



A country of sea, mountains and green valleys, the Republic of Lebanon borders the east Mediterranean with 223 kilometers of coast from south to north, and its width varies from 40 to 75 kilometers to the Eastern border with Syria. The narrow plain coast, where cities and villages line up quickly rises into the massif Mount Lebanon, whose peaks, snowy in winter, reach up to 3000 meters high. Its slopes are covered by the famous Cedar tree, the symbolic tree of country. Behind this first mountain chain, lies the Bekaa valley, planted of orchards and vineyards, dominated to the east, by the peaks of another mountain chain, the Anti Lebanon Mountains.

This geographical characteristic of intimate proximity between the sea and the mountain conditioned the history of this corner of the Near East. The important Mediterranean facade caused the exchanges between the Orient and the Occident since the times of the Phoenicians. The mountain and its valleys served throughout history as refuge for many religious minorities, for which today Lebanon is a mosaic that hosts five acknowledged branches of Islam (Sunnites, Shiites, Alaouites, Druzes, Ismailities) and eleven Christian confessions of which the Maronite's stand out.

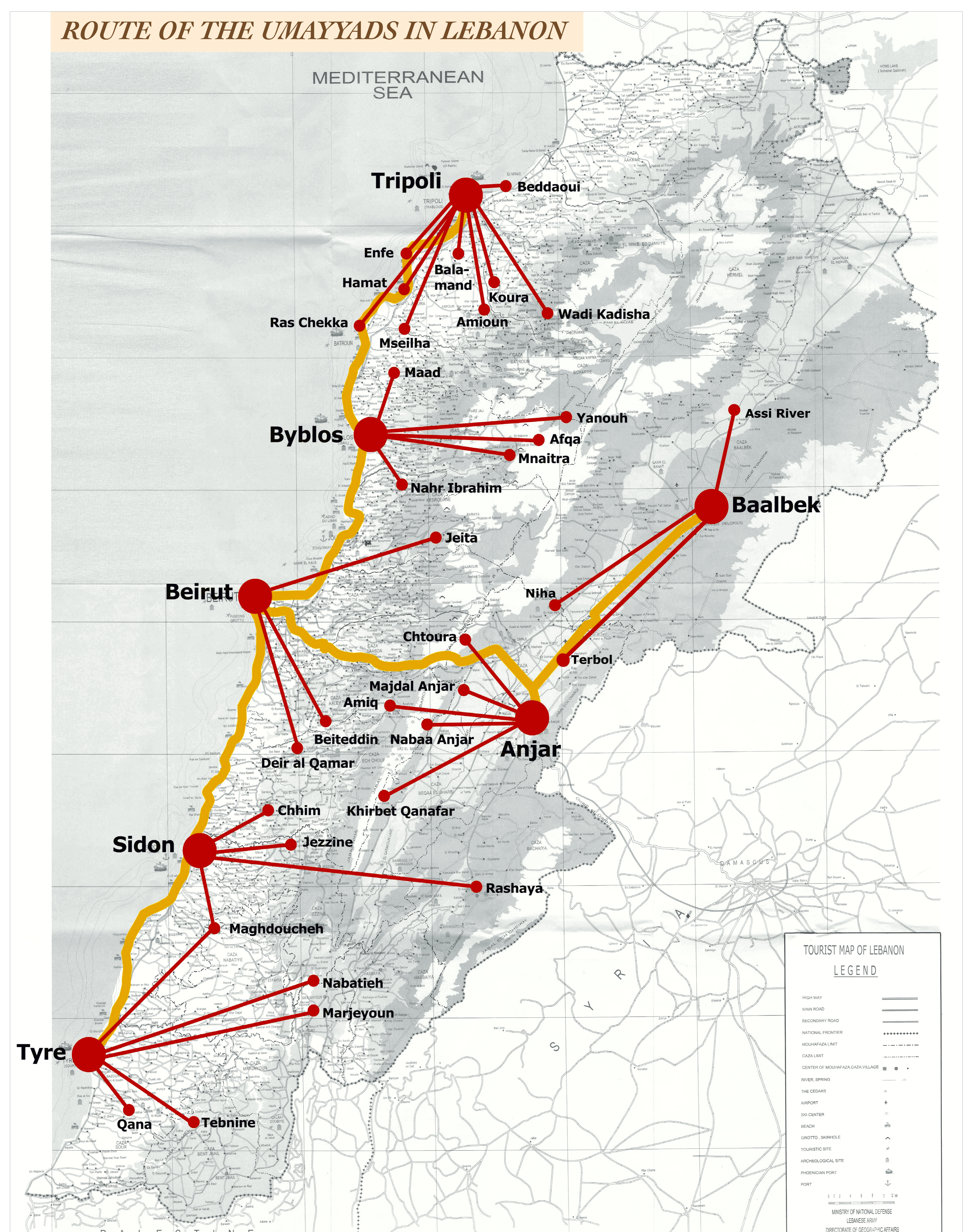
Around 2700 AC, the Canaanites, Semite tribes originating from Arabia and Mesopotamia, migrated towards the territory of the actual Syria and Lebanon, some of them settled in pre-

