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Beirut, Capital of Trade and Culture (1820–1918)

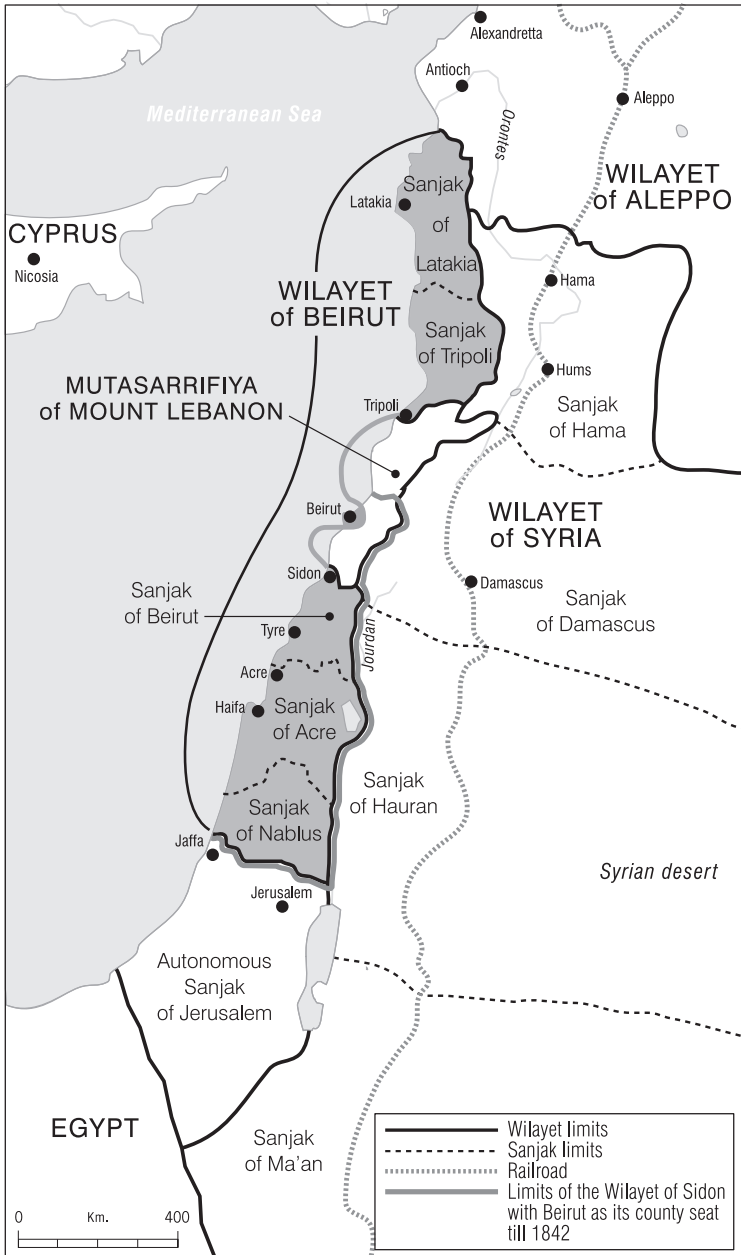
We are like the belly in relation to the other organs of the body, a belly that lives off the work of the hands and legs and is comfortably carried by them.

(Salim Bustani, 1872)

THE 'DOOR' TO EAST AND WEST

Beirut's phenomenal rise and development in the latter half of the nineteenth century benefited from the two major trends that characterise the late Ottoman period: the post-*Tanzimat* modernisation and centralisation processes and the extensive penetration of European capital in the eastern Arab provinces of the Empire. A last attempt by the ailing Ottoman Empire to face up to European colonial domination and dismemberment, the *Tanzimat* produced the opposite of their desired effects as the ambitious infrastructure and modernisation projects inflated the Ottoman debt, increased the Empire's colonial dependency and ultimately led to its demise. Paradoxically, Beirut benefited greatly from both trends: as a model of late-nineteenth-century Ottoman modernism and a base and bridgehead for European control over natural Syria.

As European colonialism radically changed international trade routes in the era of the second industrial revolution, the Beirut–Damascus axis became the main avenue of international trade in the eastern Mediterranean. In addition to its control over the traditional export of grain from the Syrian hinterland, Beirut's principal export was raw silk, the production of which had expanded under the *Mutasarrifiya*. In return, Beirut's principal imports were cotton fabrics and manufactured goods. Raw silk was exported to France, while most manufactured goods arrived from England, invading the markets of Mount Lebanon and the Syrian interior and contributing to the collapse of traditional handicrafts and local production. As Beirut's trade developed, imports exceeded exports by a factor of three. In 1887, the Ottoman authorities recognised Beirut's role and named it the capital of a new Ottoman *wilayet* bearing its name and



Map 3 The wilayet of Beirut

governing a territory of some 20,000 square kilometres, extending from Alexandretta in the north to Acre and Nablus in the south.

In effect, Beirut had already become the economic, judicial, educational and cultural, if not political, capital of Mount Lebanon. The seat of the *Mutasarrifiya* was transferred from Bayt al-Din to Ba`abda to be closer to the new capital. Commercial disputes in Mount Lebanon were adjudicated in the Beirut Commercial Court. Moreover, many consulates, foreign investors and missionaries adopted Beirut as their regional seat or upgraded their representation in the city. Both the silk economy and immigration contributed to the development of Beirut's intermediary role, economic prosperity and dominance over the Mountain. The city became the base of maritime and insurance companies (the latter numbered 20 by the end of the century). Its usurers lent villagers the *nawlun* (money to buy their travel tickets) in return for mortgages and exorbitant rates of interest. Its strongmen (*qabadays*) organised the contraband between the *wilayet* and the territory of the *Mutasarrifiya* in addition to the transport of illegal passengers destined for travel abroad. Beirut banks advanced credit to silk farmers, financed silk manufacture and handled the remittances of émigrés, estimated at 1 million pounds sterling per year in 1908.¹

