

PIERRE MOUKARZEL

LEBANESE UNIVERSITY

Beirut's Church of the Savior under the Mamluks

The history of Beirut from ancient times to the contemporary period has been the subject of several studies presented by historians of different nationalities who are interested in the history of the city and Lebanon in general. What is remarkable in these studies is the gap in the knowledge of the history of Beirut from 1291 to 1516, during the Mamluk period. Attempts to repair this situation did not succeed for lack of sufficient documentation concerning the Mamluk period. The intent of this paper, therefore, is to fill an important gap in the history of Beirut under the Mamluks: it is an attempt to restore and shed light on a part of the religious history of the city which included a holy and venerated place from the eighth century on.

The city of Beirut played an important commercial role under the Mamluks;¹ its port became the principal port on the Syrian² coast for loading spices and other products from India and East Asia. Beirut at that time was also known for the miraculous icon of Jesus Christ that was mentioned in chronicles and pilgrims' accounts from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, depicting a miracle that took place in Beirut in the eighth century. At the beginning of the 1330s, the Franciscans settled in Beirut and obtained permission to restore and live in their convent there, and they recovered the cellar that had been consecrated as a church since the eighth century, the holy place where the miracle of the icon of Jesus Christ took place. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries this Church of the Savior contributed to the reestablishment of the Latin Church in the Mamluk Sultanate, represented by the Franciscans. Though the edifice was for much of its existence exceedingly small and obscure, we can learn more about belief and practice, as well as Christian-Muslim relations, from its history than from a study of a major cathedral or monastery. That is, the modest and typical of a rich religious past can be more revealing than the grand and exceptional. Neglected and forgotten during many centuries, the Church of the Savior in Beirut under the Mamluks was a key place of contact between Europeans and locals, both Christians and Muslims. This article aims to answer the following question:

¹For information about Beirut under the Mamluks and its commercial role with Europe, see: Pierre Moukarzel, *La ville de Beyrouth sous la domination mamelouke (1291–1516) et son commerce avec l'Europe* (Baabda, 2010).

²Syria means a geographical space called by the Arabs Bilād al-Shām including the specific countries: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan.



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though Beirut had been known in Europe in the Middle Ages for the miraculous icon of Jesus Christ, why did it only become a destination for European pilgrims and regain its importance and role in relations between East and West during the Mamluk period?

The Church of the Savior and the miraculous icon are not mentioned in the Arab sources of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Arab chroniclers of the Mamluk period were interested in events that took place in the Mamluk Sultanate and not in Beirut. The chronicles are rich in detailed information about the big cities, especially Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus, Aleppo, and Tripoli. Policy, society, the economy, and wars occupied most of these texts. Beirut, on the other hand, which was a port city dependent on Damascus, had only a secondary place in chronicles relating to Bilād al-Shām. It was Damascus which attracted the interest of authors, who mentioned Beirut only when it was attacked by the Europeans (*al-faranj*) or when referring to the constructions built in the city by the governors of Damascus. In general, the city of Beirut was almost absent from the Arab chronicles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

On the other hand, the work of Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá (d. ca. 1436) is a very important source for the history of Lebanon, and especially of Beirut, during the second half of the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth century.³ The Buḥtur family, of which Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá was a member, was allied to the Mamluks and the district of al-Gharb—the mountain region southeast of Beirut—was under the Buḥtur amirs' authority. Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá cannot be compared to other chroniclers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: he was a historian of opportunity but of great interest. His text is interesting because the author lived in Beirut and witnessed events that took place there, and he was the only one of the Arab chroniclers to speak of the church held by the Franciscans that had existed since the Frankish domination of the city or to mention the miraculous icon.⁴ He gave detailed information about the church because it had been transformed into a residence, with a stable, occupied by members of his family.⁵ Apart from the church, however, he did not provide any information about the Franciscans and their presence in Beirut, and he did not mention the Christian presence in Beirut. In writing the history of his family, he mentioned Beirut because it belonged to the district governed by the Buḥtur amirs.

³Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt wa-akhbār al-salaf min dhurriyat Buḥtur ibn 'Alī amīr al-Gharb bi-Bayrūt*, ed. Kamal Salibi and Francis Hours (Beirut, 1969).

⁴"*Wa-yaz'amūn ayḍan an kān bi-kanīsat al-faranj bi-Bayrūt qūnah khashabīyah fīhā sūrah muṣawwarah fa-darabaha ba'd al-yahūd bi-sikkīn fa-sārat tanuzz daman wa-nuqilat hādhihi al-qūnah ilā Quṣṭanṭīniyah fa-ammārū 'alayhā kanīсах yu'azimūnahā al-faranj.*" Ibid., 9–10.

⁵Ibid., 106–7.



As the Arab sources lack information on the Church of the Savior in Beirut during the Mamluk period, the use of European sources to reconstitute the importance of this church and its place in Beirut during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is justified.

The Miraculous Icon of Beirut

Heir of a rich past, Beirut has occupied an important place on the littoral of the Eastern Mediterranean through numerous historical periods. Its apogee dated from the moment when the Romans rebuilt it, erecting many monuments, but it was destroyed in 140 B.C. by Diodotus Tryphon, the king of the Seleucid Empire, during the wars between the successors of Alexander. The Roman general Marcus Agrippa, sent by the emperor Augustus, established two legions in Beirut and extended its territory to the sources of the Orontes (*al-ʿĀṣī*). In 15 B.C. it became a Roman colony named Colonia Julia Augusta Felix Berytus. During the Roman period, Beirut was filled with remarkable monuments: a theater, a circus, baths, temples, and porticoes. In the third century, its school of Roman law was well known in the East. The monuments of the city were ruined by the earthquake of 551, then rebuilt by the emperor Justinian, but it never regained its former splendor.⁶ Around the sixth century there were at least the following churches in Beirut: the Anastasis or the Resurrection, the Church of the Mother of God or Theotokos, the Church of Saint Jude, the Church of the Forty Martyrs, and the cathedral or basilica built by Archbishop Eustathius.⁷ At the beginning of the seventh century, the situation within the Byzantine Empire became unstable because of the wars with Persia. The Muslim conquests that came at this time, as the Arabs invaded Syria and took Damascus, Aleppo, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The coastal cities fell one after the other and Beirut was taken in 635.⁸ Under the Arabs, Beirut was part of the province of Damascus, and from then on it was considered the port of that city.

A miracle was reported to have happened in Beirut in 750⁹ (the Synaxarion of the Maronite Church reported that it happened in 763 and the Martyrologium of

⁶Paul Collinet, *Histoire de l'École de droit de Beyrouth* (Paris, 1925), 22–23. The city experienced another earthquake in 554 and then a huge fire in 560 that completely destroyed what was rebuilt. Louis Shaykho, *Bayrūt tārikhuhā wa-āthāruhā* (Beirut, 1993), 59–60.

⁷Paul Collinet, *Histoire*, 59–75.

⁸Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* (Beirut, 1978), 133.

