

Geography and Demography of the Lebanese Shia

From Finding Stability
to Guided Expansion

Geography and Demography of the Lebanese Shia

From Finding Stability
to Guided Expansion

Researcher: **Mahmoud Hemadi**

Editor: **Sawssan Abou-Zahr**

Documentation: **Abbas Hadla**

General Supervision: **Monika Borgmann, Ali Mansour**

A Cross Section of a History The Shia Community in Lebanon

تواريخٌ مُتَقاطعةٌ حصّة الشيعة منها في 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.



Beirut, 2023
Tel: +961 1 553604
P.O. Box: 25-5 Ghobeiry, Beirut - Lebanon
www.umam-dr.org | www.memoryatwork.org



Bundesamt für
Auswärtige Angelegenheiten

German Federal Foreign Office

The views expressed herein belong solely to the writer.
The contents of this book do not reflect the opinions or organizational perspectives held by the German Federal Foreign Office.
This book was produced and published thanks to financial support from the German Federal Foreign Office.

Table of Contents

Introduction	9
1 - Lebanon: The Naming of the Country and its Impact on Geography	13
2 - The Beginnings and their Controversies	15

Chapter 1: The Shia in Northern Lebanon

1- Origin of the Shia in the North	25
2- The Renaissance of the Shia Principality in Tripoli	29
3- Causes of Shia Retreat in the North	35
4- Modest Persistent of the Shia Presence in the North	40

Chapter 2: The Shia in Mount Lebanon and Beirut

1- Emergence of the Shia in Mount Lebanon	45
2- Temporary Exodus from Mount Lebanon	50
A. Causes	55
B. Targets of Campaigns: Continuous Sectarian Debate	60
C. Consequences of Campaigns: Majority Displacement, Transformation, and Caution	65
3- The Shia in Mount Lebanon at the End of the Mamluk Era	70
4- The Shia in Mount Lebanon at the Beginning of the Ottoman Era: Continued Return, Feudalism, and Village Reconstruction	75

5- Al-Hamade Dynasty and Commitment to the Ottomans	80
6- Decline in Mount Lebanon: Weakening Commitment and Population	85
7- Shia in Mount Lebanon under the Double Qa'im Maqamate System	90
A. Administrative Organization	95
B. Druze Qa'im Maqamate and Shiite Villages	100
C. Demographic Estimates and the Shia	105
D. The Christian Qa'im Maqamate and Shiite Villages	110
E. Demographic Estimates and the Shia	115
8- The Shia during the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate	120
A. Administrative Organization	125
B. Mutasarrifate Boundaries	130
C. Mutasarrifate Districts and Shia Villages	135
D. Demographic Estimates and the Shia	140
9- Geography of the Shia at the Beginning of Greater Lebanon	145
10- Beirut's Southern Suburbs in the Past	150
11- Major Waves of Migration to the Beirut Suburbs	155
12- Civil War and Demographic Changes in the Beirut Suburbs	
13- End of the Civil War and Solidification of Shia Presence in the Southern Suburbs	160
14- Inhabitants of the Southern Suburbs: Different Estimates	165
15- Shia Geography in the Southern Suburbs: From the Embrace of Amal Movement to the Embrace of Hezbollah	170
16- The Shia and the Southern Coast: Demographic Variation and Authority	180
17- The Shia in the City of Beirut	185
A. Tracing Modest Beginnings	190
B. Early 20th Century: The Shia in Beirut of Greater Lebanon	195
C. The Shia Presence from the Late 1940s to the Present	200

D. The Shia as Voters, Concerns Linked to Demographic Shifts	205
--	-----

Chapter 3: The Shia in Southern Lebanon

1- Borders and Naming	210
2- Origins and Beginnings	215
3- The Shia in Coastal Jabal Amel until the Ottoman Era	220
4- The Shia in Internal Jabal Amel until the Ottoman Era	225
5- Jabal Amel in the Ottoman Era: Shia Population Stability and the Jezzine Exception	230
6- The Shia in Jabal Amel during the Double Qa'im Maqamate and Mutasarrifate	235
7- End of the Ottoman Era: Population and the World War I	240
8- Greater Lebanon: Southern Lebanon's Administrative Divisions and Statistics	245
9- Emigration of Southerners with the Emergence of Greater Lebanon	250
10- The South After 1948: Arena of War, Emigration, and Displacement	255
11- Border Strip and its Shiite Villages	260
12- Villages in the Vortex of Destruction, Displacement, and Deliberate Demographic Change	265

