The Historical Background of Lebanese Emigration, 1800-1914

CHARLES ISSAWI

Students of migration divide the operating forces into ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. My task will be to describe the many factors that pushed the Lebanese out of their homeland. These push factors can be subdivided into political, economic and social forces. I shall often have to look beyond Lebanon’s borders, to Syria, Palestine and further.

The political background

In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, geographical Syria, including Lebanon, was the scene of many regional and international conflicts; after that it witnessed bitter communal and social strife. The two sets of factors were loosely connected. Both combined to make life miserable for the population and thus to make them ready to consider the possibility of emigration.

In the eighteenth century Syria was formally divided into four provinces, ruled by pashas: Sham (Damascus), Aleppo, Tripoli and Sayda. In addition, southern Palestine was often administered by a pasha residing in Gaza, and Lebanon enjoyed a large degree of autonomy under its Ma‘ni and Shihabi princes. At times a leading family, notably the al-‘Azm of Damascus, would enjoy virtual independence for several generations merely paying a tribute to Istanbul, but eventually the Porte would reassert some authority, if necessary by inciting neighbouring rulers to attack the offender. Pashas and other rulers and chieftains also frequently went to war against each other, for personal,
political or commercial reasons. In the second half of the eighteenth century two warlords successively ruled, from Acre, over northern Palestine and southern Lebanon: ‘Umar al-Zahir (d. 1775) and Ahmad al-Jazzar (d. 1804).

In the meantime, Syria was being subjected to attacks and invasions. In 1772, and again in 1773, a Russian fleet in co-operation with al-Zahir, and the Mamluk ruler of Egypt Ali Bey who had invaded Syria, bombarded and pillaged Beirut. In 1799 Napoleon marched through Palestine, defeating an Ottoman army near Nazareth but eventually having to return to Egypt because of his failure to take Acre, which was defended by Al-jazzar with the help of a British fleet. In 1810 the Saudi Wahhabis raided Hauran and were repulsed only after they had carried out of extensive pillage and plunder; the Ottoman forces included a contingent from Lebanon which, however, does not seem to have engaged in actual fighting. In 1826 a small Greek naval force made an unsuccessful attempt to capture Beirut and pillaged the houses outside its walls. Of far greater consequence was the invasion in 1831, led by Ibrahim Pasha, son of Muhammad Ali, the viceroy of Egypt. Once more Acre put up a stiff resistance but was taken after a seven months’ siege. There followed the overwhelming victories of Homs, Bailan (Near Alexandretta) and Konya. By the Syria had become the focus of attention of the great powers and, under their pressure, the sultan granted Muhammad Ali lifetime rule over Syria and Cilicia. However, fighting resumed in 1839 but, in spite of a resounding victory at Nisibin, Muhammad Ali, faced with four hostile great powers and local uprisings, was forced back to Egypt. In the course of the fighting, Beirut was subjected to a heavy bombardment, Tripoli was shelled and Acre captured after a short but intense siege. Henceforth, until the first world war, Syria was spared regular warfare, as distinct from civil strife and the suppression of rebellions.¹

These wars and occupations contributed to the ensuing civil strife by helping to undermine the traditional feudal structure of Lebanon and by exacerbating relations between religious communities.

Applied to the Middle East (the Ottoman and Safavi empires) the word ‘feudal’ is a misnomer, but it describes quite accurately conditions in Mount Lebanon in the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century. The apex of the pyramid was the amir, or hakim. The Shihabis, who held this post from 1697 to 1842, were (like their Ma’ni predecessors) Sunni Muslims. They had been elected by an assembly of the notables of Shuf, at Simqaniyya, in 1697, dominated by the Qaysis, one of the two factions that had pitted the Lebanese

against each other since the early Middle Ages. They consolidated their power by their victory over their Yamani enemies at ‘Ayn Dara, in 1711. Many of the leading Druze families were eliminated at or after this battle, and others fled to Hauran, to found another Druze community in that region. The triumphant Qaysis were rewarded with titles and fiefs by the amīr, but new factions soon sprang up again: the Jumblati, Yazbaki, Nakadi, Arslani and others.

The amīr was invested by the Ottoman pasha of Sayda or Tripoli and paid a small tribute but, save in a great crisis, Ottoman interference was minimal. Two other families of amīrs, the Abu al-Lam‘ of Matn and the Arslan of Shuf, enjoyed subordinate status. Beneath them came the noble families (muqata‘jis), who held hereditary fiefs; most of them were Druzes, but in the northern regions there were some Maronite and also Greek Orthodox and Shi‘I fiefholders. The mass of the population (‘amiyya) consisted of peasants, some owners, other share-cropping tenants, mostly Maronites and Druzes but also Shi‘is, Greek Catholics, Greek Orthodox and Sunnis. Towns were few and very small—it should be remembered that not only the ports (Tripoli, Sayda and Beirut) but even Zahleh and Ba‘albak were outside the boundaries of Mount Lebanon.