⁹“*Cum autem requisitum fuisset pro signando in calendario translationis huius die, compertum est, quod ipso die habetur memoria illius preclari miraculi, quod non longe ab Antiochia apud civitatem Berittum contigit, de iconia, in qua Dominice passionis opprobria per luedos renovata sunt, ut ex chronicis haberi potest, anno Domini septingentesimo quinquagesimo.*” Paul Riant, *Exuviae sacrae Constantinopolitanae* (Paris, 2004), 2:5–6.



the Roman Church gave the date 765¹⁰): Jews were abusing an icon of Jesus Christ and making fun of it. When they pierced it with their knives and lances, blood miraculously flowed from it and this caused many Jews to convert to Christianity. At the Seventh Ecumenical Council (which took place in Nicaea in 787), many cases of wonder-working icons or miracles confirmed through icons were brought before the council.¹¹ The bishop of Beirut, Athanasius, presented a discourse on this miracle of the icon of Jesus Christ in Beirut. The house or synagogue in which the miracle took place was converted into the Church of the Savior.¹² The miraculous icon was sent to Constantinople and later to Rome. According to a legend it was an archeiropoietia image, not made with the hand of man, begun by Saint Luke and completed by an angel, and was miraculously transported by sea from Constantinople to Rome during the first Byzantine iconoclasm, which lasted from about 726 to 787.¹³ It was preserved at Saint John Lateran basilica, where it remains. The icon represents Christ sitting on a throne, his right hand raised and his left hand holding a volume. It is today completely covered with silver ornaments of 1.48 m by 0.74 m. Only the face of Christ is visible. The eastern or Byzantine origin of the icon is established.¹⁴ Putting the legend aside, the sources report that in 753 pope Stephen II (r. 752–57) made a procession of penitence by walking barefoot and carrying the icon from the Lateran to Santa Maria Mag-

¹⁰Būlus Ḍāhir, *Al-saniksār bi-ḥasab ṭaqṣ al-kanīṣah al-inṭāqīyah al-mārūnīyah* (Kaslik-Lebanon, 1996), 96; Caesare Baronio Sorano, *Martyrologium romanum Gregorii XIII, Pontifex Maximus, Jussu editum, Et Urbani VIII* (Rome, 1630), 553. At the end of the eighth century, other accounts of conversion to Christianity attributed to the influence of icons similar to what happened in Beirut circulated in Mesopotamia and Palestine. May Jabre-Mouawad, “La mosquée du Sérail à Beyrouth: Histoire d’un lieu de culte,” *Tempora: Annales d’Histoire et d’Archéologie* 14–15 (2003–4): 154–56.

¹¹Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons and the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden, 1994), 46–47. The seventh ecumenical council of Nicaea (also known as the second council of Nicaea) was held to restore the use and veneration of icons which had been suppressed during the reign of the Byzantine emperors Leo III (r. 717–41) and his son Constantine V (741–75).

¹²Ḍāhir, *Al-saniksār*, 96; Touma Bitar, *Siyar al-qiddīsīn wa-sā’ir al-a’yād fī al-kanīṣah al-urthūdhukṣīyah (al-saniksār)* (Douma, 1992), 1:65–66; Baronio Sorano, *Martyrologium*, 552–53; Joannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et ampillissima collectio* (Florence, 1767), 13:24–32.

¹³Pierre Jounel, *Le culte des saints dans les basiliques du Latran et du Vatican au douzième siècle* (Rome, 1977), 120. For more information about the legend attributed to the icon, see: Fernand de Mély, “L’image du Christ du Sancta Sanctorum et les reliques chrétiennes apportées par les flots,” *Mémoires de la Société nationale des Antiquaires de France* 58 (1902): 113–44.

¹⁴Philippe Lauer, *Le palais de Latran: Étude historique et archéologique* (Paris, 1911), 93–95; also idem, “Le trésor du Sancta Sanctorum,” *Monuments et Mémoires* 15 (1906): 22–24; Pierre Jounel, *Le culte des saints*, 120.



giore hoping to ward off the invasion of the Lombards who threatened Rome, led by their king, Aistulf (r. 749–56).¹⁵



Fig. 1. The miraculous icon of the Christ at Saint John Lateran basilica in Rome (upload.wikimedia.org)

The anti-Judaism embedded in the foundation miracle story of this Beirut church cannot be understood outside the frame of the circumstances and events that marked relations between Christians and Jews in the Byzantine Empire, and which persisted throughout the centuries. A Jewish community lived in Beirut

¹⁵ *“In una vero dierum cum multa humilitate solite procedens in letania cum sacratissima imagine domini Dei et Salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi quae acheropsita nuncupatur...”* Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis* (Paris, 1886), 1:442–43. Pope Leon IV (847–51) brought the icon with a procession to Saint-Adrien (in northwestern France) to chase away a terrible snake which ravaged the center of the city. The same rite was followed in 1470 by Pope Paul II (1464–71) for fear of the Turks. Philippe Lauer, “Le trésor du Sancta Sanctorum,” 23. On the other hand, each year the two icons of Christ and the Mother of God were the object of a common homage of the Roman people for the Feast of the Assumption. Pierre Jounel, *Le culte des saints*, 120–21.



under the Byzantines and had its own synagogue. Joshua the Stylite reported in his chronicle, which narrates the history of the Byzantine-Persian war between 502 and 506, that on 22 August 502 an earthquake struck Beirut and “the Jewish synagogue collapsed by itself.”¹⁶ From the fifth century restrictions imposed on the Jews by the Byzantines multiplied and the Jews revolted on several occasions. Under the emperor Heraclius (r. 610–41), the Persian conquest of Palestine demonstrated the hostility of the Jews to the Byzantine Empire, as numerous sources say that they assisted the invaders or took advantage of their presence to take revenge on the Christians. Heraclius, after he had conquered the Persians, decided to integrate them by force. In 634 he published an edict which compelled them to baptism on pain of death.¹⁷ When Beirut was taken by the Arabs in 635, the greater part of its inhabitants fled to neighboring regions. Caliph Mu‘āwiyah (r. 642–80) established a Jewish community in Tripoli.¹⁸ It is probable that the bishop of Beirut’s control of the synagogue of the Jews and its transformation into a church took place at the end of the Umayyad reign with the progressive repopulation of Beirut. The story of Beirut’s miraculous icon justified and strengthened the Christians’ attitude toward the Jews and gave the Christians a pretext to urge the Jews to leave the city and prevent them from returning. From the eighth century to the beginning of the sixteenth century, the sources make no mention of the presence of Jews in Beirut.¹⁹

The Church of the Savior was apparently destroyed at the beginning of the eleventh century during the reign of the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr-Allāh (r. 996–1021). According to al-Maqrīzī, more than thirty thousand churches and convents built by the Byzantines (al-Rūm) in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām were destroyed between 403/1012 and 405/1014, all their gold and silver was plundered, and their *waqfs* were confiscated.²⁰ No Christian construction has been found in excavations in Beirut or Lebanon dating from the time of the Arab occupation of the region in the middle of the seventh century until the arrival of the Latins at the end of the eleventh century. The total absence of Christian remains dating to this period was certainly due to the severe restrictions imposed by the caliph al-

¹⁶Joshua the Stylite, *Chronique de Josué le Stylite écrite vers l’an 515*, ed. Paulin Martin (Leipzig, 1876), 42.

¹⁷Pierre Maraval, *Le christianisme de Constantin à la conquête arabe* (Paris, 2001), 25–6.

¹⁸Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 133.

¹⁹The Jews began to settle in Beirut for trade at the beginning of the sixteenth century: in 1512, the Venetian merchants of Damascus made a request to the sultan to prohibit the Jews from going to the coast for trade. Joseph Toussaint Reinaud, “Traité de commerce entre la république de Venise et les derniers sultans mamelouks d’Égypte,” *Journal Asiatique* 4 (1829): 45.

²⁰Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawā‘iz wa-al-‘itibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār* (Cairo, 1987), 2:495–96.



Ḥakīm on Christians with the destruction of their churches and monasteries.²¹ In 1106–7 the Russian pilgrim Daniel visited Beirut, which was ruled by the Fatimids at the time, and spoke only about the miracle. He did not mention the church or even give a place where the miracle happened.²² Though the miracle continued to be remembered, it seems that over time the church commemorating the icon's location was forgotten by Beirut's inhabitants and visitors.

