

The Introduction to 'Mikhail Farah: An Arabic Poet from Toula, North Lebanon'

The Nicholson Museum, University of Sydney (9 June 2011)

Nicholas Hardwick

The President and Committee of the Toula Museum of Australia, members of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Sydney, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Nicholas Hardwick and I am the Curatorial Director of the Toula Museum of Australia Incorporated. I would like to welcome all of you this evening to this lecture of the museum. The Toula Museum of Australia, which is based in Sydney, was founded in the latter part of 2009 by members of the community of Toula, a village in northern Lebanon, who live in Sydney, and who are interested to promote the social and cultural interests of the village of Toula. It is a museum of Lebanese village culture, especially of the Maronite village of Toula, and it is interested in the history and culture of Lebanon in all periods and aspects, including, in antiquity, the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians.

In the realm of culture, poetry is one of the great artistic achievements of man. The major civilisations of the Mediterranean region and the Middle East have produced great poetry, which has shaped our understanding of humanity. The Arabic language is famous for its literary achievements, such as its poetry, and for the outstanding beauty of the script which conveys the profound message of the words.

This evening, we are delighted to have Dr Nijmeh Hajjar of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Sydney, to present a lecture entitled *Mikhail Farah: An Arabic Poet from Toula, North Lebanon*. The lecture is a collaborative event of the Toula Museum and the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, and I would like to thank the members of the Committee of the Toula Museum, members of the community of Toula, and the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, especially Professor Ahmad Shboul, for their assistance with making this evening possible.

Thank you also to the Nicholson Museum, which is the largest museum of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean antiquity in Australia, for providing this wonderful venue for this evening's lecture, which is in keeping with the interests of the Toula Museum, as they are, in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern history and culture. Thanks especially to Michael Turner, Senior Curator, and Emma Harrison, Curatorial Assistant, as well as the staff assisting this evening, for making the event possible.

We would like to welcome the special guests this evening, including Mr Joseph Rizk, Managing Director and CEO, Arab Bank Australia, Professor Ahmad Shboul, and Mr Graham Turnbull SC.

I would now like to call upon Mr Peter Zada, the President of the museum, to say a few words on behalf of the Committee of the museum.

[Peter Zada]

I would like to introduce Mr Monzer Farah, the Vice-President of the museum, to present an appreciation of the life of his father Mikhail Farah, who lived from 1927-1975.

[Monzer Farah]

I would like to introduce Dr Nijmeh Hajjar of Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Sydney, who will deliver the lecture. Dr Hajjar is from Lebanon and, after studies in Beirut, Brussels and Sydney, was appointed to the department here at the university, where she is presently a Senior Lecturer and the Chair. Her research interests are in the area the contemporary Arab world of 20th century, and in particular Arabic literature and language, and she has recently published a major study of Ameen Rihani, the Lebanese Arab-American writer, intellectual and political activist of the early 20th century. It is a pleasure to welcome her here tonight to present the lecture *Mikhail Farah: An Arabic Poet from Toula, North Lebanon*.

[Nijmeh Hajjar]

The two speakers have kindly agreed to take questions and Mr Zada has delegated to me the role of answering questions about the museum.

[questions]