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SPECIAL ISSUE: BRIDGEHEADS AND BREAKWATERS: THE SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF PORT CITIES AFTER THE GLOBAL TURN

Emergence of an aero-city: path dependency and 'internal' dimensions in BEY/Beirut from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries

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Abstract

Examining the early post-colonial Beirut International Airport (BEY), we make two arguments. First, BEY had the potential to become the Middle East's largest airport only because from the mid-1800s Beirut, which had a large maritime port, had been the Arab East's global cultural, commercial, communications and transport hub, which created a path dependency. Second, BEY deepened Beirut's regional-global role throughout the 1960s, making it an aero-city piggybacking on a port-city. We explore four dimensions. First, in urban planning, the government was exceptionally interventionist where BEY was concerned; second, BEY's construction triggered sociopolitical conflicts; third, BEY intersected with Palestinian and Lebanese unskilled labour flows; and, finally, air-travel, including tourism, affected Beirut's cityscape deeply yet unevenly.

Focusing on the planning, building and early operation of Beirut International Airport (BEY), the historical roots that enabled it and its interdependence with Beirut in the 1940s–1950s, this article recounts the emergence of an aero-city: a city (re-)shaped by its airport.[1] We make two complementary arguments.

One argument concerns path dependency. To explain it, we need to begin with a word on civil aviation. By the end of World War II, aviation rebounded worldwide and quickly outgrew pre-war levels. Leading countries, including the United States and Britain, as well as France, expanded their intercontinental and colonial airline routes. Because long-distance flights only really began in the 1960s, those routes involved stops at several airports. With planes heavier and passenger numbers higher than before 1939, extant airports required enlargement and new airports were built as well.[2] In the Middle East, as elsewhere, the question was where the

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[1]The term is from N. Roseau, *Aerocity: Quand l'avion fait la ville* (Marseille, 2012).
[2]*Ibid.*, 125–6, 130, for Paris and New York.

most central airports would be[3] – especially as regional airlines enjoying the post-war boom linked up with intercontinental airlines like the US Trans World Airlines (TWA) and Pan American World Airways (PAN AM), the British Overseas Airline Corporation (BOAC) and Air France.

It was in this competitive atmosphere, in the mid- to late 1940s, that early post-colonial Lebanon's Beirut-centric elite and influential foreign actors – including the Americans, British and French – imagined, planned, financed and built BEY, the Middle East's largest regional airport. How were they able to do so? And why did BEY succeed in surpassing all rival regional airports, including Cairo, soon after opening in 1950? The answer is path dependency. BEY's success was possible only because Beirut had functioned for about a hundred years, from the Ottoman mid-nineteenth century onwards, as the most important cultural, commercial, communications and transport hub connecting the Arab East with the wider world. BEY was created because of Beirut – that is, because of the extensive material and human infrastructures that local forces and the Ottoman imperial and French colonial governments had invested in Beirut for a century, which underpinned its function as a regional-global hub.

This path dependency involved a repeat pattern. Neither Beirut's maritime port, built in 1887–93 and expanded in the inter-war years, nor its airport existed before the city became a regional-global hub, nor were they the cause of it assuming this status. (Until the 1920s, Beirut played a regional-global hub role in Greater Syria,[4] and from the 1930s–1940s in the entire Arabic-speaking Middle East east of Egypt, i.e. the aforementioned Arab East.[5]) Rather, both the port and BEY resulted from Beirut's pre-existing function as a regional-global hub. And it was because both were built in and for a city that was already thriving that they, in turn, substantively deepened and secured Beirut's regional-global role.

Before World War II, many commercial and cultural-educational institutions, including non-Lebanese ones, were involved in Beirut. After the war, these were joined by international organizations, embassies and foreign banks and corporations – including many more American concerns – which made Beirut their regional headquarters. Moreover, extant institutions expanded. Thus, the American University of Beirut (AUB),[6] opened in 1866, saw a large increase in the number of both staff and students, partly through programmes co-financed by US foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation, US corporations such as ARAMCO and the US government.[7] This was not by chance. Lebanon's ex-Mandate ruler, France, as well as Britain, which was the most influential empire in the early post-war Middle East, maintained a powerful presence in early post-colonial Lebanon. At the same time, the US government's role grew rapidly. At first this was largely a result of economic interests, mainly in oil and aviation, which included US corporations and the US government's direct involvement in planning and building BEY.[8] From the 1950s, it

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[3]*Ibid.*, 129, for Paris.

[4]Today's Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel/Palestine.

[5]This role would decline in the later 1960s.

[6]Until 1920, AUB was called the Syrian Protestant College.

[7]B. Anderson, *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education* (Austin, 2011).

[8]C. Schayegh, 'Exploiting Anglo-American competition: civil aviation in early postwar Beirut', manuscript under review, argues that Beirut's commercial-political elite used Beirut's role as a hub to attract competing foreign airlines and their governments.

was also one of the consequences of political-strategic considerations, which peaked in 1958, when US Marines landed in Beirut to secure Lebanon's pro-Western government.[9]

Let us turn to our second argument. In a nutshell, it is that BEY's aforementioned role in securing Beirut's regional-global status deeply affected Beirut as a city. Again there is evidence of a repeat pattern: the maritime port had a similar effect on the city. BEY did not replace the port, however. Rather, the two synergized; maritime port operations increased after World War II. In sum, in port-cities, as in aero-cities, the port was not 'just' an addendum to the city, but helped remake it. The global cultural and political-commercial dimensions of this development have been studied elsewhere.[10] BEY/Beirut was linked to outer worlds, as demonstrated by actors mentioned in this article, including Palestinian refugees and Swiss urbanists. This being said, we will focus on the city 'itself' – the 'internal' element of the subtitle – while examining four dimensions: urban planning, sociopolitical conflicts, labour and the cityscape.

Each dimension has a sub-argument. First, the Lebanese government's willingness to facilitate urban planning involving BEY was the great exception to the rule that this government, led by Beirut's hypercapitalist political-commercial elite, refused to constrain private business or the development of real estate. Second, sociopolitical conflicts triggered by the construction of BEY, most importantly disputes over land expropriation, highlighted the ability of elite Beiruti families to privately profit from a public works project.[11] Third, regarding labour, the prospect of working at BEY intersected with the growth of new low-income neighbourhoods around central Beirut from the 1940s. The last dimension – cityscape – includes three factors: (1) many Beirutis saw BEY's terminal and runways as a reflection and an integral part of an up-and-coming modernist Beirut; (2) as BEY facilitated the burgeoning tourist industry, hotels, travel and airline agencies multiplied in Beirut in central and visible locations; and (3) by the late 1940s, the certainty that BEY would be built helped unleash a construction boom in Beirut, most obviously in the neighbourhood of Ra's Beirut that included the area of Hamra (see Figure 1). In the 1950s, Hamra was rapidly transformed into 'a touristic, commercial, and business neighborhood all at once'.[12] Two factors explain Hamra's rise. By the mid-1940s Ra's Beirut as a whole was still semi-rural and Beirut's lowest-density neighbourhood – perfect for construction. And unlike more homogeneous Beiruti neighbourhoods like Christian Ashrafiyya or Sunni Basta, its inhabitants belonged mainly to the professional middle class, were religio-ethnically mixed and included many foreigners. This development can be traced back to AUB and its large campus, which, from its opening in 1866, dominated Ra's Beirut and adjacent Ain Mreisse. In sum, then, the Americans' historic presence in Beirut, together with post-war America's rising political and

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[9]I. Gendzier, *Notes from the Minefield: United States Intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East, 1945–1958* (New York, 1997).

[10]Schayegh, 'Competition'; and C. Schayegh, 'Aerocity Beirut: how an airport shaped a city's culture', https://www.sagw.ch/sgmoik/archiv/blog/details/news/aerocity-beirut-how-an-airport-shaped-a-citys-culture accessed 19 May 2025, argue that BEY allowed Beirut's elite and middle class to keep framing Beirut as an East-West bridge.