In 1110 Beirut fell to the Crusaders. Before the Frankish conquest, Beirut had had an Orthodox suffragan bishop, subject to the archbishop of Tyre, who was in turn subject to the patriarch of Antioch. In 1112 a Latin bishop was appointed in Beirut, but, due to objections raised by King Baldwin I on one hand and the Latin patriarch of Antioch on the other, the appointment was delayed more than twenty years; it was not until 1133 that a Latin bishop of Beirut was finally consecrated, subordinate to the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem.²³ The Church of the Savior in Beirut is totally absent from pilgrim accounts of the twelfth century. The pilgrim John of Würzburg, who traveled to the Holy Land between 1160 and 1170, passed through Beirut and mentioned only the miraculous icon.²⁴ One of the twelfth-century pilgrims who visited Beirut believed that the miraculous icon was still in Beirut but does not report seeing it: around 1173, Theodoricus mentioned in his account that the icon was conserved at the cathedral of the city.²⁵ The Latin Church's possessions in Beirut were enumerated by Pope Lucius III (r. 1181–85) in 1184; there was no mention of the Church of the Savior.²⁶ In 1211–12, Wilbrandus of Oldenburg visited Beirut and mentioned the miraculous icon that had once been there but did not say anything about the Church of the Savior.²⁷

²¹Nada Helou, "Les lieux sacrés de Beyrouth au Moyen Âge: Les deux églises de Saint-Georges," in *The Holy Portulano: The Sacred Geography in the Middle Ages*, ed. Michele Bacci and Martin Rohde (Berlin-Munich-Boston, 2014), 77–78.

²²Sofia Petrovna Khitrovo, "Vie et pèlerinage de Daniel, Hégoumène russe 1106–1107," in *Itinéraires russes en Orient* (Geneva, 1889), 54–55.

²³Bernard Hamilton, *The Latin Church in the Crusader States: The Secular Church* (London, 1980), 27–28, 70; John Gordon Rowe, "The Papacy and the Ecclesiastical Province of Tyre (1100–1187)," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 53 (1960): 160–89.

²⁴*Peregrinationes tres. Seawulf, John of Würzburg, Theodericus*, ed. R. B. C. Haygens (Turnhout, 1994), 103.

²⁵"*Que ycona hactenus in eiusdem civitatis ecclesia, pontificali cathedra prefulgente, venerabiliter observatur.*" Ibid., 195–96.

²⁶Rudolf Hiestand, *Papsturkunden für kirchen im Heiligen Lande: Vorarbeiten zum Oriens Pontificus III* (Düsseldorf, 1985), 205–8, nos. 70; 303–5, nos. 127–28. For information about the churches in Beirut during the Frankish period, see: Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus* (Cambridge, 1993), 1:111–19.

²⁷Wilbrandus de Oldenburg, "Wilbrandi De Oldenburg Peregrinatio," in *Peregrinatores medii aevi quatuor Burchardus de Monte Sion, Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, Odoricus de Fore Julii, Wilbrandus de*



Until the twelfth century, the Savior was the foremost patron of cathedrals and churches. By challenging the iconoclasm of the East, the popes propagated a hierarchical sequence of Savior, Mother of God, Apostles, and Saints whose relics and images were to be honored. Between the tenth and twelfth centuries, thirty-six churches in Rome were dedicated to the Savior.²⁸ From the twelfth century onward the story of the miraculous icon was commonly associated with Beirut as a result of the ecclesiastical orientation led by the Church of Rome. Guillaume Durand (d. 1296), the bishop of Mende, was a French canonist and liturgical writer who wrote the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* (before 1286), in which he considered the Church of the Savior in Beirut as the first church consecrated by Rome in honor of the Savior; this consecration was commemorated on November 8.²⁹ During this period many cities declared that they had the miraculous icon or a phial filled with blood that had flowed from it.³⁰ The miraculous blood was also transported from Beirut to Constantinople in the eighth century; most of the similar relics related to the passion of Christ and his death were at the Church of the Virgin Theotokos of the imperial palace.³¹ Due to the conquest of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204, this relic was sent to Europe around

Oldenborg, ed. J. C. M. Laurent (Leipzig, 1864), 167.

²⁸Arnold Angenendt, "In Honore Salvatoris," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 97, no. 2, and 97, nos. 3–4 (2002): 431–56 and 791–824; Jounel, *Le culte des saints*, 305–6.

²⁹"...Et inde mos inoleuit ut ecclesie consecrentur, cum prius tantum altaria consecrarentur; et propter hoc etiam miraculum, ordinavit ecclesia fieri memoriam dominice passionis quinto idus nouembris, et Rome consecrata est ecclesia in honore Saluatoris, ubi quedam ampulla cum illo sanguine reseruetur et sollempne festum tunc agitur." Guillaume Durand, *Gvillelmi Dvrandi Rationale Divinorum Officiorvm*, ed. A. Davril O. S. B. and T. M. Thibodeau (Turnhout, 1995), Capvt VI (De Ecclesie dedicatione), 64.

³⁰Centuries later, following the model of the legendary transfer of the icon of Beirut from Constantinople to Rome in the eighth century, a legend of the Holy Face was elaborated in Lucca. According to a second tradition, Nicodemus, who buried the body of Christ, received the drops of holy blood, which, following a miraculous journey, would be carried inside the trunk of a fig tree to the coast where in due course the Monastery of the Holy Trinity at Fécamp (northern France) would arise. Jean-Guy Gouttebroze, "À l'origine du culte du Précieux sang de Fécamp, le Saint Voult de Lucques," *Tabularia "Études"* 2 (2002): 1–8. According to a Spanish tradition, the icon of Beirut arrived miraculously in Valencia in 1260. Anastas al-Karmalī, "Şalbūt Balinsiyah aw şalbūt Bayrūt," *Al-Mashriq* 11 (1908): 254–55. There was also an Italian tradition saying that the icon of Beirut arrived first in Lucca and later went to Rome. Petrus Cornelis Boeren, *Rorgo Fretellus de Nazareth et sa description de la Terre Sainte* (Amsterdam-Oxford-New York, 1980), 19.

³¹George P. Majeska, "The Relics of Constantinople after 1204," in *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, ed. Jannic Durand and Bernard Flusin (Paris, 2004), 183–90. Robert de Clari, who participated in the Fourth Crusade, mentioned in his account that in Constantinople there was a church "that was so rich and noble," called the Holy Chapel, in which "we found very rich relics of Jesus Christ" and "a large part of his blood was found in a phial." Robert de Clari, *La conquête de Constantinople* (Paris, 1939), 178.



1205: the chronicler Marino Sanuto mentioned that in 1205 the doge of Venice brought from Constantinople “the phial of the miraculous blood of Christ” and other relics. They were put in Venice in the sanctuary of the chapel of the doge.³² According to the information collected by pilgrims who passed through Beirut during the thirteenth century, several phials filled with this miraculous blood were sent to the churches in Europe: in Rome, France, England, and other places.³³ Later, in 1384, the Florentine pilgrim Simone Sigoli said that “the precious blood of Jesus Christ” was brought from Beirut to Venice and placed in the Church of Saint Mark and was shown twice a year with great solemnity: once on the Ascension and once on Good Friday. He added that half of the blood of the relic was transported to Bruges in the country of Flanders and put in “the church of Saint Barbara or rather Saint Anastasia and it is shown every Friday with great solemnity; and also is shown on other solemn feasts of the year.”³⁴ A phial of this miraculous blood was also found at the Church of Saint-Aubain in Namur (Wallonia-Belgium).³⁵ The Orthodox Synaxarion reported that Saint Baripsabas in Dalmatia had a phial of the holy blood of Jesus Christ which came from the icon of Beirut.³⁶ In 1200, Antonius, the archbishop of Novgorod, evoked the presence in the church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople of the image of Christ, saying that a Jew struck “the neck of the Christ with a knife and blood has flowed from it.”³⁷

³² “...da Constantinopoli il doge ebbe la Croce d’oro col Legno della Croce, che portava Constantino imperadore di Roma in battaglia, del miracoloso Sangue di Christo in una ampolletta, e parte del capo di San Giovanni Battista, e il braccio di San Georgio martyre; le quali reliquie furono mandate a Venezia, e poste nella capella del doge, nel santuario...” Marino Sanuto, “Vite dei duchi Veneziani,” in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, ed. L. A. Muratori (Milan, 1733), 22:533.

³³ Denys Pringle, “Pilgrimages and Pardons of Acre (1258–63),” in *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, 1187–1291* (Farnham, 2012), 234.

³⁴ Simone Sigoli, *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, and Syria in 1384 by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli*, ed. Fr. Theophilus Bellorini and Fr. Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem, 1948), 194. See also: Riant, *Exuviae sacrae*, 2:270.