The constitution of Beirut into a separate Ottoman *wilayet* attracted considerable French and European investment, especially in infrastructure and communications. In 1863, a French–Ottoman company, the Compagnie Ottomane de la Route Beyrouth-Damas, finished building a carriage road linking the two cities. The 110-kilometre trip from Beirut to Damascus took no more than 13 hours. Jacques Thobie described the road as the most lucrative French enterprise in the Ottoman Empire.² The first telegraphic link with Europe was established in 1858 and in 1890, the Compagnie Impériale des Ports, des Quais et Entrepôts de Beyrouth (with capital of 5 million francs) obtained a 100-year concession for the construction and running of a new harbour, managing customs sheds and the loading and unloading of all goods. When the new harbour started work in 1895, a Franco-Belgian company, the Société Ottomane du Chemin de Fer Damas-Hamah et Prolongements (DHP), proceeded to build a railway line between Beirut, Damascus and the Hawran. The first trains ran in 1894–95.

As Beirut's regional economic role grew, competition between British and French interests became more pronounced. While the French monopolised the silk economy, the British dominated the export of manufactured goods and were gaining an edge in

insurance, maritime transport and banking. But more important was the scramble of the two colonial powers for control over ports and means of communication (at that time, roads and railways). French investment in this sector was greater, estimated at 168.3 million francs in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. The British, out of favour in Beirut, started work on enlarging the Palestinian port of Haifa, which was rapidly replacing the traditional port of Acre, and constructing a railway line linking Haifa to Damascus. Thus began the long-term competition between Haifa and Beirut to win the role of gateway to the eastern Mediterranean. By the early twentieth century, however, Beirut port had superseded the port of Haifa as it came to handle 75 per cent of the trade of *Barr al-Sham* (the Syrian hinterland).

Perhaps the most eloquent expression of this new economic Beirut is found in an article by Salim al-Bustani (1848–84) entitled ‘Our Position’ (1872), which can be considered a founding text on the political economy of natural Syria and its coast in a changing world. ‘We have become’, he wrote, ‘the door from which the West enters the East and the East accedes to the West.’ The ‘we’ refers to natural Syria, which occupies the ‘centre’ of the ‘Oriental nation’, flanked by Turkey in the north and by Egypt and Tunis in the south. The author recommends that economic activities should exploit this geostrategic position between the West, ‘land of civilisation and success’, and the East, ‘a demographically rich territory and a land of wealth and agricultural abundance’. Bustani thus conceived of an economic role for Syria based on agriculture and trade, the latter distributing the products of the former. To legitimise trade as the vocation for the Syrian coast, Bustani makes the first references to Phoenicia initiating a tradition that considers the ancient Canaanite statelets as the founding origins of the Lebanese entity and of Lebanon’s people as a ‘people of merchants’.³

A NEW KIND OF CITY AND SOCIETY

Commenting on the particularity of Beirut’s position and role, Albert Hourani has talked about ‘a new kind of city, a new kind of urban society with a new kind of relationship with the rural hinterland’. A convergence of factors – migration, rapid urbanisation, the symbiosis between the city and Mount Lebanon, the development of an enterprising indigenous bourgeoisie, and a rapidly growing educational and cultural infrastructure – accounted for much of what made this new city and society.

Beirut's population had already quadrupled in three decades (1830–60). On the eve of the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920, it had tripled again, to 120,000 inhabitants. Much of this growth must be attributed to the refugees fleeing civil strife in 1841–45 and the 1860s. They came from Aleppo, Damascus, the Biqa` and, of course, Mount Lebanon. In 1860, some 20,000 had fled from the latter to Beirut alone. Affluent merchants and skilled artisans from Dayr al-Qamar, Jizzin and Damascus settled in the city and contributed to its economic growth. Later on, more numerous but less affluent migrants flocked from Mount Lebanon and the neighbouring countryside, seeking employment opportunities. Immigration altered the city's sectarian composition, as most of the newcomers were Christians of all sects who, by the turn of the century, constituted at least 60 per cent of its population.

The absence of strong artisan guilds greatly helped the unhindered development of Beirut's international trade and services sector.⁴ On the other hand, internal migration was an important factor in diversifying the city's economic activities and helped to create a plural urban society characterised by fluid social mobility. At the close of the nineteenth century, Beirut had earned its title of the 'jewel in the crown of the Empire', as German emperor Wilhelm II remarked during his visit in 1898.

The city witnessed unprecedented urban development, thanks to the joint effect of ambitious Ottoman infrastructure projects and the efforts of the city's municipality, set up in 1868. The municipal council, which brought together representatives of the city's merchant and notable families with some middle-class professionals, enjoyed considerable powers. It collected taxes, maintained law and order, opened streets, managed public places, constructed public schools, controlled market prices and took over responsibility for the city's sanitary infrastructure. But most importantly, Beirut's municipal council ultimately became the representative of the city's local interests, as opposed to those of the central government.

The city's centre shifted from the area around the port to the old city, now bisected by two major streets, one to connect the port to the souks and the other linking the city's centre, Sahat al-Burj, to Bab Idriss, a southern gate on the city wall. Just outside the city walls rose new official Ottoman buildings, symbols of regenerated Ottoman bureaucratic and military control. The Serail, situated on the eastern flank of the city wall, was built on the location of the old fort constructed by Fakhr al-Din II. It housed local magistrates courts and administrative services. The new infantry barracks – later

called the Grand Serail and presently housing the office of the prime minister – and the adjacent military hospital (later the Palace of Justice), were architectural expressions of the new Ottoman military organisation. The barracks dominated Sahat al-Sur and the old city. A clock tower was erected in 1899, the first of its kind in the Arab region, symbolising Ottoman modernism in obvious contrast to mosques, more traditional symbols of the Ottoman presence.