[11]Other airport historians have shown tensions surrounding airports. For post-war airports as 'sites of conflict', here concerning segregation, see A. Ortlepp, *Jim Crow Terminals. The Desegregation of American Airports* (Athens, 2017), 10. For institutional conflicts in post-war New York over airport construction, see Roseau, *Aerocity*, 135, 138.

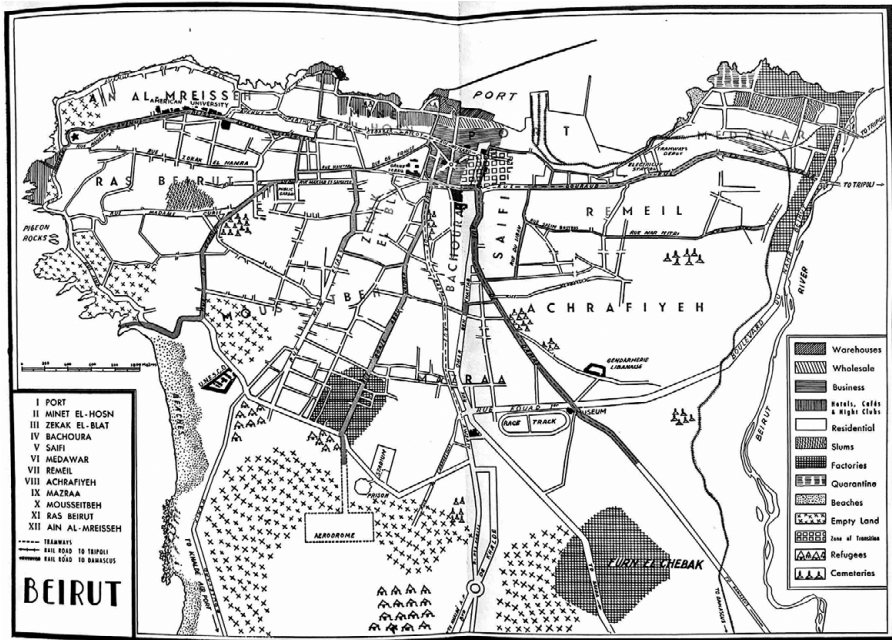[12]G. Boudisseau, 'Hamra', in J.-L. Arnaud (ed.), *Beyrouth, Grand Beyrouth* (Beirut, 1996), 67.

Figure 1. Post-war Beirut.[13]

economic influence in Lebanon, shaped the amplified regional-global hub function *of Beirut*, as secured *by BEY*, in a prominent socio-urban environment *in Beirut*.

This article contributes to the literature on aero-cities. The originating text is Nathalie Roseau's *Aerocity*.[14] It is one of a still small but growing number of histories of airports,[15] which 'until recently ha[ve] been of little interest to historians'.[16] Like others, Roseau was critical of the fact that work on airports tend to be ahistorical.[17] However, her empirical focus – changing cultural and discursive views of airports, and changes in their governance, with a focus on Paris and New York – is less central for us than her argument that airports are not globalized non-places unmoored from their cities, as some sociologists argued in the 1990s–2010s. Roseau has suggested 'relocaliz

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[13]C. Churchill, *The City of Beirut: A Socio-Economic Survey* (Beirut, 1954), IX.

[14]Roseau, *Aerocity*.

[15]Ortlepp, *Terminals*; N. Güttler, *Alles über das Fliegen. Eine politische Wissensgeschichte des Frankfurter Flughafens* (Wien, 2020). The classic text is M. Dierikx and B. Bouwens, *Building Castles of the Air: Schiphol Amsterdam and the Development of Airport Infrastructure in Europe* (The Hague, 1997). See also J. Zukowsky (ed.), *Building for Air Travel, Architecture and Design for Commercial Aviation* (New York, 1996); B. Braden and P. Hagan, *A Dream Takes Flight: Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport and Aviation in Atlanta* (Athens, 1989); M. Binney, *Airports Builders* (London, 1999); M. Cuadra, *World Airports* (Hamburg, 2002); A. Gordon, *Naked Airport*: *A Cultural History of the World's Most Revolutionary Structure* (New York, 2004); and H. Pearman, *Airports: A Century of Architecture* (London, 2004).

[16]C. Liebisch-Gümüş and L. Potthoff, 'Tagungsbericht Alltagsgeschichten von Flughäfen', H-Soz-Kult, 15 Jun. 2023.

[17]N. Roseau, 'Airports as urban narratives', *Transfers*, 2 (2012), 34; H. Daly Bednarek, 'Place or non-place', *Journal of Urban History*, 45 (2019), 386.

[ing airports] … in their specific cities' histories'.[18] Our arguments about long-term path dependency and repeat patterns – including Beirut's port – and about BEY's four material effects on Beirut take up this call, engaging urban historians interested in broad-picture diachronic processes and in ground-level synchronic issues alike. Our principal primary sources will be French, Arabic and English Beiruti newspapers; the archives of Swiss urbanists Ernst Egli and Rolf Meyer, who worked in Beirut; and Beiruti urbanist studies.

BEY: an introduction

BEY did not inaugurate aviation in Beirut. From 1931, French Air Orient aquaplanes served Beirut's St Georges Bay en route from Marseille to Saigon; and in 1938 an aerodrome opened in Bir Hassan, just south of Beirut. But BEY was different. Envisioned from the early 1940s, planned from 1945, built in 1947 and inaugurated in 1950, its three square-kilometres made it the Middle East and North Africa's (MENA) largest airport. The airport to city surface ratio – 20 per cent – was the highest in MENA, and BEY was closer to 'its' city centre (about 7 km) than most MENA competitors. Moreover, soon after its opening, BEY became MENA's premier airport. It was home to three airlines, including MENA's largest, Middle East Airlines (MEA), founded in 1945 and allied alternately with BOAC and PAN AM. BEY was also the MENA airport used by the largest number of MENA airlines – making it MENA's administrative, training and technical aviation centre – and the largest MENA airport on the transcontinental routes of a dozen non-MENA airlines, including Air France, KLM, Air India and Qantas.

Path dependency and repeat patterns

Why did MENA's premier airport belong to a capital much smaller than, for instance, Istanbul, Baghdad or Cairo? The answer lies in Beirut's late Ottoman and Mandate past. From the mid-nineteenth century, Beirut became *the* cultural-educational and commercial-economic hub connecting Greater Syria and the world. It fed, and relied on, transport and communication infrastructures including telegraphs, roads and a new maritime port built from 1887, the largest in Greater Syria.[19]

The new port did not cause Beirut to become Greater Syria's global hub. Finished in 1893, the port 'was a response to' Beirut becoming a hub from the mid-nineteenth century.[20] The idea of building a larger port was initiated by the French Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes, and the construction was mainly financed, and the port then administered, by the French-led Compagnie du Port, des Quais et des Entrepôts de Beyrouth. Although the port was not the reason why Beirut became Greater Syria's

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[18]Roseau, 'Airports', 35. Uses of this approach can be found in M. Hirsh, *Airport Urbanism: Infrastructure and Mobility in Asia* (Minneapolis, 2016); J. Wong, *Hong Kong Takes Flight: Commercial Aviation and the Making of a Global Hub* (Cambridge, 2022); R. Shamir, 'British interwar airspace in the Middle East: the forgotten airport of Lydda', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 76 (2022), 22–33.

[19]Y. Ozveren, 'The making and unmaking of an Ottoman port city', SUNY Binghamton Ph.D. thesis, 1990; C. Keyder, E. Özveren and D. Quataert, 'Port-cities in the Ottoman Empire', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 16 (1996), 519–58.