³⁵ “De Sanguine Salvatoris Domini, relato in brevi apostolico Nicolai, summi pontificis, item in donatione Philippe II, Namurcensis comitis & marchionis reliquiarum, quas donat ecclesiae Sancti Albani.” Riant, *Exuviae sacrae*, 2:200. It should be pointed out that after Constantinople was recaptured by the Byzantines in 1261, and from then until 1453 several relics continued to be exhibited in the churches of the city, including that of the miraculous blood of the image of Christ in Beirut. This indicates that the miraculous blood was divided into several phials. Majeska, “The relics,” 183–90.

³⁶ Bitar, *Siyar al-qiddīsīn*, 1:65–66.

³⁷ “Est etiam alia imago Christi quam Iudaeus quidam in faucibus percussit.” Riant, *Exuviae sacrae*, 2:222. “... un juif frappe au cou ce Christ d’un couteau, & il en sortit du sang; dans le diakonikon, nous baisâmes ce sang de Notre Seigneur, sorti de l’image.” Sofia Petrovna Khitrovo, “Antoine, Archevêque de Nogorod: Le livre du pèlerin,” in *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, 87.



Blood occupied a central place in medieval culture. A symbol of death when it escapes from the body in too great a quantity, it can be a sign of sin and horror, but also of alliance, purification, and redemption, as shown by the strength of the analogy between the blood of Christ as a symbol of his Passion and the place devoted to blood in the medieval anthropology of human passions. This may explain the thirst for relics exemplified by the dispersion of the blood of Christ throughout the Byzantine and Latin worlds. Each church needed its relic and each bishop wanted relics for his diocese—if possible, more attractive than those of his neighbor. Abbeys and monasteries asked for relics, kings and popes sought relics for the greater glory of God and for their personal prestige. Relics were symbols of the spiritual presence of the Holy Land in the heart of Western Christendom and Byzantium, especially for the faithful who did not have the means to undertake the pilgrimage to Palestine and the holy places of the East. The widespread use of relics led to the creation of a real relics market in the Middle Ages. The period of the Crusades was favorable to the development of the relics market. Byzantium had discovered them, preserved them, and even manufactured them. Venice and the great Italian merchant cities imported relics and marketed them. The sack of Byzantium in 1204 had no other purpose than to seize its wealth and especially its relics.³⁸ The demand for relics was so enormous that the trade in them was officially tolerated by the Church, and thefts of the relics were frequent and even unofficially admitted.³⁹ Relics played a significant role in the context of the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, both because the sites of their origin became holy places, and because of their role in propagating the image of the Holy Land through their diffusion to the various churches and chapels of Christendom. This dual importance led pilgrims to consider the quest for relics as one of the purposes of pilgrimage, either to visit the sacred objects' places of origin or to venerate those which were still there.⁴⁰ The famous relic of the blood from the icon, known throughout the Middle Ages as a tangible remnant of Jesus Christ, became a pilgrimage object in Europe and encouraged pilgrims to visit Beirut where the miracle took place.

³⁸John Wortley, "The Byzantine Component of the Relic-Hoard of Constantinople," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 40 (1999): 353–78.

³⁹Hubert Silvestre, "Commerce et vol de reliques au Moyen Âge," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 30, nos. 3–4 (1952): 721–39.

⁴⁰Aryeh Graboïs, *Le pèlerin occidental en Terre sainte au Moyen Âge* (Paris-Bruxelles, 1998), 59–62.



Between 1220 and 1240, the Franciscans settled in Beirut⁴¹ and built a church known as the Church of Saint Francis.⁴² They would leave around the end of the century, when the Mamluks took control of the area. As has been shown, no church dedicated to the Savior existed in Beirut during the Frankish period and any idea of rebuilding it from its ruins was totally abandoned. It was only with the return of the Franciscans around 1335, during the Mamluk period, that the Church of the Savior regained its importance to Europeans and the inhabitants of the city.⁴³ It seems that the ancient Church of the Savior, the remains of which were just a partially underground chamber, was totally abandoned and neglected by the Christians in Beirut, particularly the Melkites, for centuries.⁴⁴ Even the Latins showed no interest in restoring the church until the return of the Franciscans to Beirut in the fourteenth century. Why were the remains of the church neglected and forgotten from the eleventh till the fourteenth century? It is difficult to find an answer.

The Church of the Savior

In 1291 the Mamluks defeated the Crusader states, the Latins definitively left the Levant, and the Mamluks finally seized Beirut. The walls of the city and the citadel were dismantled; some churches were turned into mosques (such as the

⁴¹Jean Richard, *La papauté et les missions d'Orient au Moyen Âge (XIII–XVe siècles)* (Rome, 1977), 38. For more information about the geographical spread of the order during the thirteenth century, see: Grado Giovanni Merlo, *Au nom de saint François: Histoire des Frères mineurs et du franciscanisme jusqu'au début du XVIe siècle* (Paris, 2006), 66–76.

⁴²Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 106–7; Nicolas de Martoni, “Nicolai de Marthono, Notarii, Liber peregrinationis ad loca sancta,” *Revue de l'Orient Latin* 3 (1895): 626. Most likely they built the church after the death of Saint Francis in 1228; otherwise it could not be called the church of Saint Francis.

⁴³For information about the Franciscans in Beirut, see: Pierre Moukarzel, “La présence des franciscains à Beyrouth sous la domination des Mamelouks (1291–1516) d'après les récits de pèlerinage,” *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 103, no. 1 (2008): 50–84.

⁴⁴It seems that the number of the Melkites in Beirut was not large, which may explain why they did not vie for control over the ancient Church of the Savior against the claims of the Franciscans, which were supported by the European rulers and the Mamluk sultans. The decline of Byzantium reduced the Melkite communities in Syria and Egypt to a very precarious situation. The sources do not mention the Melkites in Beirut during the Frankish period and under the Mamluks. But in the fifteenth century they had an eparchy in Beirut, a part of a metropolis: in 1440, the bishop of Beirut was Michael, but there is no indication that his see was actually in Beirut. Perhaps he was the same as the bishop of Ṣaydnāyah (near Damascus) who was elected patriarch in 1451 under the name of Michael IV (r. 1451–56). Alfred Baudillart, *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* (Paris, 1935), 3:632–33, 8:1308.



Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist⁴⁵ and the Church of Saint Barbara⁴⁶), and the rest of the churches were destroyed or transformed into residences. Some exceptions are the Church of Saint Georges outside the city (one mile east near the river of Beirut), and the Churches of Saint Nicolas and Saint Georges inside the city.⁴⁷ Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá provides details about the Church of Saint Francis and what became of it. In 1294 the amirs of the Buḥtur family, who were put in charge of defending Beirut, settled in the church, which stood to the east of the city but inside the wall. It was a large church and the amirs transformed it into a stable above which they established their residence. In time, the church was known as *al-salaf* (the ancients).

In 1334, the Genoese attacked the port of Beirut and seized a ship belonging to the Catalans. From then on, the chief of the Buḥtur family, the amir Nāṣir al-Dīn, decided to live closer to the sea and the church was occupied by the al-ʿAramūnīyūn, another branch of the same family.⁴⁸ At the beginning of the fifteenth century, after 810/1407, it was sold to members of the Banū Ḥamrā⁴⁹ family, who dismantled the church and used its stones to build their madrasah. Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá added that at the time he was writing (after 1426) the church was in ruins.⁵⁰

To summarize, we know that the church was large, that it was converted into a residence at the end of the thirteenth and during the fourteenth century, and that it no longer existed at the beginning of the fifteenth century. There is no evidence that this large church dedicated to Saint Francis was built during the Frankish domination of Beirut on the site of the ancient Church of the Savior, consecrated as early as the eighth century. It was another church dedicated to Saint Francis that was built during this time near the cellar or underground chamber that constituted the remains of the ancient church, since both were in eastern Beirut.

⁴⁵Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 34.

