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Obituary

LIZ KEPFERLE

Hanna Batatu: 1926-2000

Hanna (John) Batatu passed away on Saturday, 24 June 2000, in Winsted, Connecticut, after a brief battle with cancer. Batatu was born in 1926 in Jerusalem; his first employment was as a staff officer with the Palestine Mandatory Government in Jerusalem in the 1940s. Following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, Batatu immigrated to the United States, living with relatives and working as a manager of a carpet company in Stamford, Connecticut, until 1951, when, at the age of 25, he entered Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. After earning his BS degree (*summa cum laude*) from Georgetown in 1953, he continued his higher education at Harvard University, where he earned a PhD in Political Theory in 1960.

Dr Batatu's early scholarly interests involved the United States and the Soviet Union. In his doctoral programme he shifted his focus to the Soviet Union and the Arab East. His dissertation was entitled 'The Shaykh and the Peasant in Iraq, 1917-1958'.

Apart from research fellowships at Harvard, MIT, and Princeton, Batatu held two major teaching appointments: at the American University of Beirut (1962-1981), and at Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (1982-1994). At Georgetown, he held the Shaykh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah Chair of Arab Studies, and was named Professor Emeritus upon retirement. He remained in the Washington area until the fall of 1999. Dr Batatu was to be honoured on June 28 by the American University in Beirut as one of their Millennium Scholars.

Hanna Batatu's detailed published research is invaluable to students and scholars of the modern Arab East. The first of his two major works, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (1283 pages, Princeton, 1978), is regarded by many scholars as one of the most significant works of recent times dealing with Middle Eastern society and politics. Actually three volumes in one, it is one of the few books to

have received the distinction of having an entire conference held to discuss its implications – at the University of Texas at Austin in March 1989. The proceedings of this conference were later published as a book entitled *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited*, edited by R. Lewis and R. Fernea (London: Tauris, 1991). Batatu's masterpiece has been described as 'an indispensable foundation for any thoughts regarding the creation of a new Iraqi political order' (L. Bushkoff, *Christian Science Monitor*, 3/4/90).

Last year, Dr Batatu published a counterpart to his Iraq study, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton, 1999). Dedicated 'To the People of Syria', the book traces the rural roots of Syria's ruling Ba'th party, exploring the characteristics and power structure of the Asad regime. As in his study of Iraq, Batatu relies heavily on extensive interviews with individuals at all levels of Syrian life, in the process providing valuable in-

sights into this critical Arab country. The noted political scientist Rashid Khalidi writes: 'This is a profound and comprehensive study of modern Syria that is unlikely to be surpassed for a very long time. It is a model of how social history should be written, and of how it can be used to explain the politics of a complex society like Syria.'

Hanna Batatu is survived by his brother and sister-in-law, Anthony and Bertha Reynaud of Winsted, Connecticut, and many nieces and nephews. ◆

Liz Kepferle works at Georgetown University, where since 1993 she has helped coordinate the Master of Arts in Arab Studies programme.