

PART I

The Clarion of Syria

The Context

CHAPTER I

The War of 1860

Roots and Ramifications

JENS HANSEN AND HICHAM SAFIEDDINE

The idea of an independent Lebanon stretching back to early Ottoman times has more to do with the work of historians than with geographical or social givens of history. From the Maronite patriarch Istifan al-Duwayhi (1629–1704) to prominent scholar Kamal Salibi (1929–2011), historians of Lebanon have focused on the Druze-Maronite rivalry as one of the primordial driving forces behind the crystallization of modern Lebanon. Two formative periods according to this narrative were the reign of Fakhr al-Din II al-Maʿani (1572–1635) and the later Shihabi emirate (1789–1840). This approach wrote out of Lebanon's history ruling families of other denominations and the populations of the areas surrounding what became Mt. Lebanon in the late eighteenth century.¹ Only recently has the rule of Shi'a vassals such as the Hamadas in the northern districts of Mt. Lebanon been studied critically.² It lasted, unevenly, for much of the seventeenth century and finally ended when the Ottoman army marched against the Hamadas in 1693–94 and forced them to retreat to the Beka' Valley in the east and Bilad Bishara in

the south. The Shihabi emirs stepped into this political void, encouraged Maronite settlement in Kisrawan, and built an effective tax-collecting statelet for the Druze and Maronite notability. Privileging the Druze-Maronite rivalry has also obscured the socioeconomic integration and political overlap between the coastal and mountainous regions and the rest of Syria, or Bilad al-Sham. The relative autonomy of Shihabi-ruled Mt. Lebanon was no exception in what Albert Hourani memorably labeled the golden age of the Ottoman politics of notables in the eighteenth century. The emirate coexisted alongside al-‘Azm family-rule in Damascus and Zahir al-‘Umar’s and Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar’s reign in Acre.³

Nabda-era historians consecrated the *Sonderweg* narrative of an independent Shihabi emirate. For example, Nasif al-Yaziji’s historical treatise on the feudal conditions of Mt. Lebanon completed in 1833, elided the wider Ottoman context of Bilad al-Sham, and equally ignored Mt. Lebanon’s past as home to other confessional denominations and those ruling elites that were neither Druze nor Maronite.⁴ In turn, the narrative of al-Yaziji (1801–71) influenced Tannus Shidyaq’s monumental dynastic history of notable families, *Akbbār al-a‘yan fi Jabal Lubnan*, which Butrus al-Bustani edited and published in 1859.⁵ There was nothing particularly nationalist *or* sectarian about the “feudal conditions” that either al-Yaziji or Tannus Shidyaq sketched for Mt. Lebanon. But their narrative enshrined the idea of Mt. Lebanon as an organic, if contested, territorial unit and “imagined principality” of Shihabi rule. What is less emphasized in this literature is that the structural and class-based seeds of the civil war of 1860 were sown during Shihabi rule.⁶

MOUNTAIN EMIRS AND MOUNTING CONFLICTS

When the Ottomans defeated the Mamluk army at Marj Dabiq, north of Aleppo, in 1516, they established their civil and military administration of Bilad al-Sham around three, later four, provincial capitals: Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli, and Saida. Over time, the provinces were parceled out into emirates and granted to military clients in charge of tax collection. The early seventeenth century witnessed shifting alliances and rivalries over Ottoman tax concessions and in pursuit of territorial expansion. Eventually, the conniving Druze emir of the Shuf mountains, Fakhr al-Din II Ma'ani, sought military and financial assistance from Italian city-states and the Vatican to self-enrich and secede from Ottoman rule. Originally granted tax-farming rights by the Ottomans, Fakhr al-Din II developed his own tax base through recruiting hitherto reclusive Maronites as tax collectors—some of them recent converts from Shi'ism. He also wove out trade ties with Italian merchants and opened his realm to Jesuit and other Catholic missionaries. When his power grew to include the mountain and coastal areas, thereby threatening Ottoman authority, the imperial government treated him as a rebel. Following his capture and later execution in 1633, his tax concessions either reverted to old rivals, like the Harfushs of the Kisrawan district, or to smaller upstart families like the Shihabis of Wadi al-Taym. The latter would replace the Ma'anis as the major ruling house of Mt. Lebanon in the late eighteenth century.⁷ Emir Bashir II al-Shihabi (1767–1850) ruled over the intricate web of kinship loyalties extending across Mt. Lebanon for over fifty years. Nominally under the authority of the Ottoman governor in Acre and later under Egypt's General Ibrahim Pasha, Bashir

II managed to shift the balance of power away from Istanbul. His rule was sustained by the wealth and power of landed families, but the financial pressures on this system grew exponentially as the Ottoman governors in Acre demanded ever-higher taxes from him only to be passed on to the peasants.

