

For Immediate Release



AUB conference and memorial ceremony pay tribute to Kamal S. Salibi's legacy

Beirut, Lebanon- 03/05/2012 - Historian and writer Kamal S. Salibi's legacy were commemorated in a two-day conference and memorial ceremony at the American University of Beirut in the presence of a host of dignitaries and literati.

Organized by the Department of History and Archaeology and the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies at AUB, in coordination with the Office of the Provost, the conference which was held on May 2-3 in West Hall, was entitled "Lord of Many Mansions: Celebrating the Life and Work of Kamal S. Salibi," and addressed various aspects of Lebanese history as well as Salibi's reinterpretations of Lebanese history.

"He was a prolific academic with a critical eye, unveiling history and questioning his own and others' understanding," said AUB President Peter Dorman, during the memorial ceremony held on May 2, in the evening. "His former students have attained huge successes and he has left numerous legacies to AUB and his beloved Lebanon."

"He pushed the limits of historical research in the search for the truth, always questioning his own previous conclusions in light of his new findings," said AUB Provost Ahmad Dallal during the conference. "He held radical revisionist views, was very controversial and raised lots of questions. He was the most influential history teacher who inspired and influenced both his students and colleagues."

Salibi (2 May 1929 - 1 September 2011), born to a Protestant family in Bhamdoun, was a prominent historian, professor emeritus at AUB and the founding director (later honorary president) of the Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies in Amman, Jordan. He has authored many books, of which *A House of Many Mansions: the History of Lebanon Reconsidered* and *The Bible Came From Arabia, Who Was Jesus? A Conspiracy in Jerusalem* are considered the most notable.

In a televised address, HRH Prince El-Hassan bin Talal of Jordan praised Salibi's search for common ground and consensus building among religions in the region before time ran out. "I didn't agree much with him on many issues but knew him as a friend," he added.

Former Lebanese Premier Fouad Sanyoura praised Salibi's long-range vision in presenting and dealing with history as well as asking questions whose answers no one could predict where they would lead. "He was a nationalist with his 'I am an Arab Lebanese' and he never put the 'pen' in the service of the 'sword'," said Sanyoura. "He persisted in writing what he considered the truth even if it was not to the liking of others."

His colleagues and students agreed that Salibi will be primarily remembered for his immeasurable contributions to the history of Lebanon, as he revolutionized the way we read and write about Lebanon, culminating in his magnificent deconstruction and reorientation of its historiography in *A House of Many Mansions*. His pursuit of knowledge and disregard for tradition for tradition's sake has changed forever how our history will be viewed and written.

"He was a great storyteller with a complex mind and a simple heart," said professor Tarif Khalidi, a colleague and close friend of Salibi's. "He was a happy man and his happiness was infectious."

Khalidi describe how Salibi's geographical knowledge constituted an important edge in his understanding of history as he had "literally" walked to all the locations mentioned in his history. "He was a sage who considered AUB as his cause and not simply his academic home," he added.

"He had the prophetic insight of any truly good historian, which does not mean that he predicted the future, but understood the past so well that he could see the present and where it would lead in the future," said Reverend Habib Bader. "He was a warm, loving, humble, soft spoken, generous being and with a great sense of humor."

"We are grateful for the legacy he has left us and I am proud to be part of it," said Professor Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn. "I will keep to his advice to 'always be ready to reconsider the validity of your findings in the light of new evidence.'" Abu-Husayn also announced the establishment of the Kamal Salibi annual lecture, a fitting tribute to the man and his legacy at AUB.

"No one can close the door he has opened," concluded Sleiman Bakhti, the Master of Ceremonies of the memorial.

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Photo Caption: AUB President Dorman speaks at the Salibi memorial

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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 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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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