

The Bird's Nest Armenian Orphanage in Byblos
A Legacy of Survival and Asylum Under Threat

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Introduction

Byblos Archeological Site



1
Traditional House

2
Neolithic Houses
3000-3400^{BC}

3
Crusader Castle
12th Century

4
The Great Temple
2500^{BC}

5
Rampart
2500^{BC}

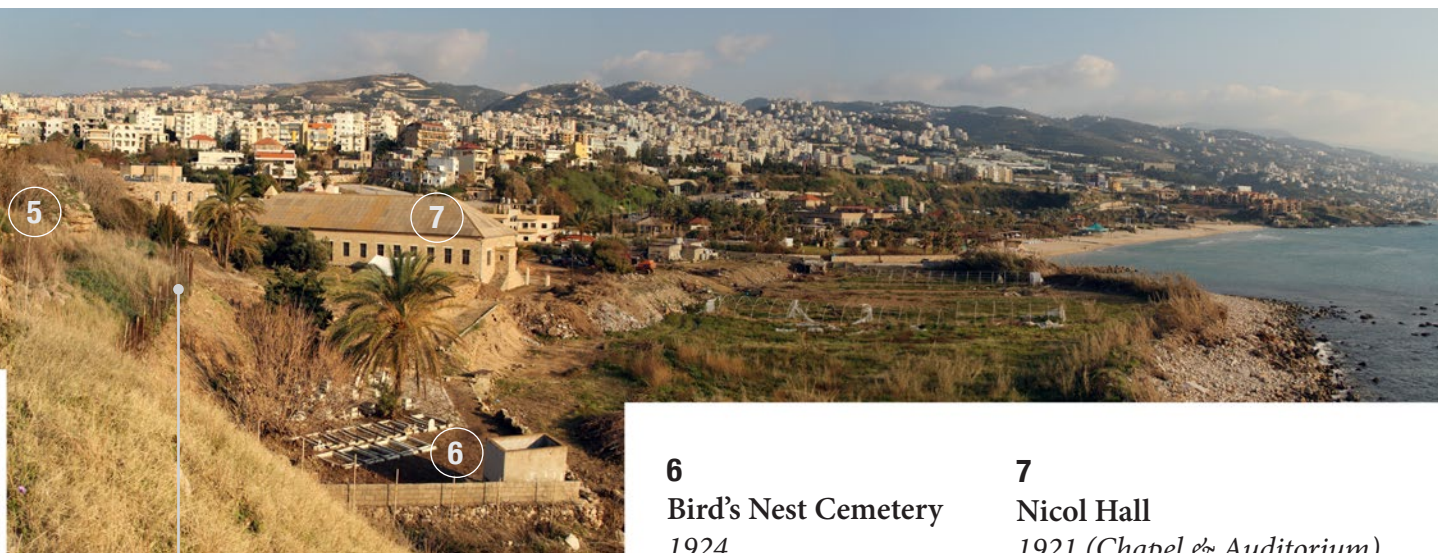
Byblos is a Mediterranean city in the Mount Lebanon Governorate in Lebanon. It is believed to have first been occupied between **8800^{BC}** and **7000^{BC}**, and thought to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

Byblos is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and has been actively inhabited since **5000^{BC}**.

One of the oldest Phoenician cities, Byblos contains the ruins of many successive civilizations. It has been closely linked to the legends as well as the history of the Mediterranean region dating back thousands of years, to Neolithic times .

Byblos is also directly associated with the development and diffusion of the Phoenician alphabet.

Plot 642: The Bird's Nest



*Border between
the Archeological Site
and Plot 642*

6
Bird's Nest Cemetery
1924

7
Nicol Hall
1921 (*Chapel & Auditorium*)

In **1920** the Near East Foundation (NEF) established a refugee camp for Armenian orphans on Plot 642 neighboring the archaeological site in the Byblos.

The Woman Missionary Workers Organization (KMA -Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere), a Danish foundation bought the orphanage in **1926** and called it the Bird's Nest.

In **1967** the KMA would transfer ownership of the plot to the Armenian Catholicosate of the Greater House of Cilicia.

What is the Bird's Nest?

A Brief History

During World War I, the American Committee for Syrian and Armenian Relief, (later The Near East Relief Foundation) ran several refugee camps throughout Lebanon for Armenian survivors of the 1915 Genocide.

Between 1919-1922 Near East Relief initiated the evacuation of 110.000 Armenian orphans from the Ottoman Empire to Russia, Eastern Armenia, Lebanon, Syria and Greece.

It was during these evacuations, that 1400 orphans settled in Byblos where an orphanage was established on Plot 642 on the coastline.