The city expanded rapidly beyond its walls, which virtually disappeared by the 1880s. A construction boom raised the price of land by 40 per cent in less than a decade as the city spread toward Nahr Beirut to the East and Ras Beirut to the West. By the end of the century, the majority of the city's inhabitants were already living outside the walls. Families of the merchant aristocracy built villas and palaces with Italianised architecture on the hills of Ashrafiyah, in the east overlooking the port, while the more recent bourgeois families moved to Zuqaq al-Bulat and Qantari in the west. New quarters developed further west: Bashura and Musaytiba, middle-class quarters of merchants and functionaries, in addition to the popular neighbourhoods of Basta and Mazra'at al-'Arab. Streets were enlarged and paved. A Belgian company, the Compagnie de Gaz de Beyrouth, which had provided Beirut streets with gas lighting in 1889, obtained the concession to build an electric tramway and provide the city with electric power under the name of Tramways et Eclairage de Beyrouth (TEB). Opened in 1909, the tramway had five lines. Many of the city's streets were enlarged, paved and cleaned as the municipality imposed street cleaning taxes on houses, shops and cafés in 1891. Sanitary and health conditions generally improved and the quarantine for maritime visitors was moved from the quarter of Rumayl to a new location further north, near Nahr Beirut. Adjacent parts of the countryside swelled with newcomers who worked in Beirut but preferred to continue living within the *Mutasarrifiyya* in areas that would soon become the city's southern suburbs of Ghubayri, Shiyah and Burj al-Barajina.

New Europeanised souks developed outside the old city, offering imported manufactured and luxury goods. Beirut's most impressive novelty in this field was the lavish Orozdi Bek department store, part of an Egyptian commercial chain with branches in many cities of Egypt and *Bilad al-Sham*, located in a Westernised multistorey building modelled after the Parisian galleries. The old khans were supplanted by no fewer than 17 modern hotels, including the prestigious Hôtel Bassoul in the Zaytuna quarter on the waterfront, later renamed Grand Hôtel d'Orient.

One major factor that explains Beirut's unique position and role as a new city is the development of its indigenous bourgeoisie. Much of the city's role in the colonial economy and the opportunities of wealth and profit it offered were exploited by its merchant class. Ultimately, European entrepreneurs played a smaller role in Beirut than in other Levantine ports like Alexandria. Local entrepreneurs imposed themselves as representatives of European companies, local retailers for European wholesalers, intermediaries in the silk market and brokers for local crops, in addition to their role as usurers. By the time Beirut became a separate *wilayet*, its trade had passed from European hands to local hands.⁵ Its local merchants invested part of their commercial profits in manufacture, especially silk reeling and banking.

Inside the city's merchant class, the balance of economic power rapidly tipped in favour of its Christian component. Christian merchants controlled the international import trade, whereas Muslim merchants had to content themselves with trade between the different ports of the Empire, the export of agricultural products from the Syrian interior to Europe and the local trade in grain, both in bulk and in retail. Indeed, Christian merchant aristocrats were associated with their Sunni counterparts – the Bayhum, Da`uq, Salam and Tabbara families, and others – in big farms, trade and franchise-holding companies. But, on the eve of World War I, Christian economic, if not political, interests had become preponderant in the city. Foreign trade, finance and representation of European firms (insurance and maritime companies) had become their semi-exclusive domain. Of the 26 houses engaged in the export of raw silk, only three belonged to Muslim families. Importers of manufactured products, building materials and pharmaceutical products were all Christians. There was only one Muslim among the eleven cotton merchants. Local banks were in the hands of Christian families, with the exception of two owned by Jewish families. Christians also dominated the liberal professions. There were only ten Muslim lawyers out of a total of 81 and two Muslim dentists out of a total of 20.⁶

The Christian merchant class was itself undergoing a process of differentiation between an aristocratic and a bourgeois faction. Its older established merchant aristocracy was mainly composed of Greek Orthodox families, whose activities covered the various *wilayas* of the empire. The Abella, Sursuq, Bustrus, Trad, Fayyad, Jbeili, Tuwayni and Tabet families arrived in the city in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Originally *mudabbirs*, tax and customs

duties collectors, merchants and moneylenders, they appropriated landed property and accumulated capital even before being attracted to the city's commercial and financial possibilities. Almost all of them benefited from the protection of one consulate or the other, a privilege granted to Europeans under the famous capitulations.⁷

Though partly engaged in the import trade and finance, the families of the merchant aristocracy remained primarily landowners—in Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Palestine and, of course, Beirut and Mount Lebanon – and exporters of grain to Europe. Some of their commercial profits was invested in real estate and in modern agricultural projects in the `Ammiq marshes (the Biqa`) or the Hula plain (Palestine). Politically, they were closely linked to the Ottoman authorities. Though their Greek Orthodox creed earned them aid and protection by Tsarist Russia, they also enjoyed close relations with Germany and Britain (Salim Bustrus was reputed to be a friend of Disraeli). Their matrimonial alliances with the Italian and British aristocracy earned them noble titles.

Parallel to this merchant aristocracy and sometimes in competition with it, a financial, commercial and manufacturing bourgeoisie arose. Its families were mainly Greek Catholics of Syrian origin and more recent arrivals to the city. They were more closely related to European capital through the silk economy (exporters of raw silk, moneylenders to peasant producers and silk reelers), banking activities and the import of European manufactured products. The two associated and related families, Pharaon and Chiha, were typical representatives of this new class. In 1876, Antoine Chiha and his father-in-law Raphael Pharaon invested the big profits they earned from speculation on raw silk in establishing a commercial and financial society that became the 'Banque Pharaon-Chiha', one of the first indigenous banks in Lebanon. On the eve of World War I, the Pharaon–Chiha association had become the biggest silk-reeling firm in the *wilayet* of Beirut, and its commercial branch controlled 12 per cent of the total volume of silk exports from Beirut. In 1894, it gained a quasi-monopoly on the import of British coal (the main energy source for the silk-reeling firms) transported by its merchant ship, flying the British flag, and kept warehouses in Mersine, Jaffa and Beirut.⁸

EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Foreign missionaries, local churches, central and local government authorities competed to provide Beirut with a sizeable and rapidly

growing educational and cultural infrastructure which would support the flowering of a distinctive intellectual climate.