[20]C. Babikian, 'Développement du port de Beyrouth et hinterland', in Arnaud (ed.), *Beyrouth*, 25.

regional-global hub, it strengthened that function. Moreover, it overlapped with a demographic spurt in the late nineteenth century.[21] It affected central Beirut's urban infrastructure at this time, and again in the 1920s and in 1934–38 due to a major extension of facilities and a major expansion of the jetty, respectively.[22]

By 1888, the growth of Beirut had caused the Ottoman Empire to grant the city its own province. Following World War I, it quasi-automatically became the capital of France's Syro-Lebanese Mandate (1918/22–1943/46). It maintained its regional-global hub role as well. Its Ottoman era ties were strong enough to survive Greater Syria's post-war division into a French and British Mandate. Although port Haifa, Beirut's only challenger, was also expanding, it did not catch up. On the contrary, in the 1930s Beirut became better connected to Iraq and, from the 1940s, to the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf.[23] More broadly, after World War II many international organizations, such as UNESCO, foreign embassies, foreign banks and corporations such as Chase Manhattan and ARAMCO, made Beirut their regional headquarters, and extant institutions like the AUB increased their staff and student numbers. Until the 1960s, Beirut remained foreigners' preferred entry-point into the region. Beirut's deep region-wide ties allowed it not only to survive the post-war birth of post-colonial countries, each with its own borders and structures, but indeed to thrive.

Several factors explain Beirut's post-war success. The foremost non-Arab actors – France, the United States and Britain – had deep social and institutional relationships in Beirut, including the AUB, a branch of the Ford Motor Company, the Université St. Joseph and the Compagnie du Port, des Quais et des Entrepôts de Beyrouth. In a related development, Lebanon's Beirut-centric commercial, financial and political elite was hyper-capitalist and resolutely open to the world. Meanwhile, Egypt, a key competitor that from its occupation by Britain in 1882 onwards had hosted many foreign companies, became state-capitalist after the 1952 Free Officer coup. And many early post-colonial governments and economies like those of Jordan and Syria lacked global connections, knowledge and infrastructures, and thus relied on Beirut.[24]

Beirut's well-established status as a regional-global hub was *the* key reason why so many new Arab airlines and already established non-Arab airlines flocked to Beirut from the mid-1940s. Thus, a path dependency underpinned post-war BEY's rapid construction and meteoric rise. The maritime port mattered in this process, but was not the sole or even a separable factor.[25] A US economist explained BEY's success as owing to the extant presence in Beirut of

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[21]M. Davie, *Beyrouth et ses faubourgs 1840–1940* (Beirut, 1996), 141. An earlier surge happened after Damascene Christians fled to Beirut following massacres in 1860.

[22]Babikian, 'Développement'; J. Laugenie, 'Le port de Beyrouth', *Revue de géographie de Lyon*, 31 (1956), 271–94.

[23]J. Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford, 2006); Davie, *Beyrouth*; T. Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste for Home: The Modern Middle Class in Ottoman Beirut* (Stanford, 2017); L. Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Cambridge, 1983); S. Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley, 2010); C. Schayegh, *The Middle East and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA, 2017); H. Safieddine, *Banking on the State: The Financial Foundations of Lebanon* (Stanford, 2019).

[24]Safieddine, *Banking*; C. Gates, *The Merchant Republic of Lebanon* (London, 1998); Gendzier, *Notes*, 43–61, 80–89; Anderson, *American University*; S. Jackson, 'Personal connections and regional networks: cross-border Ford automobile distribution in French Mandate Syria', in J. Tejel and R. Öztan (eds.), *Regimes of Mobility* (Edinburgh, 2022), 109–40; S. Nasr, 'Backdrop to civil war: the crisis of Lebanese capitalism', *MERIP*, 73 (1978), 3–13.

[25]Schayegh, 'Competition'.

an entrepreneurial class with which American, British, and French companies could deal with in confidence … ; adequate housing, recreational and entertainment facilities so that flight and maintenance crews and management found it pleasant to establish permanent headquarters; the free money market easing transferal of ticket receipts; the availability of supplies at low cost; [and] the free political and economic atmosphere.

He mentioned the maritime port as well – but elsewhere in his analysis.[26]

BEY resembled the port in that it was not its opening – in 1950 – that caused Beirut to geographically expand its hub function. Rather, as noted, this process began back in the 1930s–1940s, and involved Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf. Moreover, like the port, BEY was not financed domestically. The readiness of the state's Beirut-centric elite to break its habit of running a minimal state budget and taking large foreign loans was key for BEY.[27] Like the port in the late nineteenth century, the building and opening of BEY in the mid-twentieth century overlapped with a massive demographic spurt and construction boom in Beirut – a point unpacked below. And again like the port, BEY, once built, deepened and secured Beirut's role as a regional-global hub, a role now expanded to include the entire Arabic-speaking Middle East east of Egypt.

This development was driven also by synergies between BEY and other transport and communication infrastructures. Most important was the port. As the French head of the Compagnie du Port, des Quais et des Entrepôts de Beyrouth stated in 1959, Beirut's port kept beating its competitors because of 'Beirut as a *place*', i.e. its impressively broad social and infrastructural profile that included '33 banks', 'integral currency exchange', 'maritime agents … who know their business to perfection', 'an excellent world-spanning telephone and telex network' – and 'the region's premier airport'.[28] As BEY grew, Beirut's maritime port operations grew as well; thus, between 1948 and 1954 its 'general traffic' doubled.[29] The port's expansion was 'somewhat less spectacular' than BEY's in terms of passenger numbers. But in freight, the port eclipsed BEY – in 1955, 6,000 tons per day could be processed by 800 agents, 600 labourers and 80 uniformed officers[30] – and it continued to grow into the 1960s; passengers kept arriving by ship, especially during the tourist summer season.[31] The port also benefitted from a change in the region, which was becoming less open to foreign business as the Arab-Israeli conflict entered an inter-state stage. After Israel became independent in 1948, port Haifa, Beirut's former challenger, was neutralized as official Israeli-Arab ties were cut. The 1956 War temporarily blocked the Suez Canal, which also worked to the advantage of Beirut's port.

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[26]W. Persen, 'Lebanese economic development since 1950', *Middle East Journal*, 12 (1958), 287, quote on 288.

[27]Amounting to 44 million LL by 1951: 'Mouvements des aérodromes', *Commerce du Levant* [*CdL*], 15 Aug. 1951.

[28]C. Bazin, 'L'avenir du port de Beyrouth', 16 Jan. 1959, p. 13, LA636, Levant, Direction Afrique-Levan, Archive du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve, France. Also see Kassir, *Beirut*, 277–8.

[29]Laugenie, 'Port', 281.

[30]*Ibid.*, 277.

[31]Persen, 'Development', 287, quote on 288. 'Throughout the 1960s, [Beiruti] newspapers (especially *L'Orient*) continuously reported on the tourists arriving in Lebanon via the (maritime) port, especially in the summer months': Email, Jan Altaner to author, 28 Aug. 2023. Example: '975 touristes arrivés en 24 heures', *L'Orient*, 15 Aug. 1963, also mentioning ship names.

We now turn to our second argument: BEY's role in securing Beirut's regional-global role deeply affected Beirut as a city. We examine four dimensions: urban planning, sociopolitical conflicts, labour and cityscape.

Urban planning

Urban planning in Beirut began in the late Ottoman period. Building on those foundations, French Mandate authorities carried out cadastral surveys from 1926, and the five-year 1932 Danger Plan 'included municipal codes and provisions for public spaces and gardens, sanitation, and infrastructure'.[32] The French carried out major restructuring in the city, and 'the expansion of the port's capacity enabled traffic to almost quadruple between 1920 and 1939'.[33] However, they only officially approved the first full-scale urban master plan for Beirut, by Michel Écochard, in 1943.[34] Building on the Danger Plan, it was never realized because of war conditions and the political instability of early independence in 1943–46.

Écochard did, however, call for a new airport. Bir Hassan aerodrome would be unsuitable, he thought. It would block Beirut's expansion southwards. Rather, he called for an airport further south, where BEY indeed would be built. And he recommended that a boulevard be added to the maritime port for economic and tactical-military reasons: an urbanistic reflection of how crucial it was to connect extant and future transport infrastructures.

