

Jean Lauffray and the Lebanon

17

Jean Lauffray,

*Directeur Général de Recherche Honoraire au CNRS
Architecte DPLG*

Jean Lauffray is a pioneer in the archaeology of Beirut and spent a large number of years working in the Lebanon. He very graciously granted NMNews an interview in order to compile the following biography of his life and research in the Lebanon.

1939-1940

Having been placed in charge by the French National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS) of an archaeological prospecting mission in the Near-East, Jean Lauffray found himself on the archaeological site of Malatya in Turkey when World War II was declared. He was ordered to make his way to the nearest French Military Authorities by the local French Embassy and was enlisted in Beirut. The French High Commissioner told by the CNRS of Jean Lauffray's arrival in Beirut informed the Lebanese Department of Antiquities. He was received at the time by the Director, H. Seyrig and M. Dunand (Inspector), and later by Maurice Chéhab, the then Curator of the Beirut National Museum. He refused to return to France at the end of the war and chose instead to remain in Beirut where, at the request of M. Dunand, he was appointed Inspector General of Antiquities and Chief Architect in charge of the Byblos excavations. Attending a dinner given by Negib Bey Aboussouan, he met and befriended the latter's

son Camille Aboussouan, the future Lebanese Ambassador to UNESCO with whom he collaborated on the newly created journal "*Les Cahiers de l'Est*". An article of his, "Reflections sur l'Architecture à propos d'une maison libanaise" later reappeared in 1985 in *L'architecture libanaise du XVI^e au XIX^e siècle* published in Paris by C. Aboussouan.

In parallel to his official duties, Lauffray researched and published the *Carte archéologique du monde antique* which hangs at the farthest end of the west wing in the Museum of Beirut's entrance hall. He also became interested in the plentiful remains of the Roman and Byzantine city unearthed during the construction of new buildings around the *Place de l'étoile*. He recorded and plotted their location. Maurice Chéhab, also involved in the new finds, sanctioned his work and put him in charge of the excavations. The engineer Kalayan worked with him on the project and handled the removal and transfer of the architectural remains that had been found, such as the reassembled roman colonnade placed in front of the museum, which was part of the facade of a basilica bordering the roman forum. The said basilica was used over several centuries as the municipal, commercial and judicial headquarters of Berytus. Opposite what had previously been the Banca di



**Reassembled basilica
in front of the
Beirut National Museum.**

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18

Roma location on the southern side of the forum was a sumptuous crypto portico decorated in arcades framing representations of contemporary dignitaries.

1940

Whilst in charge of the excavations on the outer ramparts of Byblos, Lauffray discovered the roman nymph at the cross-roads of the thoroughfare leading to the acropolis and published his find in the *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* (Vol IV, p.1-36)

1944-48

Published the early results of his research on ancient Beirut urbanism in the *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* (Vol VII 1944-45 and VIII, 1946-48). They were used in the monograph published in collaboration with R. Mouterde under the title of *Beyrouth, ville romaine, histoire et monuments*.

1947

Maurice Chéhab entrusted Lauffray with the refurbishment of the Beirut Museum's halls for an exhibition sponsored by UNESCO, *Le Liban de jadis, d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*.

1950-53

Appointed Professor of Architectural Theory at the *Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts*.

1951

The ancient remains of the port of Sidon were docu-

mented and published in collaboration with P. Poidebard, under the title *Aménagements antiques du port de Saïda*. The same year he was put in charge of refurbishing the Museum of Ethnography and Costume in the palace of Beit-ed-Din where he met Kamal Djoumblat.

