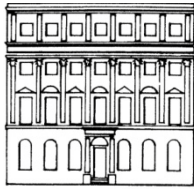


German Historical Institute
London



BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

Julia Hauser, Christine Lindner, Esther Möller:
*Education in Lebanon during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries:
A Catalyst for Multiple Modernities?*
Conference Report
German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 34, No. 2
(Nov 2012), pp134-139

Copyright © 2012 German Historical Institute London. All rights reserved.

Education in Lebanon during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Catalyst for Multiple Modernities? Workshop co-organized by the German Historical Institute London and the Leibniz Institut für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, and held at the Orient Institute Beirut, 19–21 Apr. 2012. Conveners: Julia Hauser (Göttingen), Valeska Huber (GHIL), Christine Lindner (University of Balamand, Lebanon), and Esther Möller (IEG Mainz).

This international workshop focused on educational institutions in Lebanon from the Ottoman period to the French Mandate, asking whether their remarkable heterogeneity may be interpreted as a case of ‘multiple modernities’ (Eisenstadt).

The first panel dealt with the question of how education changed the face of the city and looked at the variety of institutional and material forms it took. Christine Lindner (Balamand) analysed early educational encounters between American missionaries and Arabs by drawing on three case studies: Assad Khayat, Rahil Ata, and Charlie Smith. The different types of instruction received by these students drew upon the region’s established educational practices, showing the ad hoc nature of the missionaries’ work. In concluding, Lindner underlined the importance of domestic space as an important site in these examples.

May Davie (Tours) looked at education from an architectural perspective, illustrating the evolution of building for schools in Beirut. While foreign schools initially exceeded local ones in shape and size, they shared utilitarian architecture and a limited sphere of influence. Gradually the foreign schools developed a new kind of dominant architecture characterized by prominent visual signs, and appropriated aspects of Ottoman architecture. Educational architecture, Davie argued, did not speak one uniform language of modernity but came in a variety of shapes and forms.

Maria Bashshur Abunnasr (Amherst) combined an architectural approach with a microhistory focus on the Syrian Protestant College (SPC) in Ras Beirut. Showing the extent to which New England educational architecture was adapted, Abunnasr argued that SPC employed models: the ‘All in One’ prototype adapted from Princeton

The full conference programme can be found under Events and Conferences on the GHIL’s website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

College and the 'College Row' typical of Yale and Amherst Colleges. Despite these direct influences, the inhabitants of Ras Beirut used these structures for their own purposes in a way that was not expected by the American missionaries.

Michael Davie (Tours) analysed the spread of missionary education in late Ottoman Beirut from a topographical point of view. According to Davie, missionaries chose sites for their educational establishments as a way of ensuring both visibility and surveillance. While the SPC presented itself as an open structure, its situation within the city enabled it to exert visual control. French establishments, on the other hand, often had modern interiors but were defensive and cut off from their environment on the outside.

In his keynote lecture, Benjamin Fortna (SOAS, London) looked at changes in education from the late Ottoman Empire to the early Turkish republic, stating that ruptures with the past were not as radical as suggested by contemporaries in their representation of Ottoman educational methods as violent and backward, or by Mustafa Kemal as the educator-in-chief. Fortna argued that while buildings and methods adapted from Western European models were used to visually convey a message of modernity, religious schools did not disappear during the expansion of public schools. Emphasizing that texts function as mirrors of educational change, Fortna traced the changing relations between text and audience, and the emergence of new practices and functions of reading.

The second panel focused on discourses on education. Nadya Bou Ali (Oxford) presented a paper on Butrus al-Bustani's national vision for education. The Nahda, Bou Ali contended, was comparable less to the Renaissance than to the Enlightenment, with Bustani's conception of language reform regarded as the basis for a nation's civilizational progress. Bou Ali argued that Bustani's encyclopedia illustrates the idea of language as a mirror of society.

Magda Nammour (Beirut) dwelt on perceptions of women's education in the Levantine press at the end of the nineteenth century, tracing the evolution of the discourse on female education from an insistence on education as a right to a critique of the education system. She referred to Butrus and Selim al-Bustani's emphasis on the instruction of women to fulfil their role as men's helpmeets and their children's first educators. Self-Orientalist positions were central to modernist discourses on female education in late Ottoman Syria in

Conference Reports

that they presented local education for women as deficient by comparison with Europe.

Butros Labaki (Beirut) provided a broader perspective on the evolution of the education system in Lebanon. Emphasizing the crucial role of the different religious communities, Labaki described the schools each of these communities had founded in Lebanon since the nineteenth century. Using statistical data, he demonstrated the divergent yet comparable ways in which education was used for social mobility.

The third panel centred on the influence of gender on education, specifically women's education. Julia Hauser (Göttingen) discussed the appropriation of arguments for educating women in late nineteenth-century Beirut. Local establishments borrowed the missions' rationale for female education: girls needed to be educated if society was to progress as they were the first educators. Focusing on the foundation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle school for girls in Beirut in 1878, Hauser argued that the history of schools must be analysed within a multi-relational field.

