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# France and medical education under the Ottoman Empire

by J. Ducruet, Lebanon

French physicians practicing in the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the 19th century were few and far between (exceptions include, in the Lebanon, Dr Blois, a surgeon from Nice, who practiced in Tripoli from 1807 onwards, and Dr Suquet, known for having treated Ernest Renan).<sup>1</sup> Qualified physicians were a rare breed at the time as medicine was only taught at the army medical school in Constantinople. It was thanks to Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt and later initiatives by the viceroy of Egypt, Mohamed Ali (Mehemet Ali), that French physicians increased their presence in this part of the world and, in particular, became active in medical education. Like its counterpart in Constantinople, Kasr El-Aini medical school was an army institution. It was army schools that brought Western medicine to the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the 19th century. The second half of the century unfolded under a quite different banner. The Hatti Sharif of Gulhane (Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber), promulgated by the Sultan on November 3, 1839 and the Hatti Humayun (Imperial Edict) of February 18, 1856 were the Ottoman equivalents of a declaration of the rights of man and the citizen. They opened up the Middle East to a whole range of new initiatives, with particular respect to education and health. It was during this period that virtually all the main French hospital institutions,<sup>2</sup> as well as the schools that taught in French were founded (as reported by the French Foreign Minister at the November 26th, 1904, sitting of the Chamber of Deputies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reckoned that there were 600 schools in the Ottoman Empire teaching French to 100 000 pupils).<sup>3</sup> It was in this setting that the French Faculty of Medicine was founded in Beirut in 1883 and that an application for a *firman* (imperial decree) authorizing the construction of the *Hôtel-Dieu de France*, or Saint-Joseph University Hospital, was submitted in Constantinople in 1912.

*It was Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt that first propelled French physicians, under the aegis of Drs Desgenettes and Larrey, into a region in which they were few and far between in the early 19th century. The next advance came 25 years later under the aegis of Dr Clot, appointed senior medical officer to the Egyptian army, and later chairman of the Egyptian Health Council, by Mohamed Ali (Mehemet Ali), viceroy of Egypt. The most lasting achievement of the émigré French physicians was the advancement of medical education, beginning with the foundation of Abu-Zabal medical school, which transferred in 1837 to Kasr El-Aini, also just outside Cairo, where the first class of Lebanese physicians was to graduate. In the Lebanon itself, medical education was provided in English by the Syrian Protestant College and in French by Saint-Joseph University. Following an agreement between the French government and the Jesuits, Saint-Joseph University opened the French Faculty of Medicine on November 30, 1883. Teaching the official French syllabus, with staff and examining board despatched from France, it was empowered to award the French doctor of medicine degree. Between October 1887 and November 1913, it produced 451 doctors, half of whom practiced in the Lebanon, a quarter in Egypt and a quarter elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. Students received their clinical training in a variety of hospitals before the Faculty founded its own Hôtel-Dieu de France or Saint-Joseph University Hospital.*

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*(see French abstract on page 300)*



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### Army medical schools in Egypt

In 1798, after the Battle of the Pyramids, Bonaparte ordered four army hospitals to be set up in Giza, Cairo, and Old Cairo. In the wake of senior medical officer René-Nicolas Desgenettes (who famously inoculated himself publicly with pus from a suppurating bubo to reassure the troops that this would afford protection against bubonic plague), senior surgical officer Dominique Larrey (who introduced field hospitals and his renowned “flying” ambulances, which first came into use in 1797 during the campaign of Italy), and health corps practitioners, French physicians made their entry into the region. Initially, their patients were soldiers, but it was not long before they turned their attention to the local population. Their official mission was to characterize the most common diseases in Egypt and determine their treatment. After Bonaparte considered setting up a civilian hospital, Dr Desgenettes began by refurbishing the dilapidated 13th century Moristan Hospital, but also drew up plans for a three to four hundred-bed hospital with a



Mohamed Ali (Mehemet Ali) (1769-1849) Viceroy of Egypt. Oil on canvas, by Louis Charles Auguste Couder (1790-1873). Château de Versailles, France. © The Bridgeman Art Library.