⁴⁶Ogier d'Anglure, *Le saint voyage de Jérusalem du seigneur d'Anglure*, ed. Fr. Bonnardot-A-lognon (Paris, 1878), 11; Bertrandon de la Broquière, *Voyage d'Outremer de Bertrandon de la Broquière*, ed. Charles Schefer and Henri Cordier (Paris, 1892), 39; Anselme Adorno, *Itinéraire d'Anselme Adorno en Terre Sainte (1470–1471)* (Paris, 1978), 347; Joose van Ghistele, "Le voyage en Orient de Joose van Ghistele (1481–1485)," *Revue générale de Bruxelles* 37–38 (1883–1884): 745; Francesco Suriano, *Treatise on the Holy Land by Fra Fr. Suriano*, ed. Fr. Theophilus Bellorini and Fr. Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem, 1949), 174.

⁴⁷"*In hac civitate pulchra stat ecclesia sancti Nycolai constructa.*" Ludolphus de Sudheim, "De itinere Terre Sancte," *Archives de l'Orient Latin* 2 (1884): 338; "*In qua civitate sunt due ecclesie, Sanctus Salvator et Beatus Georius; extra cuius civitatis muros, ad duo miliaria versus orientem, est ecclesia beati Georii martiris, ubi ipse occidit draconem.*" Charles Kohler, "Le libellus de locis ultramarinis de Pierre de Pennis," *Revue de l'Orient Latin* 9 (1902): 380.

⁴⁸From the village ʿAramūn in the region of al-Gharb (the mountains near Beirut).

⁴⁹A branch of the Arabs of the Biqāʿ who settled in Rās Bayrūt.

⁵⁰Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 106–7.



Moreover, we notice that Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá made no mention of the return of the Franciscans to Beirut in 1335 and their installation in their convent next to the place where the miracle of the icon happened.⁵¹ It is clear that the Franciscans possessed a large church in Beirut in the thirteenth century and lost it definitively with the occupation of the city by the Mamluks in 1291. When they returned around 1335 they were only allowed to restore their convent. They took back the cave which was the remainder of the ancient church of the Savior, and revived the veneration of a holy place in, and pilgrimage to, Beirut. They used the church to support their requests to the sultan for the recovery of a holy place and to justify their return to Beirut rather than some other town.⁵²

The Church of the Savior is an example of a site that persisted through many centuries of profound and sometimes violent political change. In the eighth century it was a synagogue converted into a Byzantine church; it was destroyed in the eleventh century and lost in time, and then rebuilt in the fourteenth century and served by the Franciscans. It occupied an important place in the memory of the Europeans and was mentioned in Latin liturgical writings. The Latins played a major role in stimulating the veneration of the Church of the Savior, and because of the continuous service provided by the Franciscans from the fourteenth century till the sixteenth century, the church preserved its religious memories and remained a sacred place venerated by all who visited it. The Franciscans revived the glorious past of Beirut's Church of the Savior. They took care to keep their church, administering the sacraments, and offered assistance to Europeans settled in the territories under the authority of the Mamluk sultan. Their church in Beirut continued to exist for more than two centuries because they maintained good relations with the locals and gained their trust.

Pilgrims who visited Beirut in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries provide information about the church as it was under the control of the Franciscans. The Augustinian monk Jacobi of Verona visited Beirut in 1335. He noted that to enter

⁵¹The convent of the Franciscans in Beirut was established in the thirteenth century between 1220 and 1240. It was the convent of Saint Joseph. Girolamo Golubovich, *Serie cronologica dei reverendissimi superiori di Terra Santa* (Jerusalem, 1898), 216.

⁵²Through agreements with the Mamluk sultan, the policy of the two sovereigns of Naples (Robert of Anjou and his wife Sancha of Majorca) led to the sultan's recognition of the Franciscan presence in the Holy Land and in Beirut as the sole representatives of the Latin Church, and to the revival of Christian worship in the holy places, including the stimulation of Western pilgrimage. For more information, see: Pierre Moukarzel, "The Franciscans in the Mamluk Sultanate: A Privileged Community Subject to the Politico-Economic Balance between Europe and the East," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras VIII*, ed. U. Vermeulen, K. D'Hulster, and J. Van Steenberghe (Leuven, 2016), 441–62.



the church one had to descend fifteen stairs.⁵³ In 1349, Fra Niccolò of Poggibonsi said, "This church is half underground, and has two doors; before the altar two lamps always burn. There is a great indulgence."⁵⁴ In 1384, three Florentine pilgrims described the Church of the Savior. Lionardo di Nicolo Frescobaldi wrote that "In this city there is a church, which used to be officiated by the Friars of St. Francis, which is beautiful and devout, and the consul for the Venetians allotted it to us for our abode; and it is called St. Savior church."⁵⁵ Giorgio Gucci mentioned that the church was officiated almost permanently and every morning there was a mass: every day during his stay in Beirut (13 March to 10 April) he heard a mass led by a Florentine monk. During Holy Week and Easter the services were offered by several priests and friars.⁵⁶ Simone Sigoli found the church small and added that during the Frankish period there had been a bigger church that was destroyed when the city was recaptured by the Mamluks, and that later, with the consent of the sultan, the Christians had rebuilt a small church and called it Saint Savior's.⁵⁷ In 1395, the pilgrim Nicolas de Martoni visited the church and described it as a small vaulted room with only one altar, where mass was celebrated daily for the Venetian and Genoese merchants settled in Beirut. He also mentioned the convent, saying that in it there were several small dwellings to house the guardian, who lived on the alms of the European merchants visiting Beirut. This guardian of the convent of Beirut was subject to the guardian of Mount Sion in Jerusalem, who governed all parts of Syria.⁵⁸ Concerning the location of the Franciscan residences, he says that the convent and the ancient Church of the

⁵³ "In illa civitate Baruch, est ecclesia Sancti Salvatoris, ad quam descenditur per gradus XV..." Jacques de Vérone, "Liber peregrinationis fratris Jacobi de Verona," *Revue de l'Orient Latin* 3 (1895): 296.

⁵⁴ Niccolò di Poggibonsi, *A Voyage beyond the Seas (1346–1350)*, ed. Fr. Theophilus Bellorini and Fr. Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem, 1945), 82.

⁵⁵ Frescobaldi in Bellorini and Hoade, *Visit to the Holy Places*, 88.

⁵⁶ Gucci in *ibid.*, 148. Giorgio Gucci still believed that the crucifix inside the church was the miraculous icon of the eighth century: "And in this church there is a Crucifix, for which there is great veneration, because it is said that once a Saracen, to spite the Christians, entered the said church and with a rod began to strike this Crucifix, and as he struck it, it began to bleed; and ever since, as said, it is held in great reverence."

⁵⁷ Sigoli in *ibid.*, 194.

⁵⁸ "Modo non est nisi una lamia in qua est altare, et ibi omni die celebratur missa pro ipsis mercatoribus. Sunt alieque alie parve mansiones in quibus manet guardianus; quando ego fui, non erat in dicto loco nisi guardianus tantum qui illic vivit de elemosinis dictorum mercatorum et guardianus dicti loci est sub guardiano seu vicario loci Montis Syon, qui habet gubernare omnia loca Sorie." Nicolas de Martoni, "Relation du pèlerinage à Jérusalem de Nicolas de Martoni, notaire italien (1394–1395)," *Revue de l'Orient Latin* 3 (1895): 626.



Savior were beside each other in the eastern part of Beirut, 50 *braccia* (around 30 meters) from the city square.⁵⁹

The information provided by the pilgrims of the fourteenth century is similar: the church was a small, vaulted chamber, partly underground, with two doors, and in use on a regular basis. There were no windows, adornments, icons, or frescos decorating the church. What is remarkable is that the mass was celebrated solely for European merchants and pilgrims; there is nothing in any source to imply the participation of the indigenous Christians (Maronites or Melkites).⁶⁰

⁵⁹Suriano, *Treatise*, 169.

