

HISTORICAL PROFILES / Lebanon

The era of Prince Bashir Shihab II (1799–1840)

Prince Bashir Shihab II established hegemony over Lebanon in the first half of the 19th century in order to rule the country under the Ottomans. While he succeeded in keeping Lebanon neutral during conflicts, he maintained a good relationship with the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte of France, which facilitated the French mandate over the country. Lebanon had a strong cultural base, which was highlighted in the works of the British diplomat and writer Colonel Charles Henry Churchill, who wrote about the prince's system of rule, which was known as qaimaqamiyya. Bashir II encouraged development and Lebanon became known for its silk industry, which began in 19th century thanks to the skills that had evolved with the help of French spinners from Lyon, with the first silk mill founded in Btater.



Portrait of Prince Bashir Shihab II

1820



Beiteddine Palace

1818



The Silk Factory

1841

The era of mutasarrifiyya (1861–1915)

The influx of foreign missionaries into Lebanon contributed to the development of intellectual life. American missionaries founded the Syrian Evangelical School in 1866 and French Jesuits founded Saint Joseph's University in 1875; new printing presses were established, such as the Catholic Press. The influence of Western civilisation began to show in the Lebanese way of life. In 1908, a Lebanese association was established in Paris to pursue the independence of Lebanon from the Turks. Liberation was in sight. Transportation had seen significant improvements in the Ottoman era with the foundation of the Centre of Tramways Beirut. In 1881, the French began building a railway from Beirut to Damascus and the project was successfully completed in 1895. The good relationship between Prince Bashir and the French resulted in the end of the qaimaqamiyya, marked by inscriptions on the rocks of Nahr el-Kalb to the Emperor Napoleon III. It can be seen alongside later inscriptions marking the end of World War I and French General Gouraud's victory in the Battle of Maysalun on 25 July 1920.



Beirut Tramway station

1908



French plaque for Emperor Napoleon III

1860–1861



Maronite Benevolent Catholic Society of New York rule book
1895

How did art evolve during the Ottoman era?

During the Ottoman Era, architecture truly evolved, and Sursock Palace is a perfect example of this evolution. Buildings were influenced by the Islamic character of the ruler with the addition of mashrabiyya (screens) and horseshoe arc ornamentation. Later, Western architecture started to slowly infiltrate Lebanese architecture with Italian Florentine design style added to hotels in Sidon, Tripoli and Beirut. Europe also had a great impact on fine art, with Beirut drawing on European concepts of design to become the centre of culture in the Middle East. Migration was the first reason for this artistic movement, with Lebanese artists studying at schools in Rome, Paris, London, Brussels and Spain. These artists included Gibran Khalil Gibran, Khalil Salib and the sculptor Joseph el-Hoyek, who was influenced by the French sculptor Rodin. Lebanese art also had an impact on European arts, with Oriental clothing depicted in the works of artists from the European Renaissance and Baroque eras such as Bellini and Rembrandt.



Saraya Ba'abda: the headquarters of al-mutasarrifin
1887



Sursuq Palace
1860
Sursuq House; Sursuq Museum



Grand Serail
1853