The main characteristic of this society was its hierarchical character. A person’s status as a nobleman or commoner was determined by birth was hereditary. So was his allegiance: a muqata‘jī owed protection to his men and they in turn owed him loyalty, paid him rent and taxes and took his side in the conflicts between the Qaysi and Yamani factions, or their successors, that divided the country. The amīr did not exercise jurisdiction over his subjects but only through the subject’s lord; since he had only a small number of retainers and only exceptionally hired mercenaries, his capacity to impose his will on his subjects was strictly limited. Moreover, although the amīr was always chosen from the Shihab family, and more often than not was a son of the previous incumbent, no regular principle of succession was recognized. This meant that the muqata‘jis wielded considerable influence in the selection of an amīr. Since they often owned a considerable amount of land within their fief, and frequently fought their neighbours over their borders, the muqata‘jis had great power. By the same token, the amīr spent much of his time setting one lord against another.

The second characteristic is that loyalties cut across religious lines. Because of the Maronites’ southern migration (see below) many of them, as well as other Christians and Shi‘is, owed allegiance to a Druze muqata‘jī. The Qaysi-Yamani factions and their successors transcended religious lines and pitted coreligionists against each other. The amīrs also took their religion rather
lightly and some were even suspected of having secretly embraced another one. For example Fakhri al-Din (1590–1635) was believed to have become a Druze or even to have been baptized, and Sayyid-Ahmad Muhlim (1778) and his sons and Bashir II (1793–1840) almost certainly became Maronites.

The result of all these factors was that, although a poor and stagnant society, Lebanon enjoyed a degree of religious tolerance unknown in other parts of the Middle East. More generally, the Lebanese had much greater security of life and property, a fact commented upon by European observers. Volney’s remark has often been quoted:

I can discover no other cause [for the density of population] that that ray of liberty which glimmers in this country. Unlike Turks every man lives in a perfect security of life and property. The peasant is not richer than in other countries; but he is free, ‘he fears not’, as I have often heard them say, ‘that the Ag, the Kaimmakam, or the Pasha, should send their Djendis, to pillages his house, carry off his family, or give him the bastinado . . .’

In 1847 the French consul in Beirut reported that ‘Druze feudalism is disintegrating, bit by bit’, a process that led to the bloody communal clashes of 1845 and 1860. The first, and probably most important, cause of this was the growth in the number and power of the Maronites. In Salibi’s words: ‘Indeed a veritable maronite colonization of Lebanon took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the result that the Maronites became the most widespread community in the country.’ By the late seventeenth century, in addition to the original Maronite homeland, Bashrri, north Kisrawan had become predominantly Maronite and Maronites had settled among the Druzes in the Matn. In the eighteenth century the southward push continued to the Druze Shuf and Wadi al-Taym and to Shi‘I Jabal ‘Amil and also westward to Orthodox Kura and the sea ports and eastward to Shi‘I Ba‘albak. The Maronites were followed by smaller numbers

---


of Greek Orthodox and greek Catholics migrating from the interior of Syria. The *amirs* and Druze nobility welcomed these hard-working and relatively educated newcomers and, as noted before, for a long time a great degree of tolerance prevailed in Mount Lebanon. But eventually the growing numbers and improving economic condition (see below) of the Christians subjected intercommunal relations to a great strain.

The second main factor was the increasing involvement of Mount Lebanon in interregional and international conflicts. The ruler of Acre, al-Jazzar, who at various times was also pasha of Damascus and Sayda, interfered more actively in Mount Lebanon’s affairs than had any other Ottoman governor. He annexed Beirut, its only port, defeated and overthrew the *amir*, Yusuf, pillaged the country, extorted money from it and as *amir* appointed Bashir II, who was to be the last, most durable and most notable of the Shihabi princes. 

Although Napoleon did not quite reach Lebanon, and although bashir was careful not to commit himself to his side as he awaited events—his expedition had important effects. First, it drew the wrath of al-Jazzar; he invaded Lebanon and forced Bashir to abdicate and go into temporary exile. Secondly, the proximity of the French exacerbated communal tensions. Elements of both Shi‘is and Maronites in Galilee and South Lebanon co-operated with the French, whereas the Druzes, like the Sunnis, were steadily opposed to them. This collaboration was not forgotten.  

Far more important in its consequences was the eight-year Egyptian occupation. It gave Syria greater internal security than before, opened the country to foreigners and achieved a considerable measure of economic and social progress (see below). However, there were some serious drawbacks such as heavier taxation, conscription, forced labour and the introduction of some monopolies. For Mount Lebanon, it is estimated that the total amount paid in taxes rose from 2.5 million piasters to 8.5 million, of which Amir Bashir II absorbed 5 million. Still more resented was the disarming of the Druzes and their drafting into the army—the Christians remained exempt. Revolts had already broken out, and been with difficulty repressed, in Nablus,

4 Salibi, op. cit., p. XX; see also Ismail, op. cit., p. 126
among the Nusayris of the Latakia region, the Shi‘is of South Lebanon and Druzes in al-Laja. When, in 1839, orders were given to disarm them, the Maronites, suspecting that this was a prelude to conscription, also rose in revolt, together with Lebanese Shi‘is and Druzes. Fanned by British agents and supplied with British money and arms, the revolt spread in the coastlands, threatening Ibrahim Pasha’s flank and precipitating his retreat.8

