

April 12, 1931

Letter, Bayard Dodge to Thomas B. Appleget (Excerpts)

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Summary:

In 1866, US Presbyterians who had been working for half a century in the Ottoman city of Beirut founded the Syrian Protestant College (SPC), to compete with Arab and French endeavors in higher education. Chartered in the State of New York, the American University of Beirut (AUB), as the SPC has been called since 1920, came to employ American, European and Arab professors. It soon turned into a foremost institution of higher education for Arab Christians and Muslims alike from Greater Syria (present-day Syria, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan), and especially after World War I attracted more and more students also from other Arabic-speaking countries, a history told in Betty Anderson's *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education* (2011). AUB's educational quality and missionary institutional bedrock gave it some clout in the United States.

Hence, when the New York-based Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation in 1924 added an international layer to a US-centered social science grant program it had been running since 1922, it in 1925 asked the AUB president, Bayard Dodge, whether his institution would apply for such a grant. AUB did. Making its case in a way that reflected the establishment of League of Nations Mandates in the post-Ottoman Iraq and Greater Syria and the rise of anticolonial nationalisms there, AUB received a US\$39,000 grant to develop its social science offerings in 1926-1931, and three additional grants through 1940.

The text published here is a letter written by Bayard Dodge to senior officials in the Rockefeller Foundation.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

American University of Beirut

President's Office

Beirut, Syria

April 12, 1931

Thomas B. Appleget, Esq.,

Rockefeller Foundation

New York City.

Dear Mr. Appleget;

It is impossible to tell you how much we appreciate the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation in promising to grant our University \$ 30,000 for three years more of work in the social sciences. Please convey to the President and members of the Foundation our warmest thanks and assure them of the stimulus that this help will give our professors to do better work than ever before. [...]

As you know the endowment and buildings given by the Foundation three years ago have enabled us to build up our school of medicine and pre-medical work to become self-respecting and really efficient. We have been fortunate in attracting young professors of the finest type, who have been willing to refuse much higher salaries in the United States, in order to work at Beirut, where they feel that they are needed and where the Idealism of our University appeals to them. [...]

The educational centers of the Near East are Cairo, Constantinople, Athens, and Beirut. Law, engineering, medicine, and literature are quite well cared for in a number of these centers. On the other hand, there seems to be a great neglect of social sciences in these other sites and in the French university at Beirut.

At the present time there are at least two very important reasons why somebody in the Near East should develop work in the social sciences. In the first place the establishment of the European mandates in the old Asiatic countries has developed a new set of government and social problems, which are bound to have a great influence on the East and to react upon the West. Old traditions are being swept away and a chaos of new ideas is taking hold of the imagination of the people. If a number of scholars can investigate these new ideas in a thorough way, and at the same time train a small group of native leaders to form public opinion in a wise way, much can be accomplished.

In the second place, the Near East cannot compete with the great industrial nations of the West. Betterment of social life must come from improvement in marketing and commercial efficiency. Village people must learn to get along with the things that they can grow and make themselves, rather than to emigrate as they have done in the past. City people must learn to export goods, rather than to make their living by importation, as they have done heretofore.

A group of professors, with proper library facilities and time for travel and study ought to be able to accomplish much in connection with these needs. We are anxious to have our men do a thorough going piece of work from the academic point of view. At the same time we are anxious to have them solve some practical problems and to train native leaders, who in turn can solve other local questions. [...]

Sincerely yours,

Bayard Dodge

President.