In **1926** the foundation left the Middle East, and Maria Jacobsen along with the Danish KMA association bought the orphanage. Jacobsen, who served as director from 1926 to 1960 named the orphanage the Bird's Nest.

In total around 4000 orphans, whose parents were killed in the ethnic cleansing campaigns, found shelter in the Bird's Nest.

In 1967 the chairman of KMA Sister Kirsten Vind transferred ownership of the Bird's Nest to the Armenian Catholicosate of the Greater House of Cilicia.

On Maria Jacobsen

Maria Jacobsen was born in Denmark, on November 6, 1882. The Danish branch of the Woman Missionary Workers Organization (KMA) was established in 1900. It supported Armenian orphans sheltered in various areas of the Ottoman Empire, including Mush, Van, Marash and Kharberd.

In 1906 after completing nursing courses, Maria Jacobsen became a member of KMA and left for Kharberd as a missionary. She learnt Armenian and began writing her diary, which later became a valuable eyewitness testimony of the Armenian Genocide.

Just after World War I, Jacobsen gathered more than 3600 Armenian orphans from different parts of the Ottoman Empire with the support of the Near East Relief workers. In 1922, Maria Jacobsen transferred a large group of orphans to Beirut together with another Danish missionary Karen Marie Petersen.

At Bird's Nest, the Armenian orphans referred to Maria Jacobsen as "Mama Jacobsen". "Mama Jacobsen" educated thousands of orphans according to their own Armenian culture and in their own language. They became clergymen, physicians, teachers among others .

In 1950 she became the first woman to be awarded the golden medal of the Danish Kingdom. In 1954 she was granted the Gold Medal of Honor by the Lebanese Government.

Jacobsen died on April 6th 1960 and was buried in the courtyard of the Bird's Nest, as stipulated In 2014, the Republic of Armenia issued a stamp commemorating her exceptional humanism.



Armenian orphans
at the Bird's Nest.
1920s



Maria Jacobsen surrounded
by Bird's Nest orphans on the
stairs leading to the chapel and
auditorium.
1950s



Palm Sunday
at Saint Kayaneh Chapel.
2010s

Plot 642: Overview

- FULL LAND AREA: 30,955 m²
- AREA LEASED: 24,000 m²
- AREA RETAINED: 6,955 m²
- + BIRD'S NEST CEMETERY: ~300m²
- 1. SAINT KAYANEH CHAPEL**
- 2. THE DANISH HALL**
- 3. BIRD'S NEST SCHOOL
- 4. BIRD'S NEST DORMITORIES
- 5. ARMENIAN GENOCIDE MUSEUM
- 6. FOOTBALL PITCH

* The leased area is an approximation based on the circulated description of the project.

** Nicol Hall is currently divided into two sections, one houses the chapel and the other the auditorium.



The Significance of the Bird's Nest

The Bird's Nest is the locus around which the Armenian community in Bybos congregated, to form what would later become the Armenian Neighbourhood. Of particular historical and symbolic importance, are the two landmarks essential to the community's sense of belonging: The cemetery and the chapel in Nicol Hall.

For almost a hundred years, the Cemetery has been a site of pilgrimage and commemoration for generations of Armenians, while Saint Kayaneh Chapel in Nicol Hall has been a pillar that regularly brought together the community, for weddings, funerals and holidays.

*Plot 642 Cadastral Certificate
Department of Real Estate
Ministry of Finance (1948)*

*Description of Plot: A land containing lemon, banana, chinaberry trees (as well as) vines and other trees, and a two-story building that hosts **a clinic** on the ground floor and 9 rooms on the first floor (...), facing the house is a flower garden and two ponds, as well as many buildings including **a church, a school, dormitories, (...)** and **a private cemetery for the school.***



Nicol Hall 1920s



The Clinic 1934



Teacher with his pupils 1954



The Football Pitch 1960s



Saint Kayaneh Chapel 2000s



Saint Kayaneh Chapel 2007
(Getty Images Reference: 75979688)

An Exclusive Beach Resort on the Bird's Nest Historic Site

An exclusive beach resort is planned on the majority of Plot 642. The Armenian Catholicosate of the Greater House of Cilicia issued a statement published in the three Armenian dailies in Lebanon on February 21st 2015, stating that parts of the plot are to be rented out.

Given the delicate nature of the site and its proximity to archeological ruins, any construction permit would require clearance from the Directorate of Antiquities at the Ministry of Culture. UNESCO would also have to be consulted, given that Byblos is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In a bid to prepare their report, The Directorate General of Antiquities have identified several excavation sites, mostly in the area between the **Saint Kayaneh Chapel** and the cemetery. Despite these protocols, the **1921** building housing the Chapel was stripped down of all its contents including its floor, windows and alter during the month of June of the year 2016.