In 1947–52, Lebanon employed Ernst Egli, a Swiss urbanist born in the late Austro-Hungarian Empire, who had been Türkiye's head urbanist in 1927–40 and in 1940–47 taught at the Federal Technical University Zurich (ETHZ), to direct the Interior Ministry's Office of Municipalities and Urbanism. In 1949–51, he was assisted by a junior ETHZ colleague, Rolf Meyer. Building on the work of Écochard, they and their Lebanese colleagues in Beirut planned multiple elements including: elementary zoning; a city bypass road; west–east thoroughfares inside the city; north, east and south exit roads; and a central north–south road connecting the new airport to Beirut and its port.[35]

They were soon frustrated. Lebanon's Beirut-centric commercial, financial and political elite was not just hyper-capitalist and open to the world, as noted earlier, but loath to have the state – which it led – constrain private business. This not only resulted in extremely low tax rates, but also made serious urban planning quasi-impossible. In 1951 Egli and Meyer's final report deplored the fact that 'individuals … and religious and political corporations … fight tooth and nail to safeguard even their smallest interest, hurting the public interest'.[36] Egli's agenda brings this reality to life: '11 June [1948:] … with Hokayem, Raskatoff and their assistants on terrain

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[32]H. El Hibri, 'Mapping Beirut', *Arab World Geographer*, 12 (2009), 123.

[33]N. Yassin, 'Beirut', *Cities*, 29 (2012), 68.

[34]É. Verdeil, *Beyrouth et ses urbanistes* (Beirut, 2012), ch. 1.

[35]A. Khodr, 'Planning a Sectarian Topography: Revisiting Michel Ecochard's Master Plans for Beirut between 1941–1964', Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA (hereafter MIT) M.S., 2017; Hibri, 'Beirut', 124; Verdeil, *Beyrouth*, ch. 2.

[36]E. Egli and R. Meyer, 'Rapport sur l'urbanisme au Liban entre 1948–1951', p. 1, Hs 1413-121.2.1, Fond Rolf Meyer, ETH Zurich Archives (hereafter FRM/ETHZ). This is also a fascinating report on account of its broader political cultural tone; it concludes that real urbanism and the individual sacrifices it entails needs to be learnt and that early post-colonial Lebanon is not quite there yet.

[somewhere in Beirut, for] triangulation, polygonation, and levelling. Work constrained. This is all the madness of speculation';[37] '20 October [1949:] … the topographers from the Ministry of Public Works [appear] with … two other speculators'.[38] Egli and Meyer insisted that the 'difficulties blocking projects' realization are political and financial', i.e. not societal or 'technical'.[39] Beirut had well-trained urbanists, whom they praised, including Assi and Char.[40] But the government 'wants to leave as much as possible to private financiers, so that the state has to pay as little as possible'.[41]

This approach characterized all branches of government. Ministerial and Beiruti municipal urbanist offices were short of staff, materials and documentation.[42] The executive vetoed a planned 35 million LL loan that would have allowed the Beirut Municipality to ease congestion in a city whose streets were too narrow for the surging automobile traffic.[43] And parliament refused to pass two critical law drafts, the 'loi d'urbanisme' and the 'loi sur la remaniment parcellaire', which would have regulated the expropriation of private plots and compensation for owners.[44] Consequently, by the time of the 1951 report, 'no decisions have been taken' regarding the urbanist projects that Egli and Meyer together with their Lebanese colleagues had been developing to tackle the 'pressing problem … of road traffic in Lebanon and especially in Beirut'.[45] This situation was doubly problematic around the port, which was creating major traffic issues.[46]

In this sorry picture, the success of BEY was notable. Although some parliamentarians resisted at first, they soon passed the 'Loi portant désaffectation de l'ancien aérodrome' and the 'Loi réglementant la construction en bordure du Boulevard de Khaldé' connecting BEY and Beirut, the latter including 'the idea of zoning' and 'the idea of plot rearrangement with limited possibility of application in certain cases'.[47] Thus, in 1948–49, Beirut's Bir Hassan aerodrome was quickly divided into parcels and the lots auctioned off, to the glee of private investors. Building began when the

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[37] Egli, Taschentagebuch 1948, 11 Jun., HS787-9, Fond Ernst Egli, ETH Zurich Archives (hereafter FEE/ETHZ).

[38] Egli, Taschentagebuch 1949, 20 Oct., HS787-9, FEE/ETHZ.

[39] Meyer to Ministry of Public Works Director General Ibrahim Abd el-Al, Zurich, 10 Dec. 1951, Hs 1413-121.1, FRM/ETHZ.

[40] Egli and Meyer, 'Rapport', 8. Also Egli, Taschentagebuch 1948, 16 Feb., HS787-9, FEE/ETHZ, noting a meeting with 'many architects and engineers'.

[41] Letter, Meyer to [director of Swiss country-wide planning] Schüepp, Beirut, 24 Aug. 1950, Hs 1413-121.1, FRM/ETHZ. For an example of how this approach could transform – and destroy – lower-class neighbourhoods, see J. Altaner, '"Slums" into skyscrapers: the urban history, spatial production, and erasure of Beirut's Ghalghoul neighborhood, 1840–1970', AUB M.A. thesis, 2022.

[42] Meyer, 'Rapport sur la Section de l'Urbanisme de la Municipalité', 14 Nov. 1949, Hs 1413-121.2.22, FRM/ETHZ; 'Procès verbal de réunion', p. 3, 2 Feb. [1950?], Hs 1413-121.2.24, FRM/ETHZ.

[43] Egli and Meyer, 'Rapport', 6.

[44] *Ibid.*, 2–3.

[45] *Ibid.*, 14. For a short outline, see, for example, untitled document 1413.121.1$_{32a}$, FRM/ETHZ. Key long documents are Egli and Meyer, 'Plan d'aménagement de Beyrouth', no date (but datable to 1951), Hs 785-83, FEE/ETHZ; 'Rapport de présentation du Plan Directeur de la ville de Beyrouth (au 1 :10.000)', 1 Apr. 1950, Hs 1413-121.2.25-36, FRM/ETHZ.

[46] Egli and Meyer, 'Plan', 13–14.

[47] Egli and Meyer, 'Rapport', 4. For early resistance, see B. El-Khoury, *Haqa'iq lubnaniyya* (Beirut, 1983), vol. II, 275.

aerodrome closed for good in 1951.[48] Further, the construction of a 'long boulevard linking Chatila Square, near [Beirut's famous] Pine Forest, to the new airport' had a direct urbanistic result: 'The 1950 reglementation manifested the desire to create an upscale neighborhood: it involved a regular subdivision of large plots with reduced buildability favoring large villas.'[49] And perhaps most importantly, the airport construction allowed Beirut's urbanists to make their most important overall intervention in Beirut: in the sandy dunes to its south. 'In an area extending between the Beirut ring boulevard in the Mazraa-Mar Elias section and the new airport, the decree mixed a road plan with construction regulations distinguishing different zones, which appears to be the first plan of zoning approved in Lebanon.'[50]

The airport 'deeply influenced the project governing Beirut's southern suburbs', Egli and Meyer stated.[51] They and their Lebanese colleagues worked continuously on southern Beirut, including the airport (Khaldé) boulevard and other airport related matters. The boulevard itself was already finished by early 1948: it was needed to transport construction machinery and materials from the port to the BEY construction site.[52] Egli and his team worked on the airport boulevard surroundings from mid-1948, often in direct consultation with the Public Works minister and other high-ranking officials, including the President, Bechara El Khoury; thus, on 27 January 1949 Egli participated in a two-hour meeting on the airport with the entire cabinet and El Khoury.[53] Entries in Egli's diary show how busy the Public Works minister was with airport construction,[54] and indicate that 'restrictions' related to building the airport at the time affected the overall urban planning for south Beirut.[55]

In sum, in Egli's plans, it was BEY and issues surrounding it in south Beirut that were worked on from the late 1940s.[56] Thus, when in 1954 Beirut's municipality did pass an (extremely laissez-faire and hence very ineffective and sociopolitically anti-progressive) zoning regulation and master plan that was based principally on Egli's design (who had drawn on Écochard), the aforementioned elements were those that had already been completed.[57] From the start of independence, linking the city with the maritime port and the airport was a guiding principle for Lebanon's Beirut-centric commercial-political elite.

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[48]'Le lottisement de l'aérodrome', *L'Orient*, 13 Dec. 1948; Egli, Taschentagebuch 1948, 17 and 18 Aug., 23 Sept., 25 and 26 Nov., HS 787-9, FEE/ETHZ; Egli, Taschentagebuch 1949, 11 Jan., HS 787-9, FEE/ETHZ; 'Aviation', *CdL*, 24 Apr. 1954.