⁶⁰In 1941 Jean Lauffray discovered a small, partially underground church in Beirut. He wondered if it was the Church of the Savior. Jean Lauffray, "Forums et Monuments de Béryte: II: Le niveau médiéval," *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* 8 (1946–48): 7–16. Comparing the information quoted in the sources with the remains of the discovered church we can find some similarities but we cannot adopt the hypothesis that it was the Church of the Savior.



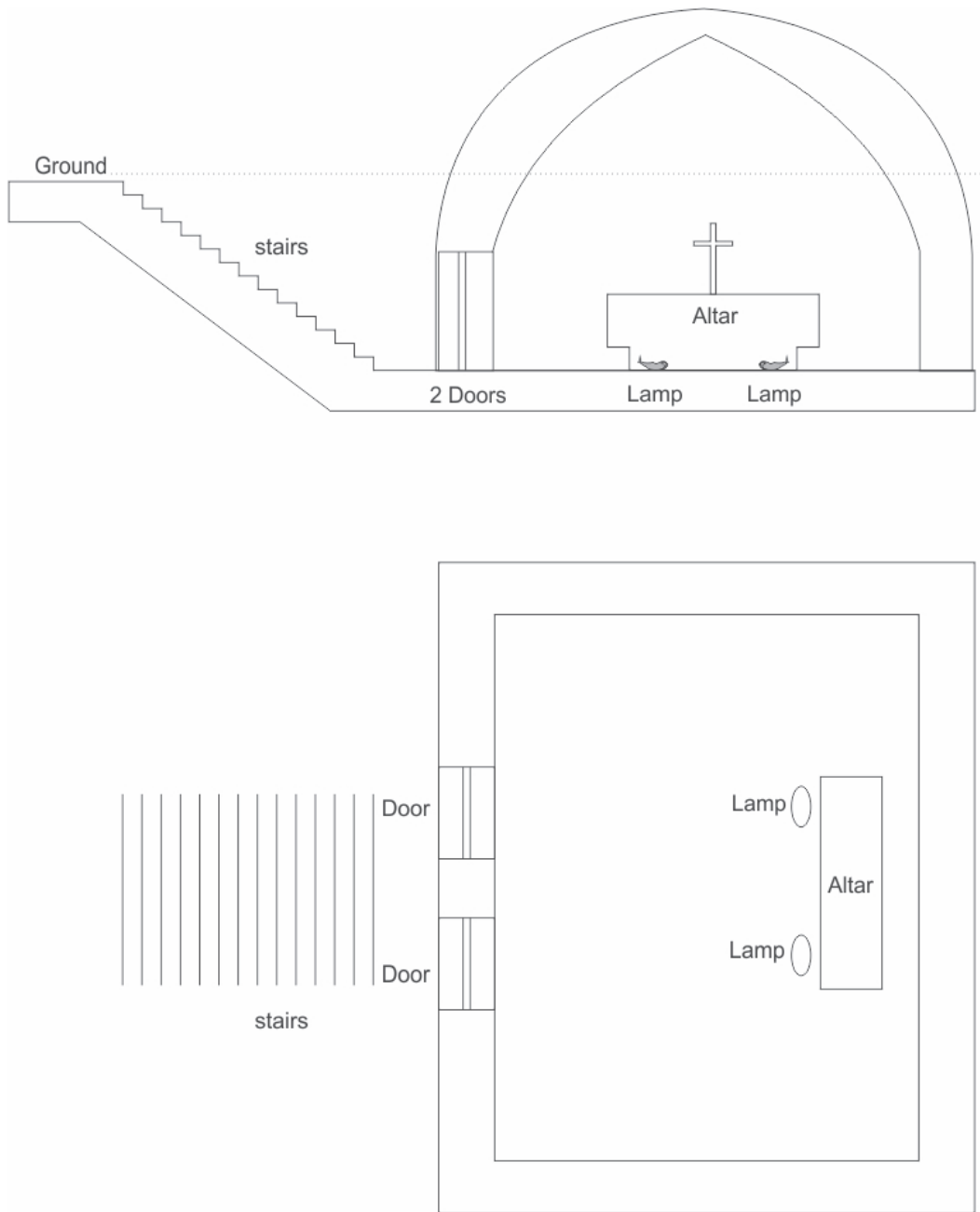


Fig. 2. The Church of the Savior in the fourteenth century (an approximate plan)

During the first half of the fifteenth century, according to the reports of European pilgrims who passed through Beirut, nothing had changed in the structure



of the church or the convent, or in the status of the Franciscan brothers, though the number of monks in the convent had increased to between six and eight. It was considered one of the largest convents of the Franciscan custody in the East.⁶¹ Between 1470 and 1480, however, the structure of the church was changed by adding an attic to divide it into two parts.

The pilgrim Johannis Poloner passed through Beirut in 1422. He spoke of an underground chamber transformed into a church with an altar; to enter it, one had to descend eighteen steps.⁶² When the pilgrim Joos van Ghistele arrived in Beirut in 1481 his first visit was to the Franciscan convent. According to his description, it was dilapidated on the outside but well-kept inside, with a full garden of fruits and vegetables (oranges, figs, almonds, olives, lemons, and more) and a singular small church formed only of a crypt and an attic. He continued his description by saying that the Franciscan monks lived on pious donations and a voluntary tax paid by Christian merchant ships entering the port: a ducat for large ships and a half-ducat for small ones.⁶³ Van Ghistele also mentioned that the Maronites celebrated their services in the crypt and the Franciscans in the attic.⁶⁴ This proves that the Maronites did not have their own church in Beirut, so they shared the Franciscan church. Probably during the second half of the fifteenth century, the Franciscans of Beirut admitted Maronites into their order as brothers who settled permanently in the convent.⁶⁵

⁶¹Golubovich, *Serie cronologica*, 216.

⁶²"*In quodam habitaculo subterraneo hujus civitatis ostenditur imago salvatoris...Facta est ibidem capella cum uno altari, habens in descensu xviii gradus.*" Titus Tobler, *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo VIII, IX, XI, et XV* (Leipzig, 1874), 266–67. It is not known if he was mistaken in counting the steps or if alterations in the staircase of the church took place between the fourteenth and the fifteenth century.

⁶³"*Eerst ten convente ende cloostere vanden observanten van Sente Fransoys oordene, daer zij zeere vriendelic ontfanghen waren ende hem lieden gheetocht alle de woonsteden daer binnen, welc clooster schijnt van buuten een cleen vervallen huus wesende, wat gherepareert zijnde, maer als men binnen comt, zo es de plecke zeere ghenouchelic van alder tiere fruytboomen, van appelen van garnaten, oraengen, fighen, amandelen, oliven, lymoenen ende andere fruyten, ende zijn ghenouch voorsien van allen lygommenen ende salladrien... Ten onderhoudene van desen cloostere gheven alle de kersten scepen met cruus zeilen daer inde havene commende eenen ducaet, ende alle de smale scepen met seylen van sneden eenen halven ducaet....*" Joos van Ghistele, *Tvoyage van mher Joss van Ghistele*, ed. Ambrosius Zeebout (Hilversum Verloren, 1998), 63.

⁶⁴"*Onder inde keercke staet eenen aultaer daer de kerstenen maroniten haerlieder dienst doen als zij daer commen... item boven up den soldere inde voorseyde keercke es oec eenen aultaer, daer de broeders vander observancien voorseyt haerlieder diensten ende ghetijden daghelicx up doen.*" *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶⁵Pierre Moukarzel, "La présence," 75–76.