The resort plans include refurbishing the **1921** Saint Kayaneh Chapel and converting it into a restaurant and a spa.

Excerpts from the statement by The Armenian Catholicosate of the Greater House of Cilicia.

(...) Taking into account the financial difficulties that the Bird's Nest has been facing, and the abandoned state of the seaside area of the plot, it was found appropriate to lease the mentioned land, to be used by families for social and sporting purposes. The tenant is former Minister and Mayor [of Jbeil] Jean Louis Kordahi. A memorandum of understanding has been signed between the tenant and the Catholicosate of the Greater House of Cilicia detailing the duration, and purpose of use of the land.

(...)The remains of the orphans [buried in the Bird's Nest cemetery] will be relocated from the abandoned seaside area to be buried in a [communal] separate grave near that of Maria Jacobsen close to The Museum of Genocide and Orphans. A special headstone will commemorate the Armenian Genocide and the lives of thousands of orphans [genocide survivors].

Statement by Bird's Nest Board of Trustees

As we pointed out in a previous statement, major constructions have been under way at the Bird's Nest in the past few months. In this regard, the old seaside cemetery dedicated to the Bird's Nest orphans and staff, will be relocated in the coming days to the other side of the plot, close to the grave of the institution's first director: Maria Jacobsen.



The Nicol Hall which houses the Saint Kayaneh Chapel
South-East View



Bird's Nest Cemetery (bottom left) and Saint Kayaneh Chapel (top left)
North-West View

Threatened Landmarks

Nicol Hall and Saint Kayaneh Chapel

Nicol Hall was hand-built in 1921 by the Armenian orphans of Jbeil, under the directorship of Major James H. Nicol. It has served as a place for worship since.

The structure contains two sections: one half is the Saint kayaneh Chapel, while the other half is the Danish Hall (as of 1989).

Saint Kayaneh, is the only place of worship for the Armenian community of Jbeil, while the Danish Hall served as the Bird's Nest's auditorium, which also held community-wide functions.

As early as 1923, a football pitch was furnished in front of Nicol Hall. The school orphans and later the Armenian community played weekly on it until recently when the school first demolished the stands then removed the goals.

A new church has been promised to the community by the Catholicosate instead of the near centenarian Saint Kayaneh Chapel which will be repurposed for use by the beach resort.



Saint Kayaneh Chapel 2015

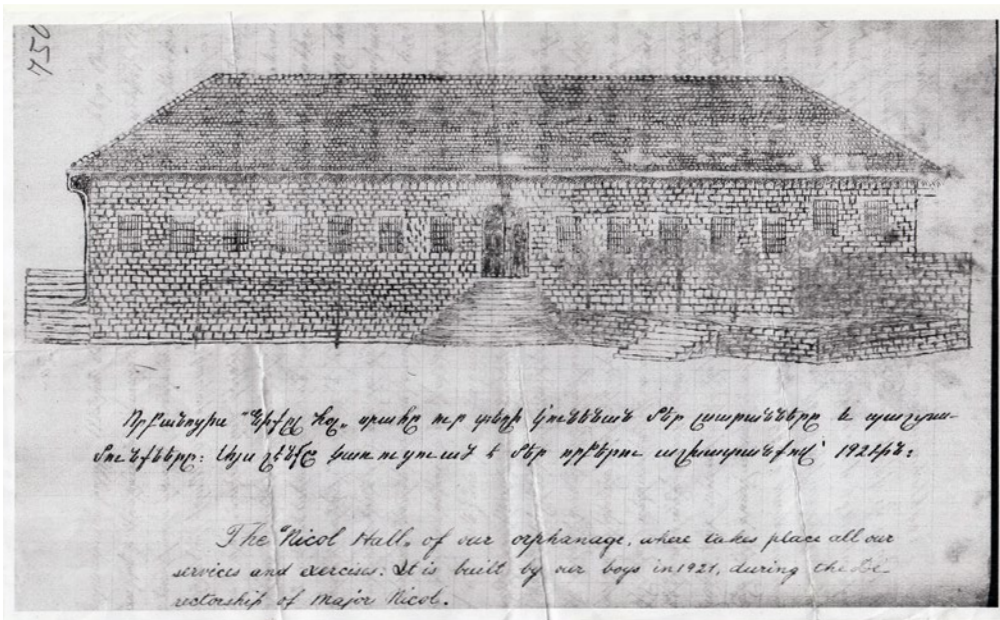


1924



1980s

Football players on the stairs of Nicol Hall



From Doun Monthly published at Bird's Nest 1920s

Threatened Landmarks

The Bird's Nest Cemetery of Genocide Survivors

For almost a hundred years, the cemetery, which was constructed in 1924 by the very orphans that would later be buried in it, has been an impromptu site of pilgrimage and commemoration for generations of Armenians.