European and Ottoman rivalry deeply affected the social, political, and economic order of Mt. Lebanon before and during Bashir II's reign. The Ottoman empire was forced to make unprecedented concessions to the other European powers in the peace treaty with Russia at Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. Subsequent military incursions from Egypt strengthened the Ottoman government's commitment to local power dynasties in Acre and Damascus. Short military campaigns by Russia in Beirut (1772 and 1774) and France in Egypt (1798) and Palestine (1800–01) brought European interests in the region menacingly close. But the greatest challenge to the Shihabi regime came from peasant uprisings.⁸ In 1821, thousands of predominantly Christian but also Druze commoners from the Kisrawan and Matn regions gathered north of Beirut to refuse the emir's tax demands. Squeezed between popular resistance and a hostile Ottoman governor in Saida, Emir Bashir II fled to the Hawran region. However, his rivals were unable to capitalize on Bashir's exile. Instead, the allied Jumblat forces crushed the uprising and confiscated its leaders' belongings. Bashir II was pardoned and returned to his palace in Bait al-Din.⁹ Four years later, the emir had the Druze leader and erstwhile ally Bashir Jumblat killed and distributed the latter faction's lands to the Maronite church and notables, and "for the first time in the history of the Emirate, Christian officials nearly monopolized the highest political positions."¹⁰

During this period, the thriving silk trade in the largely Druze-populated Shuf Mountains had brought about a large-scale, southbound Maronite labor migration. Druze notables began to seek the council and scribal services of Christians. Some Druze and Muslims converted to Christianity, including members of the ruling Shihabi dynasty. In fact, until the Egyptian invasion in 1831, there was a widely tolerated and officially sanctioned confessional ambivalence.¹¹ Emir Bashir II's own religious affiliation depended on the context in which he found himself. European travelers to Mt. Lebanon expressed exasperation at the indeterminacy of the emir's "true belief." One British traveler complained that Bashir II had "a religion to suit the place he may be in; when he comes down to Beirut, he goes to the mosque; but in the mountain he is always a Christian."¹² The increased sectarian incitement of foreign powers coupled with the introduction of principles of equality among Ottoman subjects made such ambivalence untenable and exacerbated class and religious divisions leading up to civil strife and outright rebellion.

REFORM AND REBELLION

From 1831 to 1840, Egypt occupied Bilad al-Sham and subjected the population to a series of centralizing reforms. General Ibrahim Pasha established greater public security and opened up society and the economy to European merchant capital.¹³ He also took the fateful measure of drafting Christians to suppress Druze revolts, thereby effectively turning shifting factional tensions into increasingly fixed religious enmity. While Bashir II "was a contented master in a gilded cage," the commoners felt the crunch of "taxation, conscription, disarmament, deforestation,

and *corvée* labour.”¹⁴ On June 8, 1840, commoners from all denominations gathered to declare open revolt against Egyptian rule. The meeting in Antilyas, as *Nafir Suriyya* reminded its readers, was noticeable not only for its cross-communal alliance but also because the rebels got their leaders to speak in the name of the people, liberty, and Ottoman legitimacy.¹⁵

The days of Shihabi rule were numbered when a British-Austrian naval attack a little later in 1840 ousted the Egyptian army and exiled the aging emir to Malta. The periodic outbreaks of communal violence in 1841, 1844, and 1860 as well as the Maronite peasant uprising against their Maronite landlords of 1858–59 drew European powers into two decades of conflict over the geographical, demographic, and administrative contours of Mt. Lebanon. The Maronite patriarch, his bishops, and French Catholic circles in particular echoed one another’s myths about the inviolable “privileges and traditions” of the Maronite community and the historical connections—if not “blood ties”—between the latter and the French. Many Lebanese nationalists were later to accept as a given the chimera of Christian entitlement to Mt. Lebanon that emerged only during this mutual mirroring between French and Maronite Church claims.¹⁶ At the time, the French-Maronite project faced a number of obstacles, however. Not only did the French government subordinate it to the larger concerns of the Eastern Question but the Maronite community itself was deeply split over the future of Mt. Lebanon. Moreover, the Ottoman government, backed by the British, sought to integrate Mt. Lebanon into a reorganized Bilad al-Sham and to balance the Maronites’ political ambition with support for the Druze notables, especially the returning landlords whose authority Emir Bashir II had usurped. A battle of petitions ensued in which Ottomans

and local leaders tried to buttress their visions with representations of “popular sentiments.”¹⁷

Conflicting claims were compounded by different interpretations of the Ottoman reform discourse that had been inaugurated by the Gülhane Decree of 1839. Partially because of the Ottoman decree’s invocation of equality, Maronite commoners felt entitled to challenge the traditional authority of the Druze landlords, who in turn rejected the notion of equality and insisted on their obedience. In 1841, a seemingly innocuous dispute over hunting rights in a village near the prosperous mixed town of Dayr al-Qamar led to an attack by armed Druze men. The incident eviscerated Ma’ani and Shihabi practices of cooperation between Druze landed elites and the Maronite Church. Ottoman and European schemes to resolve this new crisis were based on the assumption that it was an outburst of primordial enmity and designed to suit the interests of these powers. The compromise outcome was the administrative reorganization of Mt. Lebanon along communal lines in 1842 and 1845, which some historians have identified as the first institutionalization of the modern phenomenon of sectarianism.¹⁸

The international compromise that prevailed from 1845 to 1858—the *dual qaimaqamate*—saw the northern mountain range administered by a Maronite notable, the southern mountains by a Druze notable, and the mixed districts by a representative of minority populations, under the general authority of the Ottoman governor in Saida. This complicated arrangement satisfied neither those who felt their social power eroding nor the peasants who felt emboldened by the reformist discourse of representation and started challenging the authority of their masters.

