

With the passing away on December 24, 1994 of Emir Maurice Chéhab, the first Director of Antiquities (1942-1982), Lebanon has lost an eminent man of science and archeologist who devoted his lifetime for excavation and preservation of his country's prestigious archeological sites.

Emir Maurice was curator of the National Museum of Beirut from 1928-1942 when Lebanon's antiquities were temporarily stored in the building of German Sisters pending the construction of a museum. He was present at the official inauguration in 1942 of the present Museum, a massive yellow stone building. He dedicated his time and energy, with the assistance of his wife Olga, for the preservation and presentation of the valuable antiquities from different sites in Lebanon. The contribution of Olga Chéhab to Beirut National Museum can never be forgotten. Seven thousand years of history can be traced here in this Museum, considered as one of the most important in the Middle East.

Emir Maurice took part in the restoration work of numerous monuments in the country, notably the Beit ed Din palace, the palace of the Chéhab in Hasbaya, the Crusader castles of Sidon and Tripoli, Anjar and its Omayyad period palace and souks, and a large number of churches and mosques throughout the country. Above all, his name will be forever connected with Tyre, a site that was excavated by him as early as 1947. The presence of a number of fragments of cipollino marble columns half buried in the ground led him to the discovery of the island city of Tyre. Later, a Roman-byzantine necropolis yielded a large number of beautiful sculptured marble sarcophagi, a triumphal archway, a Roman road, aqueduct and nearby a hippodrome that extends 480 meters in length and 160 meters in width.

Lebanon must pay tribute to both Emir Maurice and his wife Olga, who, in spite of the danger to their lives in the critical period from 1975 to 1982, protected Beirut's National Museum by their presence, thus preventing pillage and the destruction of Lebanon's rich cultural heritage. As the situation became more desperate, the Museum was occupied by armies who used the building as barracks among other functions. Situated unfortunately, on the "Green Line," where the fiercest fighting went on between rival factions, the Museum was shot at, shot through time and again and was seriously damaged.

It was at this time that Emir Maurice took the decision to transfer some of the valuable objects of the Museum to a safe place and eventually covering the immovable objects with concrete casings. Thus Lebanon's national treasures have been rescued from destruction and are safe for future generations to admire.

Emir Maurice was the author of a number of books and scientific articles that always will remain as valuable and reliable reference works for researchers and students in the years to come.