medical school attached. However, the resources necessary for carrying out such a project were lacking, especially after Bonaparte returned to France in October 1799.<sup>4</sup>

Dr Desgenettes' plans were revived 25 years later. Mohamed Ali set consular agent Florent-Tourneau the task of recruiting French instructors for the Egyptian army, but also doctors. Landing in Marseille in 1824, Florent-Tourneau met up with a friend, Dr Cauvière, a physician at the local Hôtel-Dieu, who recommended one of his former students, Dr Antoine-Barthélemy Clot, originally from Grenoble, and a graduate in medicine and surgery from the Faculty of Montpellier. Dr Clot was eventually won over and on December 22, 1824 signed a 5-year contract as senior medical officer to the 150 000-strong Egyptian army, which did not have 50 physicians, health officers, or pharmacists to its name.

Over the following 3 years, Dr Clot achieved the two targets closest to his heart: mandatory smallpox vaccination throughout Egypt, and the construction of a hospital plus medical

school at Abu-Zabal, near Heliopolis. In 1832, he managed to send 12 of his graduates to continue their studies at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris so that they could return as teachers to Egypt and gradually replace the staff seconded from France, such as Drs Duvigneau, Bernard, and Gaetan. Mohamed Ali honored Dr Clot with the title of Bey, appointed him chairman of the Health Council, and provided him with the necessary resources for upgrading his hospital and medical school and moving it in 1837 close to the seat of Sheikh Aini, where it took the name Kasr (castle or palace) El-Aini.<sup>5</sup>

In the same year, 1837, Emir Bechir II asked Clot-Bey, during a visit to Beirut, to take back to Kasr El-Aini a group of young Lebanese who were keen to study medicine, and whose expenses he would pay. Notable names in this first group of Lebanese physicians trained by Clot-Bey in the French system were Youssef Jalkh (1821-1869) and Ibrahim Najjar (1822-1864) from Deir-El-Kamar. Dr Jalkh practiced for a year at Damietta (modern Dumyat, 200 km to the north east of Cairo), before setting up first in Beirut, where he became family doctor to the Chehabs, one of the country's patrician families, and later in Baabda, the mountain town overlooking Beirut.<sup>6</sup> Dr Najjar wanted to return to the Lebanon after graduating, but was



Extent of the Ottoman Empire between 1798 and 1923. Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

French Minister of Foreign Affairs, and even Jules Ferry, who headed the French government. There were powerful motives to play on when it came to rallying support: the hunger of a new generation for professional careers, the promotion of French-speaking culture and achievement, the opportunity of giving Catholicism an edge over its Protestant rival, and of course the advancement of public health, as emphasized by Professor Jules Rouvier, one of the School's founder members:

The key idea motivating the founding of the French Faculty of Medicine in Beirut and informing every detail of its organization was that of producing a corps of physicians who would practice in the towns and countryside of Syria and its surrounding provinces. Charlatanism in these provinces was rife. There was acute awareness of the lack of practicing physicians. In 1883, as today, the Ottoman Empire had only one official Faculty, the Faculty in Constantinople, whose mission was to meet the needs of the civil and military administrations.

It was too remote from our region. As a result most Syrians headed first to the Cairo school, and when that collapsed, they came back to the medical school that the American Protestant mission had opened a few years earlier in Beirut.<sup>10</sup>



Dr Antoine-Barthélemy Clot-Bey (1793-1868), founder of the Egyptian School of Medicine of Kasr El-Aini. © BIUM, France.

After agreement was reached on May 7, 1883, between the Jesuits and the French Government, the French Medical School opened on November 30 the same year in an annex to Saint-Joseph University, from which it moved on October 15, 1912 to its current location on Damascus Street. It opened despite the failure to settle a number of problems that would subsequently be resolved in stages.

