

The French Map of Beirut (1936)



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Abstract Toponymic inscriptions are an ‘authorized version’ of history written on space. This article aims to explore the toponyms on a French map of Beirut published in 1936 to show how France, as a sovereign power, transformed her ‘Lebanese policy’ into place names and thus created a different reality, in rupture with the past. This reality still endures today on the map. The new polity was created under the *mission protectrice* of France. The ‘mission’ is read on the map through the names of Gouraud, Foch, Pétain, and other generals of World War I, and by key features of the French Republic (‘The Marseillaise’, ‘the French’, ‘Paris’, and so on). With Lebanon being a ‘refuge for minorities’, the 1936 map of Beirut has thoroughfares named after saints, ulemas, and religious figures of Christians and of Muslims (‘rue patriarche Hoyek’, ‘rue Ibn Arabi’, and ‘rue Abou Bakr’). In 1918, political martyrdom was introduced to political discourse, but also to the map; thus the main square of the city is renamed ‘Place des Martyrs’, with numerous streets named after intellectuals hanged by the Ottomans and considered martyrs of the new Republic. These three ‘toponymic systems’ are in discontinuity with the toponymic past of Beirut. These toponymic dynamics still shape the map of Beirut; no constitution change or ‘toponymic cleansing’ happened after Independence in 1943. There are more ‘martyrs’ and religious figures added to the map and mandate army generals are still commemorated. Mandate-made maps continue to shape Beirut place names today.

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A. J. Kent et al. (eds.), *Mapping Empires: Colonial Cartographies of Land and Sea*,
Lecture Notes in Geoinformation and Cartography,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23447-8_14

1 Introduction

In October 1918, French troops disembarked in Beirut, a possession of the Ottoman Caliphate at the time, and replaced the British Imperial troops that had occupied the city for a week (Davie 2001: 71–72). Two years later, On 31 August, General Henri Gouraud¹ created the new political entity of Greater Lebanon by his Decree N° 318 (Haut-Commissariat 1920: 132–134). The newly-formed polity united the coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, and Tyre with Mount Lebanon.² The next day Gouraud proclaimed the State of Greater Lebanon from his residency in Beirut, the capital and the seat of the French High Commission. Subsequently, the League of Nations granted the mandate over Lebanon and Syria to France in 1922.³

France, as the new sovereign power over Syria and Lebanon, mapped Beirut and codified its place names. This chapter will focus on the toponyms⁴ of the 1:10,000 map of Beirut that was published in November 1936, by the Topography Bureau of the French Army of the Levant.⁵ Using a qualitative approach, it will explore some aspects of the toponymic systems on the map. The chapter aims to show how France transformed its ‘Lebanese policy’ into place names on the map and how colonial mapping does not only shape territory, but also sets the dynamics of toponymic systems for future post-independence maps.⁶

¹High Commissioner of France and Commander-in-Chief of its Army in the Levant.

²For more information see (Ammoun 1997; Salibi 2002; Kassir 2010; Najjar 2014).

³Lebanon was not a *colonie* of France, but under mandate. Thus in this article ‘colonization’ is defined in its broader sense: the *mise en tutelle d’un territoire sous-développé et sous-peuplé par les ressortissants d’une métropole* according to the French Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales. The Class A Mandate on Syria and Lebanon was covered by the Covenant of the League of Nations of 1919 (SDN 2011).

⁴This article follows the distinction between the prototype and the image, as put forward by Theodore the Studite and Paul Evdokimov: the image is always dissimilar to its prototype ‘in essence’, and similar to it ‘in hypostasis’ (Evdokimov 1997: 52). Toponyms are considered as ‘images’ of their prototypes; they reproduce the hypostasis, not the essence. For example, ‘Louis IX of France has a *rue Saint Louis*’ means that King Louis IX of France has a certain ‘image’ of himself that is inscribed or marked on the map of Beirut.

⁵The map is at the archives of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a scan is available from: http://historic-cities.huji.ac.il/lebanon/beirut/maps/tfl_1936_beirut.html Courtesy of The National Library of Israel, Eran Laor Cartographic Collection, Shapell Family Digitization Project and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Department of Geography—Historic Cities Research Project.

⁶This study is partially based on toponymic systems analyses made in the context of a doctoral thesis defended at the Sorbonne in 2018: *The centre and the name, readings in Beirut’s toponymy*. The abstract is available from: <http://www.theses.fr/2018SORUL067>.