Education provision in Mount Lebanon had long preceded that in Beirut. The Maronite Church, a pioneer in the field, sent student missions to Rome, particularly after the establishment of the Maronite College in the Vatican in 1584, and adopted the establishment of schools for male children as official Church policy as early as the Synod of Luwayza in 1736. One such school was the renowned Maronite seminary of `Ayn Waraqa, established in 1789, where the principal intellectuals of the Nahda studied. At about that time, the Greek Catholics established a similar school in `Ayn Traz. The French envisaged their missionary and educational role as a supplementary asset in their competition with the British. As early as 1733, the Jesuits established their institutions in Kisrawan and the north before leaving the country for a relatively long period. Upon their return in 1839, they opened a school in Beirut. Three years later, they had a network of institutions in Ghazir, Zahleh, Bikfaya, Ta`nayil, Jizzin, Dayr al-Qamar and Sidon. Meanwhile, in 1834, the Lazarites opened their school at `Ayn Tura, the first to teach in French.

Protestant missionaries, first British then American, started their activities on Lebanese territories in 1810 with a school for boys in Beirut. As`ad Shidyaq, a graduate of `Ayn Waraqa, taught Arabic in that school and became the first Protestant convert. He wrote a letter against the adoration of icons and called for a direct interpretation of the Holy Book by believers. In 1820, the Maronite patriarch Hubaysh, under orders from Rome, launched his attack against Protestant 'heresy', banning any commerce with Protestants under the threat of excommunication. As`ad Shidyaq was arrested and incarcerated in the patriarchal seat at Qannubin (Bisharri), where he died of maltreatment in 1830. Following Shidyaq's arrest, most Protestant missionaries left but returned under Muhammad `Ali to open a boys' school in Beirut (1835), followed by a school for girls (1837) and later a boarding school for boys (1850). In 1838, they set up their leading Protestant seminary in `Ubay and, two years later, a school for Druze girls in Mount Lebanon. By 1862, the Protestants were running 41 schools with 948 students.

After the 1860s, the tendency was to set up schools or upgrade them in Beirut or move them to the city. College education had begun in 1866 with the founding of the Protestant Syrian American College, which was to become the renowned American University of Beirut (AUB). The Jesuits followed suit as they transferred their

college from Ghazir (Kisrawan) to Beirut. In 1874–75, a medical school and a faculty for Oriental studies were added, marking the beginning of the Université Saint-Joseph.

The Protestant challenge prompted local churches to engage in a new round of school construction in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The Greek Orthodox built a school in the convent of Balamand near Tripoli (1833) and in Suq al-Gharb (1852). The Catholics founded the Ecole Patriarcale in 1865 and, in 1874, the Maronite bishop of Beirut established the Ecole de la Sagesse.

Lay charitable institutions also contributed their share to this rapid growth of education. In 1878, a group of Sunni notables of Beirut founded *Jam'iyat al-Maqasid al-Khayriya al-Islamiya* (the Muslim Association for Benevolent Intentions) whose main goal was the spread of education among the city's Muslim youth, as a reaction to missionary schooling. The first Maqasid schools were soon established in Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon. For the Greek Orthodox, Emilie Sursuq established Zahrat al-Ihsan (Flower of Charity), a school for girls in 1880.

Finally, Ottoman public education should not be underrated. Sultan `Abd al-Hamid II had greatly encouraged the construction of public schools. Through the joint efforts of Ottoman walis and the city's municipality, Beirut's public schools grew from 153 in 1886 to 359 in 1914.

Beirut also became a centre for printing and publishing. Book publishing in Arabic in the Arab regions of the Empire did not start until after 1727, when the Porte lifted the ban on printing in Arabic. Before then, books in Arabic were produced in Italy and France, although presses in Mount Lebanon had been established at an earlier period. The first known printing press in Mar Quzhayya monastery (in the north) began printing religious books in Syriac script as early as 1610. In 1723, Deacon `Abdalla Zakhir started a new Arabic press in the Greek Catholic monastery of Mar Yuhanna al-Shuwayr, which published the first book in Arabic in 1734. The Protestants' concern with spreading the Bible in Arabic provided Beirut with its first printing press. In 1834, Eli Smith moved the American Press from Malta to Beirut and provided it with a new set of elegant Arabic letters. In 1848, the Jesuits followed suit and set up their Catholic Press, and local presses soon followed.

In 1856 the poet and critic Khalil Houry founded *Hadiqat al-Akhbar*, the first Arabic weekly in Syria. By 1914, there were 168 publications in Beirut alone, ranging from daily and weekly political newspapers to academic and scientific journals. Among them were

a dozen women's magazines pioneered by Hind Nawfal's *Al-Fatat* in 1893. One of the leading newspapers was *Lisan al-Hal* (The Spokesman), published by Khalil Sarkis. In addition to *Al-Mashriq* (The Orient), the Jesuit orientalist journal, two professors at the Syrian Protestant College, Ya'qub Sarraf and Faris Nimr, started the scientific journal *Al-Muqtataf*. The journal, which transferred to Cairo in 1883, established itself as a forum of scientific thought, played an important role in the translation of scientific terms and published celebrated polemics on Darwin's theories. Lebanese men of letters also played a key role in the development of Arab journalism in the rest of the Sultanate. Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq's *Al-Jawa'ib* (The News), published in Istanbul in 1861, is considered to be the first pan-Arab modern newspaper. It enjoyed a wide distribution and considerable influence in all the capitals of the Arab provinces of the Empire. Intellectuals from Lebanon also played a major role in the development of journalism in Egypt. Jirji Zaydan (1861–1914) founded *Al-Hilal* (The Crescent) and the Taqla brothers Salim (1849–1912) and Bishara (1852–1911) established *Al-Ahram* (The Pyramids), both of which remain to this day the most influential monthly and daily publications, respectively, in Egypt.