Another of Muhammad Ali’s innovations also had serious consequences: his treatment of non-Muslims. Restrictions on dress were removed, Christians and Jews were represented in the consultative councils established in towns, and the appointment of British consuls in Damascus and Aleppo was regarded as raising Christian prestige. Christians became more active in trade and finance (see below). Perhaps most striking, the heads of the fiscal administration in Damascus and Aleppo were the two Bahri brothers, Syrian Greek Catholics established in Egypt and trusted by Muhammad Ali, and Christians were prominent in that administration. This was a dubious privilege, since tax-gatherers are seldom liked. Lastly, the improvement in the economic and social status of Christians seems to have gone in their head, causing them to behave tactlessly or even arrogantly. The resulting Muslim resentment vented itself in the communal clashes in Aleppo in 1850 and in the Damascus massacre of 1860.

Bashir II consolidated his power by eliminating, successively, the Druze muqata‘jis including, finally, the Junblats. By 1840, of 14 muqata‘as which for generations had been governed by Druzes, only two remained in their hands, other others having been given by Bashir to members of his family or to Christians. This earned him the hatred of the Druzes, who began to regard him as an enemy of their sect and a friend of the Christians. This impression was confirmed during the Egyptian occupation. Bashir sided with Muhammad Ali and carried out, albeit grudgingly, his instructions, including the disarming and conscripting of Druzes and the use of Christian forces against Druzes, Sunnis and Shi‘is.9 It was therefore natural that, following the Egyptian retreat, he was forced to abdicate, being supplanted by a kinsman Bashir III, also a Maronite, who had rallied to the Ottoman cause.

His successor, Bashir III, proved an incompetent ruler, unable to cope with the feudal reaction and the rising popular forces that confronted each other in Lebanon. The Druzes sought to regain their power and feudal privileges and backed a Muslim member of the Shihab family, Salman. This was opposed by

---

10 Ibid., pp. 130-1.
the Maronite patriarch, who insisted on keeping Bashir III; more generally, the Maronites opposed the restoration of Druze administrative and judicial privileges, not to mention the land that had passed into their hands.

By then the Maronite church had emerged as a leading political force. In the two previous centuries it had been reforme din many ways, its clergy had become much more educated (see below), and it had established contact with Rome and with France. Several orders of monks had emerged which, by cultivating barren lands, had acquired considerable wealth. The church had become the spokesman not only of Maronite ethnic feeling but of popular resentment against the feudal lords, primarily Druzes but also against some Maronites.\(^\text{11}\)

Another factor must be mentioned, albeit briefly: great-power rivalry. Then as now in Lebanon, secretarian strife was fomented and manipulated by outside forces, and the latter in turn were used by the local contenders in a pattern that has been ably analysed by L. Carl Brown.\(^\text{12}\) The British backed the Druzes, the French and Austrians backed the Maronites and the Russians backed the Greek Orthodox. The Ottoman authorities, trying to re-establish their control over the whole of Syria and to centralize the administration of the empire through the Tanzimat reforms, were at best indifferent to-and often warmly welcome-any strife that could weaken the power of the two communities that embodied the autonomy of Lebanon. According to the governor of Damascus, Ahmad pasha, ‘there are two plagues in Syria, the Christians and the Druzes, so every time one of them cuts the throat of other the Sublime Porte benefits’; and Guizot, then Foreign Minister of France, gave it as his opinion that the ‘old Turkish party . . . dreams of exterminating the Druzes by mean of the Maronites, and vice versa’.\(^\text{13}\) In 1841 and 1860 the Ottoman authorities seem to have backed the Druzes.\(^\text{14}\)

Like the present conflict in Lebanon, the civil wars of the mid-nineteenth century were a mixture of communal clashes and class struggles. The communal conflict broke out in 1841 and spread as far as Zahleh; casualties on both sides were heavy. Popular, non-sectarian, uprisings had started earlier. In 1820, a tax-revolt in matn and Kisrawan culminated in the formation of commune (‘anmiyya) Antilyas which successfully negotiated with Bashir II and the pasha of Acre; the following year another commune was formed by the

\(^{11}\) Harik, op. cit., chapters IV-VI; Malcolm Kerr, *Lebanon in the Last Years of Feudalism* (Beirut, 1959), pp. 3-5.


\(^{13}\) Cited in Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak ed., *Thawra wa fitna fi Lubnan* (Damascus, 1938), p. 11.

