



AMERICAN  
UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT  
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

SHEIKH ZAYED BIN SULTAN  
AL-NAHYAN CHAIR FOR ARABIC  
& ISLAMIC STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF  
HISTORY &  
ARCHAEOLOGY

# SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AND SCHOLARS

## LIFE ON THE EDGE OF EMPIRE IN EARLY ISLAMIC BEIRUT

### SPEAKER

## RANA MIKATI

Associate Professor of Islamic History,  
College of Charleston

Rana Mikati is associate professor of Islamic history at the College of Charleston. She received her PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago and trained as an archaeologist at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the University of Chicago, specializing in Islamic archaeology. Mikati's research focuses on the cultural and intellectual history of the eastern Mediterranean in the early medieval period, with particular interests in early Islamic frontiers, warfare, and material culture. Her book *Creating an Islamic City: Beirut, Jihad, and the Sacred* was published in March 2024. She is currently co-authoring a study of the manuscript dealer and publisher Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī (d. 1939) and the translocation of Islamic manuscripts in the wake of World War I.

**TUESDAY,  
OCTOBER 14,  
2025**

**6:00 PM  
AUDITORIUM A,  
WEST HALL**

### ABSTRACT

This talk explores the overlooked history of Beirut in the first two centuries of Islam, situating the city at the crossroads of empire, frontier defense, and religious memory. Beginning with its role as a naval base under the Umayyads, Beirut emerges as both a military outpost and an ascetic retreat where pietists sought refuge. With the arrival of the Abbasids to power, the jurist al-Awzā'ī (d. 774) settled in Beirut and left vivid testimonies of the hardships of frontier life and the legal dilemmas of coastal defense.

His students and successors in Beirut preserved his works, transmitted his rulings, and sustained local scholarly networks across multiple generations. In doing so, they also helped draw other scholars to the town, ensuring that Beirut remained a site of intellectual activity even as new centers of power shifted elsewhere. By the ninth century, *hadith* traditions celebrated Beirut as a site of *ribāṭ*, a practice that fused frontier defense with worship anchored in memories of companions like Salmān al-Fārisī.

Through the stories of soldiers, sailors, and scholars, Beirut appears not as a forgotten backwater but as a liminal city where empire met sea, and where the challenges of frontier life shaped Islamic law, piety, and memory.

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