The Bird's Nest Cemetery is a private cemetery, which serves as the final resting place for 33 Armenian Genocide survivors.

As per Armenian customs and tradition, the cemetery is visited at least twice a year, when relatives visit their dead on *Merelots* (the Day of the Dead), following Christmas and Easter.

On several occasions the cemetery has been included as a site of official Genocide commemorations: community leaders and officials, as well as prominent members of the clergy have led such processions.





The Bird's Nest Cemetery of Genocide Survivors

A Unique Memorial Site

The Centennial of the Armenian Genocide, only adds further resonance to our demand to protect and preserve Byblos's Cemetery of Genocide Survivors.

The Bird's Nest is a unique testament to the history of Armenians in Lebanon. It is also evidence of the resilience of the survivors of ethnic cleansing.

The site constitutes an essential marker of a proud moment in Jbeil's legacy: the coastal city welcomed 4000 Armenian orphans and was the settling grounds for a community of survivors at the turn of the twentieth century. This act of human solidarity shaped the identity of the city and the region.

The surface area of the cemetery is less than 300m² i.e 1% of the total land area of Plot 642. The cemetery is a part of the area that is classified as public domain under the zoning regulations for the preservation of the old city (See Annex on page).

It is the wish of the local Armenian community to preserve Byblos's Cemetery of Genocide survivors.

The 33 Graves

include

Khanem Bardakjian	1889 -1943	Age 54
Hagop Avakian	1894 -1957	Age 63
Marta Khabaian	1898 -1953	Age 55
Shoushanig Kayabalian	1910 -1931	Age 21
Sirvart Gulezian	1911 -1932	Age 21
Araxi Mismitian	1912 -1930	Age 8
Ardemis Zabanian	1913 -1938	Age 25
M. Jibian	1915 -1929	Age 14
Aliz Tenbeian	1924 -1936	Age 12
Antranik Kehieian	1925 -1939	Age 14
Hovannes Sereidarian	1927 -1936	Age 12
Mathios Mathiosian	1927 -1929	Age 2
Victoria Nenjian	1927 -1932	Age 5
Peruz Kechejian	1928 -1929	Age 1
Nazareth Melkonian	1928 -1929	Age 1
Setrag Hovannesian	1928 -1929	Age 1
Karnig Gulumian	1928 -1942	Age 4
Haiganoush Norsesian	1929 -1930	Age 1
Noubar Khacherian	1932 -1939	Age 3
Hogop Ashjian	1934 -1938	Age 4
Khoren D. Madtiosian	-1953	
Lousntag Khacherian	1920s-1940s*	
Tervanda Garabedian	-1960s*	
Misag Khosdeghian	-1960s*	
Mariam Khacherian	-1960s*	
Noubar Khacherian		
Alice Baby		

** based on accounts by the local community.*

"Houshamadian" (Memorial Book, the American Orphanage 1920-1925)" published in Beirut by Hamaskayine Press, mentions Mehran Zadigian as the first buried person in 1924.



As per tradition, the graves face East, towards the rising sun.
Accordingly, a memorial stone is placed on the Eastern stone wall of the cemetery, it reads:
“Remember! Life is short, death is real, eternity is immortal.”





Over the years, the central palm tree has come to serve as visual reference to the location of the cemetery.



Genocide Commemorations 2012



The Armenian community in Byblos commemorates the Genocide
24th of April 2012



2013



Official delegation led by Primate of Lebanon Archbishop Kegham Khatcherian, Members of Parliament representing Byblos and leaders of Armenian parties.





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Zoning Regulations on Plot 642

The National Campaign for the Protection of Historic Cities and the preservation of their heritage and history, identified Byblos as one of five cities to be protected. In this regard, new zoning regulations were proposed for the old city of Byblos.

The General Zoning for the Preservation of the Old City of Byblos, issued in 2004 by the Directorate General of Urban Planning (Ministry of Public Works), classifies the area between the church and the cemetery on Plot 642 as public domain (G1). The Bird's Nest cemetery lies within the area that is subject to the administration and control of the Directorate General of Antiquities at the Ministry of Culture, it also falls within the 30m marine protection buffer zone (E1IP).