2 Toponymic Inscriptions as Ideology Written on Space

In this chapter, toponyms⁷ are considered as revelators of the set of values of the power controlling the map. In a capital city, itself an ‘organized remembrance’ (Arendt and Canovan 1998: 198), toponyms are revelators of the state’s ‘ruling socio-political order and its particular “theory of the world” and a ‘narration without villains’ of the official version of national narrative (Azaryahu 1996). They are the insertion of ideology in the banality of daily life as a factor of concretization of hegemonic structures of power and authority (ibid.).

In capital cities, toponyms are an integral part of ‘the performative, preservative functions’ of a nation (Daum and Mauch 2005: 18–19):

Performative functions: the ability to stage events that put the political mission of a state and the idea of national identity on display [...]. A distinct cultural task of the capitals also lies in their *preservative functions*. Capitals serve as nation-states’ repositories of memory. There are prominent, though rarely the only, *lieux de mémoire* within nation-states. Capitals thus serve as ‘hinges’. They mediate between the nation-state’s past, present, and envisaged future.

Toponymic systems⁸ can be even more revealing of political ideology of the power introducing them to the map. For the French, Beirut was not only the capital city of the state of Greater Lebanon, but also as the seat of the French High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief for the entire Levant, and ‘showcase’ of France (Saliba 2004).

3 The French Shift of Beirut Place Names

Before 1918, most Beirut toponyms stemmed from traditional functional place names. During the first half of the nineteenth century, local architecture and planning were mostly functional (Hallak 1987; Davie 2001: 17–20, 2005) and thus was toponymy: *Sahat el Khubz* (Bread Square), *Sahat el Saraya* (Serail Square), *Sahat Bayt Trad* (The Trad Family’s Square), *Souk el Hayyakin* (Weavers’ Souk), *Mahallet el Gharbiyyeh* (West Side), *Tariq Trablous* (Tripoli Road), and so on. The *Maydan el Madfaa* (Cannons’ Maydan) was the only ‘commemorative’ name, used since the 1770s (Khalaf 2006).

With the expansion of the city, commemorative place names began to appear on the map. For example the Majidiye quarter, with its eponymous mosque, was named after Abdulmejid I, Ottoman caliph from 1839 to 1861. Similarly, the

⁷Toponyms, for this study are every name attached to a place, e.g. a street name, a river or water-surface name, a quarter name, a city name, or a green-space name.

⁸In this paper toponymic systems are defined as interacting toponyms present in more or less the same space, and usually written, re-written, controlled and run by political power.

Hamidiye Square honoured Abdülhamid II, Ottoman caliph from 1876 to 1909.⁹ After the 1908 coup d'État staged by the Committee of Union and Progress, Hamidiye was renamed Union Square. Still, most Beirut place names were traditional, as shown in the Baedeker map of 1912.¹⁰

By the end of October 1918, the Ottoman Empire surrendered and signed the Treaty of Mudros with the Allies, establishing an occupied territory in the Levant. After declaring the state of Greater Lebanon in September 1920, French Mandatory authorities proceeded to write a constitution and codify the fundamental principles of the new political entity. In 1926 a special committee appointed by France wrote the Lebanese Constitution (Michel Chiha Foundation 2017). This codification of fundamental text between 1920 and 1926 was accompanied by a parallel 'codification' of the map. An 'official' 1:10,000 map of the city was published in June 1920 by the Topography Bureau of the French Army of the Levant,¹¹ three months before the proclamation of Greater Lebanon. In this map, the new political order was reflected by the replacement of old toponyms by French military, political, and geographical names (Cheikho 1920).

4 Examining the French Map of Beirut (1936)

By 1936, Lebanon had become a republic with a constitution and a president. However, French Mandatory authorities continued to control the map. During the 1920s French Mandatory authorities continued the reconstruction of the city centre that had begun under the Ottomans in 1915 (Ghorayeb 2014: 21–36). The French built the Place de l'Étoile and considered it the 'oriental' heart of the city (Davie 2003, 2005). An updated 1:10,000 map of 1936 was published by the Topography Bureau of the French Army of the Levant, and later used to elaborate other plans of Beirut during World War II.¹² French sovereignty, French *mission protectrice* of the 'mountain-refuge' that Lebanon is supposed to be, and the ideology of the new nation are all written as toponyms on the 1936 map (Fig. 1).

