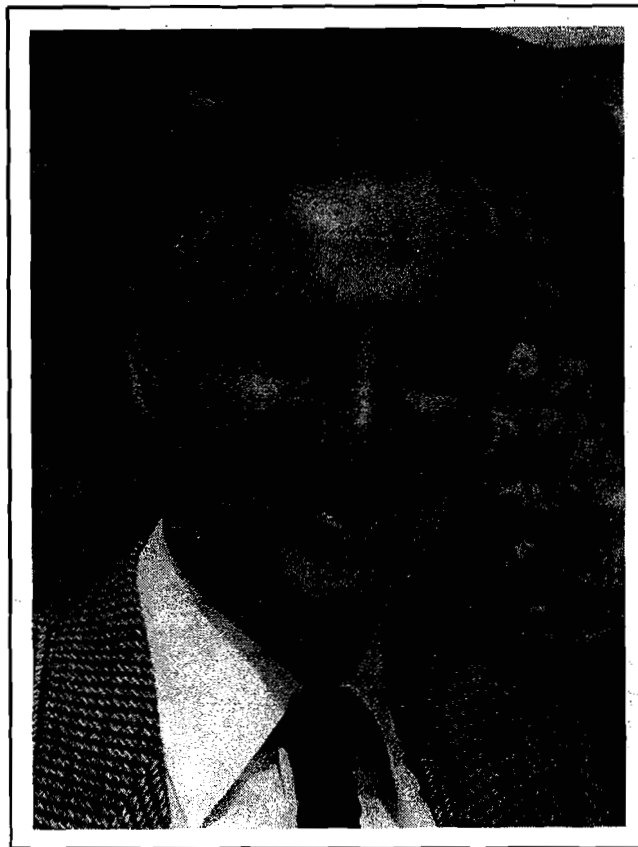


Marwan R. Buheiry
1934 - 1986



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Mr. Albert Hourani

We have met here today to remember Marwan Buheiry with love and friendship and gratitude for his life. Those who will speak after me are old friends who will be able to talk about his life as a whole. I was a new friend and I cannot speak out of many years of personal knowledge, but perhaps I can evoke something of the vividness of a first impression.

My first sight of Marwan was ten years or so ago, when he visited me at my home in Oxford, to tell me of a discovery he had made at Princeton. Searching in one of the libraries there, he had come upon a manuscript volume containing essays written by boys in the preparatory department of the American College in Beirut in the 1880's, and four or five of them were by my father. He wanted to share his discovery with me, and in retrospect this seems typical of him - his intellectual curiosity, his power of discovering hidden treasures in the byways of history and his eagerness to communicate what he had found to others.

I did not see him again until almost exactly a year ago, when he came to London to be Director of the new Centre for Lebanese Studies, and from that time until his death I met him every two weeks or so, alone or with our friend and colleague, Nadim Shehadi, in London or in Oxford, where he was a welcome member of St. Antony's College. I find almost twenty meetings recorded in my diary. They were long meetings, and in the course of them I had the excitement of seeing what had been an idea in the minds of some Lebanese men and women of good will given a clear shape by Marwan. In these few months he showed the direction in which the Centre might move.

There were three subjects which occupied him in particular. The first was the complex relationship between internal and external forces in the modern history of Lebanon. He was painfully aware that a small and delicately balanced country could not hope to live its life undisturbed: any internal movements might draw in external powers, any tremor in the environment might disturb its inner life.

The second subject was that of the alternations between symbiosis and breakdown in Lebanese history during the past century and a half, since the country was first shaken by changes in the political and economic structure of the Eastern Mediterranean lands. His thought was constantly engaged with the two moments of breakdown, that in the years between 1840 and 1860 and that in the last quarter of century; he wished to explain them, in the faith that they did not contain the whole truth about Lebanon.

Nearest perhaps to the centre of his scholarly interest was a third subject, the development of Beirut during the last 40 years: the change of scale from a middle-sized, semi-colonial port to a great cosmopolitan centre of trade, finance and culture, and the consequent changes in its structure and its relationship with the

rest of Lebanon. This was a subject which had come to absorb his thoughts, and he had started work on a major book, in collaboration with Nadim, a careful and systematic depiction of the economic, political and cultural lineaments of a great, and in the last years a tragic, city.

In the course of our talks on these subjects I formed a clear impression of an unusual scholarly personality. He had a remarkable combination of qualities: meticulous scholarship, that concern for particular facts which is one of the marks of a true historian; intellectual capacity, the ability to relate facts to general principles of historical development; and, what is rarest of all, an imaginative power which showed itself in more than one way. He used language in a manner which was at once subtle and precise; he used his eyes not only, as most scholars do, simply to read books, but to look at the world and at artifacts. He had inherited an interest in the pictorial arts, and I shall always remember how, on the last time but one when I met him, we looked together at the pictures and photographs at the Lebanese exhibition at Leighton House, which he had helped to assemble. He was always handsome and good to look at, but never more so than when he was himself looking at objects which he loved and understood, and which were for him an expression of a vision of Lebanon - of that Lebanon in which his roots were so deeply, so widely, and so firmly embedded.

