed an unexpected new interest in Zaidan and the Nahda. I was both surprised and delighted to realize how much research and study on the Nahda and Zaidan was being done in leading Western universities. “Jurji Zaidan” is no household name in the West the way it is in the Arab world where his novels are still published every few years. But the serious research that is being done in the West on the Nahda is no less—and some would say more—than the research that is occurring in the Arab-speaking world. The contributors to this volume have demonstrated how rich Zaidan's works are and how much they still have to tell us almost a century after his death. By applying the analytic tools of different academic disciplines and by putting Zaidan's work in the wider context of the Nahda, the Symposium shed much new light and opened perspectives on his scholarly, journalistic and literary works. It is hoped that it will stimulate more scholarship on Zaidan and the Nahda movement—a cultural and historical phenomenon that deserves our full and renewed attention. This research is encouraging not only in its own right but also because it is especially relevant and timely with the tumultuous events unleashed by what is being dubbed as the Arab Spring.

In all these ways the Foundation plans to support as broad an area as possible of Zaidan's contributions. It is particularly fitting that both the Proceedings of the Symposium and the aforementioned book by Thomas Philipp are being published on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Jurji Zaidan's death in 1914.

The activities sponsored by the Foundation could not have come to fruition without the support and dedication of so many people too numerous to mention. But let me single out a few who

⁴ Philipp, Thomas (New-York, Syracuse University Press, 2014).

⁵ Dupont, Anne-Laure. *Ġurġī Zaydān 1861-1914: Écrivain réformiste et témoin de la Renaissance arabe* (Damas, Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2006) and Philipp, Thomas. *Ġurġī Zaidān: His Life and Thought*. Beirut Texts and Studies, vol. 3 (Beirut, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979).

were instrumental in making the Symposium possible and as successful as it turned out to be: at the Library of Congress Dr. James Billington, the Librarian of Congress and Mary-Jane Deeb, Chief of the African and Middle Eastern Division and her staff, in particular Christopher Murphy and Muhannad Salhi, for their sponsorship and support of the Symposium; Dr Isma‘il Serageldin, the Director of the Library of Alexandria, for documenting Jurji Zaidan’s legacy in the Memory of Modern Egypt Series he spearheaded in that Library as well as his keynote address at the Symposium; and all the other contributors to the Symposium for their enriching perspectives of Zaidan as well as their collegiality, patience and help in putting this volume together. Finally, special thanks are due to Professor Thomas Philipp for helping me in the design of the Symposium and editing this volume; and to all the members of the Foundation’s Advisory Council and, in particular, Ambassador Hussein Hassouna, for promoting, tirelessly and effectively, the work of the Foundation in so many ways. Last but not least I owe a special debt of gratitude to my wife, Hada, who had the original idea for several of the works sponsored by the Foundation. She and our son George Shukri worked tirelessly in helping me to transform so many ideas into the products supported by the Foundation and described above.

George C. Zaidan
President
The Zaidan Foundation
November, 2013