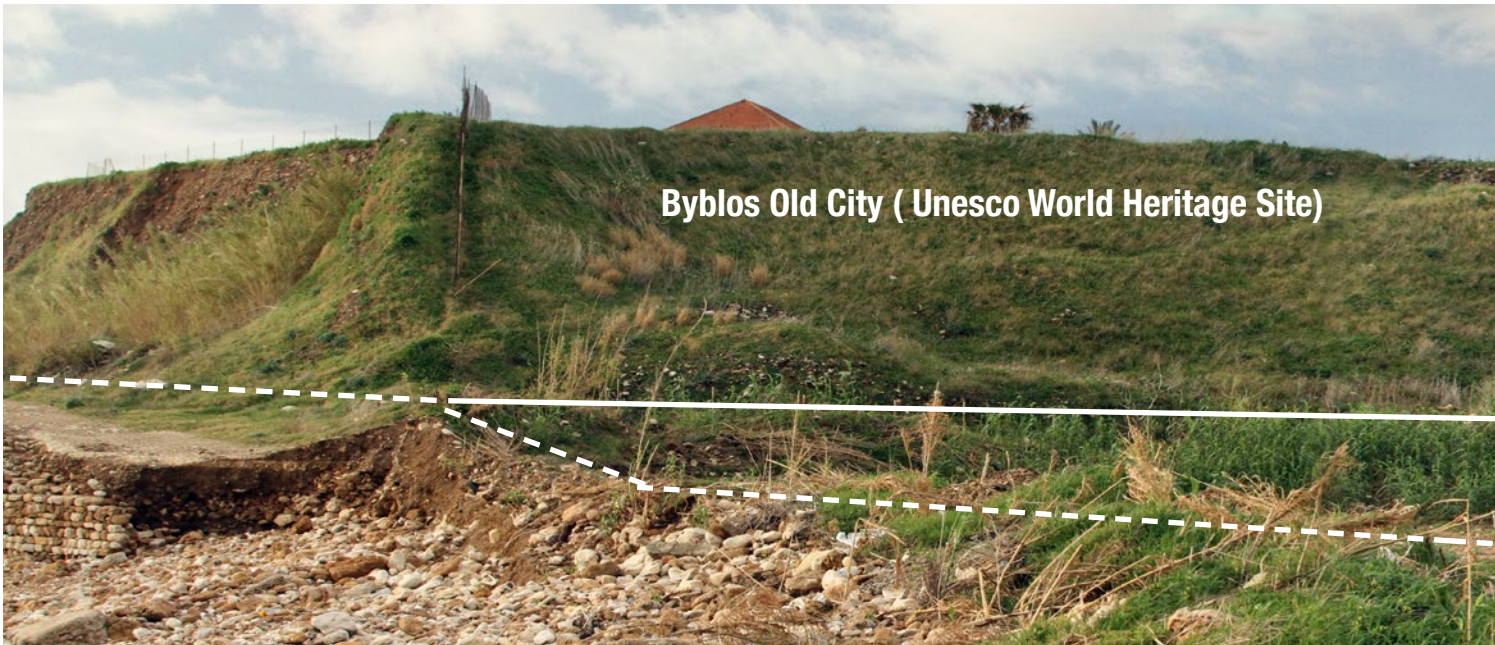
Given the delicate nature of the site and its proximity to archeological ruins, any construction permit would require clearance from the Directorate of Antiquities at the Ministry of Culture. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) would also have to be consulted, given that Byblos is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

