

*Memorial Minute for Robert M. Haddad*

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Robert (Bob) Mitchell Haddad was born in 1930 and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. His parents were Syrian immigrants from the city of Homs. He did his undergraduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh, followed by an MA in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan, and a PhD in the History of the Middle East from Harvard University in 1965. He joined Smith College in 1963, as member of both the departments of Religion and History, and went on to become the Sophia Smith Professor of History and Religion.

Bob's primary academic interest was the Christian communities in the pre-modern Islamic world. His book *Syrian Christians in A Muslim Society* (published by Princeton University Press in 1970) examines the roles played by Christians in greater Syria in accelerating the forces of change in Muslim society, first in what we call the translation movement of ancient Hellenistic and Near Eastern knowledge into Arabic in the 8th and 9th centuries, and later during the 19th century as agents of change with the emergence of various forms of nationalisms, especially in greater Syria. For this and many other projects, Bob did extensive research in Rome at the Vatican Library, in Paris at the Bibliothèque National, and in the Middle East as well, and which were facilitated by prestigious awards he received, such as a Fulbright Scholarship and a Ford Foundation Fellowship.

After retiring from Smith in 1993, Bob was chosen as president of the American University of Beirut (1993-1996), becoming the first person of Arab origin to be appointed to the

post in the university's history (AUB was established in 1866). But unfortunately, he was not allowed by the US State Department (due to its draconian regulations) to move to Lebanon, and ran the institution from New York (except for a rare short visit in his last year). I recall in early summer 1996, he arranged for a special exemption to attend and preside over the graduation ceremony, and handed me and my wife our diplomas. His tenure was pivotal, as expressed in the statement issued by the university after his death: "He led during a turbulent time, as Lebanon and AUB were struggling to recover from the Lebanese Civil War, and he helped rebuild and revitalize the university, setting it on the path to full renewal."

Bob's colleagues at Smith remember him as a wonderful raconteur, an insightful scholar, a compelling lecturer, and a huggable and cheerful Santa-like pal with a genuine sense of caring about people. Many also speak of his decisive role in faculty meetings, standing up to the rights of the faculty, and defending the curriculum against administrative fiat. As one colleague put it, Bob anticipated the long-needed expansion of historical studies beyond Europe and the US, and advocated for courses on specific and broader global themes. One such course he offered in 1977: "A Tripartite Medieval World: Latin Christian, Greek Christian and Islamic Society from the Christianizing of the Roman Empire in the fourth century to the fall of Constantinople in 1453."

Bob was also very involved throughout his career and during his retirement years in intra-Christian dialogue in the US, specifically Orthodox-Catholic conversations. As an Arab-Orthodox himself (and proudly so), Bob advocated for bridging the theological divides within US Christianity and resolving them on terms that do not privilege one group over another, and which had been one of the reasons for the marginalization of Orthodox Christians in general, and

Arab Christians in particular. His soft demeanor and trade-mark smile made him a person of trust in this endeavor.

Northampton was Bob's home in every respect, except one. He never adjusted to New England's sport culture, especially the cult around those *Red Socks*. As a Yankee fan, he had to bide his time and depend on the mercy of the TV set to connect him back to the Yankee Stadium and his childhood memories in the Bronx.

On a personal note, I also knew Bob as a Xmas tree farmer. It was a family tradition for me and my wife to bring our children in early December to his place in Wendell to pick a tree. Bob and his late wife Helen adopted an old custom of cutting Xmas trees, whereby the cut is not made close to the ground, but rather at approximately two feet high, so that some of the thick, lower branches turn into Xmas trees as they align upwards in competition to replace the severed top trunk. In this way, the tree would go on making two or three more Xmas trees; an ideal method for tree and soil preservation.

Bob passed away on 8 March 2024 in Orono, Maine. He will be sorely missed by those who knew him.