The first cultural associations in the region saw the light of day in Beirut. The Syrian Association for the Sciences and Arts a literary and scientific circle, was founded in 1847 in Beirut by Ibrahim al-Yazigi, Butrus al-Bustani and Mikha'il Mashaqqa, encouraged and influenced by the Protestant missionary and scholar Cornelius Van Dyck. The deliberations of the society, collected and published by Bustani, covered many themes on science, history, rationality, women's rights, the fight against superstition, the history of Beirut and the importance of trade. The society was dissolved, but its members in 1852 and its inner circle founded the Syrian Scientific Association six years later, with a much wider and multi-sectarian audience and a membership of more than 180. There was also the short-lived Oriental Society founded in 1850, whose records have unfortunately disappeared. Literary salons also appeared at that time, with Ibrahim al-Yazigi's wife Warda founding the most reputed salon.

AL-NAHDA: THE CULTURAL RENAISSANCE

The contribution of Lebanese territories to the renaissance of Arab writing and culture, the *Nahda*, was the product of a singular symbiosis between Beirut and Mount Lebanon in the wider context

of the opening of both to Europe and the Syrian interior. While Beirut offered the educational and cultural infrastructure and the urban setting, Mount Lebanon provided the human element and the experience of a dramatic transitional period that witnessed the collapse of the old *muqata`ji* order, amid a bloody civil war. The *Nahda*'s principal actors were recent migrants from Mount Lebanon to Beirut. The city transformed them into a new type of intellectuals. They had studied in the Mountain but perfected their education in the city. Almost all had been *mudabbirs*, serving as secretaries and copyists under *muqata`jis* and rulers. In the city they became educators, translators, journalists or simply writers. Their patrons were sometimes merchant bourgeois who advertised in their newspapers or financed the publication of their books.

Typical of this class was Nasif al-Yazigi (1800–1871), who began his career as a private secretary to Prince Haydar al-Shihabi and Bashir Shihab II. He settled in Beirut around 1840 and came in contact with Protestant missionaries as a tutor in Arabic and later taught at the Syrian Protestant College. He wrote on philosophy, grammar, style, rhetoric and poetry, covering topics such as the poetry of al-Mutanabbi (915–955) and the *muqata`ji* system in Mount Lebanon. His son Ibrahim (1847–1906) was a grammarian, man of letters and educator who taught at the Ecole Patriarcale and the National School in Beirut. Nasif al-Yazigi made a valuable contribution to the modern study of Arabic poetry and his wide range of interests included music, painting and astronomy. Among his many innovations was the creation of a simplified Arab font, which reduced Arabic character forms from 300 to 60 and contributed to the creation of the Arabic typewriter. Ibrahim died in exile in Egypt after fleeing Ottoman repression.

Butrus al-Bustani (1819–1883) was the *Nahda*'s encyclopaedist. The *Mu`allim* (Master) was also a grammarian, educator, journalist, critic and pioneer in liberal, nationalist and secular thought. He studied in `Ayn Waraqa, the famous Maronite college, and taught at the Protestant seminary in Beirut then at the Syrian Protestant College. In 1863, Bustani founded the National School in Beirut, the first secular school in the Arab east, with instruction in Arabic, Turkish, French, English, Greek and Latin. Butrus al-Bustani published the first political bulletin, *Nafir Suriya* (September 1860–April 1861). In 1870, he published the daily *Al-Janna*, edited by his son Salim, the weekly *Al-Junayna*, edited by his kinsman Sulayman (the translator in verse of Homer's Iliad), and the monthly *Al-Jinan*.⁹

His main contributions, however, are the first modern Arabic dictionary (1870) and a six-volume encyclopaedia (1870–82).

Faris Shidyaq (1805–1887) is undoubtedly the most radical and creative of the *Nahda* figures. Born in `Ashqut (in Kisrawan), he lived in Hadath, near Beirut, in a family that suffered greatly from the oppression of the Church and the local feudal leaders. His grandfather, father and brother died as ‘martyrs of freedom of thought and inclination’, as he was later to write. Faris also studied at `Ayn Waraqa and, upon the death of his father, worked as a copyist of manuscripts. However, he continued his studies under his elder brother As`ad, whose arrest and death completely changed the course of Faris’s life. He broke from the Maronite Church, converted to Protestantism and left the country to an exile from which he never returned. In Cairo, under Muhammad `Ali, he taught Arabic to American Protestant missionaries and studied under the sheikhs of al-Azhar. From 1834 to 1848 Shidyaq was in Malta, where he taught at the American missionary school and edited the publications of the American Press. Later, he spent a decade moving between England and France, during which he assisted Dr Samuel Lee in the translation of the Bible into Arabic. After a brief stay in Tunis in 1859, invited by its reformist governor, Ahmad Bey, to edit the official *Al-Ra`id al-Tunis*, he converted to Islam and went to settle in Istanbul where he spent the remainder of his days. In the Ottoman capital he worked at the Imperial Press, translated the *Journal of Ottoman Court Orders* into Arabic (1868–76) and founded the newspaper *Al-Jawa`ib* in 1861. Man of letters, philologist and grammarian, Faris is the author of two books relating his travels in Europe, *Al-Wasita fi Ma`rifat Ahwal Malta* (Means of Knowing Malta) and *Kashf al-Mukhabba `Ann Funun Urubba* (Unveiling the Hidden in European Arts), both published in 1863. His writings on philology and grammar include a number of dictionaries from French and English into Arabic; *Al-Jasus `ala-l-Qamus* (The Spy on the Dictionary), a monumental critique of Fayruzabadi’s classic dictionary; and two books on grammar and rhetoric. His masterpiece *Al-Saq `ala-l-Saq* (The Thigh Over the Thigh), written and published in Paris in 1855, is considered a founding text of Arab modernity, both in content and form.