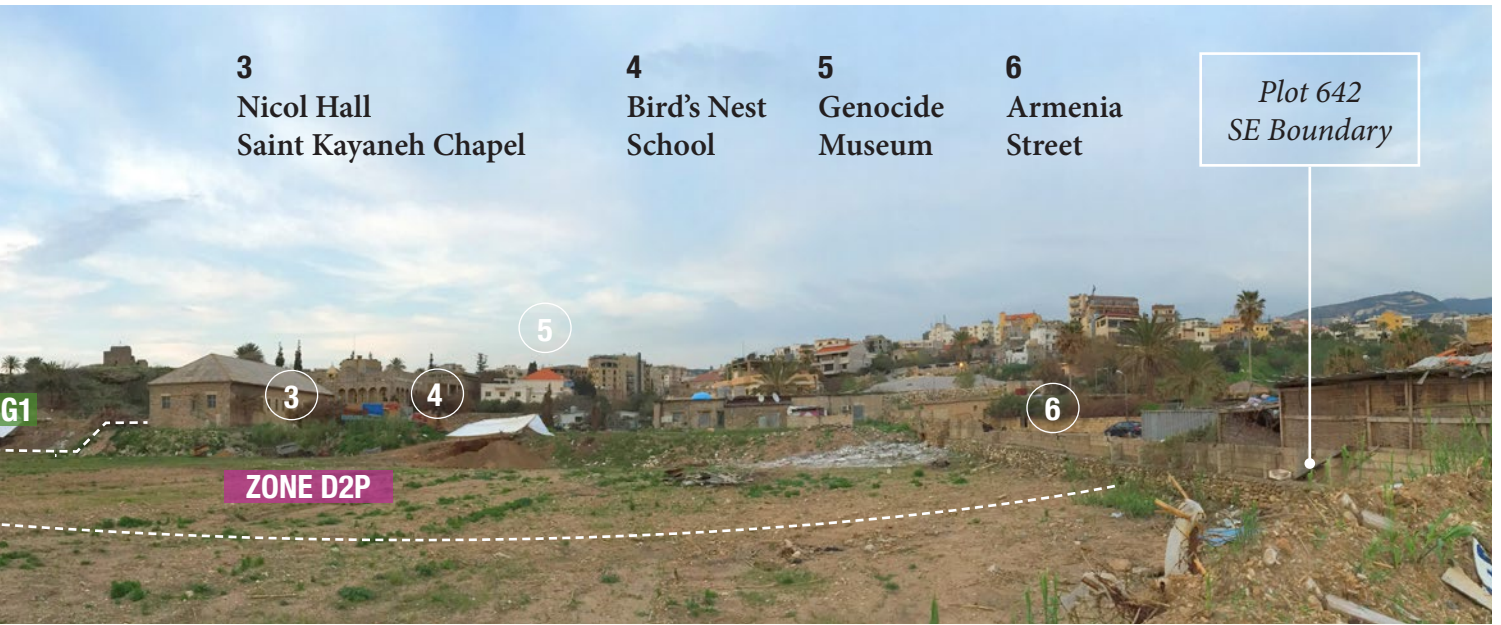
In a bid to prepare their report, The Directorate General of Antiquities have identified several excavation sites, mostly in the area between the Saint Kayaneh Chapel and the cemetery.

Despite these protocols, preparation work already seems to be underway for construction on the site.

Byblos Old City Regulation (2003)		
G1	PUBLIC DOMAIN	Excavation Field Subject to Directorate General of Antiquities control and administration
D2P	INDIVIDUAL VILLA	Ground Occupation 20%
E1IP	MARINE	Construction is not allowed in this area further to the decree 3362 dated 26/5/1972







3
Nicol Hall
Saint Kayaneh Chapel

4
Bird's Nest
School

5
Genocide
Museum

6
Armenia
Street

Plot 642
SE Boundary

ZONE D2P

North-West View (wide angle)