⁹The Löytved map of 1876 shows some commemorative trends but not these two toponyms. This map, drawn by Julius Löytved (Vice-Consul of Denmark), is a south-up map and one of its original copies is located within the archives of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and available from: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8494564f>.

¹⁰The Baedeker map of Beirut was drawn by Karl Baedeker in a 'Handbook for Travellers, 5th Edition' in 1912 and is available from: <http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/lebanon.html>

¹¹The map of Beirut 1920 is in the archives of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and is available from: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53066704k/>

¹²Some historical Beirut maps are available at the Archives militaires de la Défense in Vincennes and at the archives of the IGN in Saint-Mandé. The author visited the two archives during his doctoral research on Beirut toponyms.

Verdun. The ally of France in the battle has the *rue de Londres*. After World War I, France officially went to the Levant to ‘protect minorities’. Its protective mission is also codified on the map.

4.2 *The Military Mission Protectrice of France*

In 1919, Georges Clemenceau promised a national home for Maronites in his correspondence with Patriarch Elias Hoyek (Rondot 1954; Tadié 2016: 46). At the same time, the Patriarch, heading a delegation of Lebanese notables to the Versailles Peace Conference, requested an independent Lebanese ‘Phoenician’ state with French protection (Ippolito 2011; Kaufman 2014: 85–86). Thus, the French mission in the Levant was described not as the traditional *mission civilisatrice*, but as a *mission protectrice*, that is, a protective mission of minorities (Commission de publication des documents diplomatiques français 2004: XLVIII), based on the ‘Catholic connection’ between France and Lebanon (Laurens 1991). The mission was used as a reason to justify French military interventions in Syria (Pinta 1995: 94–95; Heyberger 2018). The military visibility of France (Davie 2001: 73) was written on the map since 1920 and on the first map of Beirut, the names of living military leaders adorned major thoroughfares of the city. On the 1936 map, this military toponymic presence was kept, even if Lebanon was its own republic by then.

The *rue de l’Armée* runs by the Grand Serail (The High Commission’s headquarters.) Another street by the Port, *rue des Libérateurs*, commemorates the ‘liberation’ of the Levant from Ottoman rule. The High Commissioner in the Levant who established the Mandate, General Henri Gouraud, has a *rue Gouraud*,¹⁶ one of the most famous streets of Beirut that connects the old city to its eastern quarters.¹⁷ To the south east of the city centre, the governor of Lebanon and of the isle of Arwad, Albert Trabaud, is commemorated by a *rue Trabaud*.

Other generals, not necessarily affiliated to the French Army of the Levant, are toponymized on the 1936 map. World War I French officers, Ferdinand Foch and Philippe Pétain, had a *rue du maréchal Foch*, *quartier Foch*, and *rue du maréchal Pétain*¹⁸ since 1920. Another General and High Commissioner of the Levant (1923–1924), Maxime Weygand, is honoured by a *rue Weygand*, the official address of Beirut Municipality, and a *quartier Weygand* at the city’s eastern entry.

¹⁶In other words, General Henri Gouraud commemorated himself by putting himself on the map of Beirut.

¹⁷Another Mandate officer was commemorated on the 1920 map; Colonel Émile Niéger, who played an important role in ‘pacifying’ the southern parts of Lebanon (Khoury 2004), has a *rue Colonel Niéger* connecting the Grand Serail to the south-western quarters of the city. The street is renamed *rue [Maurice] Barrès* in the 1936 map.

¹⁸Later and in 1945, *rue Pétain* became *rue France* and is still on the map of Beirut today.

Since 1920, a British World War I hero, General Edmund Allenby,¹⁹ has a very central *rue Allenby* in the heart of Beirut. Allenby was the first of the Allies to enter the Levant and then the city (Magazine Circulation Co. 1918), and such was his fame after World War I that two contemporaneous eminent Arab-speaking poets, Elia Abu Madi and Ahmed Shawqi, praised him in their writings.²⁰ Today, Beirut is the only Arab city that keeps the souvenir of Allenby's march on its present map.