He had no time to carry out these plans. Some papers on the interaction of external and internal forces were written and delivered, and may still be published; a conference on the alternations of harmony and breakdown in Lebanese history had been planned (who knows if it can now be held without his guiding hand?); The book on Beirut exists in notes only, and in the minds of those who heard him speak of it. All of us who knew and loved him must have a sense of a life cruelly cut short. For me at least, however, this is intertwined with something else, the sense of a mind which had suddenly reached the height of its powers. It seems to me, looking back, that he had changed during the last year; it was as if he had found a subject and a purpose which called out all the latent forces of his mind and imagination. He had already achieved much as a devoted teacher and a writer of articles respected by other scholars, but now there was a maturity and confidence which might have issued in something remarkable. The poet W. B. Yeats said that man was forced to choose perfection of the life or of the work. If Marwan's work was cut short, at least in his life he had reached a certain perfection, and that is a victory. No words of ours can soothe the pain of his wife, his children, his family and his friends; but it gives me a kind of consolation, a kind of hope, that I have seen the flowering of a remarkable mind and a beautiful personality.

Mrs Myrna Bustani,

When a few Lebanese friends in London thought in 1984 of setting up, in Oxford, a Centre for Lebanese Studies, a director for the Centre had to be found. We were looking for an experienced Lebanese academic with intellectual integrity, unquestionable political impartiality, who had the cast of mind to work in the Oxford University environment. Marwan Buheiry's name came at the top of the list of candidates. I had the pleasant task of interviewing him for the job in July 1984. Marwan was then teaching social and economic history of the Middle East at the American University of Beirut.

Marwan quickly realised the significance of such a centre, it was essential that the centre was not policy oriented, and non partisan; once the centre established a scholarly reputation it would be accepted as an authority on Lebanon: in fact, it would be the first pure research centre of the Arab World. Furthermore, the research carried out by the Centre would help one day to rebuild the Lebanon on a factual and sound basis.

Marwan's death is a great loss to the Centre. He was the keystone of this project and was as crucial to it as the keystone of the Baalbeck temple he talked about.

Marwan had a rare mind but was humble in his intellectual brilliance, he had the accuracy of a scientist and the questioning uncertainty of a scholar. He was a perfectionist, never fully satisfied but searching for further knowledge. He had no preconceived dogma whatsoever. His work was always open-ended, perhaps to be corrected, by a new find, a newly discovered book or photograph or print. He was eager to share his knowledge with everyone. His generosity, dedication, kindness, and his sense of humour infused his work and his relationships. Above all he was a perfect gentleman.

Even Marwan's closest friends did not know if Marwan prayed on Friday or Sunday. Was he a Christian, Protestant, Armenian, Catholic or Orthodox or was he a Moslem, Sunni or Shiite - or could he be Druze?? Somehow it didn't really matter to those who knew him. Yesterday, prayers were said for him in a mosque, and today he is remembered in a church. He was the result of a mixture of all these cultures and he understood them all. His main faith was in Lebanon itself.

In these days of turmoil when Lebanese are so divided, how rare it is to find someone like Marwan who was everyone's friend and whose work was unanimously approved by Lebanese of all factions and faiths.

Marwan inherited the artistic sensitivity of his father, the lively intelligence of his Armenian mother, he had learned Anglo-Saxon ways and concepts from his British stepfather, he was Mervyn and Marwan; he was brought up with two

libraries: the Sarraffian Protestant library and the Buheiry Islamic library; he was inspired by the liberal thinking of AUB and Princeton while being aware of other trends; all these influences gave him a universality rarely to be found. In fact, "To have the sense of the Universal" was one of Marwan's favourite expressions.

Marwan was struck just after he had delivered a most fascinating lecture. It was his last lecture, a lecture his friends can never forget.

My father used to tell us how his own mother taught him his first lessons, when he was a boy. She used to make him memorise the two sides of a page in his text book, and then, having asked him if he had learnt them she would, tear off the page and destroy it. These were days of war, famine and poverty in Lebanon and the little boy knew they could not afford to buy another book, so he never forgot his lesson!

In a similar implacable way Marwan has been torn out of our lives like a page out of a book and we Lebanese are much too poor in human beings like Marwan to afford to forget him.

He dedicated his last lecture to Leila, his wife. And to Leila I say, on behalf of the board of trustees of the American University of Beirut, the trustees of the Centre for Lebanese Studies, the members of the British-Lebanese Association and all of Marwan's friends, to Leila, and to his sons, Waël and Samer, we share your loss and your grief. We shall miss Marwan very much.