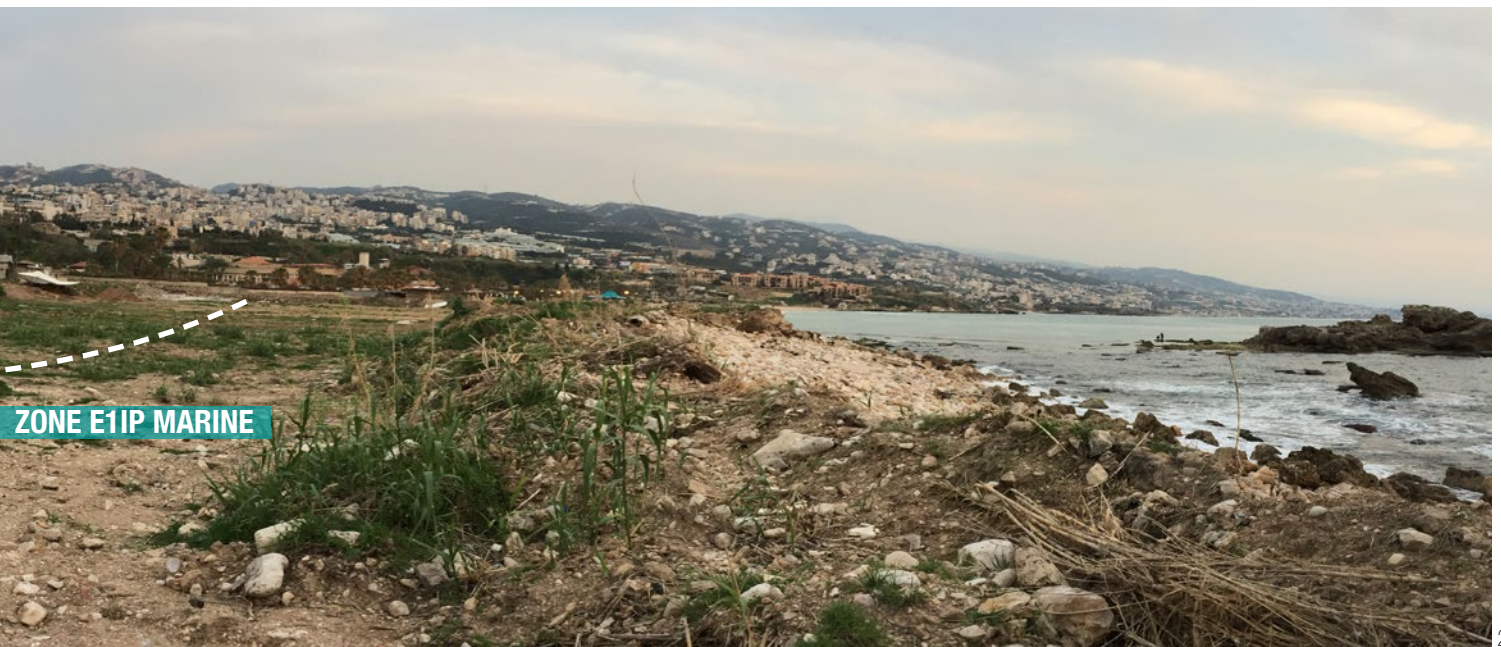


— PLOT 642 BOUNDARY
- - - ZONING BOUNDARY

+ The Cemetery

ZONE G1 PUBLIC DOMAIN

North-West View (the cemetery)



ZONE E1IP MARINE

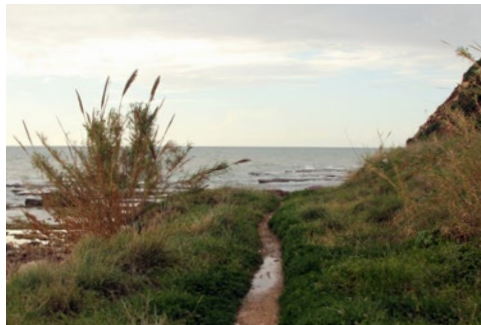
South-East View (wide angle)

Pedestrian Walkway

The Municipality of Byblos has plans to construct a pedestrian walkway that bridges the old port with Armenia Street. It will run parallel to the coastline at the foothill of the archeological site and across the coastline of Bird's Nest (Plot 642).

The footpath is the favorite itinerary for strollers, lovers and fishermen. It starts on Armenia Street on Plot 642 and ends on Shamiyeh Pebble Beach. Recently strong storms have caused the deterioration of parts of the existing footpath, including the section that ran parallel to the coastline on Plot 642

The new walkway would also give the historic Bird's Nest Cemetery of Genocide Survivors its due value by affording it high visibility and accessibility, and by allowing direct access to the area designated as public domain from the walkway.





