

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

JACQUES TOCATLIAN

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

W. Boyd Rayward

at

Paris, France

on

22 June 2000

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION  
Oral History Program  
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315 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

## JACQUES TOCATLIAN

1929 Born in Alexandria, Egypt on 31 August

### Education

1953 B.S., industrial chemistry, Alexandria University, Egypt  
1956 M.S., textile technology, Milano Polytechnico, Italy  
1959 M.S., organic chemistry, Utah State University  
1968 M.S., information and library sciences, Drexel University

### Professional Experience

1953-1957 National Starch Co., Alexandria, Egypt  
Industrial Chemist

1959-1963 Monsanto Chemical Company  
Research Chemist

1963-1968 Food and Machinery Corporation [FMC]  
Literature Chemist

1968-1969 Merck Sharp & Dohme Pharmaceutical Company  
Information Specialist

[UNESCO]  
1969-1976 Project Officer (P-4/5)  
1977-1978 Project Officer (P-5), Bureau of Studies and Programming  
1979-1987 Director (D-1), Intergovernmental General Information Program  
1988-1990 Director (D-2), Office of Information Programs and Services  
1990-1991 Consultant for Bibliotheca Alexandria

1991-present United Nations University and FID [International Federation for  
Information and Documentation]  
Part-time consultant

### Honors

FID Fellow

## ABSTRACT

Jacques Tocatlian has always had an international take on learning and acquiring information. He was born in Egypt, where he attended a French secondary school. From there, Tocatlian moved on to study industrial chemistry at an Egyptian university, where he took classes taught by English-speaking German professors. Tocatlian then earned an M.S. in textile technology from Milano Polytechnico in Italy, and an M.S. in organic chemistry from Utah State University. After a position as a literature chemist caught his eye at Monsanto Chemical Company, Tocatlian interviewed and was referred to the research department because of his outstanding qualifications. Still, research in the laboratory did not quell Tocatlian's attraction to research in the library. After work in the plastics division at Monsanto, Tocatlian accepted a position at the Food and Machinery Corporation in Princeton as a literature chemist, and worked on the first Selective Dissemination of Information [SDI] experiment. Tocatlian decided to pursue a master's in information and library science at Drexel Institute [now University], which was at the forefront of scientific information storage and retrieval in the 1960s. No sooner did Tocatlian learn of the United Nations Conference on World Science Information System [UNISIST] than he applied to one of its parenting organizations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] where he worked from 1969 until retirement in 1991. Throughout the interview, Tocatlian discusses the international standardization issues of UNESCO and the organization of UNISIST. Woven into the history of the program is mention of the tension brought about by the Cold War. Tocatlian discusses influences of non-governmental and other information science organizations on UNISIST, as well as the impact of the failure of the Global Information Network, created by UNISIST 2 in 1972. He concludes the interview by reflecting on the conceptual shift of science from a "social good" to a commodity, observations of UNESCO, and his decision to leave the laboratory.

## INTERVIEWER

W. Boyd Rayward is a research professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He turned to librarianship after graduating in English literature from the University of Sydney. He received his Ph.D. from the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago in 1973. He has held positions in the University of Chicago [where he became Dean of the Graduate Library School]. He served as Professor and Head of the School of Information Library and Archive Studies and Dean of the University's Faculty of Professional Studies at the University of New South Wales in Sydney where he is now professor emeritus. He has published two books related to Paul Otlet, Belgian documentalist and internationalist, and a great many articles on history of national and international schemes for the organization and dissemination of information.

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- 4      **International and Standardization Issues of UNISIST and UNESCO**  
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- 9      **The Global Information Network and Consequences of UNISIST 2**  
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- 20     **Reflections on UNESCO and Conclusion**  
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## NOTES

1. Jacques Tocatlian, "International Information Systems," *Advances in Librarianship* 5 (1979): 1-59.
2. Jacques Tocatlian, "A Critical evaluation of experiences and Strategies," Session 2a: *Experiences with International Cooperation and the Developing Countries*: Chairperson, Carlos Correa (<http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unubooks/uno7cc/uno7cco8.htm>).

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