



Nevertheless, in the wake of the work done by UMAM D&R, our intent in *Books from the Battlefield* is to challenge the platitudes (and hence, mainstream public opinion) which position the concepts of "war" and "culture" at opposite and irreconcilable ends of the spectrum. In this project, we attempt to elucidate the association between Lebanon and written works against the backdrop of war. In such an endeavor, UMAM D&R's vision has always been to ponder, contend with, and sometimes revise our recent history—even its most painful and shameful episodes—both openly and honestly. Indeed, only by doing so can we finally come to terms with this part of our "past." More specifically, *Books from the Battlefield* seeks to explore the role played by "cultural production" during the war (especially in book form), and the influence it may continue to exert in view of the recent spate of epiphanies as well as the physical and symbolic "reincarnations" of the war.

To these three broad categories, perhaps we need to add a fourth and vital class, which includes all of the literature that was *not* produced. In fact, while some episodes of the war were repeatedly emphasized and became “overproductive” in propaganda terms, others remain the “poor cousins” in a gesture of ongoing self-censorship! It is certainly evident that this unequal treatment needs to be remedied as much as it needs to be compensated.

This project aims to raise questions rather than suggest answers. It is nevertheless compelled to respond to certain queries. Indeed, at the barest minimum, one fundamental question must be answered: When does our framework start and finish? Does it begin on the afternoon of Sunday, April 13, 1975, in Beirut's southeast suburb Ain ar-Roummaneh? Alternatively, did it begin in earnest in Istanbul on another April 13th some 300 years earlier? This was the date on which Prince Fakhr al Din II was executed (as suggested by one of the battlefield books, the introduction to which—quite significantly—was dated April 13, 1977 and signed “A Lebanese veteran”). Clearly, it seems quite challenging, if not perfectly unreasonable, to search for an end to this long-running strife when we cannot pinpoint its absurd beginning!

While answering this seemingly existential question has heretofore proven impossible, avoiding the task altogether is neither acceptable nor realistic—it will continue to haunt us even if we pretend that there is no need to tackle the issue. Therefore, UMAM D&R has chosen to explore the “memories of the war” primarily through visual means. In this sense, this initiative seeks to do nothing more than open the door to an ongoing research and documentation project. In doing so, however, it extends a standing invitation to those who wish to join this most important and cathartic project.

It is also helpful to include a disclaimer so as to avoid some of the inevitable reproaches our endeavor might provoke. In this initiative, we do not pretend to undertake an exhaustive review of the war's literature, nor do we suggest that our investigation represents anything other than what is mentioned in the title of the exhibition. So let's consider this exhibition to be a tour through samples of literature. With this in mind, and like any tour being conducted by a well-prepared guide, we must expect to find his or her fingerprints on the objects being displayed!

*Books from the Battlefield – Featuring the War's Literature* marks the fifth official anniversary of UMAM D&R. It also highlights the completion of the first stage of UMAM D&R's "logistical" preparation and readiness improvements. These important changes will enable the organization to share its collection with a wider audience, including its growing archive of books, periodicals, other publications, and array of audiovisual material.

Given the weight of these programmatic enhancements, it is important to acknowledge and thank the institutions and organizations whose assistance made it possible for UMAM D&R to display and share the fruits of its efforts:

- The Beirut World Book Capital receives our sincere thanks for its contribution, which made this exhibition possible.
- Thanks go as well to the Norwegian Embassy in Beirut. Its grant allowed UMAM D&R to digitize and make available in an electronic format several thousand pages of literature and other important materials.
- Finally, we offer our thanks to the Danish Foreign Ministry for its gracious institutional grant. This permitted UMAM D&R to renovate one of the wings of The Hangar and designate it as a reading and multipurpose room.