1952

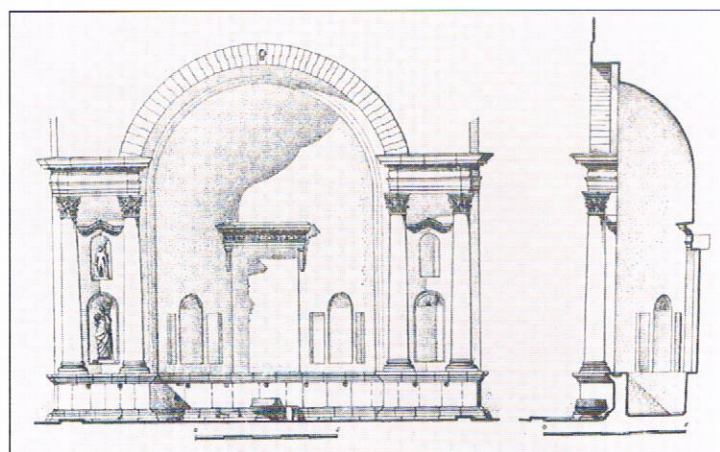
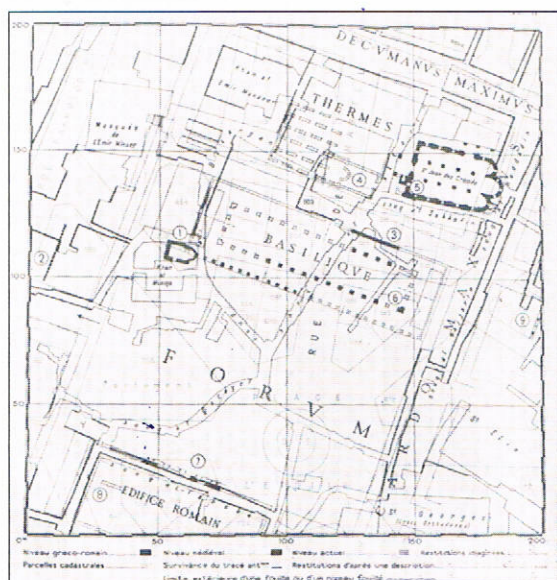
Awarded the Golden Order of Merit by the Lebanese Government.

1954

Awarded the First Class Medal for services rendered to the National Education and the Arts (decree 109 issued on 16 January 1954).

1955

Returned to France whereby the CNRS put him in charge of creating a Department of Ancient Architecture in the Aquitaine and later appointed him Director of the Centre *franco-égyptien d'études des temples de Karnak*. On his frequent trips between Upper Egypt and the Aquitaine he would, whenever possible, visit Beirut and catch up on new archaeological discoveries and remained in close contact with M. Dunand. He decides to publish with M. Dunand volume VI of the *Fouilles de Byblos*. Several chapters were drafted but sadly it remained unpublished as M. Dunand suffered a serious accident which ultimately led to his death.



Roman nymphaeum, Byblos

Lauffray's plan of Beirut.

19

1992

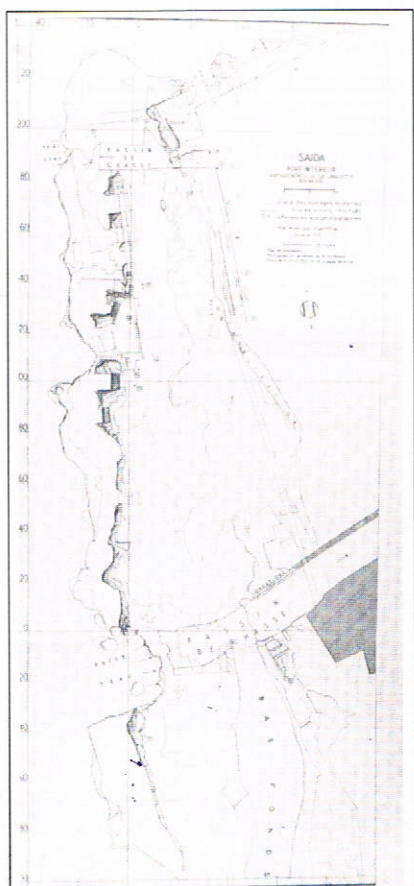
Documents covering over sixty years of prospecting at Byblos are currently housed in the *Faculté des Lettres* in Geneva by the Dunand Trust. In 1989 Lauffray was granted the commission to classify the documents prior to having them made available for research. He found the unfinished fourth volume. In 1992, on the advice of the *Commission des Fouilles* of the French Foreign Office a subsidy was granted to Lauffray to finish the volume and prepare it for publication.

1994

Appointed by UNESCO as a member of the International Scientific Commission in charge of advising the Lebanese Government on the archaeological prospecting to be done before the reconstruction of Beirut's city centre and the protecting of the most important remains unearthed amongst which the commission chose the roman forum whose location Lauffray had placed at the *Place de l'étoile*, opposite the Parliament building. Indeed what was discovered between 1994 and 1995 has confirmed the historical importance of the said forum and its surrounding monuments.



Fragment of an architrave unearthed by J. Lauffray in the *chantier de la Poste*



Port of Sidon



Architectural elements unearthed at the time of laying foundations for the *Lazarieh* building (Emir Béchir street).