\(^{14}\) Salibi, op. cit., pp. 50, 99-100; Ismail, op. cit., vol. IV, pp. 140-4, 272
people of Jubayl and Batrun, but it was less successful. In 1840, during the uprisings against the Egyptians, a proclamation referred to the French Revolution of 1789.\textsuperscript{15}

The troubles of 1841 led to the dismissal of Bashir III, and in 1842, Umar Pasha, a Croat convert to Islam, was appointed governor of Lebanon. He attempted to conciliate the Druze chieftains by restoring many of their privileges, but this ran into Maronite opposition and when he tried to pursue a policy more favourable to the maronites he was faced with a Druze revolt. Moreover, by imposing heavy hand taxes and customs duties, he angered the whole population, and was forced out. At this point the powers intervened, and eventually Lebanon was divided into two districts (\textit{qaimmaqamiyya}), a Maronite and a Druze one, the boundary line being the Beirut-Damascus road.

Unfortunately, this boundary did not reflect the distribution of the population, leaving quite a few Druze in the northern district and many Maronites in the south. Hence, in the words of the Ottoman Foreign Mnister, Rif 'at Pasha, “The plan dividing Lebanon into two \textit{qaimmaqamates}, a Christian and a Druze one, is tantamount to lighting the fire of a civil war in it.”\textsuperscript{16} This fire soon flared up, with large casualties on both sides; there was also much loss of property, that of the maronites being put at 8 million piasters and that of the Druzes at 1.3 million–a combined figure well above the highest amount raised in annual taxes in Lebanon (see above).\textsuperscript{17} Once again there was European pressure and a new \textit{reglement} was imposed. Each of the two \textit{qaimmaqams} was to be assisted by a salaried council (\textit{majlis}), representing all the communities, which had both fiscal and judicial powers; in other words a new bureaucratic organ was implanted in the feudal body politic. However, this had little impact in the south, where the main Druze families regrouped under the leadership of Sa ‘id Junblat and resumed their sway over the peasants, both Druze and Maronite. Meanwhile, in the north the Maronite church was passing through a crisis that finally aligned it with the peasants against the Maronite feudal families, which in turn were divided into feuding factions.\textsuperscript{18} By the date 1850s northern Lebanon was in turmoil. Peasant uprisings, backed by the clergy, soon dispossessed and expelled Maronite feudal families and seized their property (see below). The movement spread to the south, where it was bound to degenerate into a communal conflict, pitting Maronite peasants against their Druze lords. Fighting soon broke out.

\textsuperscript{16} Yazbak, op cit., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{17} See document reproduced in Issawi, \textit{Fertile Crescent}, p. 45.
and the Druzes, being much more disciplined, inclined great losses on their opponents. ‘in less than four weeks an estimated total of eleven thousand Christians had been killed, four thousand more had perished of destitution, and nearly a hundred thousand had become homeless refugees. The Druzes had also lost a number of dead, but otherwise their triumph had been amazing.’ The property damage was put at 15 to 20 million piasters-though one French estimate ran as high as 175 million. The fighting in Lebanon sparked a massacre in Damascus; a Presbyterian missionary estimated the number of Christians killed to be at least 3,000 men, or over one-third of the number of males; Salibi’s figure is 5,500 persons. Property losses were put at 150 million piasters, or £1,250,000. Many thousands of Christians fled from the interior to the coast.\(^{19}\)

These events provoked an international reaction. A French army landed in Beirut and, reluctantly, Britain decided not to oppose it. The Porte sent its Foreign Minister, Fraud Pasha, who dealt severe punishments to responsible Turkish officers and civilians and much lighter ones to the Druze leaders. A *reglement organique* was promulgated in 1861, under which the country (i.e. the Mountain, excluding coastal areas and plains) was administered until the first world war. The governor (*mutasarrif*) was to be a Catholic, who was an Ottoman but not a Lebanese subject. He was to be assisted by a local administrative council, representing all the religious communities, by paid officials and by a locally raised gendarmerie. Taxes were assessed on the basis of a census and a cadaster and the proceeds were spent within the country; indeed until 1878 the budget showed a deficit which was met by a subsidy from Istanbul.\(^{20}\) Under this regime Lebanon enjoyed security until the first world war, made considerable progress and was free from communal strife.

Other parts of Syria were not so fortunate, and communal tensions erupted periodically. Most of these were the reflection of events occurring outside the region, such as the Russian wars against the Ottoman Empire and the Muslims of Central Asia or the occupation of Tunisia by the French or of Cyprus and Egypt by the British.\(^{21}\) In 1875-8 the British consuls reported several incidents of killing and pillaging in the Aleppo regions (but not in Damascus_ and the visit of a British squadron to Syrian waters was deemed

---


\(^{20}\) Issawi, *Fertile Crescent*, pp. 82-3.

salutary.\textsuperscript{22} And as late as 1903 a British consul reported an emigration of Christians from Beirut, many from ‘the most considered Greek Orthodox families’, to Egypt and elsewhere because of the insecurity engendered by the events of 6 September of that year.\textsuperscript{23} This insecurity was an important factor working for emigration.

Two more political factors may be mentioned: the Hamidian tyranny (1876-1908), which bore heavily on free thought; and the young Turk attempt (1908-14) to Turkify the Arab provinces. It is unlikely that either one affected the mass of the population, but they may have induced some educated people to emigrate in search of a freer climate.

