

Lebanese Archives in the French Archives: Issues and Initiatives

Fatme Charafeddine

Research and Instruction Department, Head
American University of Beirut

Mariette Abdel Hay

Collection Development Department, Head



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Greater Lebanon, French Mandate Flag



In this presentation



- A case study of a collection of diplomatic archival materials received as a gift by the University Libraries.
- Will try to shed light on issues and challenges concerning the selection, assessment and processing of archival collections

We will start with a short introduction to the history of Lebanon and its archival resources

Lebanon in Modern History



- Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire 1516-1918
 - Mount Lebanon managed to get conditioned or total independence several times
- Lebanon came under French Mandate 1920-1943 –at the end World War I and the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire
 - State of Greater Lebanon was created adding to Mount Lebanon, the areas of north Lebanon, south Lebanon and the Bekaa.
- Independence of Lebanon November 1943, final withdrawal of French troupes in 1946

Archival Sources on Lebanon



- The National Archives in Lebanon
- Ottoman Archives / Turkey
- French National and Diplomatic Archives / Paris
- The Repatriated Archives of the French consulates in Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire/ Nantes
- Diplomatic archives of other concerned countries
- Archives in monasteries and other religious and civil institutions
- Archives of ruling families, Emirs and Sheiks.
- Private collections

Barriers in Accessing Archival Documents



- National Archives in Lebanon do not cover periods prior to the creation of the state of Greater Lebanon in 1920
- Geographic barriers: travel cost and permission
- Language: Ottoman as an example, few people know the language
- Restrictions to access the archives in institutions and private collections
- Loss, damage and dispersion of family and local administrative archives

Initiatives to Collect Archival Materials

Prince Maurice Chehab



- Historian, founder and head of the General Directorate of Antiquities (GDA) from 1928-1982.
- The first to start collecting archives of political families and local administrative registers.
- In an article published in 1976. Chehab described the collection:
 - Houses archival collections from the 16th century to 1914.
 - Private collections of administrative registers from the time of Mount Lebanon
 - Foreign archives on specific topics from Florence, Vienna and Rome
- GDA activities were affected by the civil war. It is today closed to public. We don't know much about the fate of Chehab collection.

Adel Ismail



- Student of Chehab, historian and diplomat, was the first to start publishing the French diplomatic Archives in a comprehensive and systematic way.
- Between 1974-1994 Ismail published two series of French diplomatic documents in 41 volumes.
- Ismail work was well recognized. He was assigned to be Ambassador to UNESCO for publishing French diplomatic and consular documents relating to the history of Lebanon .
- Ismail is winner of the Prix de l'Académie Française in 1956 and 1989.

Ismail's Collections: short description



- 1951, Adel Ismail, then a doctorate student at the Sorbonne, started to collect French diplomatic documents concerning Lebanon in coordination with his teacher Maurice Chehab.
- By 1954 Ismail had made copies of 100 000 diplomatic documents from 16th century to 1918 .
- Documents were transcribed by a team under Ismail's supervision.
- 1974, Ismail started to publish the transcribed documents according to an official agreement with the Lebanese government.
- Documents were meant to be published in their exact order, form and content.

Other Initiatives



- In parallel to Ismail's work , other historians were publishing diplomatic documents concerned with a specific period or subject.
- Antoine Hokaym, historian and university professor started in 1981 a book series : *History by Documents, l'histoire par les documents.*

Qassir Foundation Donation



- In fall 2014 Hekmat Qassir Foundation , donated to the UL a collection of French diplomatic archives mostly covering Lebanon.
- The Foundation indicated that the collection was compiled by Dr. Adel Ismail.
- The donation consisted of 42 boxes, containing 250 volumes and around 500 microfilm reels.
- The condition of documents differed, some were worn out and very hard to read.

Assessing the donation



First question that comes to mind:

- Is this the same collection that was already published by Adel Ismail?
- After doing an inventory we found that coverage is different :
 - Coverage date of Ismail's published documents ended in 1916 while it ended in 1945 in the donated documents.
 - More than half of the donated documents cover a time period not covered at all in Ismail's published documents.

Brief Preliminary Inventory



The donation covers the following series (some are incomplete):

Ottoman Empire

- ✦ The Repatriated archives from the Consulate of Beirut and Seyde (1638-1905)
- ✦ The political correspondence of the French Embassy in Constantinople (1831-1860)
- ✦ Political correspondence of Consulates in Beirut (1840-1896), Syria and Turkey(1840-1916)
- ✦ Political and commercial correspondence, Beirut (1830-1848)
- ✦ Political affairs until 1896 (in Austria, Russia and Prussia)

The French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon and during WW2

- ✦ E-Levant 1918-1929/sub- Series: Syrie-Liban-Cilicie
- ✦ E-Levant /Sub -Series: Syrie-Liban 1930-1940
- ✦ Vichy Afrique Levant (1940-1944)
- ✦ WW2 (1939-1945) Levant, Alger and Londres

Quick Comparison



Qassir

- General date coverage
1638-1945
- Council in Beirut and Seyde (1638-1905)
- French Embassy in Constantinople (1831-1860)

Published by Adel Ismail

- General date coverage
1670-1914
- Council in Seyde (1670-1822)
- Council in Beirut (1826-1914),
- French Embassy in Constantinople(1831-1868)

