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A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT: DOMESTIC ENGINEERING IN THE MOUKHTARA PALACE

In the late 1790s Sheikh Bashir Joumblatt, a leader of Lebanon's Druze community, rose to prominence as ruler of the Mount Lebanon range. In a time of sectarian tensions between regional religious groups, Sheikh Bashir embarked on several civic projects that benefited the population regardless of religious affiliation: he built various religious structures, instituted charity for the poor, and undertook large-scale infrastructure building. One such infrastructural endeavor was a canal to bring freshwater into the village of Moukhtara from the Barouk River in 1806. The Moukhtara Palace, the home of the Joumblatt family, was also served by

this new canal. In fact, the main water canal runs right through the palace—a marvel of domestic engineering.

Building on centuries of regional water management techniques and expertise (from the Roman Baths to the Ottoman Hamams), the new stream runs underneath and inside the palace complex, branching out to flow into multiple rooms, chambers, and cavities, and performing a variety of uses. The water then emerges as a cascading canal and fountain in a splendid inner garden. In between, a variety of visible and invisible infrastructural systems mobilize the stream's flow for the benefit of the house's internal climate, its agricultural efficiency, and even its political capabilities. Heated by a furnace, the water travels in floor cavities to warm the living

quarter of the house in the cold winter; meanwhile the vapor is channeled into the walls of baths and released in steam rooms. In another branch, cascading water powers a mill used to grind wheat, olives, and other food stocks. Besides serving as utility inside the house, channels irrigate the agricultural grounds of the palace where olive and orange trees grow. The fountain within the heart of the complex not only creates a cool micro-environment in the hot summers but also produces a soundscape that eliminates any potential eavesdropping, making political conversation more secure around those spaces. In a final branch, water continues cascading into the village down the hill, serving freshwater to the peaceful town of Moukhtara and the villages beyond.