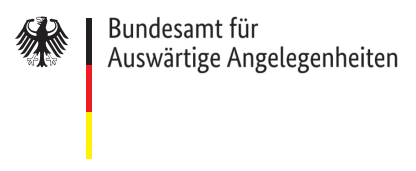
History of the Shia Community in Lebanon

From the Mysterious Past to the Unknown Future

Part One:

From Emergence until 1959



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Part One: From Emergence until 1959

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Documentation & Research

Bundesamt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten

A Cross Section of a History
The Shia Community in Lebanon

تواريخُ مُتَقاطِعَة
حِصّة الشيعة منها فِي لبنان

UMAM Documentation and Research (UMAM D&R) is undertaking a history project in Lebanon entitled A Cross Section of a History. This project will create a space to explore and deepen understanding of the socio-political histories of specific communities within Lebanon - including the Shia, among others - to trace and explore their historical dynamics until today. Micro-level histories of individuals, families, and towns in Lebanon will be addressed, out of the belief that examination of these various histories will show the mosaic of personal and collective experiences of communities in Lebanon over history.

The title of the project "a cross section of a history" embodies this mission: by focusing on specific elements of Lebanon's collective, cacophonous history, we aim to illuminate unique and collective dynamics, identities, and transformations that help to explain the Lebanon we are seeing today. This project aims to directly engage with community members around Lebanon and in the diaspora, as well as academics and experts. The outputs of the project will be a research report and collections of archival material.

Documentation & Research

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Introduction

The seventh century AD witnessed the expansion of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula in various directions, leading to its entry into Lebanon. Over time, various Islamic sects emerged, each having a presence in different regions, including the Shia, who themselves divided into several groups, among them the Twelver (Imamiyyah) Shia. Although the times of the initial spread of Shia groups outside Lebanon are clear and well-documented in historical sources, their emergence in Lebanon are not as evident, despite the dominance of traditional narratives that attributing their period of spread to the arrival of the companion (Sahābiy) Abu Dharr al-Ghifari.

In contrast, the tenth century brought greater clarity in the emergence of major Shia population centers in the cities of Tripoli and Tyre (Sur) and their surroundings, with periods of independent governance during specific time frames and in specific areas such as the regions of the Beqaa, Baalbek, Jezzine, and Mount Lebanon. However, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed significant demographic changes among Shia populations, and communities along the coast, in general, were susceptible to displacement during this period. The first wave of displacement occurred after the fall of a large part of the coastal region to

the Crusaders, while the second wave followed the later capture by the Mamluks, prompting the Shia communities to migrate inward.

Under Mamluk rule, the fourteenth century witnessed two tragedies for the Shia in Lebanon. The first, at the commencement of the century, was with their displacement from Keserwan, and the second, at the end of the century, concluded with the assassination of Muhammad ibn Makki, the "First Martyr," also called Al-Jizzini, who was in the process of formulating a project aimed at unifying the community. .

During the Ottoman era in the region that began in the early sixteenth century, the Shia in Lebanon were primarily concentrated in three geographical areas: Jabal Amel, the Bekaa Valley, and Mount Lebanon. In these three regions, Shia families ruled as feudal lords, and their appointment was mandatory by the Ottoman authorities in exchange for tax collection, maintaining security, and other obligations. These families engaged in conflicts among themselves and with adherents of other sects, often requiring Ottoman intervention. This situation persisted, marked by fluctuations, until the eighteenth century, which was characterized by a defeat and weakening of the Shia position, especially in Mount Lebanon and Jabal Amel.

During the Egyptian rule of the country from 1830 to 1840, the Shia found themselves compelled to position themselves within the Ottoman framework for various reasons. With the departure of the Egyptians from the country, they hoped to return to the pre-eighteenth-century reality as a reward. However, they collided with numerous realistic factors that posed obstacles to their aspirations. This included legal barriers resulting from the Ottoman regulations aimed at modernizing the state and meeting the conditions of the West, who supported them in their wars against Russia.

Thus, starting from the mid-nineteenth century, the Shia

of Lebanon became administratively divided between the Double Qa'im Maqamate, then under the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate, and the traditional mandatory system. However, there were some centralizations and updates among the Shia in Jabal Amel. Additionally, there was direct Ottoman rule in Baalbek, involving the dismantling of Harfush authority and the abolition of the Emirate, transforming it into a district. As a result, the ruling Shia families lost many of their privileges, and their regions incurred a diminishment in their autonomy.

After the withdrawal of the Ottomans in 1918, the fall of the country under French mandate in 1920, and the declaration of Greater Lebanon, the Shia emerged as a fundamental community after the incorporation of various geographic areas into the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate. In 1926, they obtained a formal recognition that they had lacked throughout their history. Since their inclusion in the emerging state, and with initial differences in their stance towards it, until the end of the fifth decade of the twentieth century the Shia in Lebanon went through various political challenges, including purely local issues and those linked to the regional context. Over time, the natural political process of their socio-political movement led the sect towards the maturity of the appropriate opportunity for political transformation until the arrival of Musa al-Sadr in 1959.