**Economic trends\textsuperscript{24}**

In the course of the hundred years or so before the first world war, Syria witnessed appreciable economic progress; this is in sharp contrast to its experience in the two preceding centuries. However, this development was neither continuous nor even in its impact on various sectors, regions, classes and sects. Hence the overall improvement was accompanied by much discontent. Moreover, the most sustained progress occurred between 1880 and 1914, that is after emigration to the New World had begun to gather momentum. Before that there had been some very difficult periods, such as the 1840s following the Egyptian withdrawal, the 1860s because of the communal clashes, and the 1870s with the fall in world prices of agricultural produce.

The population of geographical Syria grew rapidly, from perhaps 1.2 million in 1800 to around 1.5 million in 1840, 2.5 million in 1878 and 4 million in 1913. The rate of population growth seems to have accelerated, from perhaps 1 per cent per annum in the first half of the century to 1.4 per cent in 1895-1913.

For Lebanon, numerous population estimates are available, but they are inconsistent. In 1840 Bowring quoted two government figures for the Mountain, 154,000 and 192,000, and judged the former nearer the mark.\textsuperscript{25}

\footnotesize


\textsuperscript{23} Issawi, *Fertile Crescent*, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{24} Except where otherwise specified, the information in this section is derived from Issawi, *Fertile Crescent*.

Chevallier, using French and Lebanese sources, has higher figures, but settles for the figure of about 200,000 in 1840. More reliable figures are 210,000 for 1878 and 240,000 for 1895, which would suggest that Bowring’s lower estimate is the most acceptable and that the annual rate of growth was between 0.7 and 0.8 per cent, which seems plausible.

As elsewhere in the Middle East, the growth was due to the combination of high birth rates and falling death rates. Birth rates seem to have been particularly high among the Maronites and low among the Druzes, many of whose men were drafted into the army or fled to Hauran. As for the declining death rates, they were due-as elsewhere-to the weakening of the Malthusian checks. Hygienic conditions improved with the introduction of vaccination and with the quarantines set up by the Egyptians, and plagues diminished. And it is noteworthy that the cholera epidemic of 1865, which devastated the coast and the interior, caused very few deaths in the Mountain. Famines were eliminated, thanks to the improvements in transport that made it possible to import wheat easily from abroad and avoid the sharp fluctuations in price characteristic of the interior. Lastly-except of course for the communal clashes of 1841, 1845 and 1860-Lebanon enjoyed peace and security.

In the eighteenth century, as noted by Volney and others, Lebanon was already far more thickly populated than other parts of Syria or the Middle East. In the nineteenth century, the density greatly increased. On the eve of the first world war, Mount Lebanon had 159 inhabitants per square kilometer compared to 34 in the vilayet of Beirut, 25 in Jerusalem, 15 in Aleppo and 13 in Damascus. Basing himself on a study made by the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture, Chevallier puts the density of population around 1840 at 240 per square kilometer of cultivated area (80,000 hectares, or 800 square kilometres out of a total of 3,200 governed by Bashir II). This high density of population must have been one of the main factors pushing the Lebanese to emigrate.

Another very important factor was the integration of Lebanon in the world economy, through trade, transport and communications, and finance.

In the nineteenth century Syria’s trade expanded greatly. Between 1833 and 1910, imports, in current prices, rose 8.9 times, exports 7.4 times, and total

---

26 Chevallier, op. cit., pp. 33-42.
27 Ibid., pp. 46-7.
29 Ibid.
31 Chevallier, op. cit., p. 42.
trade 8.4 times. Deflating by British export and import prices give a compound rate of growth of 3.5 per cent per annum in imports and 3.1 in exports.\(^{32}\) No figures are available for Lebanon, but the trade of Beirut—which although administratively separate had developed very close economic and social ties with the Mountain-expanded greatly.\(^{33}\) In the eighteenth century Beirut had been a small and somnolent port but they 1825, thanks to the enterprise of its Christian merchants, it was handling most of the trade of Damascus and its position improved further under Egyptian rule. By the 1850s it was handling about 70 per cent of Syria’s sea trade, but thereafter its share fell to under 30 in 1910-12, when Alexandretta and Jaffa shot forward the Tripoli and Haifa were linked by rail to the interior. Between 1833 and 1871-3, Beirut’s imports rose 2.8 times, or 2.7 per cent per annum, and its exports rose 2.56 times, at 2.5 per cent; between 1871-3 and 1910-12, imports rose 1.5 times, or 1.1 per cent, and exports 1.03, or 0.1 per cent.\(^{31}\)

Beirut owed its dominance in trade to its pre-eminence in means of transport. In 1863 a modern road—the first in Syria—linked it with Damascus. In 1893 it inaugurated a modern port, the only one of its kind between Izmir and Port Said, and in 1895 a railway—a close second to the Jerusalem-Jaffa line of 1892—was opened between Beirut and Damascus. In 1861 the Beirut-Damascus telegraph line was opened; in 1863 Beirut was linked to Istanbul, and shortly thereafter to Alexandria. Early in this century, telephones began to be used.\(^ {33}\)