The French Third Republic was known for its leanings towards the *laïcité* and its conflict with the Catholic Church following the 1905 law on the separation of Churches and State. Yet Mandatory Authorities introduced the names of two warrior patron saints of France to the map of Beirut. On the eastern hills of the city a *rue Saint Louis* was named after the Crusader king of France. Its naming provoked some objections from locals who did not want 'foreign saints' (Davie 2001: 73). In 1920, the French Republic reestablished its diplomatic relations with the Holy See and a French special ambassador participated in the canonization of Joan of Arc in Rome by Pope Benedict XV. Later, Pope Pius XI declared her a secondary patron saint of France, assuring that the French nation is the *Fille aînée de l'Église*.²¹ A *rue Jeanne d'Arc* appears on the map of 1936 and still exists in the Hamra quarter.

4.3 *Lebanon as the Refuge for Minorities and Confessions*

Lebanon was considered as a 'mountain-refuge' (Lammens 1921) and a country of communities and minorities (Rondot *op cit*: 85–87). Beirut toponymy was meant to reflect the mosaic of faiths in Lebanon with its officially-recognized 17 religious groups. The 1936 map highlights this diversity. Besides Joan of Arc and Louis IX, two other French saints are toponymized: St Charles and St Vincent (de Paul). Six locally-venerated saints enjoy a visible presence on the map and their names adorn important thoroughfares: Mar²² Nicholas of Myra, Mar Demetrius [Mitr] of Thessalonica, prophet Mar Elias of Tishba, Mar Michael the Archangel,²³ Mar Antonios [Anthony] of Egypt and of Padua, and Mar Maron the Hermit. A saint of Eastern Churches and an important figure in the history of Beirut *via* the Roman Law School (Badre 2016) and in legitimizing Beirut's role as capital (Emereau 1915: 422–424), the Roman emperor Justinian has a *rue Justinien*. Curiously, the 1920 map names it *rue de la République*, but before 1936 the French Mandatory

¹⁹Field Marshal and 1st Viscount Allenby of Megiddo in 1919, see Hughes (2011).

²⁰See Abu Madi (1996: 241, 595–597) and Shawqi (2005).

²¹For more information see Leo XIII (1884), the entry 'Benoît XV' in Ambrogi and Le Tourneau (2017), and Drago and Tawil (2017).

²²*Mar* is a Syriac word meaning 'saint' or 'venerated', found in many Beirut hagiotoponyms.

²³Saint Michael the Archangel gives his names to a street and to the Camp St Michel of Armenian refugees.

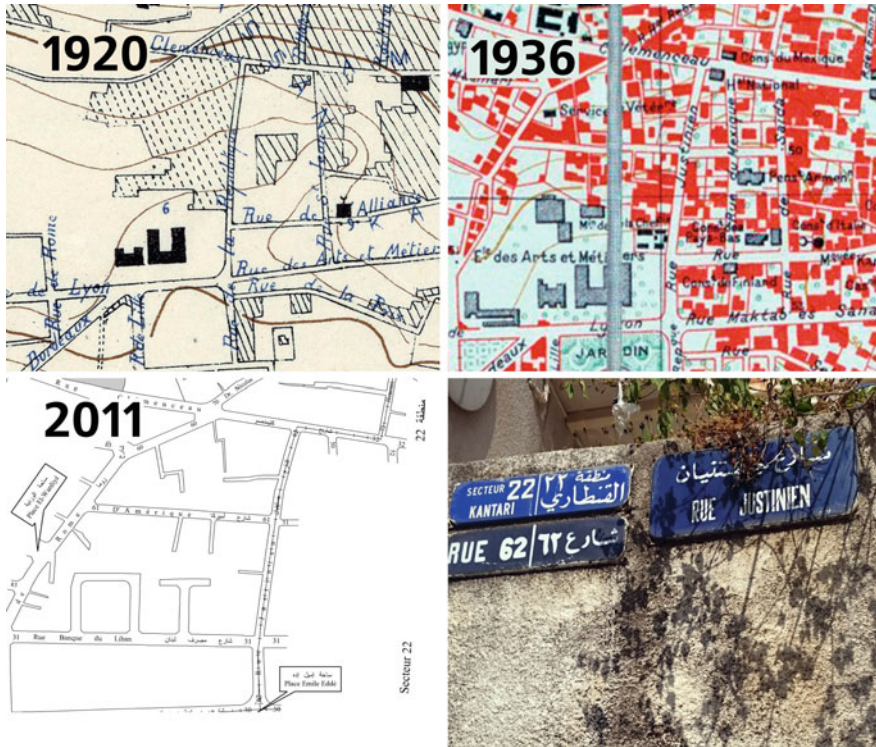


Fig. 2 From République to Justinian on the map of Beirut (Courtesy of the BnF, The Hebrew University, and the Municipality of Beirut; image by the author)

authorities found the figure of the Roman emperor so important that they renamed the biggest part of rue de la République after him (Fig. 2).