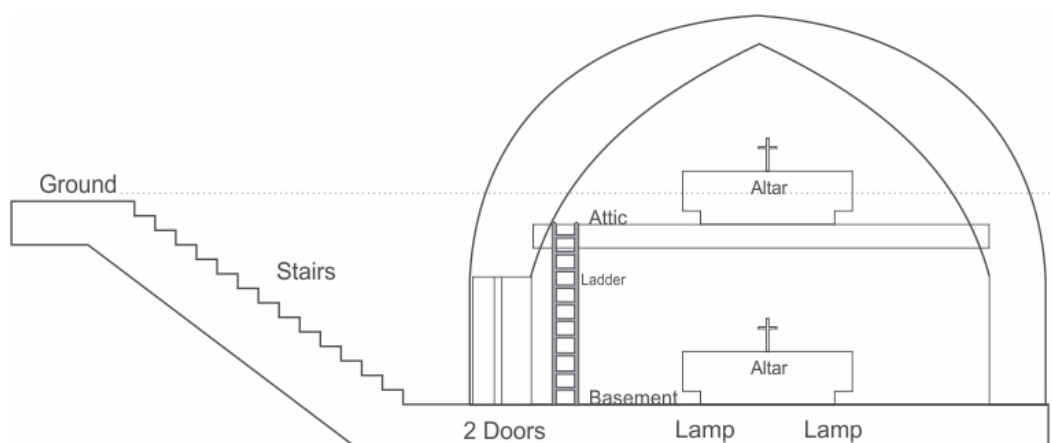


Fig. 3. The Church of the Savior in the fifteenth century (an approximate plan)

The information gathered on the Church of the Savior and the convent during different periods allows us to deduce that the Franciscans in Beirut during the Mamluks' reign failed to obtain permission to rebuild or enlarge their property (the convent and the church). They were only authorized to divide the inside of the church into two floors, probably by using planks rather than stones.⁶⁶ Perhaps they could not have engaged in larger construction efforts in any case, since their only means of subsistence in Beirut was the alms offered by European merchants who frequented the city for commerce.

The Importance of the Church of the Savior

The Church of the Savior in Beirut was important because it was the only Latin church that existed in a coastal city outside Palestine. Beirut at that period was the port of Damascus, which was the main market for spices and other commodities and products coming from India and the Far East. As a holy place the church played a number of roles. It attracted European merchants and pilgrims to Beirut, some of whom settled there. The Franciscans said mass for the sailors and merchants, took care of their spiritual needs and the sacraments, and lived on alms. They also hid fleeing slaves and renegades and helped them return to Christian countries aboard European merchant vessels.⁶⁷ The church was also a cemetery for Europeans who died in Beirut: in 1419, a Genoese merchant settled

⁶⁶According to Islamic doctrine, it was forbidden to build new churches in important cities and towns of the Muslim world. But the *dhimmīs* were sometimes allowed to restore or rebuild churches which had fallen into ruin. Antoine Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam* (Beirut, 1995), 174.

⁶⁷Suriano, *Treatise*, 169.



in Beirut, specified in his will that he wanted to be buried in the Church of the Savior of the Franciscans “*in loco maiori ipsius ecclesie*.” He bequeathed five ducats to the Franciscans for masses “*pro remissione sive alleviatione anime*.”⁶⁸ The Franciscans not only carried out pastoral tasks for Europeans visiting or living in the Mamluk territories, but also sought to establish good relations with the local population. During the fifteenth century the Franciscans acted as a connection between the Holy See of the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches, especially the Maronite Church: the Franciscans in Beirut put the Church of the Savior at the Maronites’ disposal and the convent of the Franciscans beside this church became, from the second half of the fifteenth century, the basic center of relations and contacts between the papacy and the Eastern Christians in Syria. In 1439, Pope Eugene IV (r. 1431–47) received the oath of fidelity of the Armenian envoys at the Council of Florence. At about the same time the friar John, superior of the Franciscans in Beirut, arrived with a profession of faith and an act of obedience sent by the Maronite patriarch to the pope. In 1440, the Franciscan Anthony of Troïa was sent by the pope on missions to Eastern Christians, and in 1444 the Franciscan friar Peter of Ferrare, from the convent of Franciscans in Beirut, was appointed an apostolic commissioner to the Maronites and the Syrians.⁶⁹

At the same time, the Church of the Savior contributed to establishing good relations with the local population, setting an example of cohabitation between Christians and Muslims at a time when relations between East and West were not always positive, often affecting Christians, Europeans and natives, living in the territories subject to the Mamluk sultan. According to Francesco Suriano, who was the guardian of the Franciscan convent in Beirut from 1481 to 1484, the Church of the Savior was venerated not only by Christians but by all Muslims of the country. He gave several examples of good relations between the Franciscans and Muslims in Beirut.⁷⁰

The Church of the Savior allowed the Franciscans, as the guardians of a holy place, to reestablish the Latin bishop’s see in the city at the end of the fourteenth century. The Latin bishopric of Beirut did not disappear when its seat no longer existed in Beirut after the occupation of the city by the Mamluks in 1291. This seat was not abolished but was moved to Nicosia, Cyprus.⁷¹ In 1397, pope Boniface IX (r. 1389–1404) appointed the Franciscan Brother Blaise de Clusiano bishop of

⁶⁸Charles Verlinden, “Marchands chrétiens et juifs dans l’État mamelouk au début du XVe siècle d’après un notaire vénitien,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 51 (1981): 47.

⁶⁹Richard, *La papauté*, 70; Henri Lammens, “Frère Gryphon et le Liban au XVe siècle,” *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 4 (1899): 77.

⁷⁰Suriano, *Treatise*, 170–72.

⁷¹Émmanuel-Guillaume Rey, *Les familles d’Outre-Mer de Du Cange* (Paris, 1869), 782.



Beirut: "He must reside personally in his church and not exercise episcopal rights outside the city and the diocese."⁷²

The Church of the Savior contributed towards the increase of the number of Franciscan monks in Beirut as more were required to serve the church, to provide provisions and goods to the Franciscans in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and to substitute for the Franciscans in the Church of the Resurrection.⁷³ It also occupied an important place in the pilgrimage networks established by Venice with the collaboration of the Franciscans. Starting in the 1380s, Venice had organized a system of transportation for pilgrims to the Holy Land that was complementary to the commercial transportation system. The pilgrims' galleys were an integral part of the merchant fleet system. The Venetian Senate authorized pilgrims to travel on board galleys bound for Beirut, which left Venice every year by August 24 or at the beginning of September. Toward the end of the fourteenth century, the influx of pilgrims was very large and Beirut galleys were for a few years the principal means of transport.⁷⁴ The Franciscans welcomed the pilgrims to the Holy Land from the moment of the ships' arrival in Beirut, they hosted travelers, and they guided pilgrims to Palestine. Thus, the Church of the Savior in Beirut was the first place visited by pilgrims who passed through the city before continuing their journey to Palestine.⁷⁵

Conclusion

While aware that Beirut was not part of the Holy Land, all the European merchants and pilgrims who passed through Beirut remembered the splendor of its past and visited the church where a miracle happened in the eighth century. Its regular maintenance by the Franciscans during the Mamluk period was intended to and to perpetuate Christians' memory of Beirut's Christian past. The presence of the Church of the Savior in Beirut provided an opportunity to revive the glorious and sacred image of the city in spite of the changes that upset the East and contributed to the annihilation of the Latin presence there. It formed the basis for the reestablishment of the Latin Church in Syria from the fourteenth to the

⁷² "...cui ingiunse di risiedere personalmente nella sua chiesa e di non esercitare diritti vescovili fuori città e diocesi." Giorgio Fedalto, *La chiesa latina in Oriente* (Italy, 1981), 1:212; Rey, *Les familles*, 782.

⁷³ "Là ont noz freres ung couvent pour recevoir les vivres et biens qui leur sont apportez de Chipre, pour transporter en Hierusalem et Bethleem." Jean Thenaud, *Le voyage d'outremer de Jean Thenaud*, ed. Charles Schefer (Paris, 1884), 115; Norberto Risciani, *Documenti e firmani* (Jerusalem, 1936), 308.

⁷⁴For more information, see: Eliyahu Ashtor, "Venezia e il pellegrinaggio in Terrasanta nel basso Medioevo," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 143, no. 2 (1985): 197–223.

⁷⁵The pilgrims in Beirut also visited the place where Saint George killed the dragon. Moukarzel, *La ville de Beyrouth*, 90.



sixteenth centuries and made it possible to enlarge the activities of Latin clergy outside Palestine.

