PART THREE

SPACE, URBAN INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETY IN OTTOMAN BILAD AL-SHAM
The city of Sidon (Arabic: Sayda) underwent a remarkable boom during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was closely related to the regional and supra-regional history of Bilad al-Sham in the same period. But the fourteenth, fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, whose architecture is so visible in cities such as Tripoli or Damascus, did not put a similar stamp on Sidon. The Eastern Mediterranean shares a common history, but its cities do not always share similar patterns of urban development. Why was the fate of Sidon so different from that of Acre or Beirut? Was it based on geopolitical and regional factors, the different waves of external change breaking over the Eastern Mediterranean, or should it be seen in the context of the kinds of power struggle in the regional capitals like Aleppo and Damascus or Cairo and Istanbul? This article elaborates the main principles and steps in the urban development of an Ottoman provincial harbour town and attempts to identify the town’s key agents by combining a study of the written records with that of its material culture.1

1 The material for this article is based on a study of the city of Sidon (history, urbanism and architecture) for the History Museum of the Debbané Foundation (www.museumSayda.org) in co-operation with the German Orient Institute in Beirut. During 2002–04 a building archaeological survey of the eighteenth century Dar Debbané, which will house the museum, was carried out, accompanied by a study of the city of Sidon (Team: Stefan Weber, Ralph Bodenstein and Beshr al-Barry: Marianne Boqvist joined us during our first seasons). During the 2004–05 seasons Nathalie Chahine, Youssef el-Khoury, Roland Haddad, Fouad Ghoussayn and Lana Shehadeh were working with us. I am especially grateful to Stoyanka Kenderova, Akram al-ʿUlabi, Marianne Boqvist and Astrid Meier for their generous help in providing source material and Stefan Knost for opening an important window to Aleppo. A publication detailing the major buildings of Sidon is in preparation and will be published as the second volume of: Stefan Weber and Ralph Bodenstein, Ottoman Sidon, The Changing Fate of a Mediterranean Port City, Beiruter Texte und Studien 122, Beirut. I am indebted to Astrid Meier, Ralph Bodenstein and Gege Zimmermann for their critical reading of this article.