

## The Beirut Port as a Trans imperial Hub in the Interwar Middle East

This work is part of the larger research initiative titled "Sea-Border and Air-Space Formation in the Interwar Middle East: A Trans-Imperial Perspective, which is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF).

This study adopts a trans imperial lens to examine the Beirut port not just as a colonial hub but as a site of interaction and competition among multiple imperial and local actors. The port's strategic location made it a vital node in trans imperial trade routes, where overlapping interests of the French Mandate, British actors, and local elites created a dynamic and contested space. By meticulously mapping these interactions, the project aims to illuminate the intricate networks connecting local and imperial actors, shedding new light on Beirut's pivotal role as a trans-imperial nexus. This approach seeks to demonstrate how the city's activities not only influenced its foreland — the regions it directly connected with overseas — but also profoundly impacted the Arab hinterland. By examining the dynamics of trade, migration, political alliances, and cultural exchanges, the project aspires to uncover how Beirut functioned as a crucial intermediary, shaping regional and imperial relationships, and serving as a conduit for people, ideas, goods, and influence across the middle east.

### **Key questions:**

#### **Colonial Competition and Infrastructure:**

How did the interplay of British and French competition and occasional cooperation influence the governance, trade policies, and infrastructure development of the Beirut port during the interwar period?

#### **Beirut as a Regional Hub:**

In what ways did local actors, foreign companies, and international institutions, contribute to positioning Beirut as a central and attractive hub in an increasingly interconnected Middle East? How did these collaborations or conflicts expand Beirut's frontier effects, shape regimes of mobility, and enhance its role as a trans-imperial nexus in the increasingly interconnected Middle East?

#### **Local Agency and Networks:**

How did Lebanese elites, merchants, and business owners leverage their local and international networks to negotiate, resist, or adapt to French imperial policies, asserting their agency in shaping the Beirut port's economic trajectory and its connections to both the Arab hinterland and the international foreland?