Beirut was also the financial centre of Syria. In 1856 the Ottoman Bank opened a branch in that city and by 1914 it had been joined by the Anglo-Palestine Company, Deutsche-Palastina Bank and Banque de Salonique. Insurance companies also proliferated and by 1910 there were 19 companies representing seven nationalities. Of an estimated 206 million francs of European (mainly French) investments in Syria, some 82 million, or 40 per cent, were in Beirut, in the port, road, railways and other utilities. It should be added that, during the period of autonomy starting in 1861, Mount Lebanon built an excellent network of road: in 1900 415 kilometres and 261 projected, or about 211 per thousand square kilometres and 2.25 per thousand inhabitants.\(^ {36}\)


\(^{34}\) For further figures and details see Issawi, *Fertile Crescent*, pp. 127-51 and Boutros Labaki, *Introduction a l’histoire economique du Liban* (Beirut, 1984), chapter 5.


\(^{36}\) Ibid.; pp. 410-14, 135, 82; Ruppin, op. cit., p. 267.
All these developments transformed the structure of the Lebanese economy. In agriculture the main change was the expansion of silk cultivation and the diffusion of small-scale ownership. Already early in the eighteenth century, exports of silk from Lebanon to France were quite considerable. Parts of the Moutain specialized so heavily in the production of silk and other cash crops that it could meet only about half of its requirements of cereals; the rest had to be imported from the inland parts of Syria. In the late 1840s, a study by Urquhart of a small Lebanese farm showed that it concentrated on mulberry trees (for silkworms) and vines, between which a small amount of grain was sown and vegetables were planted; the grain and vegetables were consumed by the daily, whereas wine and floss were almost entirely marketed. The earned income was used to pay taxes and to buy clothing, bread and foodstuffs, since the harvest form the farm did not cover food requirements. Quite clearly this farm was no longer living in a barter economy but was closely tied to the market, and this was true of a large part of the Mountain. From a study by a British consul one can conclude that in 1846 silk accounted for 57 per cent of the value of gross agricultural output and in 1855, when cereals prices were exceptionally high because the Crimean War, for 44 per cent. After 1861, progress was rapid: the yen-year average output of cocoons of the whole of Syria rose from 1,756 tons in the 1860s to 5,337 in 1901-10; of this, about three-quarters came from Lebanon.

Silk growers were not involved in the market merely through their sales of cocoons. From 1840 on, silkworms eggs were imported, from Iran, Italy and elsewhere; after the pebrine disease struck, in the 1870s, eggs were imported from France and from the Silk Institute in Bursa. Farmers also borrowed funds from European and Lebanese merchants. Lastly, they set up a large industry to reel the silk (see below).

The spread of ownership came about for several reasons. In contrast to other parts of the Middle East, in 1840 Bowring noted:

In Mount Lebanon almost every male inhabitant is a small proprietor of land. In the neighborhood of Beyrout there are also a great number of landholders who, for the most part, cultivate the wild mulberry tree. Large proprietors there are few, except among the emirs of Mount Lebanon, some

---

of whom have extensive lands, which they either cultivate for their own account, or let out to farming tenants.\(^{40}\)

The social upheavals of 1840-60 broke up many large estates. Peasants also acquired land from large owners by purchase, using funds sent by emigrants (see below) or through *mugharasa* (co-pl�ntation), a system under which a peasant planted trees on barren land and, when they reached maturity, received part of the land as his share.

As a result of all those developments, the planted area expanded considerably, terraces were built to cultivate hillsides, and forests rapidly dwindled both in the Mountain and in the Beirut vilayet. Lebanon was filling up and its inhabitant were immersed in a monetary economy.

In industry, developments in Lebanon were unique. In other parts of the Middle East the inflow of European machine-made goods, carried by improved transport, dealt the local handicrafts a severe blow. Some scholars believe that the distress of the handicraftsmen was an important cause of the communal conflicts in Aleppo and Damascus. In Lebanon however, including Beirut, handicrafts were relatively unimportant and any decline that may have occurred in them was much more than offset by the rapid growth of silk reeling.\(^{41}\) A modern industry was started by French and British capital but by the 1860s most of it was owned by Lebanese and by the turn of the century it was almost wholly in Lebanese hands. Its fixed capital was estimated at £200,000 and around 1910 it was estimated at £800,000.

The peculiar structure of the Lebanese economy-so different from that of other parts of the Middle East-and its extremely high degree of monetization is brought out by a national income estimate (see Table 1).

One may presume that this monetization of the economy and involvement in the market made the Lebanese more aware of the outside world and its possibilities, and more ready to consider emigrating. Of course Lebanon was to pay a horrendous price for it peculiar economic structure: the famine of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of income</th>
<th>Million Piastres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remittances from the USA</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silkworm breeding</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{40}\) Bowring, op. cit., p. 102.