existing coastal settlements which developed into the main cities on the Lebanese coast: **Sidon (Saida), Tyre (Sour), Berytus (Beirut), Aradus or Byblos (Jbeil)**. Later, these Canaanites who inhabited the coastal cities would be called Phoenicians by the Greeks. Their city-states become maritime empires, they expanded their colonies in the coasts of the Mediterranean and some shores on the Atlantic, where they found for example Gadir, Cadiz, until 1200 BC. The objects manufactured by their industries and artisans, with materials from different origins - gold, bronze, ivory, glass - indicate an eminent eclecticism in design, encompassing countless influences, that show in the magnificent pieces exposed in the National Museum of Beirut. Its collections illustrate the long history of the country of the Phoenicians, that was successively invaded by several regional powers including the Egyptians, Hyksos, Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans. The conquest of Alexander the Great of coastal Phoenician cities towards 333, culminated with the famous episode of the city of **Tyre**, would introduce definitely the Mediterranean Levant in the Hellenistic cultural sphere. The roman peace, between 64 BC and the end of the fourth century AD brought an economical and cultural boom to these cities, that left the permanent traces in various corners of the country. The temples of Bacchus, Venus and Jupiter, still exist with extraordinary vigor in **Baalbek**, at the

heart of the fertile meadows of Bekaa. **Tyre**, in the south of the country, has an impressive ensemble of remains of Roman architecture: a stadium, a gymnasium, thermal bathes and a spectacular hippodrome the tiers of which survived along with an obelisk to mark the turn of carriages. Next to it, a byzantine arch reminds us that the country was also, during centuries, a province of the Byzantine Empire.

The second half of the sixth century was marked by an economic crisis caused by natural disasters including the earthquake in the year 551 which destroyed many of the monuments of the city of Beirut, among which the infamous Law School. The decline of the coastal cities was followed by the Muslim conquest in 634, and with the formation of the first Muslim dynasty, the Umayyad dynasty, these cities were part of the large Muslim empire, and Arabic became the language of the region.

In the Umayyad period which lasted to the middle of the eighth century, international trade was revitalized; the linen of Egypt was exported to Byzantium and to Europe. Spices and silk from India crossed the land of the young Muslim empire to faraway destinations. Of worth mentioning is that Egypt was the first supplier of gold used mainly for minting coins during this period.





Route of the Umayyads in Lebanon

The Umayyad route in Lebanon is a journey from the port cities that connected the eastern Mediterranean with the rest of the world to the interior of the country where the **Umayyad city of Anjar** is located. **Coastal Lebanese cities** had been the link between the two worlds from the second millennium BC. The archaeological and architectural remains in these cities attest to the succession of the civilizations that developed in the Mediterranean. They display the wealth of the cultural exchange in the Mediterranean from when the Phoenicians sailed to the European and North African shores to the present. These coastal cities are supplemented by Anjar, one of the Umayyad cities, which sprouted in the eastern Mediterranean in the first half of the eighth century.