[49]Verdeil, *Beyrouth*, ch. 6, para 6, https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/2174#bodyftn5 accessed 19 May 2025.

[50]*Ibid.*, ch. 6, para 7.

[51]Egli and Meyer, 'Rapport', 16; Egli and Meyer, 'Plan', 13–14.

[52]'Déclaration de M. Gabriel Murr sur l'aérodrome de Khaldé et la TAPLINE', *CdL*, 4 Feb. 1948.

[53]Egli, Taschentagebuch 1949, 27 Jan., HS 787-9, FEE/ETHZ; also, for example, Egli, Taschentagebuch 1948, 16 Sept., 29 Nov., and 2 Jan. 1949, HS 787-9, FEE/ETHZ; Egli, Taschentagebuch 1949, 22 Feb., HS 787-9, FEE/ETHZ.

[54]Egli, Taschentagebuch 1948, 30 Sept., HS 787-9, FEE/ETHZ.

[55]Egli', Taschentagebuch 1949, 9 Dec., HS 787-9, FEE/ETHZ.

[56]'Many of the other measures regarding road constructions were only dealt with over a decade later, in the 1960s, despite continuous advocacy': email, Jan Altaner to author, 28 Aug. 2023.

[57]For the laissez-faire 1954 regulation and master plan, see Verdeil, *Beyrouth*, ch. 2, para. 34; R. Saliba, 'Emerging trends in urbanism: the Beirut post-war experience' (2001), https://www.csbe.org/material-on-water-conservation-1-1 accessed 29 May 2025.

Sociopolitical conflicts

BEY's construction triggered serious sociopolitical conflicts. These formed a part of wider debates about the early post-colonial government's decision-making, information management and corruption involving Beirut's commercial-political elite. Frequent rumours reflected these discussions and pressures, sometimes forcing cabinet members to issue *dementi*s or to offer clarifications in newspapers or in parliament,[58] and occasionally pitting officials against each other.[59] These rumours revolved around varied questions: where the airport would be built, whether it would happen at all, whether construction was stopped or what construction costs were.[60]

The most sensitive rumours and related sociopolitical conflicts concerned land expropriation and compensation. For some time, the government had claimed BEY would only be built on uncultivated sandy plots. But in early 1947 engineers suddenly appeared on other, mainly citricultural fields.[61] Rumours abounded; it was unclear what was going to happen, and why the government had apparently changed its mind about the airport's location. Farmers repeatedly expelled the engineers. In turn, officials abused them as 'a band of lunatics' and a 'bunch of scoundrels'. In response, Beirut's newspaper *L'Orient* launched a 'big inquiry'.[62] It absolved the farmers, relaying what were presumably their own words. These were telling. The farmers' assurance that they did not want to 'set our interests against a higher public interest' echoed the issue that Egli, Meyer and their Beiruti colleagues would raise soon – but the farmers would yield, while Beirut's elite urban speculators would not, as we saw above. Also, the farmers' self-depiction – 'it took the determined labor and efforts of several generations to transform the sandy lands of Ghadir into one of the richest agriculture zones along Beirut's coast … a real miracle'[63] – reflected the broader question of Lebanon's economic future and corresponding government investments. As noted earlier, agriculture and irrigation were valued much less than commerce and large-scale transport and communication. *L'Orient* then attacked the Public Works Ministry as an 'arrogant bureaucracy' disregarding 'elementary principles of justice and equity'.[64] Yes, the airport was needed and the technical work was done well. But it was 'scandalous' that for months the ministry's evaluation commission had neglected to determine the value of the land to be expropriated and misinformed the public. It was its officials who were responsible for the resulting rumours and public distrust and for the clashes with farmers, who represented several hundred families.[65] In the end, Prime Minister Riad al-Sulh intervened and two members of the evaluation commission were let go.[66]

[58]'Une grande enquête de L'Orient', *L'Orient*, 20 Mar. 1947; 'A la chambre', *CdL*, 28 Jan. 1950.

[59]'Al-Murr: aklaf al-matar 24 miliunan!', *al-Hayat*, 29 Jun. 1951; and, responding, 'Jawaban 'ala kitab al-Murr wa-l-intiqadat', *al-Hayat*, 22 Jul. 1951, on BEY construction costs.

[60]'Grande enquête', *CdL*; 'L'amenagement de l'aérodrome de Khaldé', *CdL*, 2 Apr. 1947; 'Les travaux de l'aérodrome international de Khaldé', *CdL*, 23 Oct. 1948; 'A la chambre', *CdL*. Even in 1949 some Beirutis believed the building of a large airport was a chimera: El-Khoury, *Haqa'iq lubnaniyya*, vol. II, 275.

[61]Complicating matters was the fact that Beirut's sandy southern expanses had the city's 'most complex land-related (*foncier*) history': V. Clerc-Huybrechts, *Les quartiers irréguliers de Beyrouth* (Beirut, 2008), ch. 3, para. 1, https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/73?lang=fr accessed 19 May 2025.

[62]'Grande enquête', *CdL*.

[63]'La querelle de l'aéroport', *L'Orient*, 14 Mar. 1947 (a text submitted to *L'Orient* by Ghadir farmers' representatives).

[64]*Ibid.*

[65]'Grande enquête', *CdL*; 'L'enquête de L'Orient sur l'Aérodrome de Khaldé', *L'Orient*, 16 Mar. 1947; 'La querelle', *L'Orient*.

[66]'L'enquête de L'Orient' , *L'Orient*; 'Grande enquête', *CdL*.

Matters remained unresolved. Then, in September 1947, the government replaced the single-ministerial evaluation commission with a multi-ministerial one that was to immediately study all remaining agricultural plots and agree on compensation with their farmer-owners.[67] This decision had a twofold prelude. In August, money for landowner compensation was included in a large government budgetary allocation for airport construction – and a scandal erupted as 'some plots had been evaluated at an excessive price'.[68] A Public Works Ministry official was fired and replaced by another, as these plots, it seems, did not belong to farmers, but to the Salams, a Beiruti elite family, whose most powerful member, Sa'eb, was Interior Minister in 1946 and then prime minister six times in the 1950s–1970s. The family's estate outside Beirut was in Upper Ghadir, overlooking BEY. The location was convenient for meetings like the tea party Sa'eb organized in May 1946 for Lebanese politicians and foreign diplomats regarding MEA, and a PAN AM/MEA regional conference in March 1951.[69] Sa'eb was able to act thus because in 1945 the Salams had bankrolled MEA. They owned 300,000 square metres of the 1,750,000 to be expropriated in Lower Ghadir, *L'Orient* reported. The newspaper also expressed its hope that BEY's construction would not involve 'scandalous speculations'.[70] This was doubly relevant because the Salams had 'already benefited from the enormous added-value of the opening of [a part of] the boulevard that will cut through their lands to get to the airport'.[71] The Salams and farmers' ultimate compensation is unknown to me.[72] Clearly, however, BEY's construction triggered intense sociopolitical compensation-related tensions and debates in Beirut.[73]

Labour

Another type of social tension concerned rural–urban migration. While it would only accelerate in the 1950s–1960s, 'pushed by neglect to rural areas and mounting inequalities between rural and urban areas', it was already manifest from the 1940s, driven by the arrival in Lebanon of around 100,000 Palestinian *nakba* refugees. 'With the help of the newly established United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA), six permanent camps were built on leased land on the outskirts of

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[67]'Les difficultés d'expropriation', *L'Orient*, 5 Sept. 1947.

[68]'Les scandales de l'aérodrome de Khaldé', *L'Orient*, 14 Aug. 1947; 'L'aérodrome de Khaldé', *CdL*, 10 Aug. 1947.

[69]'Le Thé de la MEA', *L'Orient*, 22 May 1946; 'Traffic/sales reps. conference', *Clipper* [in-house PAN AM magazine], 9 (March 1951), 9.

[70]'Grande enquête', *CdL*.

[71]'La querelle', *L'Orient*.