Yusuf al-Asir (1815–1889) was born in Sidon and stood out as the leading Muslim among the men of the *Nahda*. A graduate of al-Azhar in Cairo, he held the position of judge in Tripoli, mufti in `Akkar and attorney-general in Mount Lebanon under the *Mutasarrifiya*. In addition to a collection of poetry, his writings

include a commentary on the Ottoman Code. He was also the founder of the first newspaper in Lebanon (1875) to be published by a Muslim.

A common concern of all the *Nabda* pioneers was to liberate Arabic writing from its lethargy and conventional styles. They succeeded brilliantly in prose and much less so in poetry. Undoubtedly the translation of the Bible into Arabic was a landmark in that effort as the process of translation itself contributed to the innovation of Arabic prose. Three translations were produced within a period of 15 years. The Shidyaq–Lee translation came out first, in 1857, but remained largely unknown. Eli Smith (1801–1852) started the project in 1847, assisted by Butrus al-Bustani and the translation was corrected by Nasif al-Yazigi. After Smith's death, the effort was continued by Cornelius Van Dyck (1818–1895) helped by Yusuf al-Asir and the final version came out in 1865. In 1880, Ibrahim al-Yazigi produced the Bible translation for the Jesuits. Regardless of the controversies it gave rise to, the new translation of the Bible would influence generations of writers, including Gibran Khalil Gibran, author of *The Prophet*.

Literary renewal did not stop at language. New literary forms appeared under the direct influence of Western literature. Marun Naqqash (1817–1855) introduced the theatrical arts. In 1848, he staged the first modern play in Arabic, the operetta *Al-Bakhil*, a loose translation of Molière's *L'Avare*. Mikha'il Mashaqqa must be mentioned as a pioneer in the autobiography genre with his *Al-Jawab `ala Iqtirah al-Ahbab* (An Answer to the Enquiry of the Beloved Ones, 1873), while Salim al-Bustani initiated the novel form with his *Al-Huyam fi Jinan al-Sham* (Love in the Gardens of Sham) and *Zannubiya* (Zenobia). Jirji Zaydan wrote the first historical novels evoking glorious or dramatic episodes of Arab–Muslim history along with his classic histories of Arabic literature and Muslim civilisation.

Those men lived through a dramatic transitional period in which the old society was disintegrating, and they were not content to be passive witnesses of its transformations. They were actively engaged in the struggle against the two pillars of the old order: the *muqata`ji* system and the Maronite Church. Equally important in understanding their motives, thought and positions is the decisive impact that the 1860 civil war left on their lives. Many factors account for the conversion of the Maronites Bustani and Shidyaq and the Greek Catholic Mashaqqa to Protestantism and the close association of the Greek Catholic Yazigis with Protestant

missionaries. Their views on the Maronite Church and their secular leaning certainly contributed to their decision. However, dissidents from their communities were not all Christians. Amir Muhammad Ibn `Abbas Arslan, appointed *qa'im maqam* of the Druze in 1858, resigned his post in protest against the horrors of the 1860 war and settled in Beirut, where he devoted himself to literature until the end of his days. He was later to preside over the Scientific Association.

Moreover, those Christian intellectuals did not turn to Christian Europe for inspiration, but to the secular Europe of the Enlightenment, of English liberalism, and the ideals of the French Revolution of 1789. Freedom of expression, the rule of law, the central role of the individual in society and the state and equality were the underlying themes in their writings. Shidyaq, questioning the arbitrary arrest and incarceration of his brother As`ad by the Maronite patriarch, writes: 'suppose my brother argued and polemised in religious affairs and maintained you were in error, you did not have to kill him for that. You should have refuted his proofs and arguments by words, spoken or written ...'¹⁰ Bustani, for his part, emphasised the need for good government (governance) and the respect for laws.

Even so, European concepts were not uncritically assimilated. The attraction of civilisation, progress, democracy and freedom did not hide, in Shidyaq's eyes, the misery of the working populations in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. As much as he admired equality among citizens in England, he was also deeply aware of the rigidity of the country's social hierarchy and was shocked to find out that the condition of the English peasants was no better than that of peasants in Mount Lebanon. He soon discovered that the basis of the peasants' misery in England was the system of land ownership, in which a few thousand families monopolised the majority of cultivable land. Shidyaq was opposed to inherited wealth, sceptical about the idealisation of poverty as propagated by religion; he meditated at length on the way money corrupts human relations and feelings. In Victorian London, where rich and poor quarters coexisted 'as Heaven and Hell would coexist', Shidyaq realised that poverty was at the basis of all social ills: crime, suicide, prostitution of adolescents, abortion, and so on. But he discovered that the misery of the many made the happiness of the few: 'How could it be that a thousand human beings, nay two thousands, should labour for the happiness of only one man?' Shidyaq's deep sense of social justice led him to socialism (which he translated into *Isbtirakiyyah* in 1878). Ultimately, he believed that a society of peasants and

workers was more reasonable than one exclusively and entirely composed of rich people.

The Lebanese *Nahda* followed the tradition of its Egyptian counterpart in assigning the greatest importance to education as a principal mode of access to modernity and civilisation. However, Shidyaq departs from his colleagues in his emphasis on industrialisation and the value of work and of time, which he linked to the notion of progress. He further warned against reducing modernity and civilisation to living in the cities and speaking a foreign language. ‘Education without work’, says he, ‘is like a tree without fruits or a river without water.’

The intellectuals of the Lebanese *Nahda* were also pioneers of feminism. Bustani, in his famous ‘Allocution On the Education of Women’ (1849), argued the case for the education of women perhaps for the first time in the Arab world. But the *mu'allim* essentially envisaged an ideal oriental woman, educated yet restricted to her household, where her main role was the education of her children. Shidyaq went much further than his contemporaries in calling for complete equality between women and men. He defended women’s right to work and to choose their husbands, and supported their equal right to divorce. However, the Lebanese libertarian’s most original contribution to women’s liberation, in the mid-nineteenth century, was his defence of women’s equal right to sexual pleasure, even justifying extra-marital relations!