The School's status required clarification from both the Ottoman and French governments. Ibrahim Pacha, Governor of Beirut, made it plain that the School could not open without authorization. The Consul General replied that the science courses on offer were merely an extension to the syllabus already authorized at Saint-Joseph University and covered by the *firman*s of 1665 and 1695.<sup>11</sup> Not until 1901 would the Sublime Porte fully confirm the existence in law of educational institu-

told he would first have to serve the Egyptian army, since Kasr El-Aini was an army school. While visiting Constantinople during a 3-month leave, he was invited to continue his studies at the city's army medical school. He stayed 4 years, receiving his diploma in the presence of Sultan Abdul-Majid. He turned down the offer of a post in Constantinople and was appointed senior medical officer to the Ottoman army in Beirut in 1846. In particular, he was in charge of the Beirut army hospital built in 1849 at Bab Idriss.<sup>7</sup> The Kasr El-Aini graduation class also included Dr Ghaleb El-Khoury (1818-1896), who returned to the Lebanon in 1845 to attend the Maronite patriarch Youssef Hobeiche in the final year of his life and later the Druze leader Said Bey Jumblatt.<sup>8</sup>

### The French Faculty of Medicine in Beirut under the Ottoman Empire

The Jesuits had been wanting to establish a Faculty of Medicine in Beirut as early as 1872, but the credit for actually doing so belongs to Father Rémi Normand. On August 8, 1880 he submitted his *Report to the French government on the necessity of establishing a French Catholic medical school in Beirut*.<sup>9</sup> His idea was well-received by the Consul General in Beirut, the French Ambassador in Constantinople, the



Franco-Ottoman examining board of the French Faculty of Medicine of Beirut on 11 November 1907. The graduates are behind, in the third row, holding their diplomas.

tions operated under French Embassy auspices.<sup>12</sup> As for the French Ministry of Higher Education, it authorized the Beirut Medical School to prepare students for the degree of doctor of medicine on October 6, 1888. The School thus became a Faculty, with a status equivalent to that of a free faculty. The Minister spelled out the position a few years later:

My office combined the best of both worlds, with a very loose interpretation of the laws of July 12, 1875, and March 18, 1880, on freedom in higher education. On the one hand we considered the Beirut Faculty as a free faculty on foreign soil, while at the same time recognizing that its students had the same rights in law as free faculty students in France, including the right to graduate with a French doctor of medicine degree. They also enjoyed preferential treatment in that instead of coming to France to take their examinations, one of our faculties would dispatch its board of examiners to Beirut every year.<sup>13</sup>



Dr Hippolyte de Brun, Professor at the French Faculty of Medicine of Beirut (chair of clinical medicine) from 1885 to 1914 and 1919 to 1926.

The examinations held at the Beirut Faculty between October 1887 and November 1913 produced 451 physicians with full-fledged doctor of medicine degrees from the French State. After a further examination or mere formality, depending on their graduation class, 405 of these physicians duplicated their French qualification with a degree from the Constantinople Faculty of Medicine enabling them to practise legally throughout the Ottoman Empire.<sup>14</sup>

The examining boards from France played a very important role in the early days of the Faculty's history by supervising not only its results, as measured by examination, but also its syllabus and teaching methods. Later the chairmen of these boards went to make up a Faculty upper council sitting in Paris whose function was to rule on teaching appointments and the general scientific and technical direction taken by the Beirut Faculty. The 28 examination sessions held from 1887 to 1913 drew 66 missions of French professors from the faculties of medicine in Lyon (30), Paris (19), Bordeaux (5), Nancy (4), Toulouse (3), Montpellier (3), and Lille (2).<sup>15</sup>

Only in October 1898 were Faculty graduates finally authorized to practice in the Ottoman Empire without having to sit a further examination: "One or two delegates from the Imperial Medical School in Constantinople will be co-opted with full voting rights to the examining board from France and will directly authorize successful candidates to practice in the Ottoman Empire."<sup>16</sup>

Henceforth, new graduates were effectively awarded two doctor of medicine degrees: the French State degree and the Constantinople Faculty of Medicine degree. Graduates from earlier years were assisted in normalizing their status as necessary.

The Beirut syllabus was aligned to 3 years of study as in France, following the decree of June 20, 1878. The decree of July 31, 1893, extended this to 4 years. Extension to 5 years, provided for in the decrees of November 29, 1911, and July 29, 1912, was not applied in Beirut until after the World War I, starting in January 1919.