[72]Clerc-Huybrechts, *Quartiers*, ch. 3, paras. 13–16, states that, following some French cadaster work in the 1930s, a preliminary land-cadaster report of the *entire* sandy area south of Beirut was drawn up between 1945–49, but remained contested into the 1950s; a final cadaster was not produced until 1958. The work took so long because of 'the poorly understood land tenure status in this area' and because of the 'increasingly significant stakes in this plain as the city develops and major infrastructure projects are planned there, foremost among them Beirut International Airport'. *Ibid.*, ch. 3, para. 17, https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/73?lang=fr accessed 20 May 2025.

[73]A different political debate, in 1948, concerned Beirut's Société des amis des arbres, which protested against the planned revised trajectory of the airport boulevard, to cross the Pine Forest, for which 4,000 trees would need to be cut down: 'Le boulevard de Khaldé', *L'Orient*, 1 Feb. 1948; also 'La forêt de pins', *L'Orient*, 19 Feb. 1948; 'Le ministre des Travaux Publics', *L'Orient*, 23 Feb. 1948.

Beirut between 1949 and 1952.'[74] At the same time, small villages around Beirut turned into sprawling, unregulated suburbs for the poor, called by some 'bidon-villes' and slums.[75] Consisting of poor quality houses, hovels and huts, they housed first thousands and ultimately hundreds of thousands of Lebanese rural migrants.[76]

This reality intersected with BEY's construction and operation. In 1948, the Public Works Ministry instructed BEY authorities to evict poor families living in hangars, who may also have been attempting to scavenge building material.[77] The literature contains interesting hints about BEY's effects on labour.[78] Three cases concern Burj al-Barajneh, parts of which became a Palestinian refugee camp, located just northeast of BEY, and Ouzai, just north of BEY, home primarily to poor Lebanese rural migrants (Figure 2).[79] In the 1980s, the French scholar Philippe Gorokhoff reported that some of the earliest Palestinian inhabitants of Burj worked at the BEY construction site.[80] When in the 1990s a Durham University student, Rebecca Roberts, interviewed Palestinians there, they recalled that 'when the[y] first began arriving in Bourj al-Barajneh it was a barren area of sand dunes and cacti. From the camp many inhabitants remember being able to see the airport in one direction and the central areas of Beirut in the other.'[81] And interviews by anthropologist Nadia Latif in the early 2000s concerning family memories revealed that while most inhabitants of Ouzai worked in Beirut, their own neighbourhood and nearby fields, BEY 'provided additional employment opportunities'.[82]

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[74]Yassin, 'Beirut', 68.

[75]A. Bourgey and J. Pharès, 'Les bidonvilles de l'agglomération de Beyrouth', *Revue de géographie de Lyon*, 48 (1973), 107–39.

[76]F. Khuri, *From Village to Suburb: Order and Change in Greater Beirut* (Chicago, 1975); Clerc-Huybrechts, *Quartiers*; Kassir, *Beirut*, 409–38; P. Gorokhoff, 'Création et évolution d'un camp palestinien de la banlieue sud de Beyrouth: Bourj el-Barajneh', *Études sur le monde arabe*, 1 (1984), 313–30.

[77]'L'aérodrome n'est pas un refuge!', *L'Orient*, 18 Jul. 1948.

[78]Although I have consulted with colleagues, including Zachary Cuyler, Lara Harb, Mona Harb, Mezna Qato, Yezid Sayigh and Zeead Yaghi, regarding this matter, it has proven really difficult to locate primary source evidence of unskilled Palestinian and Lebanese labourers working in BEY. Qato kindly suggested the UNRWA's Central Registry Archive, now in Amman, but presently closed to researchers. A 'quasi-government or even a quasi-state for millions of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East', it 'comprises millions of documents dating from the late 1940s': A. Irfan and J. Kelcey, 'Historical silencing and epistemic in/justice through the UNRWA archive', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 93 (2023), 13, 19. H. Adelman, *UNRWA Archives* (Toronto, 1985) includes an inventory of the archives when they were divided between Vienna, Gaza and Beirut, among which are two entries that *perhaps* could be relevant: p. 103: L[ebanon]/510: requests from refugees (1955–59); and L/520: refugee registration and distribution (1955–59).

[79]https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/30628/burj-al-barajneh-refugee-camp accessed 19 May 2025. The refugees, many from Tarshiha in the Galilee, settled there because they had extant relations with local merchants: *ibid.*

[80]Gorokhoff, 'Création', 319.

[81]R. Roberts, 'Bourj al-Barajneh: the significance of village origin in a Palestinian refugee camp', Durham University M.A. thesis, 1999, 36.

[82]N. Latif, 'Burj al-Barajneh: the production of urban space and forms of local engagement in the Palestinian refugee camp', *Salam w Kalam*, 24 Mar. 2021, https://www.salamwakalam.com/articles/%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%ac%d8%a6%d9%88%d9%86/534/undp-the-peace-building-news/en# accessed 25 May 2025. The airport was at times also the location of more organized workers' protests: for a case in 1964, see Z. Cuyler, 'Building shared power: the Trans-Arabian Pipeline and the technopolitics of anti-sectarian labor mobilization in Lebanon, 1950–1964', *Labor History*, 60 (2019), 71.

Figure 2. Ouzai, to BEY's north.[83]

Another case emerges from the work by urbanist Mona Fawaz on a neighbourhood just east of BEY, Hayy el-Sellom, which was 'today Beirut's largest informal settlement'. She recounts how 'in 1950, a man by the name of Abu Raymond purchased an empty piece of land at the edge of the village of Mrayjeh, then a Christian village in Beirut's southern suburb where a few of his relatives lived. Abu Raymond's family had lived for generations in this area; their move was triggered by the construction of the Beirut International Airport, only a few hundred meters away.' Moreover, she added, 'around the same time, a group of Muslim Shi'ite families from the H tribe, fleeing their village because of a tribal dispute, arrived in Beirut'. Selling them a plot in Hayy el-Sellom convinced Abu Raymond that 'housing provision could be profitable because of the steady flow of rural migrants to the southern suburbs of Beirut who usually paid high rents for rooms'. They hoped to 'find employment either in the new airport or in the factories located nearby'.[84]

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[83]Beirut airport, aerial view (1960), Collection 'Plan Directeur de Beyrouth et de sa Banlieue', Michel Écochard digital archive, MIT Aga Khan Documentation Center, MIT Libraries, Cambridge, MA. https://www.archnet.org/sites/8377?media_content_id=97481 accessed 19 May 2025. I thank Jan Altaner for the image.

[84]M. Fawaz, 'An unusual clique of city-makers', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32 (2008), 572, 573.

Cityscape

BEY also affected Beirut's cityscape. We discuss three aspects: the terminal and runways, hotels and travel-related offices, and the growth of Beirut.

First, though, a crucial point underlying these factors should be made. BEY facilitated international travel for thousands of foreign professionals who, as noted earlier, began living in Beirut and working for international organizations, foreign embassies, foreign banks and companies, and extant institutions like AUB from the 1940s. Moreover, BEY turbocharged tourism. Tourism was more important to post-war Beirut (and Lebanon more broadly) than before World War II and involved not only Arab vacationers and visiting diaspora Lebanese but also Westerners.[85] Americans were key to this enterprise. Rich and numerous compared to their early post-war Western counterparts and imbued with a globalist understanding of the United States, early post-war upper-middle class Americans began travelling abroad in numbers that heralded the dawn of a new tourist age less dominated by elites.[86]

By 1964 Americans formed the single largest national contingent of arrivals, accounting for 22 per cent, at BEY.[87] From the 1950s, PAN AM, allied with MEA in 1949–54, dominated aviation tourism. In 1951, it inaugurated a weekly 21-hour long New York–Beirut service, stopping only in London to pick up Europeans. In 1953, it introduced 'tourist class fares to the Middle East'. And by 1952 it was solely responsible for bringing 22,000 passengers to and through Beirut on ten weekly transcontinental trunk flights.[88] That year, 80,886 passengers would disembark in BEY overall, either as a stopover or because it was their destination. This was five times the maritime port's numbers, and the stopover passengers alone, who often spent only a day or a night in Beirut, were estimated to have spent 12 million LL that year.[89] By 1954, about 10 per cent of all disembarkments were by ship, though ship passengers' *absolute* numbers were growing to around 2,000 per month in the early 1950s. But BEY grew faster: in 1955, 149,279 passengers disembarked, and in 1959, 229,461.[90]