The popular uprising in the Kisrawan district of 1858–59 was the peasants’ response to the *dual qaimaqamate*. Under the

leadership of Tanyus Shahin, a muleteer from the village of Rayfun, hundreds of armed Maronite commoners drove the coconfessional Khazin *muqata'jis* out of their districts and looted their residences. What distinguished this uprising from previous ones was that the rebels appropriated the Ottoman reform discourse to challenge the social hierarchy by mobilizing their faith for political purposes and against a notable family of the same faith-based community.¹⁹ Between 1841 and 1858, then, the burgeoning idea of an autonomous Mt. Lebanon replaced the “feudal order”—still upheld by al-Yaziji and Tannus al-Shidyahq—with a new conception of social equality and political representation.

In May 1860, a few hundred rebels crossed the al-Kalb River heading south, where, they conjectured, their fellow Maronite peasants needed protection from Druze overlords. The appearance of bands of well-armed men in the mixed district of Matn inflamed an already tense situation.²⁰ Most scholars today agree that the skirmishes of the last week in May started the all-out civil war in Mt. Lebanon and were caused by Christian attacks on Druze villages. Within days the fighting spread to Wadi al-Taym, where seventeen Shihabi family members were hunted down and murdered, and to the Jezzín district, where fifteen hundred Christian residents were killed. Many more fled to the coastal city of Saida and to the town of Hasbaya at the foot of Mt. Hermon, where a further massacre of unarmed Christians occurred in early June. In mid-June, the city of Zahleh, in the northern Beka' Valley, fell to Druze forces.²¹ On June 21, Dayr al-Qamar was sacked long after its inhabitants had surrendered and an estimated two thousand Christians were massacred.²²

SECTARIAN ORDERS, IMPERIAL PACIFICATIONS, AND
PATRIOTIC VISIONS

News of the civil war in Mt. Lebanon and Damascus traveled fast to Europe and beyond. France was quickest to respond. Paris dispatched an army of six thousand soldiers under General de Beaufort d'Hautpoul, whose mission was to punish the Druze victors and revive what Carol Hakim described as the "Franco-Lebanese dream" of Christian sovereignty. General de Beaufort adopted the Maronite clergy's position, expressed forcefully by the Bishop of Saida and Butrus al-Bustani's avuncular nemesis 'Abdallah al-Bustani (1780–1866). The latter informed Napoleon III that "the French expedition has come to Syria to protect the Christians and deliver them from oppression and tyranny."²³

But de Beaufort had to contend with his own government, which had a more comprehensive view of the problem, as well as with the skillful Ottoman special envoy, Fu'ad Pasha, who was determined to nip European military intervention in the bud. Fu'ad Pasha's pacification policy, too, singled out the Druze leadership, including Bashir Jumblat's son, Sa'id Bey, as the main culprit, and had them hanged or exiled. Compared to Ottoman interventions of the earlier times, which the old mantra "let bygones be bygones" best exemplified, Fu'ad Pasha sought to mark a clean break with the past.²⁴ Significantly, he had a postwar vision for Bilad al-Sham as a whole, a vision that the young British representative on the International Commission of Inquiry, Lord Dufferin, shared when he declared that

As a general rule when you have to deal with a large population differing in their religious opinions, but perfectly assimilated in language and manners and habits of thought, the principle of fusion rather than that of separation is the one to be adopted. Religious beliefs ought not be converted into a geographical expression, and a wise government would insist upon the various subject sects subordinating their polemical to their civil relations with one another.³⁵

In this immediate and urgent context, *Nafir Suriyya*'s narrative sided with Fu'ad Pasha and Lord Dufferin against the Franco-Lebanese vision in general and against Bishop 'Abdallah al-Bustani in particular. Effectively, Butrus al-Bustani called out the bishop's Maronite victimology.³⁶ As our translation in part 2 shows, *Nafir Suriyya* also partially adopted al-Yaziji's and Tannus Shidyaq's version of history, according to which the Druze-Maronite consensus held together the particular communal and feudal mixture of the region's time-honored system of rule. The underlying engine of this history was family factionalism, which, as al-Bustani reiterated, went back to the rivalry between northern Arabian (Qaysi) and southern Arabian (Yamani) settlement in Bilad al-Sham during the Arab conquest. al-Bustani, however, recast this condition as a liability where his predecessors saw in it an asset. He acknowledged in *Nafir Suriyya* that the civil war in 1860 was not an isolated mountain affair but affected Bilad al-Sham as a whole. As we will argue in the last chapter of part 1, the title *Nafir Suriyya* gestured toward this wider geographical context and raised the idea that it was the shared experience of civil war that bound all people in Bilad al-Sham together as "Syrians" in an affective community of "compatriots" under the sign of Ottoman sovereignty. al-Bustani's own life trajectory, to which the next chapter turns, embodied this vision with all its promises and pitfalls.