



The Zaidan Foundation  
*Enhancing Intercultural Understanding*



## PRESS REPORT

### ***Jurji Zaidan: His Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature***

June 5th, 2012

Washington DC. June 6<sup>th</sup> 2012 -- A Symposium on *Jurji Zaidan: His Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature* was held on Tuesday, June 5th at The Library of Congress to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Jurji Zaidan and the 120th anniversary of the publishing house he founded, Dar-al-Hilal, one of the biggest publishing houses in the Middle East.

Jurji Zaidan (1861-1914) was a prominent leader of the Arab Renaissance. The Conference explored his contributions to that movement, which gave rise to a secular form of Arab nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Contributors to the Symposium included scholars from leading Universities in the US, Canada and France, and Ambassadors Hussein Hassouna and Clovis Maksoud.

Opening remarks by George Zaidan, President of the Zaidan Foundation, were followed by Dr Ismail Serageldin, the Director of the Library of Alexandria who delivered the keynote address. Dr Serageldin created the Memory of Modern Egypt Series—a major project at the Library of Alexandria documenting the history of Egypt in the last 200 years. His assessment of the place of Jurji Zaidan's contributions in the intellectual, educational and journalistic history of Egypt were therefore particularly pertinent.

Jurji Zaidan was a prolific and hugely popular writer in the Arab world. He introduced the historical novel into Arabic literature and wrote 22 acclaimed novels spanning Arab history from pre-Islamic to modern times. They have often been compared to the works of Alexandre Dumas and Sir Walter Scott. They are being reprinted every few years in the Arabic-speaking world and about 100 translations were published into more than ten languages.

The Zaidan Foundation published the first translations into English of five of these novels. These are available now at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) Two novels are set in Spain at the time of the Arab invasion in the eighth century, two during the Abbasid period a century later and one at the time of the Crusades. The translations were done by eminent scholars from Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, UCLA, McGill and Durham, several of whom made presentations at the Symposium

The ten scholarly papers presented at the Symposium as well as a few others will be published in the Proceedings of the Symposium. Videos of spoken presentations will be available at the Library of Congress website. Further details are available at the Zaidan Foundation website at [www.zaidanfoundation.org](http://www.zaidanfoundation.org). The Symposium was jointly sponsored by The Library of Congress, the Kluge Center and the Zaidan Foundation.