Following the French faculty tradition, teaching was divided between professorial chairs, numbering four at the School's foundation, and 11 in 1914. Jesuits already present in Beirut were assigned the chairs of chemistry, biology, microbiology, and physics. Professors from France were appointed to the other chairs. From November 1883 to November 1914, the incumbents of the chair of internal pathology and clinical medicine were Professors Jules Rouvier and Hippolyte de Brun, in that order. Their counterparts for the chair of external pathology and clinical surgery were Professors Elisée Sénès, Maurice Hache and Eugène Cottart. Professors Etienne Flavard, Frédéric Baldy, and Pierre-Paul Guigues were the successive incumbents of the chair of pharmacology from November 1884 to November 1914. Professor Henri Nègre held the chair of anatomy from November 1885 to November 1914, and Professor Jules Rouvier, followed by Professor Albert Chapotain, that of obstetrics and gynecology. The successive incumbents of the chair of therapeutics and hygiene from October 1889 to November 1914 were Professors Benoit Boyer, Jérôme La Bonnardière, and Justin Calmette, while Professor d'Auber de Peyrelongue held the chair of physiology from September 1912 to November 1914.<sup>17</sup>



Dr Henri Nègre,  
Professor at the  
French Faculty of  
Medicine of Beirut  
(chair of anatomy)  
from 1885 to 1914 and  
1919 to 1932.

First-year medical students totaled 124 in the decade from 1883 to 1892 (78 from the Lebanon, nine from Syria, 16 from Egypt, five from Turkey, and 16 from other countries), climbing to 313 for the decade from 1893 to 1902 (148 from the Lebanon, 37 from Syria, 46 from Egypt, 36 from Turkey, and 46 from other countries), and to 516 for the decade from 1903 to 1912 (202 from the Lebanon, 34 from Syria, 64 from Egypt, 120 from Turkey, 17 from Iran, 14 from Palestine, 6 from Iraq, and 59 from other countries). Of these 516 students, 252 were Catholic, 164 Orthodox or Protestant, 54 Moslem and 46 Jewish. Annual medical student numbers climbed from 10 in 1883-1884 to 90 in 1896-1897, 158 in 1902-1903, and 271 in 1912-1913.<sup>18</sup>

World War I introduced a hiatus into the Faculty's development. Despite Germany's declaration of war against France on August 4, 1914, the academic year started as normal on October 12. However, on November 2 came the news that diplomatic relations had been suspended between France and the Ottoman Empire. On November 11, the wali, or Turkish Governor of Beirut, closed down the Faculty. In the following weeks, all members of religious orders who were enemy nationals were expelled to Egypt, together with the lay teaching staff and their families. In the spring of 1915, the Faculty buildings were taken over by a telegraphy school, succeeded on April 1, 1916, by an Ottoman medical school, which operated for 2½ years. After its defeat, Turkey sued for an armistice, which was signed on October 30, 1918, in the harbor town of Mudros, on the Aegean island of Lemnos. The French Faculty of Medicine was back in business 3 months later on January 17, 1919.<sup>19</sup>

The Faculty Chancellor described the extent of his graduates' influence beyond the confines of the Lebanon and Syria:

We can boast many graduates in neighboring countries... In Egypt, we have 156 in Cairo, Alexandria, Damanhur, Tanta, Beni-Suef, Tahta, Helwan, Sohag, Port Said, Ismailia, Suez, Heliopolis, Mansoura, Qina, Fayoum, Port Tewfik, Al Minya, Assiut, etc. Over 100 are spread over the Turkish provinces, in Asia Minor, Cilicia, Constantinople, Smyrna, the Dardanelles, Bursa, Orfa, Ankara, Adana, Eskisehir, Izmit, Samsun, Zonguldak, etc. Mesopotamia boasts 12, including one who has become Minister of Hygiene in Iraq. There are no less than 31 in Palestine... One has just been put in charge of a hospital in Amman, in Transjordan. To round off these statistics, let me add that as well as some 50 other graduates who have either settled in Europe or are taking specialist degrees in France, the Faculty has 23 graduates in the Egyptian army in Sudan, 8 in America, 7 in Persia, 4 in Greece, 4 on the island of Cyprus, 2 in Bulgaria, 1 each in Chania (Crete), Rhodes, Tunis, Serbia, and Senegal, and even 1 in Hangzhou, China.<sup>20</sup>



Reverend Father  
Lucien Cattin,  
Chancellor of the  
French Faculty of  
Medicine of Beirut  
from 1895 to 1913 and  
1921 to 1923.

