

OBITUARY NOTICE

NAJM A. BEZIRGAN
[December 26, 1979]

The fields of Islamic Middle Eastern and Arabic Studies suffered a great loss with the death of Najm A. Bezirgan on December 26, 1979. Dr. Bezirgan was an Associate Professor of Arabic Literature, Islamic Philosophy and Middle Eastern Studies at The University of Texas at Austin, which he joined in 1967 as an Assistant Professor, being promoted to the higher rank in 1972. A Memorial Meeting for Dr. Bezirgan was held at The University of Texas at Austin on January 29, 1980, sponsored by the Department of Oriental and African Languages and Literatures, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Program in Comparative Literature, and the Foreign Language Education Center. The speakers at the meeting included Professor M.A. Jazayery for DOALL, Professor Peter F. Abboud for the Arabic Program within DOALL, Professor James Bill for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Professor John G. Bordie for the Foreign Language Education Center, Professor David Edwards of the Department of Government, Professor Christopher Middleton for the Program in Comparative Literature, and Tura Campanella for the students.

Dr. Bezirgan received a B.A. in Philosophy from the University of Baghdad in 1956, and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Manchester in 1965. He taught Philosophy at the University of Baghdad from 1965-1966, and served as Assistant Editor of the *Oxford English-Arabic Dictionary* from 1966-1967. At the University he taught courses in Arabic Literature and Language at undergraduate and at graduate levels, as well as courses in Islamic Philosophy. The two-semester freshman course, "Introduction to the Middle East," which he taught for many years, was a favorite among students.

In addition to his native language of Arabic and English which he had studied, he was proficient in Turkish and Kurdish languages and was familiar with Persian. His academic training was in philosophy. He was also interested in English literature and comparative literature, and deeply interested in religion and the arts. He was, in fact, a man of remarkable erudition and encyclopaedic knowledge. The word that comes to mind in describing him is the Arabic word *ʿālim*. He was a great believer in the intrinsic unity of human sciences, not bound within arbitrary limits of one or another discipline; he was, in fact, a 20th-century Arab-Moslem version of the renaissance man.

One of Najm's characteristics was his reluctance to let himself be influenced by the "publish or perish" syndrome. The result was that, although he had many good ideas, and his classes—graduate as well as undergraduate—reflected an immense knowledge in the various fields in which he worked, he seldom bothered to publish his ideas in the printed form, although he was an active participant in meetings, conferences, symposia, etc., both in the United States and Europe, and in the Middle East. On such occasions his extensive knowledge of the subject, his passionate delivery and defense of his ideas, his clearly presented arguments, combined with an excellent command of the English language, made him a most interesting speaker to listen to.

At the time of his death he was a member of the Graduate Studies Committee not only of Oriental and African Languages and Literatures

and Middle Eastern Studies, but also of Comparative Literature. Further, he was sought out by students in the graduate Foreign Language Education Program for membership on master's and doctoral committees.

He was well liked by his students to whom he was known, in the words of a colleague, "as a fair and impartial person who enjoyed the daily give-and-take associated with classroom teaching as well as the dedicated responsibility required of guided work with graduate students." As the same colleague put it: "He was not pedantically sober-sided in his development of students, for he was always fond of a meaningful point or a ready quip made in the course of discussion ...". Students came to him in large numbers for scholarly guidance as well as personal friendship. As one graduate student said: "He mixed the human with the intellectual to such a degree that when he spoke about an imprisoned poet, you saw this person as a friend in need; and when he warmly retold something one of his three teen-age children had said, you felt that here indeed was wisdom." At the time of his death, Dr. Bezirgan was involved in a number of scholarly projects at varying stages of completion. The personal loss felt by his colleagues is made the more serious because these projects were not completed and published.

Najm will be missed by those who knew him as colleague, teacher and friend, and by future generations who will never be able to sit in his classes or to benefit from his scholarship and humanity.

*Peter F. Abboud and
M.A. Jazayerly*