Finally, the Lebanese *Nahda* was a movement for the national revival of the Arabs. Ibrahim al-Yazigi’s poem ‘Arabs, Arise and Awake!’ became the rallying call for the early generations of Arab nationalists. However, it was Butrus al-Bustani who elaborated the notion of homeland (*watan*). Although the national space was Syria (present Lebanon, Syria and Palestine), whose people were bound by the bonds of a common language, culture and history. In line with the *Nahda*’s passion for scientific concepts, Bustani used the metaphor of the magnet to describe the power of attraction that the homeland exercised on its people.

ARAB DECENTRALISTS AND INDEPENDENTISTS

Beirut harboured one of the earliest manifestations of Arab nationalism, providing it with its cultural ethos. The turbulent developments inside the Ottoman Empire eventually transformed the idea into a movement.

In 1876, the Grand Vizier, Midhat Pasha, backed by Ottoman reformers, deposed Sultan `Abd al-`Aziz, and replaced him by his brother Sultan `Abd al-Hamid II (1876–1909). The ‘Hamidian revolution’ marked a turning point in the history of the Ottoman Empire and the destiny of its Arab regions. The Ottoman reformers had envisaged a set of political reforms in order to save the Empire from European encroachment. On 23 December of that year, they declared the Ottoman constitution. Known as ‘Midhat Pasha’s constitution’, the new charter confirmed the equality of all the subjects of the Empire, guaranteed basic liberties and adopted a constitutional and limited parliamentary regime.

Nationalist agitation in the Arab regions was a direct consequence of developments in Istanbul. In 1877, the project of an independent Arab kingdom, covering the territories of Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, was revived. Encouraged by the outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman war on 18 April 1877, Muslim notables and intellectuals from Syria’s major cities and rural centres converged upon Damascus to pay allegiance to `Abd al-Qadir and urge him to lead the movement for the unity of *Bilad al-Sham*.¹¹ They still conceived of that unity inside the confines of the Ottoman Empire. Significantly, the movement welcomed a new recruit in Yusuf Karam, whose political beliefs had undergone a radical transformation while he was in exile.

As soon as the regions of the Empire had started to react favourably to the declaration of the constitution, `Abd al-Hamid suspended it under the pretext of the Russo-Ottoman war. Midhat Pasha was dismissed and sent into exile. The outcome of the Russo-Ottoman war shifted in favour of the Russians, laying a heavy burden on the Empire. According to the treaties of San Stephano and Berlin (March and April 1878), the Ottoman Empire lost territories to Russia and was forced to recognise the independence of Romania and Serbia and to concede additional Ottoman territory to the European powers. `Abd al-Hamid ceded Cyprus to Britain and the latter encouraged France to occupy Tunisia. More importantly, Britain occupied Egypt in 1882 under the guise of suppressing the anti-British `Urabi revolt by officers of the Egyptian army. In the end, Yusuf Karam was proven right: Britain and France had started planning the dismemberment of the ailing Ottoman Empire. Aware that Istanbul could no longer count on Britain to help preserve the unity of the Empire, `Abd al-Hamid II resorted to an internal policy of massive repression and allied himself externally with Germany, the new and rival European imperial power.

When Midhat Pasha was reinstated in 1878 and appointed wali of Syria, a new lease of life was granted to Arab nationalists. The first clandestine brochures calling for revolt against the Turks and for Arab independence appeared on the walls of Beirut in 1881 and 1882. They were attributed to a secret society founded in 1876 by a dozen Christian intellectuals, mostly former Syrian Protestant College (SPC) students. However, Midhat's mandate was brief. Accused by the central government of seeking to detach the Arab provinces, he was arrested and exiled again to Ta'if (in the Arab peninsula) in 1881 and assassinated two years later, probably on the orders of `Abd al-Hamid. Midhat's demise ended the first phase of Arab national agitation. In 1882–83, the 'Arabist' secret society was disbanded and its members, including Sarruf, Nimr and Yazigi, fled to Egypt and many of the pro-`Abd al-Qadir notables and ulemas were assigned to residence or exiled.

To consolidate his rule and face up to European designs, `Abd al-Hamid called for Islamic unity, now that Arabs and Muslims constituted the majority of his subjects. If this helped temporarily to appease Arab independentist agitation, it nevertheless unleashed a new wave of struggle against Hamidian authoritarianism. The major demands were the return to the constitution, decentralisation and a larger measure of participation for the Arabs in running the affairs of the Sultanate. In 1902, a secret circle calling for constitutional life and the end of Hamidian rule was founded in Damascus. Four years later, a group of Arab students in Istanbul formed the Association for Arab Renaissance (*Jam'iyyat al-Nahda al-'Arabiya*), calling for reform and wider political Arab participation. In Paris, a group of Christian Lebanese notables and merchants founded the Ottoman League (1908), while Arab Muslims students formed the Young Arab League (*al-Jam'iya al-'Arabiya al-Fatat*) in 1911. Among them were Muhammad Rustum Haydar and Ghalib Mahmasani from Lebanon, `Awni `Abd al-Hadi from Palestine, Jamil Mardam from Syria, and Rafiq al-Tamimi from Iraq. Their aim was to 'raise the Arab nation to the level of modern nations'. In response to the official policy of Islamisation, which emphasised the historical role of the Arabs in propagating Islam, decentralists demanded equal rights for Arabs and the officialisation of Arabic, and proclaimed the unity of the Arab regions of the empire. The multi-sectarian decentralists took residence in Cairo, where they founded the Ottoman Party for Administrative Decentralisation in 1912.

