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Powell Remembers Zaydan, Mubarak, Sorur, Edib and Sha'arawi during AUB 150th Founders' Day Ceremony

Khuri: “everything we see around us today started with that small number of faculty and students meeting here in Beirut 150 years ago”

The American University of Beirut (AUB) celebrated its 150th year of foundation in the presence of AUB President Fadlo R. Khuri, Board members, Provost, Deans, Faculty members, staff and students.

The AUB Founders' Day is a day of tradition and pride where the founding fathers of AUB are honored along with the principles they and the university have represented over the decades, such as freedom of thought and expression; tolerance, respect for diversity, and dialogue; creative and critical thinking, life-long learning, personal integrity, civic responsibility, commitment and leadership.

The speaker's for this year's ceremony was Dr. Eve M. Troutt Powell, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

AUB President was first to speak; he said: “It is an extraordinary thought that everything we see around us today started with that small number of faculty and students meeting in rented rooms here in Beirut a century-and-a-half ago”.

“We have treated 2016 as an inflection point, a point in our long and distinguished history when we can look ahead to devise how we ensure this University will remain relevant and sustainable—intellectually, ethically, economically, socially environmentally sustainable—in future years, even decades, even though to our bicentennial and beyond”, he added.

Khuri ended: “We will do that by modeling a better, fairer, freer, more ethical and democratic workplace here at AUB. By doing so we will continue to honor and celebrate the founders of our college, who took that far-sighted and transformative step 150 years ago to create this institution.”

Khuri then announced the first prize winner for this year, Mr. Maximilien Monteil who delivered a speech entitled “students who are curious”.

Then, Dr. Eve M. Troutt Powell spoke. She said: “I am so grateful to have been invited by President Fadlo Khuri to speak on the 150th anniversary of the founding of the American University in Beirut. That you would honor me by with the task, as a historian, to give some perspective on the significance and power of the liberal arts, at this moment in AUB’s history, is almost overwhelming”.

She added: “I do want to begin my talk today with the words of AUB’s second president, Howard Bliss. In 1911 he said: “the purpose of the College is not to produce singly or chiefly men who are doctors, men who are pharmacists, men who are merchants, men who are preachers, teachers, lawyers, editors, statesmen; but it is the purpose of the College to produce doctors who are men, pharmacists who are men, merchants who are men, preachers, teachers, lawyers, editors, statesmen who are men.” And by 1911 he could refer to a long line of AUB graduates (I will get to women soon) who had indeed proven themselves to be lawyers, doctors and writers who were men, preachers, scholars and editors who were men. One of these men who has influenced over a century of scholarship is the legendary Jurji Zaydan. Another such 19th century Renaissance man (or *rajil al-nahda*) was Jurji Zaydan’s older Egyptian counterpart, Ali Mubarak Pasha. What I have always found fascinating in both Jurji Zaydan and Ali Mubarak Pasha was their interest in slavery, as a reality of their times and as a literary trope. My next example of a scholar and intellectual, a specialist in the liberal arts of languages, was perhaps unknown to Jurji Zaydan or Ali Mubarak; This is Father Daniel Sorur Farim Deng who Father Daniel Sorur used this gift for languages to write passionate and sophisticated articles about the “travails of Black Slaves in Africa” and his beautiful Memories, or Memoirs.

And now for the women, for whom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century societies in which the men I have discussed lived, a liberal arts education required a father or brother devoted to reforming the status of women. Halide Edib Adivar was born in 1884, the first Ottoman woman to go to the American College for Girls, and one of the first to write novels describing late Ottoman life, but also what life was like for Ottoman women. She was an activist before and after WWI, a nationalist leader as the Ottoman Empire became the Turkish Republic and an exile when she rebelled against Ataturk’s leadership. Pictured here as well is Huda Sha’arawi, Halide’s age-mate. Born in Egypt in 1881, Huda was an elite young woman who also became an activist in the 1919 Revolution against the British occupation. Not a novelist like Halide, Huda was an even more effective politician, who founded the women’s rights movement

in the country, but fought to keep women's issues and concerns in the minds of the members of Egypt's first parliament and subsequent governments".

She concluded: "All of the people I have discussed used their education to persuade and to teach, while often leading nationalist movements, women's movements or abolition movements. Many of them also faced discrimination or prejudice as well... they teach us that That the liberal arts remind us of what is timeless: our connections to each other are most strongly expressed in prose and in poetry, in music and in dance, in the social sciences of how we relate to each other, and in the natural sciences of discovery and healing. These are the arts and tools which make, if I may paraphrase Howard Bliss, doctors, pharmacists, merchants, preachers, teachers, lawyers, editors and statesmen – who are human and can find the humanity in others.

The ceremony was concluded by the Alma Mater.

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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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