Only a partial image of the Church of the Savior in Beirut could be restored here, due to the lack of documentation about Beirut during the Mamluk period and the scarcity of archaeological remains. Without such sources it is difficult to reconstruct the history and study the place that this church had in the memory of Beirut.

The Ottoman sultan Selim I (r. 1512–20) conquered the Mamluk Sultanate, defeating the Mamluks at the battle of Marj Dābiq in 1516, and then at the battle of Rīdānīyah in 1517. Under the Ottomans, the Franciscans continued to serve the Church of the Savior and were still sharing it with the Maronites. In 1564, the Portuguese Friar Pantaleam D’Aveyro, who stayed in the convent of the Franciscans, related that the church was divided in two equal parts in length and width: the upper part for the Franciscans and the lower part for the Maronites.⁷⁶

In 1571, however, the Franciscans fled from Beirut due to the wars between the Ottomans and the Christian powers, and the fall of Cyprus to the Turks. They were compelled to withdraw with the Venetian merchants toward Aleppo. The Church of the Savior was converted into a *qayṣarīyah* (a market with a roof)⁷⁷ and the convent into a mosque,⁷⁸ and with that they disappeared. All that remained was an elliptical seal from the fourteenth century depicting Christ seated on a

⁷⁶ “& na Igreja, que foi Synagoga, celebraō os Frades os Officios divinos, & debaixo della tem os Christãos Maronitas, sугeitos ao Patriarca do Monte Libano, outra Igreja de mesmo tamanho em comprimēto, & largura, na qual se ajuntaō os Domingos, & festas, & nos mais dias, que entre si tem obrigaçāo de ouvir Missa.” Pantaleam D’Aveyro, *Itinerario da Terra Santa, E suas particularidades* (Lisbon, 1685), 487. Pantaleam D’Aveyro described in his narrative the miracle that happened in Beirut in the eighth century and said that a phial of Christ’s blood resulting from it was sent to Venice and was preserved with great veneration in Saint Mark’s church. He indicated precisely its place inside that church: it was at the entrance on the left: “quando entraō á maō esquerda.” *Ibid.*, 487.

⁷⁷ “Wa-fī hādhihi al-sanah ahālī Bayrūt waḍa‘ū yadahum ‘alā kanīsat al-mawārinat fa-hajarūhā wa-ja‘alūhā qayṣarīyah...” Iṣṭifān al-Duwayhī, *Tārīkh al-azminah*, ed. Boutros Fahd (Beirut, 1983), 438. The Maronite patriarch Iṣṭifān al-Duwayhī (r. 1670–1704) did not mention the church of the Savior in his chronicle; he designated it as the “church of the Maronites.”

⁷⁸ “...les religieux de l’ordre de Sainct François y auoient vn beau monastere qu’ils ont perdu par leur grand faute, depuis quelques années en ça les Turcs l’ayant pris pour faire vne mosquee.” Jacques de Villamont, *Les voyages du seigneur de Villamont, Chevalier de l’Ordre de Hierusalem, Gentilhomme de la chambre du Roy* (Paris, 1600), 224–25. With time this mosque would be known as Jāmi‘ al-Sarāyā. Du Mesnil du Buisson, “Les anciennes défenses de Beyrouth,” *Syria* 2 (1921): 257. Camille Enlart, who studied the monuments in Beirut from the Crusader period, visited the city during the 1920s. On the convent turned into a mosque and the Franciscan church he wrote: “...the mosque does not offer any interest and no trace of any ancient vestige.... The crypt under the ancient buildings of the military administration is only a beautiful cellar, of Arab construction, of a later period to the Latin occupation.” Camille Enlart, *Les monuments des croisés dans le royaume de Jérusalem* (Paris, 1925), 1:79.



bench-shaped throne, holding the cruciferous globe with his left hand and blessing with his right, with the following legend:

S: G: FR: MINORUM. LOCI: S: S. BARUTI (Sigillum Fratrum Minorum Loci Sancti Salvatoris Baruti [Seal of Friars Minor at the place of Saint Savior in Beirut]).⁷⁹



Fig. 4. The elliptical seal commemorating the Church of the Savior in Beirut

⁷⁹Gustave Schlumberger and Adrien Blanchet, *Collection sigillographique de MM. Gustave Schlumberger et Adrien Blanchet: Six-cent-quatre-vingt dix sceaux et bagues* (Paris, 1914), seal no. 664 and plate XXVII, no. 4.



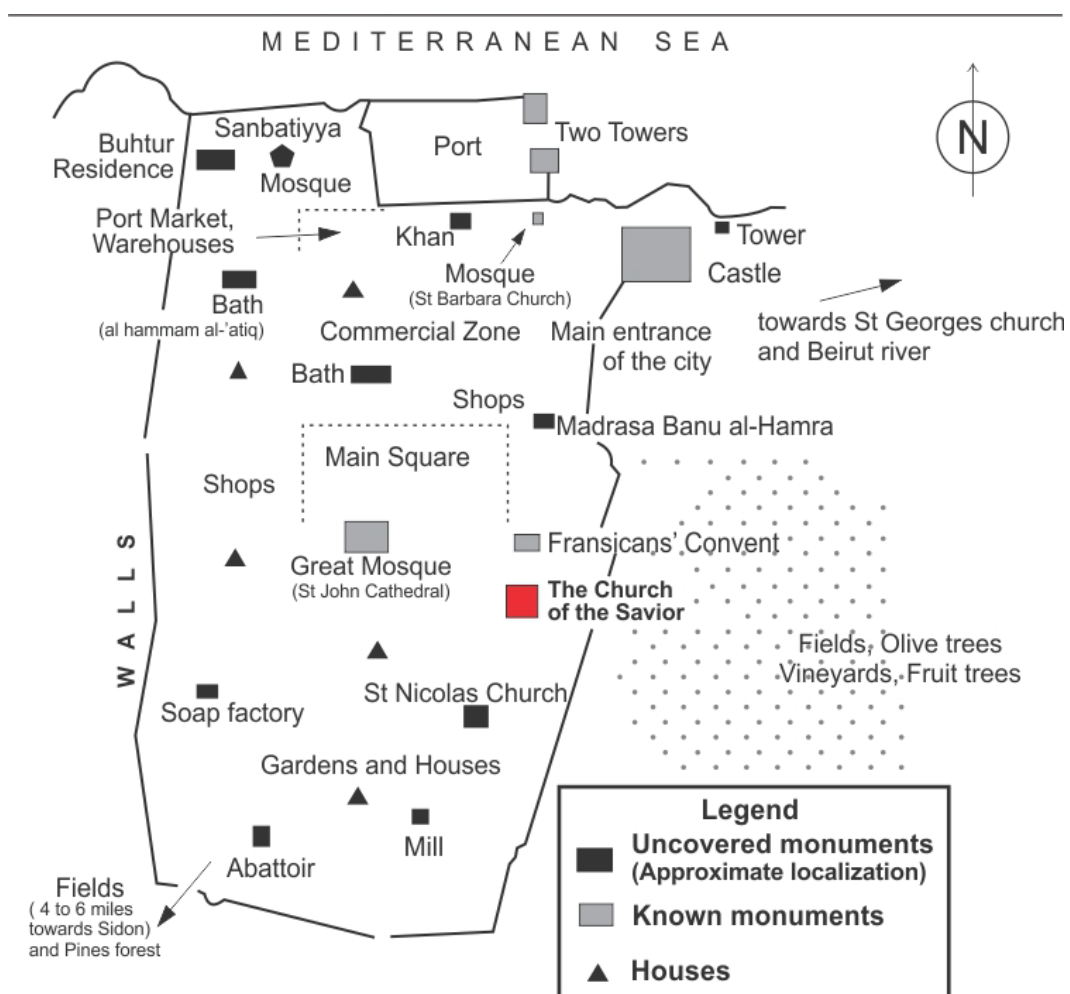


Fig. 5. An approximate plan of Beirut under the Mamluks