Other Published Documents



- **Documents diplomatiques français relatifs à l'histoire du Liban et de la Syrie à l'époque du mandat : 1914-1946 / collection dirigée par Antoine Hokayem.** Beyrouth : Editions universitaires du Liban ; Paris : L'Harmattan, 2003-2012
- Middle East Online Series 3: Lebanon and Syria 1920-1976 – UK Archives Gale
 - Around 150,000 pages
 - Fully-searchable facsimile documents
 - Languages covered: English, French and some Arabic
- The French Mandate in The Lebanon, Christian-Muslim Relations, and the U.S. Consulate at Beirut, 1920-1941 Gale consists of correspondence and telegrams received and sent by the American consular post in Beirut

Hokayem-Ismaïl Case



While assessing Qassir's donation we came across an intriguing case:

- In 1980, appeared a 60 page pamphlet signed by Antoine Hokayem, severely criticizing the work of Adel Ismaïl and discrediting his methodology.
- The controversy, in the middle of the Lebanese civil war, soon took a tour of a conflict with strong political and confessional charge.

Development of the Case



- 1975- Ismail started to publish the documents
- February 1980, Hokayem published his pamphlet “Etude critique sur les Documents diplomatiques et consulaire de Adel Ismail”
- 1996 LU held a conference to honor Ismail and his works
- 1997, Ismail published his response to Hokayme’s allegation in the book « أزمة الفكر اللبناني في كتابة تاريخ لبنان وتوثيقه »
- 1998, Hokaym published his book منهجية عادل اسماعيل في نشر الوثائق الدبلوماسية والقنصلية: دراسة تقويمية

Hokayem's Accusations



- Questioning the criteria Ismail used in the selection of documents. It was “arbitrary” or even “directed” according to Hokayem.
- There was substantial cuts in some of the reproduced text. According to Hokayem omission and alteration of content was done on purpose and for censorship of certain texts
- Some words were sometimes changed “Christians” changed to “people”

More



- Ismail mislead the readers when he indicated in his introduction that he published the documents as in their original content “in-extenso”
- Ismail didn't warn the reader when omitting text by using (...) or any other kind of explanation.
- Ismail should have defined in his introduction the criteria he used to select the documents and the cases in which he omitted text.

Ismail's Defense



- Selection is inevitable due to the huge quantity of documents. Selection is practiced by all government when publishing their archives.
- Censorship is sometimes advisable, to protect privacy and to avoid creating political or communal tensions and it was recommended by the Lebanese authorities who had asked him to publish the documents.
- He accused Hokayem of attacking him for political reasons, confessional differences and professional rivalry.

Are Archives complete anyway French Archives



- *There are large gaps which reflect some of the major crises in the period between 1920 and 1945. For example, a great deal of the material at the Quai d'Orsay on the 1930s was burned deliberately in May 1940, to avoid the papers falling into German hands.*
- *A year later, the Vichy High Commissioner in Beirut, General Dentz, destroyed the archives of the Secrétariat-Général in the face of the imminent advance of Free French and British forces.*
- *Many archives also disappeared in the chaos surrounding the French departure from Syria in 1945. There are no records of the various representatives of the High Commissioner in Damascus, Aleppo, Lattakia and Suwayda.*
- *Finally, some of the archives still extant in 1945 fell victim to the vicissitudes of the Lebanese Civil War.*
- *Thus, what seems to be a very substantial collection at Nantes only represents a fraction of the original.*

Hekmat Kassir Donation



- Although important, the donation covers a minor percentage of what is available: the Archives of the High Commission for the Republic of Syria and Lebanon repatriated in 1968, represents more than 5,000 box and bundles. Thus, the collection should be completed. Beirut Consul 695 cartoons
- High commissioner of France for Syria and Lebanon covers Mandate period thousands of boxes
- Besides, some volumes are incomplete printed according to a pre-selection, others are not clear. Are also available some transcripts, typewritten upon request.
- Were also received treaties and conventions from Adel Ismail as an ambassador

Lessons Learned from Hokaym-Ismail Case



- More than 40 year work of collecting, transcribing and publishing documents by Ismail were undermined due to some wrong methodological practices.
- Subjectivity is relative. It is very hard to agree on the criteria of selecting documents for publication.
- It is almost impossible to publish all archival documents which makes selection a must.
- Visiting the original Archives remains inevitable

Future of Qassir Donation: Brainstorming



- Catalog and classify the collection in a searchable database
- Digitize the documents
- Invite researchers to collaborate in transcribing the content.
- Identify and link to the same documents when already published.
- Open to suggestions and ideas

Published Guides to Archival Sources



- L'histoire des pays arabes dans les archives diplomatiques : thèmes et references, 1535-1945 / Adel Ismail , 1992- Arabe (UNESCO).
- Documents diplomatiques français relatifs à l'histoire du Liban et de la Syrie à l'époque du mandat : 1914-1946 / collection dirigée par Antoine Hokayem. 2003-2012.
- Les provinces Arabes de l'empire Ottoman aux Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères de France, 1793-1918/ Hokayem, Antoine., 1988

الارشيف العثماني : فهرس شامل لوثائق الدولة العثمانية المحفوظة بدار الوثائق التابعة لرئاسة الوزراء باستانبول / اعداد نجاتي اقطاش، عصمت بينارق؛ ترجمة صالح سداوي صالح؛ اشراف وتقديم اكمل الدين احسان اوغلي، 1986

المحفوظات اللبنانية في ستين عاماً، 1920-1980 / اعداد نسيب عبد الصمد، 1980

Thank You

