The marginalization of waqf in Abdelnour’s translation should be put next to the definition that the author gives of public space. Within this category, he substitutes the roads, the courtyards of places of worship [bihâr al-‘âdib], seaports [al-‘asâkîl], coasts, squares, and promenades. Before the city’s sudden development in the middle of the nineteenth century, public space existed naturally: squares were used as meeting places to spend free time, celebrate marriages, funerals, religious and seasonal holidays, and to receive important visitors to the city.

Open spaces in the direct vicinity of religious buildings were used as a natural extension to house large crowds on special days. Coasts, riversides, and lakesides were used for temporary storage before and after shipments, for repairing boats, watering the cattle, or washing clothes. Curiously enough, Abdelnour does not classify these public spaces into one of the five categories of real estate property as defined by the Ottoman Land Code, and designates them rather as “ardî ghayr mamlûk,” i.e. land plots that are not owned. It therefore seems that these public spaces had no clear legal status, but were simply undistributed remaining spaces, in the sense of residual here, used by everybody.

With the demographic growth of the city and the construction boom, and more specifically the construction of customs, large warehouses, and important religious buildings, public spaces progressively lost their traditional use. Nevertheless the contemporary lifestyle inspired by that of “civilized countries” [al-bul’dân al-mutamaddina] required open spaces for the celebration of religious and seasonal holidays, playgrounds for the children of the poor, refuges in case of fire or an earthquake, and also enough open space to purify the air, embellish the city, and “entertain the stranger” [tasliyat al-gharîb]. But with the rapid increase of the price of land, public spaces were threatened by the greed of powerful landowners and the employees of the administration, who tried to transform them into private land.
Although the law granted the municipality with the role of protecting these remaining spaces, it seems that their existence, at least in the form and function that they had before the Tanzimat, was as threatened as that of waqf.

CONCLUSION

With the Building Code of 1882, the urban space of Beirut was for the first time conceived as a whole entity.⁵ Remaining space in both senses of the word, perpetual and residual, could not be afforded anymore and had to disappear. Affected by the new market economy and the rise of new urban dynamics, waqf authorities had to reconsider the way in which they managed their property and their role within the city. In this new market economy, in which land became a commodity, the need for land was only limited by the lust of the individual. As proven by the hero of Leo Tolstoy’s novel “How much Land does a Man Need?”, written in 1888, this lust has no limits and could have disastrous consequences. Allowed to have all the land he could walk around in one day for one thousand rubles, Pahom walks until he falls dead, reminding us that “six feet from [our] head to [our] heels was all [we] needed”.

This vision of property clearly opposed the separation between usufruct and land that waqf promoted, and the rise of new urban dynamics, waqf authorities had to reconsider the way in which they managed their property and their role within the city. In this new market economy, in which land became a commodity, the need for land was only limited by the lust of the individual. As proven by the hero of Leo Tolstoy’s novel “How much Land does a Man Need?”, written in 1888, this lust has no limits and could have disastrous consequences. Allowed to have all the land he could walk around in one day for one thousand rubles, Pahom walks until he falls dead, reminding us that “six feet from [our] head to [our] heels was all [we] needed”.

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For waqf authorities, the law became the place that remains, a place for negotiation while shifting from one system of space production to another that provided them, as well as all other protagonists, with the vocabularies, idioms, and concepts for communication and deliberation. This remaining place eventually allowed the waqf institutions, and the various religious communities that they represented, to sustain their interests in the city and remain the biggest landowners in Lebanon until today. The main reason behind the survival of waqf is also the fact that the city’s families of notables, who provided both the new urban institutions, like the municipality, and the waqf with their protagonists, were keen on sustaining old and new structures of power within the city, to serve their needs in an optimal way. A more pessimistic view is to consider the religious community as the remaining place left for the Lebanese to negotiate the physical remains of their land, if laws and regulations are not revised and revived to again take this role.

FOOTNOTES


2. Beirut’s transformation started under the short but very significant Egyptian rule of Ibrahim Pasha, son of Muhammad Ali Pasha, from 1831 to 1840. In the following decades, the change was accelerated through a series of key measures and events: the construction of a casern and a quarantine area in 1835; the creation of the Beirut-Damascus road in 1857; the rise of the press, starting with a first local newspaper in 1838; the arrival of an important, mainly Christian, migratory wave in the aftermath of the sectarian strife in Mount Lebanon and Damascus in 1890; the creation of the first municipal council in 1863; the nomination of the city as the capital of a vilayet (government) that ranged from Palestine to Lattakia in 1888; and finally the construction of a new port in 1896. Along with the abovementioned key events, the city witnessed a growing presence of foreign representation in support of national commercial interests and in the proliferation of missionary schools. This progressively led to the formation of an intellectual middle class in Beirut that instigated a real cultural renaissance, the Nahda, largely modeled on the Egyptian renaissance model that flourished in the wake of the reformist drive of Muhammad Ali Pasha at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

3. Each article’s translation is followed by the interpretation of the author written in smaller characters.

4. Youssef Haidar Architects and Dagher, Cottbus-Senftenberg from 2016, with a thesis on the impact of religious endowments on urban projects in Late Ottoman and French Mandate Beirut. He is a Fellow at the Saint Joseph University, Beirut, in the framework of the research project “Atlas of the Religious Spaces of Lebanon” and a Fellow of the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin, in the framework of the research project “Global Prayers: Redemption and Liberation in the City”. He is also a lecturer in cultural heritage studies at the School of Architecture of the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts since 2003. Between 2000 and 2008, he was a conservation architect, at Youssef Haidar Architects and Dagher, Hanna, and Partners Architects successively, where he managed several conservation and rehabilitation projects, among them the Oman Mosque, the American University Archaeological Museum in Beirut, and the Soap Museum in Saida.

5. See Young (1905-07).

6. The perception of the city as one entity was even more emphasized by the demolition of the city walls that led to the creation of new spatial perceptions: Like a building, the city now had façades, the main one being the maritime façade perceived by the visitors (merchants, industrials, diplomats, writers, etc.) arriving by boat.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Joseph RUSTOM holds a Master of Architecture from the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts from 2000, a Master of Advanced Studies in the Preservation of Archaeological Sites and Monuments from the Marc Bloch University in Strasbourg, 2001, a Master of Advanced Studies in Urban Archaeology from the Francois Rabelais University in Tours, 2004, and a Doctoral Degree in Urban Planning from the STU Cobitou-Senftenberg from 2016, with a thesis on the impact of religious endowments on urban projects in Late Ottoman and French Mandate Beirut. He is a Fellow at the Saint Joseph University, Beirut, in the framework of the research project “Atlas of the Religious Spaces of Lebanon” and a Fellow of the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin, in the framework of the research project “Global Prayers: Redemption and Liberation in the City”. He is also a lecturer in cultural heritage studies at the School of Architecture of the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts since 2003. Between 2000 and 2008, he was a conservation architect, at Youssef Haidar Architects and Dagher, Hanna, and Partners Architects successively, where he managed several conservation and rehabilitation projects, among them the Oman Mosque, the American University Archaeological Museum in Beirut, and the Soap Museum in Saida.