\(^{41}\) See list of crafts in Issawi, *Fertile Crescent*, p. 382; and figures on silk reeling, ibid., p. 378.
1915-18. The mobilization of farmers and unfavourable weather reduced cereal crops; transport was diverted for military needs; grain found its way to the Arab tribes; the relentless Allied blockade prevented the import of food; the market mechanisms broke down; and the Ottoman authorities were less than eager to supply the coastal regions and the Mountain, whose loyalty was in doubt. Death from starvation and starvation-related diseases in greater Syria probably surpassed 500,000, or one-eighth of the population; of these the greater part was in present-day Lebanon.\(^{42}\)

**Social factors**

The relevant social factors may be briefly considered under four headings: urbanization, education, the formation of a middle class, and conscription.

Urbanization in Lebanon means, of course, Beirut, but it should be noted that other towns also grew. Between 1830 and 1914, the population of Tripoli rose from 15,000 to 30,000, Ba’albak grew to about 25,000 inhabitants and both Sayda and Zahleh to about 15,000. In other words, no Lebanese citizen was more than one or two days’ walking distance from a town and most lived within two or three days’ travel from Beirut. One would expect the sight of urban living to have had a stimulating effect on country people and to have opened their minds of the possibility of emigration to far bigger cities overseas.

As for Beirut, it grew very slowly until the late 1830s, from some 6,000 around 1800 to about 10,000, but after that its growth accelerated. It became the commercial and transport and communications centre of the Levant, and it also became an administrative centre. Protestant and Catholic missionaries and other foreigners began to settle in the cities. During the communal

---

\(^{42}\) See forthcoming article by L. S. Schilcher.
upheavals of 1845 and 1860, thousands of Christian refugees came to Beirut from the Mountain and the interior and Christians became a majority of the population. By 1860 the total population may have been about 60,000 and by 1914 it was 150,000. By 1914 Beirut was well provided with amenities: waterworks installed in 1875, gasworks in 1888, electricity in 1909 and electric streetcars in 1908. The city lights of Beirut, so clearly visible from the Mountain, were beckoning people to migrate to more exciting places.

In education Lebanon had a head start over other parts of the Middle East, thanks to its contacts with the Catholic church. As early as 1584 the Maronite College in Rome was opened and its graduates returned to spread education in the Mountain. In 1610 a Syriac press was introduced and in 1624 a school was opened. By the middle of the eighteenth century there were five presses, serving the various Christian sects, and many more schools and the Jesuits were also active in education.43 In the nineteenth century, thanks to the efforts of both foreign missions and local clergy, education expanded very rapidly. The Americans opened their first school in Beirut in 1834 and established their press, which was to render such great service to Lebanon and the Arab world. The Jesuits returned in 1831, set up their equally good press in 1853 and founded many schools. The British were also active and, from the 1880s, the Russians. In 1869 a US consular dispatch stated: ‘Previous to 1860m in Beirut, there were but 4 girls’ schools and 15 boys’ schools, while from 1860 to 1869 there were established 23 girls’ and 29 boys’ schools . . . a grand total of 75 schools with 5,150 pupils or 6 per cent of the whole population.’44 By 1913 Mount Lebanon had 330 schools, with perhaps over 20,000 pupils.45 As for Syria as a whole, it had about 100,000 pupils, or some 15 per cent of the school-age population. Two institutes of higher education had been founded in Beirut, the Syrian Protestant College in 1866 and the Jesuit St Joseph University in 1875, as well as a government Medical College in Damascus in 1903. The press was very highly developed by Middle Eastern standards. Between 1851 and 1914, 143 periodicals were founded in Beirut and Lebanon. Most proved ephemeral but, in 1914, in the whole of Syria there were 50 dailies, 15 weeklies and 20 monthlies or quarterlies; of these, a large number were in Beirut. In the Mountain, in 1900, there were four weeklies. As for books, Touma lists 338 new titles up to 1914, and believes that the actual figure

43 For these and other developments see Harik, op cit., pp. 159-66 and Hitti, op. cit., pp. 675-7; see list in Touma, op. cit., pp. 348-60.
44 See dispatch in Issawi, Fertile Crescent, p. 54.
45 Touma, op. cit, p. 353, basing himself in Cuinet, gives a figure of 120,000, which seems much too high.
was about twice as great. Of the authors, the enormous majority were Christians, with only a few Muslims or Druzes.\footnote{Idem, pp. 358-60; Issawi, op. cit., p. 32.}

In 1845 an American missionary had already observed that in Kisrawan ‘from one-fourth to one-third of adult males can read’, though far fewer women had received any education. By 1914 the overall literacy rate in Mount Lebanon for those ten years old or over may have been around 50 per cent - an exceptionally high figure for a country outside Europe and North America.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 30-3, 81.} This high level of education and exposure to the press must surely have stimulated emigration.

