

February 20, 1935

Letter, Bayard Dodge to Edmund E. Day (Excerpts)

Citation:

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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. The letter was sent from the AUB office in New York, United States, which Dodge visited periodically.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

American University of Beirut
50 West 50th Street - Room 1707
NEW YORK CITY
February 20th 1935
Telephone, Columbus 5-3040
Doctor Edmund E. Day
Director of the Division of Social Sciences,
Rockefeller Foundation,
49 West 49th Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear Doctor Day:

On behalf of the American University of Beirut I wish to express very hearty appreciation of the aid which has been given for Social Science Research.

Most of the Beirut students are destined to play some part in the building up of the new states which have been created in the Near East after the war. It is difficult for these young men and women to understand modern European ideas in a constructive way. It is even more difficult for them to think clearly when their countrymen are excited by nationalism and misled by forms of emotional propaganda.

The aid which has been given to research has enabled the members of the Beirut faculty to study the real needs of the communities around them in an unprejudiced and scientific spirit. It is very gratifying to see how this spirit has influenced the students. Many of them are beginning to realize that the solutions to their national problems much come from thorough study rather than from emotional agitation. Even the limited amount of research which has already been accomplished has turned the Social Science work of the University into something much more useful and constructive than it has ever been in the past.

We understand that it is the policy of the Rockefeller Foundation gradually to diminish and end grants being given to Social Science programs. So much aid has already been given to us that we do not wish to seem to be too grasping. On the other hand, it will be difficult for us to make permanent the benefits of aid already given unless some further help can be offered during the next five or six years when we are attempting to re-establish our work after the depression.

Accordingly, we wish to request that the Foundation should make a grant on a decreasing scale, for a period of five years, with an understanding that the University itself will do all that is possible to conserve the benefits resulting from the timely aid of the Foundation. [...]

With very sincere thanks for this aid, which has already brought so many benefits to our campus.

Faithfully yours,
Bayard Dodge,
President