

## IN MEMORIAM

### **Butrus Abu-Manneh 1932–2018**

Professor Butrus Abu-Manneh, 86, passed away surrounded by his family on December 24, 2018, in Haifa, Israel. His memorial service was held in John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, which he helped found in downtown Haifa. Abu-Manneh served as a bridge between different worlds. He was a true gentleman, a classic historian, and admired in many circles. For one hour, Arabs, Christians, and Jews were united in the same room to honor his memory.

Abu-Manneh was beloved by his students and a dear friend to his colleagues. He was one of the founders of the Department of Middle Eastern Studies and Islam at the University of Haifa in 1971, where he taught for most of his career and was one of its mainstays until his retirement in 2002. He was one of the first researchers in Israel to master the Ottoman and Turkish languages. He was an expert in a wide range of topics in Ottoman History: Ottoman control of the province of Syria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the sources of the tanzimat reforms; the contribution of Arab Christian intellectuals to the revival of the Arabic language and culture in Ottoman Syria; various aspects of the history of the Nakshabandiyya Sufi order; and the status of Jerusalem in later Ottoman perceptions, among other topics.

Some of his articles are collected in his 2001 book entitled *Studies on Islam and the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1826–1876)*. His articles are knowledgeable, meticulous, and based on hundreds of hours of Sisyphean work in the various archives of Istanbul. “The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript,” which was published in 1994, is a good example. One of the most important questions facing historians of the late Ottoman Empire is what forces triggered the process of reforms promoted by the empire’s elite in the 1830s. The School of Westernization, which dominated Ottoman historiography for decades, believed that pressure from the European powers and the direct and indirect encounter of the Ottoman

political elite with European culture and institutions were the main driving forces behind these reforms. Abu-Manneh rejected this explanation and made the groundbreaking argument that the ideas underlying the Imperial Decree of 1839 were formulated by senior figures in the empire who sought to bring about changes that would be in the spirit of the shari‘a. The article had enormous impact and sparked a crucial academic debate.

Butrus Abu-Manneh was born in 1932 in Ramleh. He studied in the Arab College in Jerusalem and then in al-Amariyya school in Jaffa. Later, he worked as a history teacher in Lydda and Ramleh. In 1952 he entered the Hebrew University and studied philosophy and general history followed by an MA in Middle Eastern history. In 1965 he wrote his Ph.D. at St. Antony’s College, Oxford, under the supervision of the well-known historian and Professor Albert Hourani. In 1967 he married Naila Nakkara, the daughter of the renowned Communist lawyer Hanna Nakkara. They had two sons: Raid, who is a London-based solicitor, and Bashir, an English Professor at the University of Kent.

Professor Abu-Manneh saw himself not only as a researcher but primarily as a teacher. Education of the Arab population in Israel was close to his heart and he wrote several history books for pupils. In 1999 he was appointed the head of the committee for teaching history in Arab schools at the Ministry of Education. Part of the program was to introduce the history of Palestine and the *Nakba* to Arab schools. He was also very active in the Greek Orthodox community and served as a member in the board of directors in the local Arab Orthodox School.

In 2002 he became an honorary citizen of Haifa and in 2011 was voted honorary member of MEISAI (The Middle East and Islamic Studies Association of Israel). Professor Abu-Manneh was my teacher, supervisor, eventually my colleague, and friend. He graciously gave loyalty and friendship both personally and professionally. He leaves behind a wife, two children, and two grandchildren and will be missed by all. ✦

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