Different Christian institutions lend their name to the entire street where they are located. The *rue de l’archevêché orthodoxe, du patriarcat syrien* [syriaque], *rue du Saint-Sauveur* [Mokhallisiyé], *rue de l’Hôtel-Dieu, rue de la Faculté Saint-Joseph, rue de l’Hôpital orthodoxe, rue des Saints-Coeurs, rue des Capucins,* and *rue de Sagesse* are some examples. Finally, two localities named *quartier arménien* appear on the eastern side of the city to mark the settlement of refugees from the 1915 Genocide (Kévorkian et al. 2007: 119–122). Patriarch Elias Hoyek himself is commemorated by an eminent *rue patriarche Hoyek*, connecting the courthouse to the sea façade. Other Christian Greek Orthodox archbishops of Beirut are commemorated by the *rue du Monseigneur Messarra* and *rue du Monseigneur Ghofrail*.

In Muslim-majority quarters of Beirut, to the south and south-west of the city centre, toponyms emanating from Islamic traditions appear on the map. Streets

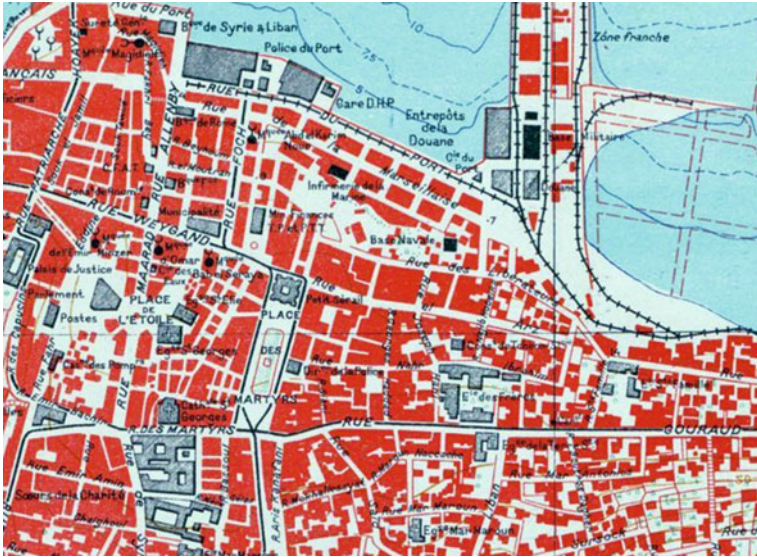


Fig. 3 A detail of the map of Beirut 1936 with the Place des Martyrs, rues Gouraud, Foch, Allenby, Patriarche Hoyek, amongst others (Courtesy of The Hebrew University)

carrying the names of *Sidi*²⁴ *Hassan* [Imam Hassan bin Ali], *Saïde Fatmé* [Fatima, daughter of Mohamed, founder of Islam], *Saïde Khadija* [first wife of Mohamed], *Saïde Aisha* [wife of Mohamed], *Ibn Arabi* [a soufi holy man], *Umayyads* and *Abbasids* [first and second dynasties of caliphs], *Abu Bakr*, *Omar*, and *Othman* (the three first caliphs) were added to the Beirut toponyms by the Mandatory Authorities.²⁵

4.4 Political Martyrs of the New Nation

The state of Greater Lebanon was formed by merging the city of Beirut with Mount Lebanon (Davie 1996: 71–105). Historical figures of the mountain were added to the map of Beirut. Fakhreddine the Maanid, an Ottoman figure of the newly-introduced national myth (Abu Fakhr and Salibi 2012) has a beautiful street in the city centre. Another important figure of the Mountain history, Emir Bashir II, has a

²⁴In Arabic *sidi* is ‘my lord’ and *saïde* is ‘my lady’, both words are used as veneration titles for members of the House of Mohamed.

²⁵In a city where notable Muslim families claim descent from the Prophet or from first caliphs (Hallak 1987, 2010) the choice of toponyms among members of Mohamed’s household and caliphs can make sense.

central street. But the toponymic system of national martyrs, set by the French, is the most eminent on the Beirut map (Fig. 3).