The route illustrates a wonderful and concise course in history of civilizations, with direct and immediate comparison among all the architectural and cultural legacies of these civilizations.

Among the various architectural remains the urban fabrics of various periods still exist in various fragments, with pluralistic cultural traits that mark the many aspects of daily life in these cities, including food, relationship with the natural setting and the multitude of diverse landscapes.

The Route of the Umayyads connects the Lebanese historic coastal cities among each other and to the hinterland of the Umayyad city. Whichever direction one takes the cities are **Tripoli, Byblos, Beirut, Sidon and Tyre**. From Beirut one would drive east to the Bekaa Valley where the **Umayyad city of Anjar**, and the city of **Baalbek** where is an Umayyad mosque. The scenery along the coastal route is that of beaches, shores, populated areas on the west side of the highway, and varieties of mountains and hills on the east side of the route. Mountains tend to look higher in the northern part of the route, i.e. between **Tripoli, Byblos and Beirut**, then from **Beirut to Tyre** in the south green hills are abundant.

From **Beirut to Anjar** one has to cross the Western Lebanese Mountains with their curvy routes and picturesque greenery until reaching Dahr al-Baydar where the landscape changes dramatically. From there, the expansive and colourful Bekaa Valley spreads from north to south. It is reminiscent of many fertile plains around the Mediterranean, however, the eastern mountains gives it a wonderful romantic aura. Contrast is clearly between the fertile valley and the arid mountains. It is there where the Umayyad chose to build one of their early cities in the eastern Mediterranean, along the cities in Syria, Jordan, and the West Bank. Next to the Umayyad city of Anjar, there is the modern city, which is mostly inhabited by Armenians who migrated from Cilicia in Turkey in the aftermath of the First World War. In there a little river runs among thickets of trees with several restaurants installed along its banks. The valley was considered precious even before the Umayyad period. To the north of Anjar stand the remains of the Roman city of Baalbek (Heliopolis) with its large temple precinct, which includes large courtyards, and the still standing Temple of Bacchus, and the remains of the temples of Jupiter and Venus.

The Coastal cities of the Umayyad route in Lebanon were all established in the period when the Phoenicians formed the Mediterranean. They all fell to Alexander the Great and their relationship with the immediate culture of the Mediterranean became stronger in the Hellenistic and then in the Roman periods. When the Umayyad Caliphate was established, the Umayyads tried to employ some coastal center as launching pads to conquer Cyprus. These attempts soon calmed down in the 8th century AD. Nevertheless, succeeding caliphates such as the Fatimids, and later sultanates such as the Ayyubids, the Mamluks and the Ottoman used the ports of these cities in their connections with the rest of the Mediterranean, whether in times of war or in times of peace and active commerce. These cities witnessed uneven

developments depending on the periods. In **Tripoli** for example, an important military and commercial port in the late medieval period, we can clearly see the predominance of Mamluk buildings. In **Byblos** we see the clear presence of Phoenician, Roman and Ottoman artifacts. In these periods, Byblos was an active port city. **Beirut**, whose pre-Ottoman monuments disappeared, keeps an aura of an Ottoman and French Mandate personality. **Sidon** was dormant since the Hellenistic period. It witnessed a surge of commercial activities in the late Ottoman Period, particularly in its commercial relationship with the western Mediterranean. A prominent Ottoman Khan, the Khan el-Franj (the Europeans) dominated the seascape overlooking the ancient citadel of the city. **Tyre**, a minor city in the Ottoman period keeps the memories of the Hellenistic and Roman period prominently visible.

The French Mandate introduced urban design to Lebanese cities, that took away many of historic monuments. The new buildings underlined the "Arab" identity of these cities, with a clear influence by late 19th century French and Italian architecture.

A major characteristic of these cities is their close relationship with the interior of the eastern Mediterranean. The route between Damascus and Beirut has been an active artery for commercial and cultural continuity.