### The Hôtel-Dieu de France

The problem common to all faculties of medicine, that of integrating the teaching of clinical and hospital skills into the course, was particularly thorny in the first decades of the Beirut Faculty. The Daughters of Charity hospital and later St George's Hospital provided temporary solutions until the Faculty was able to found its own hospital. This required funds. Reverend Father Lucien Cattin, the Faculty Chancellor, journeyed to France to whip up interest among parliamentarians, bankers, major corporations, and numerous private individuals. He received active support from the French Asia Committee, which was instrumental, along with a newspaper, *Le Temps*, in the launch of a national subscription in May 1911, in particular by the Paris press association, the *Syndicat de la Presse Parisienne*.



Laying of the foundation stone of the Hôtel-Dieu de France hospital on May 2, 1922 by General Gouraud, High Commissioner, flanked by Mgr Giannini, Apostolic Delegate, and Reverend Father Chanteur, Rector of the University.



Inauguration of the Hôtel-Dieu de France on May 26, 1923, by General Weygand (second storey, 1st arch on the right after the flags, with the Bishop).

Two adjoining properties totaling nearly 4 hectares (40 000 m<sup>2</sup>) came up for sale not far from the Faculty of Medicine. While awaiting authorization from the Sublime Porte for registration of this land in the name of the French State, purchase by the solicitor Emile Eddé “on behalf of, and with the funds of, the French government” proceeded on July 11, 1912. Authorization proved slow in coming. On January 29, 1914, the French Consul General in Beirut went ahead regardless and instructed the project architect, Father Joseph Mattern, to build the boundary wall and assemble his construction materials. After the Ottoman Empire entered the war and closed the Faculty of Medicine on November 11, 1914, the future hospital site was looted. The building stone was filched for the Beirut garrison barracks (*Grand Sérail*) and principal administrative building (*Petit Sérail*). The project was not revived until hostilities ceased.

On December 1, 1921, an application was accordingly submitted to General Gouraud, High Commissioner of Syria and the Lebanon, who granted his approval. An association, the Hôtel-Dieu de France Charity, governed by the French law of August 3, 1909, was set up to supervise construction of the hospital based on the prewar design, its subsequent management, and the organization of clinical teaching for the Faculty of Medicine. Its governing board had five members: a chairman (the High Commissioner), an executive director (the Jesuit Faculty Chancellor), and three other members from among the Faculty professors.

General Gouraud laid the foundation stone of the Hôtel-Dieu de France on May 2, 1922. Land ownership was transferred to the French State and the Charity was gifted 2 800 000 francs by the French government. General Gouraud’s successor, General Weygand, opened the hospital on May 27, 1923. Within a year, the Hôtel-Dieu de France had catered for 1018 patients, 929 of whom were non-fee-paying because looked after by the welfare services (*Assistance Publique*); these were of particular value for the Faculty of Medicine because they were the only patients to whom students had access at that time. The departments

of medicine and surgery opened on January 2, 1924, under Professors Justin Calmette and Eugène Cottard, respectively. The Hospital recruited externs and interns from the senior student body into its departments by competitive examination, as well as junior staff physicians from among the new graduates.

Even twinned with its own hospital, the French Faculty of Medicine was hardly equipped to provide the Lebanon and surrounding region with a health service on its own. Other institutions that were founded by it or alongside it came some way to-



Graduation ceremony at the French Faculty of Medicine of Beirut on July 7, 1923, attended by the High Commissioner General Weygand (white uniform, front row, middle), Reverend Father Lucien Cattin, Chancellor of the Faculty, on his left, and Professor Dubreuil, President of the Examining Board, on his right), further, military doctors and professors of the Faculty.

ward achieving this aim. In first place were the Schools of Pharmacy and Dentistry. In 1883, the French Medical School was properly known as the *Joint School of Medicine and Pharmacy*. Pharmacy gradually achieved its due independent status, largely thanks to Professors Etienne Flavard, Frédéric Baldy, and Pierre-Paul Guigues, producing 94 French-qualified pharmacists between 1887 and 1914.