In August 1915 and May 1916, in Beirut and Damascus, Ottoman authorities executed about forty Syro-Lebanese intellectuals and political activists (of different Christian and Muslim denominations), accused of high treason and of collaborating with the Allies (Ajay 1974; Kassir 2010: 284; Zachs 2012). Upon the arrival of the French, names of some of the executed, considered martyrs, appeared on the map, with a *rue des Martyrs* to the south of the Place des Canons, Beirut's central square (Khalaf 2006).

Since 1930, a statue 'to celebrate understanding between Christians and Muslims' (Kassir *op cit*) was erected in the central square of Beirut, *place des Martyrs*, as it is named on the 1936 map and on present-day maps. Numerous streets are named after the martyrs: *rues Abdel Wahab Englizi, Saïd Akl, Chafic Mouayed* [Azem], *Abdel-Karim El-Khalil, Petro Paoli, and Abdel-Ghani Arayssi*, amongst others. The 1936 map includes up to 15 toponyms of the *shouhada*²⁶; half of them Damascenes.

5 France Yesterday, Lebanon Today: A Continuity of Toponymic Dynamics

After the Lebanese Independence of 1943, the name of General Georges Catroux (one of the last high commissioners) was added to the map. Later, General de Gaulle was also added to the map, to adorn the western maritime façade of the city and form the 'corniche de Beyrouth' along with the *rue de Paris*. The most recent toponym related to French sovereignty is the *rue Jacques Chirac*, added to the map by the end of the 2000s.

In 1951 the Municipal Council of Beirut decided to rename the 'foreign military names' [*sic*] after local celebrities (Lisan Al Hal 1951). However, the renaming was never accepted by the Ministry of the Interior and the 'foreign military names' remain on the map of Beirut. Some writers have recently voiced their opposition to the 'ever-present colonisation in the streets of Beirut' (Al-Kasim 2006; Mohsen 2008). An increasing number of religious figures are commemorated on the map—Christians and Muslims of every denomination and official religion of Lebanon. Different map features carry the names of local clergymen, e.g., Patriarch Paul Meouchy, Archbishop Ignace Moubarac, Antoine Salhani SJ, Mufti Hassan Khalid, Cheikh Mohammed Toufik Khalid, and Cheikh Mustapha Naja. After Independence, more martyrs of 1915 and 1916 were commemorated, and were later augmented by other national martyrs, considered to be heroes of the whole Lebanese nation. The last to be added are Rafic Hariri, Gibran Tuani, Samir Kassir, and some others who were assassinated between 2005 and 2008.

²⁶The Arabic word for martyrs.

Toponymic systems introduced by the French Mandate are still operational on the map. These include martyrs, religious figures and even French generals' names. The city did not undergo a 'toponymic purge' and some toponyms were gradually changed but without any rupture with the toponymic system that was established by the French Mandatory authorities. The Lebanese Constitution (the founding text of Lebanon), was never abrogated or changed, but only modified upon Independence (Koch 2005). The reality of this fundamental text is indeed reflected by the continuity of the text on maps of the Lebanese capital, where colonial-era place names were not re-written, but left in place.

Is the Beirut example to be generalized? Damascus, the neighbouring sister city of Beirut and capital of Syria, has undergone numerous toponymic purges since Syria gained independence in 1946 (Keilo 2015) and a cleansing of all French mandatory names. Yet the toponymic system of national martyrs, introduced at the same time in Beirut, is still expanding and new martyrs are being added to the map. In the Damascene case, in spite of toponymic cleansing, some toponymic dynamics were retained. In the Beirut case, the colonial mandatory power has not only radically changed toponyms on the map but also created toponymic systems and established a commemoration dynamic that still governs the map of Beirut today: The Beirut and Damascene cases remind us of the invented tradition of Hobsbawm and Ranger (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992, 1) or even of the invention of memory inscribed in space (Said 2000). Lebanon itself was created by a Decree of Gouraud, in the name of the French Republic. Does this explain the importance of the 'foreign military names'? If the rupture is expressed through the toponyms imposed during the Mandate, the *raison d'être* of the Lebanese Republic, can we consider this to be a viable explanation of the presence of these toponyms and their toponymic systems on the map today? The Beirut case is worthy of attention by comparing it to others in order to understand how colonial mapping outlives colonialism and its dynamics and systems still draw the map and dictate its outline.

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