Chapter 4: The Shia in the Bekaa

1- Borders and Beginnings	270
2- The Shia until the Emergence of Harfush Dynasty at the End of the Mamluk Era	275
3- Harfush Dynasty and Commitment: Strengthening and Stabilizing Geography until the End of the Ottoman Era	280
4- Bekaa within Greater Lebanon: Administrative Divisions and Shiite Villages	285
5- Migration from the Bekaa	290

6- Bekaa's Clan Settlement Structure	295
Conclusion	301
Appendices	303
Maps	305
Bibliography List	307
Image Sources and References	309

Introduction

The geography of habitation, migration, and displacement holds a prominent position in the collective consciousness of human communities. It plays a crucial role in shaping their identity, defining them, and molding the places they inhabit. This research focuses on the milestones in the relationship between the Shia in Lebanon and residential areas, migration, displacement, conflicts over land, and their proportion within the overall population, as these have significant political and social implications for the community. Therefore, shedding light on these aspects and delving into their details is essential for understanding the current state of the Shia community in Lebanon. Furthermore, this is an area that often does not receive as much attention compared to political, religious, and cultural historical analysis of the community, rendering it more vital to undertake this research.

Throughout the different historical periods that played fundamental roles in the formation of the Shia community in Lebanon, there have been central milestones that left a lasting impact on the collective Shia consciousness in Lebanon. These include the introduction of Shiism to Lebanon; displacement and

persecution in Tripoli and Koura; conflicts between committed Shiites, other sectarian communities, and the Ottomans in their respective regions; the consequences of these conflicts on the population structure in Mount Lebanon; the migration of Shia communities towards Beirut and its suburbs; and the wars with Israel, accompanied by occupation and displacement.

The geographical framework of this research revolves around the geography inhabited by Shias in Lebanon over the ages. The chronological framework extends from the emergence of this community in Lebanon to the present day. Based on this, the chosen research path provides a presentation predominantly focused on monitoring the geography inhabited by the Shia in Lebanon throughout history. It covers the four regions that constitute Lebanon: the north, Mount Lebanon and the capital of Beirut, the South, and the Bekaa. Regarding the research framework, it is divided into an introduction, a preface, four chapters, a conclusion, and a summary. These chapters have allocated specific sections to the regions comprising Lebanon that witnessed the presence and experiences of this Shia community, always starting from their inception phase.

The first chapter addresses the demographic reality of the Shia in northern Lebanon, shedding light on their presence there and progressing to the stage of the community's decline in the region. Its presence reached a level of scarcity and diminished impact in subsequent historical periods, extending from the Crusader era to the present day. The second chapter examines the Shia presence in the Mount Lebanon region, dedicating ample space to significant geographic transformations initiated by the Keserwan campaigns and their demographic impact. It also

explores the decline of the commitment of Shia followers in the mountain during the Ottoman period and its resulting demographic effects. Furthermore, it traces the substantial transformations in terms of Shia presence in the mountain, coinciding with the influx of displaced populations to Beirut and its suburbs, leading to the formation of labor neighborhoods in its eastern parts of the capital, and extending to the changes affecting its southern suburbs. The third chapter delves into Southern Lebanon along its coast and inland, an area that has relatively maintained its Shia population stability since the tenth century. The situation is similar in the Bekaa Valley, the area examined in the fourth chapter.

The research methodology is primarily based on a historical approach, relying on collecting data from authentic sources and later references within specific temporal and spatial boundaries. This research aimed to present a maximum number of different event narratives and avoided interfering with the historical accounts as presented by historians and narrators, except when necessary. It also utilized analytical and critical methods where deemed necessary.

