

**Letter in Nomination of George Atiyeh
for the Middle East Studies Association Service Award[†]**

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University of Arizona
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On behalf of the members of the Middle East Librarians Association, I hereby nominate our esteemed colleague, Dr. George N. Atiyeh, to be the next recipient of the MESA Service Award.

This nomination of our friend and colleague is based only in small part on our abundant affection and respect for him. In far greater measure, we nominate him for the MESA Service Award because of his important and unique contributions to the field of Middle East Studies and to the furtherance and spread of knowledge and understanding of the peoples and cultures of the Middle East. In his work as teacher and librarian, he has influenced Middle East Studies and contributed to the world of learning in ways not surpassed or even matched by most others. Receipt of the MESA Service Award would be fitting recognition by his colleagues in Middle East studies of the importance of his contributions to the field.

[†] Editor's note: The MESA Service Award was established in 1996 and was first awarded at MESA's 1997 Annual Meeting. The award recognizes the contributions of individuals through their outstanding service to MESA or the profession. Readers will recall that George Atiyeh's nomination for the MESA Service Award was first suggested at the 1998 Annual Meeting. Dona Straley agreed to coordinate efforts in this regard and work with Edward Jajko to draft a letter of nomination for submission to the MESA Secretariat. Besides justifying George's nomination and documenting his many valuable contributions to the field, the letter is also of interest, as it also includes his vita and partial bibliography. Obviously, their efforts paid off. George's wife, Daisy, accepted the award on behalf of her husband at a ceremony at the MESA meeting in December in Washington.

Born in Lebanon, Dr. Atiyeh graduated from the American University of Beirut (B.A., 1948, M.A., 1950), and received his doctorate in oriental languages and literature from the University of Chicago in 1954. He was professor and chairman, Department of Humanities, of the University of Puerto Rico from 1954–1967 before joining the Library of Congress in 1967 as Head of its Near East Section. In 1991, he became Acting Chief of the African & Middle East Division of the Library of Congress, supervising its Near East, Africa, and Hebraic Sections. He served at LC until forced to retire for medical reasons in July 1996.

The Near East Section of the Library of Congress is responsible for materials in the languages of the Arab world, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Under Dr. Atiyeh's direction, the holdings of the Near East Section have become world-renowned.

While directing and informing the work of specialists concentrating on Turkey, Iran, and other areas, Dr. Atiyeh applied his knowledge and scholarship to development of the Library's collections of Arabica. Among other accomplishments, he acquired numerous rare publications from the Arab countries; identified and acquired Arab-American newspapers published in the early 1900s; brought leading Arab authors to the Library to record their own works for the Archive of World Literature. He developed acquisitions guidelines for the Library of Congress Office in Cairo that became a prototype for use in the Library's other field offices. Over the years, he paid numerous visits to the Middle East, developing contacts for the Library of Congress, acquiring publications, evaluating book sellers and other potential sources of scholarly materials, and, not incidentally, in his many official visits with publishers, book sellers, research centers, archives, and universities, conveying the message of American scholarly interest in and expertise on the Middle East.

Dr. Atiyeh undertook or participated in a series of major programs at the Library of Congress designed to illustrate the scope of its collections and to heighten scholarly interest in the Middle East. With the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress, he organized a major conference on the history of printing in the Islamic world. Held at the library, this conference included speakers from several countries. Dr. Atiyeh edited the papers presented at the conference and published them as *The Book in the Islamic world*, co-published in 1995 by the Library of Congress and the State University of New York Press. The conference, the associated special exhibition of treasures of Middle Eastern publication from the Library's

collections, the published conference papers, and the bringing together of experts from around the world to meet and discuss the book in the Islamic world were all monumental contributions to the field of Middle East studies.

During his long and fruitful career, Dr. Atiyeh developed relationships that benefited the Library of Congress and other government and scholarly institutions, and the field of Middle East studies as a whole. He served on the U.S.-Egypt Joint Commission on Culture of the Department of State from 1975–1978 and in 1979 was invited to serve as a member of the advisory committee on Islamic affairs at the White House. He has served as a member of the advisory council of the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies of Georgetown University; the advisory editorial board of the *Middle East Journal*; the Arab-American Affairs council; and the international advisory board of al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, London. During his last official trip abroad, Dr. Atiyeh accompanied the Librarian of Congress to the opening of the Mubarak Library in Cairo and on visits to key Egyptian officials and institutions.

Dr. Atiyeh has been an active, long-time member of MESA. He is also a founding member of the Middle East Librarians Association and over the years, despite demurring from holding any official or elective position, one of its leaders and guiding hands. He is a founding member of the Middle East Microform Project (MEMP) and served with distinction as an ex officio member of its board. He sponsored numerous MEMP microfilming projects, preserving for posterity valuable collections of Sudanese newspapers, documents from the period of civil war in Lebanon, and other rarities of importance to researchers.

As a member of the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA) since 1971, he has guided and advised the association and its members, influencing the librarians who head and work in the numerous Middle East collections around the country that serve the needs of the members of MESA. In 1997, his MELA colleagues named him the first (and only) honorary member of that organization.

In addition to the publication cited above, Dr. Atiyeh is the author of, in his own all too modest description, “several books and bibliographies.” He has also written numerous articles on various topics, including Arab philosophy, al-Kindi, Christian-Muslim relations, intellectual history, and librarianship.

