



# Lebanon's Forgotten Space Program

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How often do children dream of becoming astronauts when they grow up? There is a universal fascination with space and Manoug Manougian of Lebanon was one of those youngsters with space exploration on his mind. The BBC spoke with Manougian about the 1960s Rocket Society he began at Haigazian College. In the report, we learn that:

50 years ago he and a group of students found themselves as space pioneers of the Arab world. Despite a shoestring budget, they developed a rocket capable of reaching the edge of space. The team of seven students refined their designs and rocket launches grew more ambitious. Each student was assigned a different aspect of the rocket and by April 1961 it could reach an altitude of 1,000 metres. The next rocket reached 2,000 metres. Word spread and the Lebanese military took an interest. They offered the services of Youssef Wehebe, a young lieutenant specialised in ballistics.

Military interest brought the initiative considerable attention within and outside of Lebanon. His little club "was regularly front page news in Lebanon. Every launch was accompanied by a glamorous party in Beirut. But as Manougian's profile grew, so did the level of unwanted attention. He suspected that foreign agents were monitoring his work and found that papers in his office were being disturbed overnight. Other Arab countries were keen to use his skills for their own weapons programmes." Ultimately, he felt the ambitions of the Rocket Society had been lost in the notoriety and attention their work garnered; he opted to give up the society and chose an academic career in the United States.

The article notes that, "it has only been since the release of a documentary film that interest in Manougian's exploits has been revived and today he is keen that history notes the small part Lebanon



The rockets were named after the cedar tree, Lebanon's national emblem. BBC.

played in the space race.”

Much of the archival material of the Rocket Society was lost or destroyed in the Civil War.

The full article, *Lebanon's forgotten space programme*, from November 14, 2013 by Richard Hooper is **available here**. A more recent report was written for Smithsonian.com: read “The Bizarre Tale of the Middle East's First Space Program”

**here.**

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