As for the challenges faced during this research, they were mainly related to population statistics and estimations. These were not naturally available for periods before the early Ottoman era, and therefore this research employed analysis and estimation methods based on narratives and accounts provided by historians, travelers, and observers. For later periods, the beginning of the Ottoman era helped by providing tax records, although this source disappeared later with the Ottoman policy of transferring tax collection to committed families. This continued until the issue of Lebanon as an entity was raised in the 19th century, accompanying sectarian challenges in Mount

Lebanon. The research re-evaluated population estimates associated with the political organization during the Double Qa'im Maqamate and the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate periods, as well as the issue of preparing for the establishment of Greater Lebanon. It is important to note the potential subjectivity and bias in these numbers and estimations, as they were linked to direct political goals and often subjected to the estimates of researchers associated primarily with Western decision-making centers, some of whom held military ranks in their armies. After 1932, the date of the last official census, population estimates dominated the scene, and therefore caution must be exercised around relying on these numbers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research highlighted the demographic transformations of the Shia population in Lebanon throughout different eras, starting from the controversial origins of their presence in the country to the present day. It paid special attention to the subject of their emergence, presenting contrasting theories in each region at the beginning of each chapter. The research first covered the reality of Shia in north Lebanon, emphasizing the beginnings of their presence and their significant influence during the era of the Emirate of Banu Ammar, eventually leading to the decline of their presence and limited remaining settlements. The research then addressed the demographic dynamics and geopolitical significance, focusing on the Shia presence in Mount Lebanon and Beirut from its inception to the present day. It explored demographic, political, sectarian, and security-oriented shifts, delving into key historical milestones such as the campaigns in Keserwan which were accompanied by displacement and the creation of a Shia concentration elsewhere as a natural outcome. Subsequently, it examined the resurgence of the Shia population during the Ottoman era, documented through tax records. This presence persisted due to the "Itizam" law which granted al-Hamade dynasty the role of representing the Shia under Ottoman rule. The Shia population was however later

compounded by various natural factors contributing to their decline, marked by conflicts, village burnings, and the disruption of livelihoods.

Statistically, the decline of the community can be traced during the Double Qa'im Maqamate and the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate periods until the establishment of Greater Lebanon in 1920. This period presented figures drawn from diverse sources concerning Shia villages and their populations, and its analysis extended to the transformations affecting the central region, symbolized by the capital and its surroundings, leading to Shia migrations within the mountain and from other regions. This culminated in their concentration predominantly in the southern suburbs of the capital, emerging as a symbolic hub of Shia influence in recent times. The subsequent examination of Beirut, chosen for its connection to the aforementioned transformations, traced the Shia presence from modest beginnings, migrations, and sectarian clashes to the sectarian incidents of May 7, 2008. These demographic shifts resulted in a significant concentration of Shia in a confined geographical area of the mountain and the capital, contrasting with their minority status in the early 20th century. This led to political, social, economic, strategic, and security-related transformations.

The research then focused on the Shia in southern Lebanon, highlighting their presence across various epochs and emphasizing the stability of their demographic geography. It elucidated their role as a center for migration waves towards Beirut and its suburbs and different emigration stations abroad, often linked to wars and Israeli invasions. Finally, the research shed light on Shia in the Bekaa, examining their social structure from the Ottoman era to the present. It explored their geographical stability, the role of al-Harfush dynasty in establishing Baalbek as a secure haven, and subsequent waves of migration towards Beirut and its outskirts, intensifying since the 1950s.

Considering the above events and dynamics, it can be concluded that the Shia's geographic situation in Lebanon experienced limited fluctuations, particularly in the north, the mountain, and the capital, while Jabal Amel and the Bekaa witnessed relatively stable geographic conditions. However, Mount Lebanon and its surroundings have been the most prominent arena for transformative developments, taking on an explosive and directional character in recent times. In conclusion, it is hoped that this research will pave the way for future studies in this sensitive field.