■ Pedestrian Walkway: ~750m
 PLOT 642 BOUNDARY
 ZONING BOUNDARY

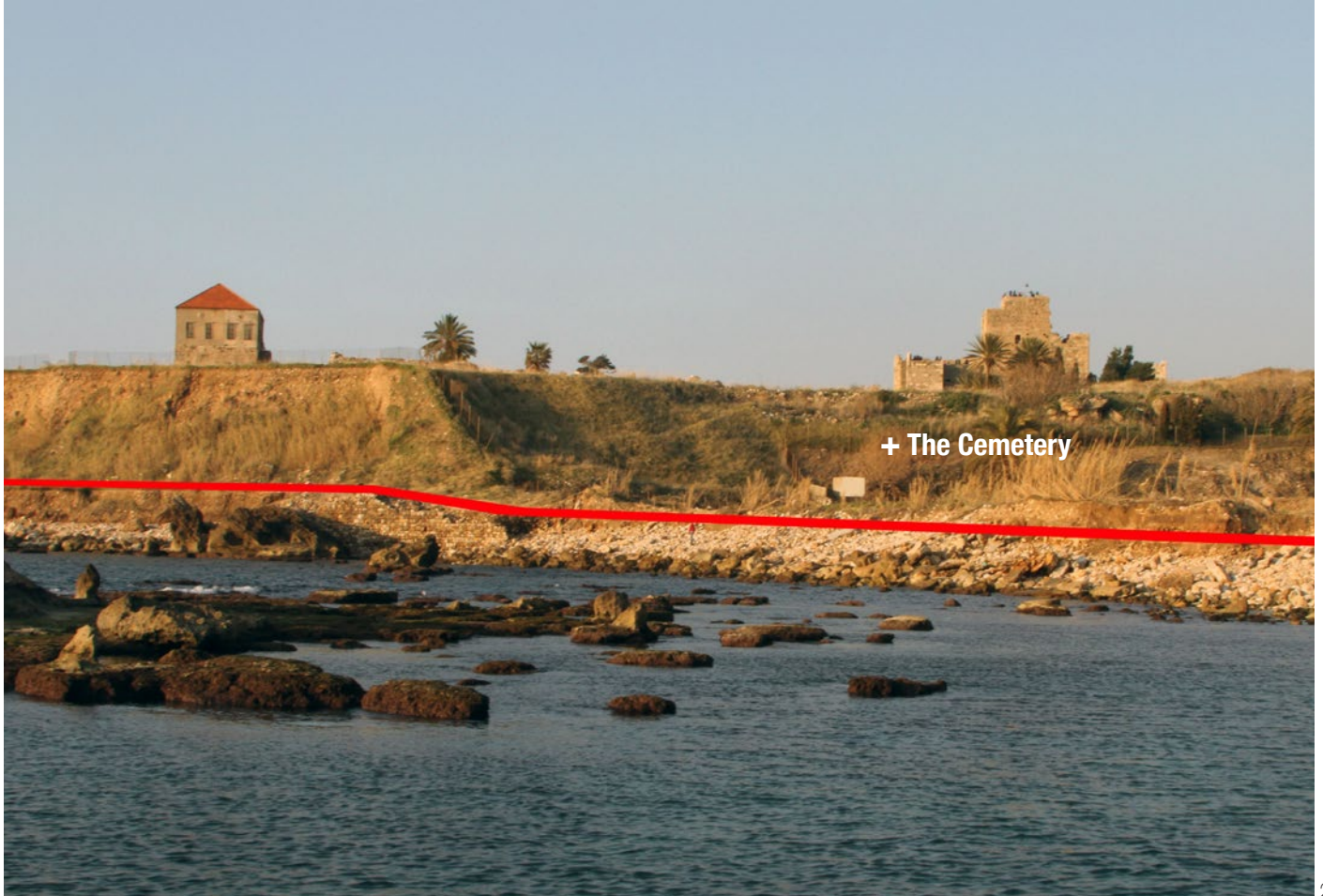
+ The Cemetery

ZONE D2P

ZONE E1IP MARINE

ZONE G1 PUBLIC DOMAIN

view towards South-East



+ The Cemetery

view towards North

The Armenian Neighbourhood

The Bird's Nest shares a 350m long border with the archeological site of the old city of Byblos. It also has a 200m waterfront facing al-Zireh rock.

Bird's Nest School has been serving as the only Armenian school, in Jbeil and its neighboring districts.

The students of the Bird's Nest have played football throughout most of the school's history, on a seven-a-side football pitch which organically came about, in front of Nicol Hall. Later on, the local Armenian community also joined the tradition of playing sunday football, making use of the pitch.

At the Northern main entrance of The Bird's Nest, sits a 200-year-old house. It was used as the main residence of the consecutive directors of the orphanage, it also housed a clinic on the ground floor. This building will host the Armenian Genocide Museum planned for completion in 2015.

The Bird's Nest school, which is referred to as the Armenian Orphanage, is located in *Ain al-Yasmin* (The Jasmine Spring) neighborhood, known for *al-Yasmin* spring that flows towards al-Zireh beach. The area was famously populated with banana fields and red prickly-pears. Since the 1940s locals began referring to the area as *Hay al-Arman* (The Armenian Neighborhood).

In the early 20th century, the Armenian community began burying their dead on a little hill looking over the southern section of the sand beach.

The beach was called *al-Raml* (The Sand) as well as *Bahr al-Arman* (The Sea of the Armenians). More recently it has become known by the names of the different resorts that were built along it: Paradise, Tam Tam, Eddé Sands, etc.

In 2013, the street leading to *Ain al-Yasmin* was officially named **Armenia Street**.

The Armenian Genocide Museum at the Bird's Nest

Due to open in 2015





The Bird's Nest School with the Crusader Citadel in the background.



The Bird's Nest with the blue dome of Khodr Mosque in the background.



view over the roof of Nicol Hall, showing *Bahr al-Arman*. The beach became the first burial ground for the Armenian community in Byblos.

Neighbourhood Key Locations

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Traditional House | 10. Armenian Genocide Museum |
| 2. Neolithic Houses | 11. Temple of the Obelisks |
| 3. Crusader Castle | 12. Roman Colonnade |
| 4. The Great Temple | 13. Roman Theatre |
| 5. Football Pitch | 14. Byblos Old Port |
| 6. Bird's Nest Cemetery | 15. Armenia Street |
| 7. Nicol Hall | 16. Shamiyeh Pebble Beach |
| 8. Bird's Nest School | 17. Zireh Beach |
| 9. Bird's Nest Dormitories | ■ Footpath |



Byblos Southern Coastline

Byblos Archeological Site

Cemetery of Genocide Survivors

The Diplomatic Club Exclusive Beach Resort planned on **The Bird's Nest**

Le Phenix de Byblos Beach Resort

Eddé Sands Beach Resort

Bay 183 Beach Resort

Byblos Sud Luxury Housing and Beach Resort