BEY's terminal and runways changed how Beirutis experienced their city. Reporters at the 1950 airport inauguration celebration, which attracted thousands of Beirutis

[85]Kassir, *Beirut*; W. Hazbun, 'Touring exotic lands', in A. Bayat (ed.), *Global Middle East* (Oakland, 2021), 228–9; Z. Maasri, 'Troubled geography: imagining Lebanon in 1960s tourist promotion', in K. Fallan and G. Lees-Maffei (eds.), *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in the Age of Globalization* (New York, 2016), 125–34. For the pre-war period, see J. Daam, *Tourism and the Emergence of Nation-States in the Arab Eastern Mediterranean, 1920s–1930s* (Leiden, 2022). More broadly, see W. Hazbun, *Beaches, Ruins, Resorts* (Duluth, 2008). For sources, see, for example, K. Showker, *Travel Lebanon. A Modern Guide to an Ancient Land* (Beirut, 1965); 'Conseillers suisses pour le Liban (Industrie hôtelière au Liban)', E2200.14-01#1000/188#98*, Swiss Federal Archives, Bern.

[86]J. Pearson, 'Tourism and transport', in E. Zuelow and K. James (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Tourism and Travel* (Oxford, 2022); C. Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapell Hill, 2004); J. Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge, MA, 2013).

[87]National Tourism Council, 'Enquête touristique menée par le Conseil National du Tourisme à l'Aéroport de Beyrouth en 1964' p. 3, 19920554/136, Fonds Delprat (87 AS), Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France. I thank Zeead Yaghi for this document.

[88]'New Strato Clipper', *Clipper*, 7 (1951), 2; 'Speaking for themselves', *Daily Star* [*DS*], 9 Jul. 1952; 'Latest Tourist Fares – New York–Beirut', *Clipper*, 9 (1953), 7.

[89]R. Alamuddin, 'The Lebanese passenger air transport industry during 1952–1962', AUB MBA thesis, 1965, 68; 'Les deux ans de Khaldé', *CdL*, 2 Jul. 1952.

[90]'Le port de Beyrouth', *CdL*, 27 Feb. 1954, states that only 10 per cent of all tourists entered by the port, but that the number increased from 17,934 in 1951 to 21,436 in 1952.

Figure 3. Inaugural stamp of BEY terminal (1954).[91]

young and old, rich and poor, were overwhelmed by the 'runways' colossal length' of 2.5 kilometres. Children from Bourj Barajne and adults rushed onto them, running, strolling and taking possession. Thereafter, ever larger and heavier airplanes like PAN AM Stratoclippers and BOAC Comets buzzed low over Beirut to land on these runways. As for the 'ultramodern' terminal, it was 'the most modern and beautiful airport building of its kind in all the East' (Figure 3) and, with the airport's cutting-edge technical equipment, seemed to represent Beirut's future.[92]

In Beirut, hotels multiplied. From the late 1940s, reporters and officials advocated the opening of new establishments to service the expected wave of visitors.[93] The hotel-cityscape shifted quickly. In 1951, the luxury Bristol opened. In 1952, as a hotel passenger service was opened in BEY to assist visitors, the *New York Times* reported that 'Beirut is now better equipped from the standpoint of modern hotels' than Cairo. For the more than 200,000 tourists who entered the country that year, 15,000 hotel beds were available. This number made Beirut equal to Egypt, although the Land on the Nile was an older tourist destination and much more populous.[94] The year 1955 became Lebanon's Year of Tourism. In 1956, Beiruti businessman Najib Salha, who in 1953 had founded the Société des grands hôtels du Liban, began constructing the Phoenicia-Intercontinental together with a PAN AM subsidiary, Intercontinental Hotels Corporation. Opened in 1961, this hotel became a landmark. Famous for its unprecedented size, with about 300 rooms, soon doubled to 600, for its façade and for the placement of the bar under the pool, it was located close to the French Mandate-era St Georges hotel on Beirut's waterfront (Figure 4).[95] In 1964, an enquiry showed

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[91]https://storage.googleapis.com/stamps.items.collectgram.com/121/big/121faa56fe6c06433ff4421bb435c506477045a9.jpg.

[92]'Aérogare de Khaldé', *CdL*, 24 Apr. 1954, and *al-Hayat*, 22 Apr. 1954, caption to an untitled terminal photo. See also 'L'Aérodrome de Khaldé', *CdL*, 5 Jul. 1950. For the inauguration, see also El-Khoury, *Haqa'iq lubnaniyya*, vol. III, 316. For the US lead in staging airports as a 'mass spectacle', see Roseau, *Aerocity*, 181.

[93]'L'importance économique de l'aérodrome de Khaldé', *CdL*, 18 Dec. 1948; 'L'Etat prendrait-il en main la construction d'un grand palace à Beyrouth?', *CdL*, 24 Dec. 1949; 'L'Aérodrome de Khaldé', *CdL*, 1 Jul. 1950.

[94]'Cairo and Beirut vie for air prize', *New York Times* 9 March 1952; 'Le problème capital de l'équipement hôtelier', *CdL*, 27 Feb. 1954. The number 15,000 was apparently for all of Lebanon, but given Beirut's tourist centrality, a good number of tourists were concentrated there.

[95]'IHC Plans to Open New Hotel in Beirut', *Clipper*, 12 (1956), 4; T. Hadjithomas Mehanna, *Le Phoenicia, un hôtel dans l'histoire* (Beirut, 2012).

Figure 4. The Phoenicia-Intercontinental.[96]

that 91 per cent of American, 81 per cent of European and 71 per cent of Arab visitors to Lebanon stayed in Beiruti hotels.[97]

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[96]Postcard, *c.* 1961, in the possession of the author.

[97]National Tourism Council, 'Enquête touristique', 7–8. In July and August, only 39 per cent of Arabs stayed in Beirut; almost as many were in the mountains.

Travel agencies multiplied, too, in Beirut. The foremost agencies, which worked with the leading airlines, were highly visible in central locations. Thus, BOAC worked with M. Cook and Sons, Farajallah and Hitti Frères at the Place de l'Etoile (Sahat al-Najma, also known as the Place du Parlament), with the Karmak National Tourist Organization at rue Allenby and with Peltours and TRAVA, both on the Avenue des Français.[98] Airline offices opened in central locations. MEA's office faced the Place de l'Etoile; branches in Fakhreddin Street and Bab Idriss followed.[99] PAN AM's first office was near AUB. After allying with MEA in 1949, it joined MEA's Place de l'Etoile office. In 1952, MEA chairman Saeb Salam purchased a plot from the Beirut Municipality on (what from 1957 was called) Riad al-Sulh Square. Situated in downtown Beirut, this was 'a most desirable part of the city', he assured PAN AM, which co-financed the purchase.[100] When MEA and PAN AM dissolved their alliance in 1954, taking exclusive possession was a central PAN AM demand.[101] The building guaranteed maximum visibility in Beirut and exemplified how aviation marked Beirut's cityscape (Figure 5).