The chronological framework of this researchencompasses the period from the Arab Islamic conquest of the region in the seventh century AD to the end of the fifth decade of the twentieth century, passing through the stages of the Double Qa'im Maqamate, the French mandate, and then independence. This research was conducted to shed light on the mentioned historical periods. This research encountered various difficulties, including issues related to the diversity of biases among some writers and incidental technical challenges: the first challenge was

overcome by avoiding reliance on texts that express judgments or positions, yet the second remained an imposition to the research. This study primarily followed a historical methodology based on narrating events related to the subject, tracing its development, and examining its impacts across different chronological stages. Additionally, the research occasionally employed a descriptive methodology, which involved describing phenomena horizontally within the same period, as well as a comparative methodology, which relies on comparisons across different times and places. This was done based on contemporary sources of events and later works in various political, cultural, social, economic, and other fields. The research is structured into an introduction, eight chapters, a conclusion, and a summary.

Summary

This research examines the history of Shia in Lebanon from its inception to the arrival of Musa al-Sadr. The following observations and conclusions can be presented regarding the period covered in this research.

● The historical presence of Shia in Lebanon is subject to various opinions despite the dominance of a specific narrative on this matter.

● The Shia in Lebanon were not always predominantly associated with the Twelver Imami sect, which constitutes the majority of Shia in the country today. In fact, the Ismaili presence had a significant influence during certain periods.

● After the end of Fatimid rule and until the era of the Double Qa'im Maqamate, the Shia predominantly came under Sunni rule.

● The Mamluk campaigns on Keserwan and the accompanying displacement of the Shia towards other regions played a significant role in strengthening their presence in the new areas.

● Ambiguity surrounds the Mamluk killing of the "First Martyr," and the incident involves intertwining religious and political causes. The same applies to the "Second Martyr."

● The Ottoman era witnessed the rise of feudal families at the expense of religious figures. These families, in commitment to their agreements with the Ottoman rulers, were able to shape the history of the Shia during that period.

● The eighteenth century brought a Nakba, catastrophe, for the Shia, ending a long chapter of their self-rule under the Ottoman Empire.

● After the Egyptian rule ended , the Shia of Mount Lebanon came under the system of the Double Qa'im Maqamate, while the Shia in the regions of Jabal Amel and the Bekaa were under direct Ottoman rule.

● The Shia did not have a unified stance regarding the Christian-Druze sectarian strife that swept the country in the mid-nineteenth century. Instead, positions changed based on the circumstances of each group and its interests.

● The Shia leadership during this period was traditional, and the bold attempt to break this pattern by establishing party leaderships failed.

● The Shia were sharply divided over joining Greater Lebanon, leaving a significant impact on their later stance towards the Arab revolution.

● The Twelver Shia received official recognition as an independent sect after being initially considered on the sidelines of Islam.

● While it is true that the Shia division suffered marginalization starting with the establishment of Greater Lebanon, this description of later stages appears exaggerated compared to the circumstances accompanying the Shia's accession and their specific internal conditions. However, it cannot be ignored that during this time, the political process of the sect was not yet complete.

● The Twelver Shia's successful position between

maintaining good relations with France and advocating for independence, along with their demographic proportion, resulted in their official recognition as an essential component in the new state by being granted the position of the tPresidency of the Parliament. The Shia thus became one of the elements of the Lebanese formula that emerged from the National Pact.

● The Twelver Shia played a prominent role during the local complications that hit Lebanon in the 1950s, and they were also affected by the regional complexities' impacts on the country.

● The arrival of Musa al-Sadr to Lebanon, after his years in Iran and Iraq, was not independent of the local and regional situations and their complexities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has examined the political history of the Shia in Lebanon from its beginning to the arrival of Musa al-Sadr. The first chapter covers fundamental definitions related to the title of Shia and their divisions. The second chapter delves into their history from the time of the Arab Islamic conquests to the Mamluk era in the mid-thirteenth century, presenting their beginnings as a doctrine and detailing their circumstances during subsequent periods. The third chapter addresses the Shia reality up to the early Ottoman era, focusing on the Mamluk campaigns on Keserwan and the role of the "First Martyr." The fourth chapter discusses the Shia reality leading up to the Double Qa'im Maqamate period, shedding light primarily on the roles of traditional Shia families and their relationship with authority and other procurators, as well as their positions regarding Egyptian rule.
The fifth chapter addresses the time span from the Double Qa'im Maqamate and the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate era until the establishment of Greater Lebanon. It reveals the differing political and administrative circumstances for the Shia in Jabal Amel, Mount Lebanon, and the Beqaa region. It also highlights the diversity of perspectives regarding "Greater Lebanon" among the supporters and advocates of the Arab project and accompanied by the military accidents attached to it. The sixth chapter covers the period from the establishment of Greater Lebanon to

independence and French withdrawal, the witnessing the official recognition of the Shia division, the fading demands of supporters of the Arab project after the French treaties with Syria and Lebanon, and the acknowledgment by some Shia political and religious elites of Lebanese identity as a factual reality. This broke the ice between Shia opponents of Greater Lebanon and their engagement in official institutions.

The seventh chapter sheds light on the stage from independence and until 1959, during which the Shia emerged as a pillar of the National Pact, Shia parties appeared, and members of the sect played a role in the crises that hit Lebanon, especially in 1952 and 1958. This section concludes with the arrival of Musa al-Sadr and his relationship with President Fouad Chehab.

As for the eighth and final chapter, it presents an overview of Shia political figures who successively held parliamentary and ministerial positions and presided over the Parliament.

In conclusion, this research hopes to shed light, to the best of its ability, on the emergence, history, and political process of the Shia in Lebanon during this long period. It has striven to have added new insights, especially in contentious topics, moving away from dominant narrative traditions.