The revolt of the Young Turks in 1909 and the reactivation of the constitution revived nationalist agitation in the Arab provinces. In 1913, the Young Arab Society moved its offices to Beirut and published *Al-Mufid*, edited by `Abd al-Ghani `Uraysi. The most notable of the local movements for reform and decentralisation was the Beirut Reform Movement of 1912–13. In late 1912, 84 Beirut notables and intellectuals met at the city's municipality and elected a 25-member Preparatory Committee for Reform. They demanded the officialisation of Arabic, decentralisation, the extension of the powers of the *wilaya's* council and the reduction of military service. It was also suggested that the council be formed of 30 elected members, half Muslims and half non-Muslims (the latter comprised of 13 Christians and two Jews) and control a larger share of the budget revenues – in fact, everything except the revenues from customs, post and telegraph and the exemption tax from military service. The reformists further threatened to join the autonomous region of Mount Lebanon should their demands not be met.

However, in the end the outcome of Beirut's autonomist demands was no better than that of the Mountain. On 8 April 1913, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) declared the movement's demands 'an act of treason against the Ottoman State', dismissed wali Adham *Beyk* for his sympathies toward the city's reformists and appointed Hazim *Beyk*, who disbanded the Reform Committee on that same day. The next day, all Beirut papers were bordered in black in sympathetic protest. Three days later, the Committee's general assembly, convening in the meeting hall of the Syrian Protestant College, called for a general strike, and a memorandum signed by 1,300 of the city's inhabitants (merchants, rentiers, physicians, lawyers and journalists) was addressed to the Porte, objecting to the disbanding of the Reform Committee as unconstitutional. The response came in the form of further repression. The police were ordered to force merchants to open shop, six members of the committee were arrested and accused of instigating the strike, and the two nationalist newspapers, `Uraysi's *Al-Mufid* and Sheikh Ahmad Tabbara's *Al-Ittihad al-`Uthmani*, were closed. Though the detainees were released, the Ottoman authorities appointed a more restricted committee (with considerably fewer Christians). The movement fizzled out.

The apogee of that period was the First Arab Congress in Paris representing the different nationalist tendencies among the elites of the Arab regions. Held on 17–23 June 1913 under the auspices

of the Ottoman Party, for Administrative Decentralisation, the congress was attended by delegates from Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Beirut and Mount Lebanon, in addition to the Lebanese support committees in Paris, Cairo, the United States and Mexico. The Syrian `Abd al-Hamid al-Zahrawi presided, and participants demanded Ottoman reform, decentralisation, the recognition of Arabic in the Ottoman Parliament and its officialisation in the Arab provinces, and the extension of the right for Arab conscripts to serve their terms in their own provinces in time of peace. The congress further supported the programme of the Beirut Reform movement and the increase of the *Mutasarrifiya*'s financial revenues. The dominant mood was set by `Abd al-Ghani al-Uraysi, who affirmed that Arabs were simultaneously members of a nation with specific characteristics and Ottoman citizens, and consequently possessed legitimate rights in both capacities. An issue of discord revolved around the demand of some Christian delegates from Mount Lebanon who insisted that 'foreign experts and advisers' should assist in carrying out the reforms. The majority of the delegates saw in this proposal an attempt to introduce the idea of enlisting European help against Ottoman rule. That note of discord, which was eventually settled, foreshadowed the later rift between independentists and protectionists.

Although the negotiations between a delegation from the Arab Congress and CUP members Jamal Pasha and Tal'at Pasha at first seemed promising, they yielded few results, allowing only the election of six Arab notables to the Ottoman Senate. In the end, the CUP's abandonment of `Abd al-Hamid's policy of Islamic unity, its military dictatorship, and Turkish nationalist policies drove Arab nationalists and Lebanese independentists alike to seek independence by force, even with the help of European powers.

THE CATASTROPHIES OF WORLD WAR I

The catastrophies that befell the inhabitants of Beirut and Mount Lebanon during World War I would have a direct impact on later developments. Ottoman repression against the independentist movement in Beirut and the Mountain was particularly harsh. Under the iron hand of Ottoman envoy Jamal Pasha, the 'Butcher', in 1915 and 1916, 33 Lebanese and Arab nationalist activists were sentenced to death at court martial in `Alay for high treason, accused of connections with the Allies. They were publicly hanged in Beirut and Damascus.

After the declaration of the war, the terrible *Safar Barlik* was imposed – a compulsory military service which still haunts the popular imagination today. The exemption tax – set at 44 gold pounds per head – put people at the mercy of the usurers. Ottoman authorities controlled trade, expropriated wheat and livestock, speculated, issued paper money (which they arbitrarily paid as equivalent in value to gold) and imposed a compulsory subscription to war bonds, payable in cash. Most importantly, the war revealed the economic insufficiency of autonomous Mount Lebanon, which depended on overseas trade for more than half of its revenues and mostly fulfilled its needs in cereals and livestock with imports from the Biqa` and the Syrian interior. The shortages of the war – aggravated by a locust invasion during the spring of summer of 1915 – and the speculation of the usurers and governors made the territories of the *Mutasarrifiya* and Beirut the hardest hit by famine of all the Ottoman provinces.

Father Yammin, a Maronite priest from the north, wrote a poignant account of Beirut and Mount Lebanon during the war years in which he describes, in painful detail, the ravages of locusts, the epidemics – typhus, cholera and leprosy – and prostitution and famine. People devoured the meat of dead dogs and camels and cases of cannibalism were reported in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Tripoli and Jabal `Amil. In Beirut, famine victims stacked in the streets were collected by municipal carts and dumped into collective graves in the Al-Raml quarter on the city's outskirts. Many were taken for dead and buried alive. Significantly, Yammin refused to follow the tradition of blaming all his country's ills on the Ottomans. He likewise accuses rich Lebanese who had become 'devoid of any feeling of tenderness and pity toward their kin'. But his rage was primarily directed against Beirut usurers, who lent money in return for exorbitant interest rates, set at 25–50 per cent at the beginning of the war, and raised to 70–150 per cent by 1916. These 'traders in souls', as Yammin calls them, had introduced the most cynical methods for robbing people of their properties and belongings.¹²

By the end of the war, an estimated 100,000 inhabitants of Beirut and Mount Lebanon had died of famine.