The idea of a Dental School alongside the French Faculty of Medicine dated from 1912, but came to fruition only in 1920 under the leadership of André Fernagut, catering for 10 students in its first year (7 from Egypt, 2 from Greece, and 1 from the Lebanon). It was followed by the *Faculty of Medicine Midwifery School*, which although planned in 1896 did not open until November 3, 1922, becoming the *School of Midwifery and Nursing* in 1929. It became fully operational in 1939, when the French Maternity Hospital was built opposite the Faculty of Medicine. Lastly, we must mention the Institutes. In 1913, the entire Middle East could boast only two anti-rabies institutes, in Cairo and Constantinople. The French Faculty of Medicine opened its Anti-Rabies Institute on May 1, 1913, and managed to treat 143 patients before being closed,



The buildings of the Faculty of Medicine of Saint-Joseph University in 1940.

along with the Faculty, on November 14, 1914. It then reopened on May 1, 1919, operating without interruption until 1958, when it reverted to the Ministry of Health. The Institute of Bacteriology also reverted to same Ministry at the same time, having been founded on March 1, 1919, after which it played a key role in the fight against cholera, smallpox, tetanus, and diphtheria. The Institutes drove the creation of laboratory technician schools. Thus any reference to France and medical education under the Ottoman Empire cannot fail to evoke the multiple institutions that have helped to make the health services in this part of the world into what they have become today. □

Unless otherwise specified, illustrations are provided by the Author, courtesy of Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth.

Wide-angle view of today's Hôtel-Dieu de France complex in Beirut.



#### THE HÔTEL-DIEU DE FRANCE TODAY

- ◆ 170 hospital physicians
- ◆ 300 registered nurses
- ◆ More than 100 residents (in speciality training)
- ◆ 60 interns
- ◆ 430 hospital beds
- ◆ 20 000 patients every year
- ◆ 11 operating rooms
- ◆ 2 cardiovascular surgery operating rooms
- ◆ Central 15-bed postanesthetic recovery facility

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## LA FRANCE ET L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE LA MÉDECINE SOUS L'EMPIRE OTTOMAN

**L**ors de l'expédition de Bonaparte en Égypte, sous l'égide des Drs Desgenettes et Larrey, et, vingt-cinq ans plus tard, grâce à Mohammed Ali (Méhémet Ali), vice-roi d'Égypte, sous l'égide du Dr Clot, nommé médecin-chirurgien en chef de l'armée égyptienne, puis Président du Conseil égyptien de la santé, les médecins français firent leur entrée officielle dans une région où ils étaient clairsemés au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. La promotion de l'enseignement de la médecine fut leur œuvre la plus marquante avec la fondation de l'école de médecine d'Abou-Zabal transférée à Kasr El-Aïni en 1837. Une première promotion de médecins libanais fut formée à Kasr El-Aïni. Au Liban, le Syrian Protestant College, en langue anglaise, et l'Université Saint-Joseph, en langue française, assurèrent à leur tour cet enseignement de la médecine. Suite à un accord entre le Gouvernement français et les Jésuites, la Faculté française de médecine fut ouverte à l'Université Saint-Joseph le 30 novembre 1883. Appliquant les programmes d'enseignement officiels en France, ses enseignants et les membres des jurys d'examens venant alors de France, elle fut habilitée à délivrer le diplôme d'État français de docteur en médecine; elle décerna ce diplôme d'octobre 1887 à novembre 1913 à 451 médecins dont environ la moitié exercèrent au Liban, un quart en Égypte et un quart dans les autres régions de l'Empire ottoman. Elle assura son enseignement hospitalier dans divers hôpitaux avant la fondation de l'Hôtel-Dieu de France.

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