How did BEY affect Beirut's growth? Our answer begins with a general note. Since the nineteenth century, Beirut's economic centre had been downtown, next to the port (Figure 1; also called Central Business District [CBD]). It was characterized by 'crafts, significant concentration of tertiary activities (banks, offices, hotels), leisure activities (cinemas, cabarets, etc.), but above all a multitude of retail and wholesale businesses (specialized souks, commercial buildings, etc.)'. After World War II, a second centre arose to the west of the CBD: Hamra and more broadly Ra's Beirut, to which it belonged, and adjacent Ain Mraisse. Hamra 'specialized in leisure activities (cinemas, sidewalk cafes, games rooms, restaurants), tourism (hotels, furnished apartments, travel agencies, airlines), business (banks, offices) and in the trade of luxury (jewellery, clothing, art galleries)'.[102] It was not by chance that Ra's Beirut, Ain Mraisse and the CBD (and adjacent Saifi) were Beirut's only high-income neighbourhoods.[103] After the war Beirut experienced a construction boom. The built environment almost doubled from 140,000 square metres in 1945–47 to 250,000 square metres in 1948–50, municipal construction permits tripled from 390 in 1945 to 1,261 in 1955, while a 1952–53 survey of 2,000 households showed that half the city's buildings were less than 20 years old.[104] As Beirut's lowest-density neighbourhood in the mid-1940s, Ra's Beirut was subjected to a considerable share of construction. In a chorogram of Hamra's urbanization that tabulated 75 plots, almost half (i.e. 34) plots were defined as rural for the year 1945, but only a quarter (i.e. 19) for 1955. And by the early 1960s, 'Ras Beirut, and Hamra in particular, [was Beirut's] area [of] maximum land values'.[105]

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[98]'MISR Airlines', *CdL*, 18 Aug. 1948; 'BOAC', *L'Orient*, 5 Mar. 1946. The Aboujaoudé travel agency had branches in both Cairo and Beirut, in rue Allenby and Parliament: *CdL*, 15 Jun. 1946; *CdL*, 11 Dec. 1946; *CdL*, 1 May 1948.

[99]MEA advertisements in *CdL*, 15 May 1946; *DS*, 4 May 1954; *CdL*, 21 May 1955.

[100]MEA President Sa'eb Salam to PAN AM Vice President Harold Harris, 1 Feb. 1952, folder 3#2, box 510, series II, 'Divisions and Affiliates' box 6, Pan American World Airways Records, Special Collections Division, University of Miami, Miami.

[101]*Clipper*, 11 (28 Apr. 1955).

[102]Boudisseau, 'Hamra', para. 3.

[103]C. Churchill, *The City of Beirut: A Socio-Economic Survey* (Beirut, 1954), table 117; median calculation of the table in Khalaf and Kongstad, *Hamra*, 25.

[104]Khalaf and Kongstad, *Hamra*, 21; Churchill, *Beirut*, 20.

[105]Khalaf and Kongstad, *Hamra*, 27, 32, 41.

Figure 5. PAN AM's MEA headquarters on Riad al-Sulh Square.[106]

Two factors suggest that BEY helped unleash that construction boom, especially in Hamra. First, when BEY was already in the construction phase, there were intense public discussions in the city about the need to rapidly build up tourism infrastructure, including hotels. In 1950, Beirut's municipality received a large budget from the central government to undertake urban work in its central areas to better accommodate tourists.[107] And second, Hamra did become Beirut's principal tourist centre: hence, the aforementioned 'hotels, furnished apartments, travel agencies, (and) airlines' that were fed through BEY.[108] BEY was not only important to Hamra because of its tens of thousands of visitors but because of its residents as well. The fundamental reason was AUB. Historically dominating Ra's Beirut, including Hamra and Ain Mreisse, from the 1940s AUB became 'a fundamental and not merely incidental factor in the urbanization and growth' of those neighbourhoods. Moreover, these neighbourhoods attracted a specific population. The Lebanese were religio-ethnically mixed, and by the 1960s formed only half the population. The other half were non-Lebanese Arabs (36 per cent), including many Palestinians (13 per cent), North Americans (6 per cent), Europeans (5 per cent), Armenians (5 per cent) and Asians (1 per cent), among others. As has been noted, Ra's Beirut and Ain Mreisse were high-income neighbourhoods. And perhaps most importantly, their population was largely socioculturally liberal and belonged to the professional middle class. Hamra 'attract[ed] careers such as pilots, hostesses, interpreters, decorators, journalists, publishers, artists, entertainers, public

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[106]https://garystockbridge617.getarchive.net/amp/topics/pan+american+world+airways.

[107]'L'importance économique de l'aérodrome de Khaldé', *CdL*, 18 Dec. 1948; 'L'aérodrome de Khaldé', *CdL*, 1 Jul. 1950. Also see 'La construction d'une palace ultra-moderne à Beyrouth sera terminée dans deux ans', *CdL*, 1 Nov. 1950.

[108]Boudisseau, 'Hamra', para. 3.

relations experts, and market analysts' and '[drew] the largest number of engineers, doctors, and hospitals … government ministries and foreign embassies'. Many Hamra residents had both the money *and* professional and family reasons to travel – and to this end, BEY was the indispensable means.[109]

In sum, BEY helped unleash a building boom that was felt perhaps most intensely in Hamra. Historically dominated by AUB and with almost half the population comprising non-Lebanese nationals, this neighbourhood became a key focus, *in Beirut*, of the expanded regional-global hub secured *by BEY* at a time of global US ascendancy.

Conclusion

This text has made two complementary arguments. First, BEY was able to become MENA's premier airport only because for a century Beirut had been a regional-global hub: there was a path dependency, which contained a repeat pattern. The fact that BEY followed from Beirut's role as a hub, as opposed to creating it, evokes comparisons with Beirut's maritime port. Secondly, BEY, again like the port, helped secure Beirut's role as regional-global hub. This appeared *within* Beirut, for instance in urban planning, sociopolitical contestations, labour and in the cityscape. Put in a nutshell: Beirut made BEY, and BEY helped remake Beirut.

Our case study provokes questions that might underpin future research. One question is: what are the upsides and downsides of our approach to studying what we may call the city-airport nexus? Rather than just one approach, two were combined in this article: one diachronic (argument 1), the other synchronic (argument 2). The upside was that we were able to show that airports have structural prehistories involving human and material infrastructures such as a maritime port, and to demonstrate city-airport interdependence. The downside? Argument 1 was very brief, and we did not cover all dimensions of argument 2.

The practical limitations of this article hides a substantive question. What do we mean by (city-airport) 'nexus'? Do we see a close relationship between two separate things? Or is the nexus so strong that the two merge? The former view permits two perspectives: city-to-airport (thus, in Roseau's *Aerocity*, especially, images are almost entirely of airports, not cities) and airport-to-city (thus, our argument 2 plays out mainly in the city).[110] What connects the two? Sheer physical proximity as well as thick material transport infrastructures such as a highway or a train or tram track, and perhaps the decision-making authority of one single institution? This question is especially relevant for the post-war period, when two processes neutralized each other while also forcing people to rethink what airports and cities 'are'. Accommodating ever bigger and heavier planes, post-war airports were built further away from city centres than before – but post-war cities were more subject to urban sprawl, creating (what in some parts became known as) suburbs.

The last question might be: who are our actors? The two airport histories cited most in this article, Roseau's *Aerocity* and Ortlepp's *Jim Crow Terminals*, though thematically different, involved various local-urban actors as well as actors from

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[109]Khalaf and Kongstad, *Hamra*, 67, 21, 65, 29, 78.

[110]And Ortlepp, *Terminals*, 49, shows how de-segregation activism in airports in the American South reverberated politically in cities (and beyond).

'beyond' a city/airport. But what *is* local and urban *versus* global (or: what is glocal?) in a field, aviation, that is unique in bringing distant lives closer together? And who holds what sort of power in these situations?

Consider terminal design. In BEY, it was entrusted to the same Parisian architects responsible for Orly Airport in Paris that showcased France's cultural sophistication. Meanwhile, BEY's duty-free zone echoed the consumerism manifest most clearly in US post-war airports – a feature that the growing number of American tourists and their European peers visiting Beirut or stopping over had come to expect.[111] At the same time, the Beiruti owners of the Bristol, a five-star hotel that opened in 1951, launched restaurants in the terminal, and BEY's duty free was framed as an 'International Suk' (bazaar). Beirut, and an imaginary Orientalist tourist version of it, was inserted into BEY.

Let us conclude. A decade ago, Roseau issued a call to 'relocalize [airports] … in their specific cities' histories'.[112] She was right. Since then, studies have come in many forms. We have combined two, one diachronic, the other synchronic. By doing so, and with our concluding conceptual questions, we hope to have helped integrate airports into urban history.

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[111]Schayegh, 'Aerocity Beirut'.
[112]Roseau, 'Airports', 35.