Professor Tarif Khalidi

In the few days since Marwan Buheiry has left us, my mind has been wandering back to the American University of Beirut where Marwan studied, met and married Leila, taught with such distinction and loved. Almost exactly two years ago, the AUB lost Malcolm Kerr who, like Marwan, had studied there, met and married Ann, taught with such distinction and loved. Two lives of two historians, parallel in many respects, converged upon a university, touched it deeply for a while and then left it. In any other university, such loss would occasion the deepest sorrow; for AUB, their loss is nothing less than tragic.

Marwan imparted to both students and colleagues a vibrant enthusiasm for the past, a curiosity about all origins, a grace of speaking and of writing, a sparkling imagination that constantly blended past with present. To his friends, he communicated a serenity which transcended the facile pessimism and the equally facile optimism which tossed and tumbled our opinions and our lives. With Marwan, sorrow resolved itself in thought. Indeed, while all else around him was out of joint, Marwan would redouble and redirect his energy and his will, as if in quiet defiance of the storm raging outside the lecture halls.

In his last four years or so at AUB, Marwan was to organize one international conference and to play a crucial role in organizing two others, all held at AUB. In between, he was invited to numerous conferences in the Arab World, Europe and the United States. His thoughts and reflections on the AUB's past, present and future attracted the regular attention of university trustees and administrators, while his analyses of the Middle East situation and of the question of Palestine attracted the attention of numerous academics and journalists. At AUB itself, he gave several public lectures on topics of such unusual interest that, in a city chocked with fear, always drew immense audiences. In these lectures, Marwan would conceive the most wonderful topics, weaving from them tapestries of meaning, infusing them with life and humour but never for a moment departing from the rigorous scholarly standards he had set for himself. These lectures ranged over a wide spectrum of periods and disciplines: art history, economic and social history, diplomatic history, the history of the countryside, the contemporary situation in Lebanon and the Arab world. He crammed so much into these last four or five years that the vividness of his life seems to glow in what he has said and what he has written.

As we mourn this most serene and most gracious of friends, and mourn with Leila, Waël and Samer a loving husband and father, we mourn also with a university that has had more than its fair share of sorrows, and with the Department of History, where, his grace, his wit, his wisdom, his meticulous and imaginative scholarship, his boundless generosity of spirit will always be

cherished in the memory of the colleagues who had the joy and the privilege of knowing him.

H.E. General Ahmed El-Hajj

Mrs. Buheiry, Waël and Samer, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm not here to make a funeral oration.

I stand before you as a Lebanese who feels his country's tragic loss. Lebanon has lost a noble son who died in his country's service. The few words and thoughts I am going to share with you, are a simple expression of the respect and gratitude that comrades-at-arms feel for each other. I am a soldier, and I know that the noblest act of a soldier is to give up his life in the discharge of his duties. Without, in any way minimising the soldier's sacred role, there are men who achieve equal honour in making the supreme sacrifice, but who never carry a rifle or take arms against anyone.

Marwan Buheiry was armed with pen and book, his testimony to the world and future. He translated his devotion and loyalty to his country into words that took shape and form before the eyes of the world on the printed page. As a distinguished historian, he was fully aware of the place and mission of the nation to which he belonged. As a teacher, he identified himself with the ideals of the land that bore him. As a man, he believed in the values that Lebanon has upheld and propagated for centuries: unity, tolerance, equality, justice, freedom and democracy. Lebanon's salvation surely lies in those values which Dr. Buheiry has served so well.

The very brief period of time he was allowed to live among us here in England can scarcely be measured against the number of days and months he spent working for Lebanon by establishing the Centre for Lebanese Studies in the U.K. The quality of his service will continue to inspire generations to come of Lebanese scholars, both in the U.K. and in his native land. We, the living, can but take pride in the example he set, and the heroic manner in which he died.

What words, what gesture, what token of appreciation can ever assuage the suffering, reduce the agony of grief and mitigate the severity of pain experienced by his family and his friends? One thought, and one thought alone redeems man and renders him triumphant over the tyranny of death, and that is the immortality he achieves through the quality of his deeds and the fair fruits of his mind.

As a historian, Marwan Buheiry has written his own chronicle, the chronicle of a heroic death and of noble service to his country at a time when it is in dire need of loyalty, devotion, dedication and integrity that a distinguished son like him can offer.

On behalf of His Excellency President Gemayel and the Embassy of Lebanon to the Court of St. James', I express sincerest condolences to the family of our dear lost friend, the members of the Centre for Lebanese Studies in the United

Kingdom, the members of the British-Lebanese Association, and to the Lebanese community in the U.K. His Excellency President Gemayel has conferred upon Dr. Marwan Buheiry the Order of the Cedar in recognition of his distinguished service to Lebanon's cultural and academic life.

The Church Choir sang the Ave Verum by
W.A. Mozart & Panis Angelicus by Cesar Frank
with Mr. Rajai Khouri of the Beirut Orpheus
Choir as guest soloist.