

For Immediate Release



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Constantine Zurayk: An intellect and a school of thought remembered at AUB

In collaboration with the Constantine Zurayk Cultural Foundation, and as part of AUB's 150th anniversary celebrations, the American University of Beirut (AUB) held a one-day seminar "In Remembrance of Constantine Zurayk" conjoined with the opening of an exhibit of the Constantine Zurayk archival collection recently donated to the AUB Libraries by the Zurayk family.

One of AUB's history-making intellects, Dr. Constantine Zurayk is known as one of the first pioneers in Arab nationalism and a scholar of broad interests spanning many disciplines with far-reaching impact on AUB, Lebanon, and the region. Credited with coining the term Nakba for the 1948 Palestinian exodus and developing ideas such as the "Arab mission" and "national philosophy," Dr. Zurayk was a strong proponent of an intellectual reformation of Arab society, emphasizing the need for rationalism and an ethical revolution.

"Dr. Zurayk was the public intellectual par excellence, an academic who was fully engaged with the concerns of the present and future of his society, broadly defined," said AUB Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Dr. Nadia El Cheikh in her opening speech. "He was a pioneer in what a true humanistic academic should be: a stellar teacher within the walls, and an engaged intellectual in the city. At the start of the 21st century, it behooves us to emulate giants that shaped the 20th!"

The seminar featured world-class speakers and included two chaired panels. The first panel, "New Perspectives on Arab Archives: Challenges, Precariousness, and Potentials," invited scholars to read archives in the Arab world through the lens of the "archival turn", the new understanding that archives do not simply function as repositories but as a subject for study in their own right and an active site of knowledge production.

The second panel, "Nationalism, Culture, and Civilization," engaged with issues arising from Zurayk's major preoccupations in relation to recent trends in the Arab World and beyond, exploring the various meanings and political uses of the concepts of civilization and culture, and

the fortunes of Arabism in its various manifestations in the political, historical, cultural and linguistic fields.

The keynote address entitled “Reading Zurayk in the Twenty First Century” and delivered by Dr. Aziz Al Azmeh, Professor at Central European University (CEU), Budapest, shed light on issues that Zurayk devoted attention to regarding religion, sect, and nationality that were washing over the Arab world in the early part of the twenty-first century and measures Zurayk’s idea and public aspirations against military and polemical assaults that they were met with more recently.

The Constantine Zurayk archival collection

The Exhibition of Constantine Zurayk Collection spreads in the Mahmoud Malhas Common Room in West Hall. The exhibit tries to do two main things: to showcase the rich and multifaceted trajectory of Dr. Zurayk and the various facets of his engagement as a teacher, a scholar a mentor, a friend, a public intellectual, an institution builder, a diplomat, an influential speaker, and a methodical researcher and writer; and to showcase the socio-political and historical context, the fast-changing Arab reality, that the documents bear witness to.

“Costi’s” multifaceted and rich life from the time of his childhood in his beloved Damascus, through his years of study at AUB, and then on to his studies at Chicago, Princeton, and Columbia, and then his return to Beirut and AUB to teach, and engage in service, is mostly displayed on the banners, reproduced documents and photos from the archival collection, books he authored, and a few books about him, threading the various phases and pieces together. The narrative relied for the most part on Dr. Zurayk’s own autobiography and Dr. Aziz Al-Azmeh’s book on Zurayk: Arabiyun lil qarn al ishrin.

The display tables contain original materials from the archive, including items related to Zurayk’s views on nationalism and related to al urwah al wuthqa newspaper and its bylaws. Also, displayed are letters addressed to Zurayk from students, friends, and colleagues who were involved in al urwah from across the globe; letters and correspondence between Zuryak and Dr. Philip Hitti as well Dr. Charles Malek; some of Zuryak’s addresses and speeches that show his skill as an orator and his ability to inspire his listeners; and a display of letters from a variety of individuals from the late 1930 early 1940s, that give a glimpse onto the socio-political context of the Arab reality in the foremath of WWII and the tragedy of Palestine.

“AUB is the place of choice to take the lead in helping to preserve the intellectual heritage of our region, to open access to it, and thus, carve a space for the public good where public history can strive and help us strive,” said Dr. Kaoukab Chebaro, Associate University Librarian for Archives and Special Collections. “This archive is accessible and open to any curious mind wishing to dig into it. We hope the collection will serve as a testimony to a person unusually

committed and inspiring, still, until today, in spite of the lapse of time and the changing socio-political and economic realities around us.”

“Constantine used to think and then ask, ‘So, what can be done?’ His thoughts have transformed into institutions that guarantee the development of those thoughts and the achievement of the goals behind them,” said Dr. Hisham Nashabe, President of the Constantine Zurayk Cultural Foundation. “As he got older, Constantine once told me, ‘my thinking is still active but my body is not keeping up.’ Today, as I see leading young researchers gather to study aspects of Constantine Zurayk’s thought, I feel as though they are giving back to our Mentor, Zurayk, that vitality that he missed in his last days.”

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For more information please contact:

Simon Kachar
Director of News and Media Relations
Mobile: 03427024 Office: 01374374 Ext: 2676
Email: sk158@aub.edu.lb

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor’s, master’s, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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