All these developments facilitated, and were facilitated by, the emergence of a middle class, first mainly entrepreneurial then salaried as well. Prosperous farmers growing cash crops; merchants engaged in internal, regional and international trade; agents of foreign shipping lines; employees of the road, railway and port companies, of banks and of the above-mentioned public utilities; owners of silk-reeling factories and a few minor industries; hotel keepers; teachers; newspaper publishers and editors; officials of the Beirut vilayet and the autonomous Mountain administration-all this constituted a bourgeois nucleus which had no counterpart in other Arab countries, and in Turkey only among the minorities. This middle class was aware of developments in the outside world. One may also presume that some of its members were periodically ruined by the world-wide economic and political crises and would have been tempted to seek their fortune elsewhere.

One last word on conscription. Traditionally, in the Ottoman Empire, non-Muslims were exempt (or excluded) from military service, paying instead a poll tax. As noted above, under Egyptian rule the Druzes were drafted, and the Christians came to believe that their turn would follow, an important contributory cause to the uprising against Ibrahim. In the Hatti Humayun decree of 1856, full equality was promised to non-Muslims, and this eventually led to their being required to serve in the armed forces. The draft was gradually introduced and in 1871 was formalized in a law.

Under its autonomous regime, Lebanon remained exempt, but in the adjacent parts of the vilayets of Beirut and Damascus fear of conscription seems to have been an important factor stimulating emigration, and it may well have had some effect in the Mountain too.

A question may be raised here: how did the Lebanese villages get the message that there were opportunities abroad? Personal contacts probably played the main part—an occasional returnee, coming home to get married, for a visit, or for retirement. Letters and telegrams reached the villagers formed a
picture of an outside world rich in opportunities if inaccurate in its geographical outlines: for instance, until quite recently ‘Amerka’ covered Australia and West Africa – as well as the Americas: ‘I am emigrating to that part of Amerka that is under French rule; it is very hot there and the people are black,’ I was told in the 1940’s, about Senegal. On the other hand ‘Nayurk’ meant the United States – ‘it is jus like Lebanon, consisting of a capital and villages and I am going to join my brother in one of the villages’, i.e. Chicago.

The course of emigration

Emigration from Lebanon to adjacent or nearby areas has a long history: Maronites to the Tripoli and Latakia regions, to Palestine and to the coastlands; Druzes to Jabal al-Duruz, and so on. Very little can be said on this subject, for lack of data.

The trail-blazers of overseas emigration from Syria were the Greek Catholics (Melkites) of Sayda who, in eighteenth century, came to control a substantial segment of Syrian maritime trade with Egypt and to operate most of the vessels (French owned) engaged in that trade. Some of them settled in Damietta and elsewhere, and extended their businesses when the French establishments were ruined by the Revolutionary wars. Under Muhammad Ali the number of Syrians increased, some – like the Bahris mentioned earlier – playing a significant part in the administration. Egypt’s rapid expansion in the nineteenth century drew many emigrants from Lebanon and other parts of Syria and by the 1900s they numbered some 50,000. They played a leading part in the Egyptian press and a significant part in trade and the professions. Most of them had been educated in French or American schools and had acquired a foreign language.

The communal clashes and upheavals of the 1840s and 1850s provided the stimulus for large-scale emigration from Lebanon. In 1848, a company was founded, with a capital of 200,000 francs, to promote the emigration of Maronites to Algeria; fortunately, the scheme was not successful. In 1858, an estimated 5,000 emigrants had left from five Maronites villages alone. After 1860 emigration accelerated and by 1900 an estimated 120,000 had left Syria,

51 I. M. Smilyanskaya, Krestyanskoe dvizhenie v Livane, tr. in Issawi, Fertile Crescent, p. 49.
the vast majority from Lebanon, at first for the United States and soon after to Brazil and other Latin American countries. By 1896 emigration from Syria was running at 5,500 people a year; by then the Christians had been joined by Druzes. In 1900 the American consul put the number of Syrians in the United States at over 50,000, and in 1902 the British consul stated that ‘emigration is always on the increase and has now extended from the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon to all districts of Syria.’ In 1900-14, some 225,000 ‘Syrians’ or ‘Turks’ (these were the designations used for Syrians and Lebanese in both the United States and Latin America) had emigrated. In 1911 the US Immigration Commission pointed out that Syrian immigrants had higher levels of skills than other immigrants: 22.7 per cent were in skilled occupations and 20.3 per cent were in trade. However, a 1904 reported by the US consul in Beirut shows that most of those engaged in trade were small pedlars; of 842 graduated to date of the American College (University), only 37 had left for the United States, but a much larger number had gone to Egypt, Sudan and others parts of the Middle East.

By 1914, emigration was running at 15,000 – 20,000 a year. Overall, it is estimated that some 350,000 Syrians had left, two-thirds to the United States and most of the rest to South America. The number of Lebanese abroad, estimated at over 100,000, equaled at least a quarter, and in some districts a half, of the population. There is the story of the man who, when asked what was the population of his village, replied: ‘Five thousand abroad and one thousand at home, for purposes of reproduction.’ The contribution of the emigrants to the national income of Lebanon has been noted, and their remittances have been a major item in the balance of payments. Their intellectual and social contributions are incalculable.

---

52 For breakdowns, see Elie Safa, L’Emigration libanaise (Beirut, 1960), pp. 188-91.