Ellen Fleischmann (Dayton) likewise examined the impact of competition on missionary education, focusing on American Protestant missionary establishments for girls, which forced American missionaries to gear their curricula to local demand. According to Fleischmann, this development illustrated the contradictions within ideas about women's education. Over time, American notions of female education became increasingly gendered in ways that lessened the value of an American education for women within the education market of Lebanon.

Jamila Costi (Beirut) took a closer look at the Greek Orthodox school of Zahrat al-Ihsan. Founded by a graduate of Catholic and Protestant establishments, it combined aspects of missionary work with lay female initiative. It functioned as a charity, as the boarding school for upper-class girls funded an orphanage for destitute children, but was run by a religious community representing the first modern female congregation dedicated to social activities within the Greek Orthodox community. This school was central to the emergence of the Syrian women's movement, as many of its first representatives graduated from this school.

Christian Sassmannshausen (Berlin) looked at educational discourses and strategies in late Ottoman Tripoli. Examining the census

of 1921, he reconstructed the varying degrees of education among Tripoli's Muslim and Christian population, focusing on relations between literacy, profession, and the choice to educate children. To illustrate women's educational opportunities, he ended with the case of Anisa Saiba'a, a Greek Orthodox woman who studied medicine in Beirut and Scotland before practising surgery in Egypt.

The fourth panel looked at the relationship between education and identity with regard to language, nation, and religion. Souad Slim (Balamand) focused on the elementary school for girls funded by the Russian Imperial Palestine Association in Beirut. While the school's principal, Aleksandra Czerkessova, espoused a sense of mission and an Orientalist attitude, her establishment's strong emphasis on teaching Arabic distinguished it from others. This was a response to growing nationalist tendencies within the Antiochian Orthodox community that was increasingly opposed to their high-ranking clergy being ethnic Greeks ignorant of Arabic.

Abdellatif Fakhoury (Beirut) traced the history of the Jam'iyya al-maqasid al-khayriyya al-islamiyya, a Sunni Muslim charity association specializing in male and female education which played a crucial part in Sunni's response to foreign Christian schools in Beirut. He explained the foundation of the organization in 1878 and illustrated how its schools' methods, teachers, and subjects provided both a modern curriculum and a religious Muslim education for students. Taking the example of five Maqasid students who went to Cairo to study medicine, Fakhoury underlined the institution's efforts in preparing their students for a changing society and labour market.

Catherine Le Thomas (Paris) dealt with the Shi'a community's educational efforts. She explained the late integration of the Shi'a into Lebanese society by outlining how their education developed from a traditional religious schooling into secondary schooling from the nineteenth to the late twentieth century. Taking a closer look at two of their organizations, Amiliya in Beirut and Jafaria in Jabal' Aml, Le Thomas emphasized parallels with other contemporary schools. Despite conflicts amongst the clergy that hindered the expansion of communal educational facilities, these schools eventually contributed to social homogenization amongst the Shi'a.

The fifth panel focused on the reception of education by students themselves. Marilene Karam (Paris) presented a paper on the Jewish educator and journalist Esther Moyal, whose life illustrates the fluid

Conference Reports

boundaries between foreign and local schools. Moyal attended the American Beirut Female Seminary, worked as a teacher at local schools, and studied both Arabic and Hebrew with private teachers. With her husband, Shimon Moyal, she turned to politics, assuming a staunchly Ottomanist stance. Her activities came to an abrupt end, however, after a move to Jaffa, so that her influence on the Ottomanist and Syrian women's movement has fallen into oblivion.

Nadya Sbaiti (Northampton) focused on the expectations and anxieties around the baccalaureate examination from the perspective of both the French Mandate government and the Lebanese students. Starting with the students' complaints about the failure of the baccalaureate to secure future careers, Sbaiti examined the government's change in policy from the idea of 'assimilating' students to French culture to more utilitarian concepts aimed at preventing assimilation. This was undermined, however, by an increase in the number of candidates for the baccalaureate and their complaints about the failures of the Mandate education system.

Esther Möller (Mainz) examined extracurricular aspects of French schools in late Mandate Lebanon. Looking at the schools of the secular Mission Laïque Française, Möller argued that the socio-economic perspectives they offered and the close relations between the schools and their graduates were necessary conditions for an active alumni network. The graduates' professional choices reflected the political change to which the Lebanese adapted and the often divergent expectations of school administrations and parents.

In his final comment, Ussama Makdisi (Houston) summed up the general issues of the workshop, stressing that the question of whether education acted as a catalyst of multiple modernities could not easily be answered. He emphasized the ways in which missions and their educational models were both appropriated and rejected. Makdisi problematized the appropriateness of cultural imperialism as a concept in historical research on missions, encouraging scholars to analyse interactions between various local and foreign powers on the ground.

All in all, the workshop revealed that there is no single answer to the question of whether the schools in question were actually catalysts of modernity. Still, it showed the benefits of comparing foreign and local, state and private, secular and religious schools, which shared many more values, strategies, and problems than has been

Education in Lebanon

assumed in most existing studies. As a consequence, future research should concentrate on further bringing out the aspects common to, as well the minor differences between, these institutions so crucial to Lebanese society and identities.

JULIA HAUSER (Universität Göttingen), CHRISTINE LINDNER (University of Balamand, Lebanon), and ESTHER MÖLLER (IEG Mainz)