The knowledge and scholarship of a librarian, however, are evidenced in the collections the librarian builds, their usefulness to scholars, and their anticipation of future needs; by the information and service the librarian

provides to inquirers; by the librarian's advocacy for his field of specialization, within his organization and beyond its walls; and by the librarian's efforts to make his collections accessible to the reading public. In all of these activities, and in every act of his professional life, whether selecting individual books offered in a dealer's list, advising a researcher on appropriate paths to follow, or doing his own research for an article or book, the Middle East specialist librarian applies his body of knowledge of the languages and history of his area to his work so that in the end a coherent, meaningful, useful collection will be made available to scholars, researchers, and even the casual reading public. Throughout nearly thirty years at the Library of Congress, Dr. Atiyeh applied his vast knowledge and great abilities to the development of unequalled collections of materials from and about the Middle East, thereby creating an unparalleled resource for scholarship and making the Library of Congress a major world center for Middle East studies.

Presentation of the MESA Service Award to Dr. Atiyeh would be fitting recognition of his great and lasting contributions to the field of Middle East studies. My colleagues and I, members of the Middle East Librarians Association, urge that MESA bestow this well-deserved award on him.

Sincerely,

Dona S. Straley

President, Middle East Librarians Association

Associate Professor and Middle East Studies Librarian

The Ohio State University Libraries

GEORGE NICHOLAS ATIYEH

Personal

1923 Born in Amioun, Lebanon, son of Nicholas H. and
Mary Beshara Atiyeh

1954 Married Daisy Roper

Children: George, Rose Marie, Lancelot

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Education

1948 B.A., American University of Beirut

1950 M.A., American University of Beirut

1954 Ph.D., University of Chicago

Professional Positions

- 1954–1967 Department of Humanities, University of Puerto Rico,
Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico
- 1954–1957 Assistant Professor
- 1957–1960 Associate Professor
- 1960–1967 Professor and Chairman of the Department
- 1967–1996 Head, Near East Section, Library of Congress,
Washington, D.C.
- 1969–1979 Visiting lecturer, School of Advanced International Studies,
Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C.

Advisory/Governing Boards

- U.S.-Egypt Joint Commission on Culture, U.S. Department of State
Advisory Committee on Islamic Affairs, White House
Middle East Journal, Advisory Editorial Board
Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University,
Advisory Council
Arab-American Affairs Council
Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, London,
International Advisory Council
Middle East Microform Project, Executive Committee

Selected Publications

- Avicenna's conception of miracles*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1954.
- Mabāḥith fī al-madanīyah al-ulā*. [Beirut]: Dār al-Nashr lil-Jāmi'iyīn, [1956]
- Min ḥadāratinā*. Bayrut: Dār al-Nashr lil-Jāmi'iyīn, 1956.
- Al-Kindi, the philosopher of the Arabs*. Rawalpindi: Islamic Research Institute, 1966.
(Publication of the Islamic Research Institute; no. 6) Reprinted 1976, 1985, 1994.
- (editor) Fleming, William. *Artes e ideas*. [New York]: Holt, Rinehart and Winston;
[Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico]: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1968.
(Translation into Spanish of the author's *Arts and ideas*.)
- "Oedipus rex in modern Arabic literature." In *Überlieferung und Auftrag, Festschrift für Michael de Ferdinandy z. 60. Geburtstag, 5 Okt. 1972*. Wiesbaden: Pressler, 1972. P. 134–147.
- The Contemporary Middle East, 1948–1973: a selective and annotated bibliography*.
Boston: G.K. Hall, [1975]
- Jerusalem, past and present: an annotated bibliography in English*. New York: Americans for Middle East Understanding, 1975.

- (editor) *Arab and American cultures*. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977. (Proceedings of a conference sponsored by the publisher.)
- “Jerusalem in medieval Christian thought,” *Studies in comparative religion* 13 (1979): 167–175.
- “Al-Kindi’s concept of man,” *Hamdard islamicus* 3 (1980): 35–46.
- “An acquisition trip to North Africa and the Near East,” *MELA notes* 20 (1980): 7–39.
- (consultant) Dorr, Steven R. *Scholars’ guide to Washington, D.C., for Middle Eastern studies*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981. (Scholars’ guide to Washington, D.C. ; no. 7)
- (translator) Khuri, Shukri. “The story of Finyanus,” *Mundus arabicus* 1 (1981): 1–35.
- “Acquisitions from the Middle East,” *Library acquisitions: practice and theory* 6 (1982): 185–194.
- “Humanism and secularism in the modern Arab heritage: the ideas of al-Kawakibi and Zurayk,” *Hamdard islamicus* 8 (1985): 21–40. Reprinted in: *Arab civilization: challenges and responses: studies in honor of Constantine K. Zurayk*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- (editor) *Arab civilization: challenges and responses: studies in honor of Constantine K. Zurayk*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- (under the direction of) *The Near East national union list*. Vol. 1. Washington: Library of Congress, 1988.
- “A guide to further reading in Arabic.” In *The Genius of Arab civilization: source of Renaissance*. 3rd ed. New York: New York University Press, 1992. P. 285–295.
- “Contributions of Christians to Arabic civilization.” In *The First one hundred years: a centennial anthology celebrating Antiochian Orthodoxy in North America*. Englewood, NJ: Antakya Press, 1995. P. 219–240.
- “The book in the modern Arab world: the cases of Lebanon and Egypt.” In *The Book in the Islamic world: the written word and communication in the Middle East*. Albany: State University of New York Press; [Washington, D.C.]: Library of Congress, 1995. P. 233–253.
- (editor) *The Book in the Islamic world: the written word and communication in the Middle East*. Albany: State University of New York Press; [Washington, D.C.]: Library of Congress, 1995. (Proceedings of the conference organized by Dr. Atiyeh at the Library of Congress in 1990.)
- (co-editor) *The Conservation and preservation of Islamic manuscripts: proceedings of the third conference of Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 18th-November 1995*. London: al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1996. (Publication ; no. 19)