Lebanese Shia in the Economy
A Parallel Entity Attracting Sanctions
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A Cross Section of a History
The Shia Community in Lebanon

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.

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The economy is a complex system of interconnected production, consumption, and trade activities that is specific to a nation, region, state, or community. It is also one of the most prominent pillars of any society, to the extent that there does not exist a society that seeks to achieve self-sufficiency and meet its essential needs, as well as to expand its trade with surplus production with other societies that do not have an economy. The economy reflects the strength of its society, the nature of its people's lives, and their level of prosperity. As it is impossible to separate the economy from politics, the relationship between them is a constant dialectic; the economy influences politics, and vice versa.

With the historical emergence of Shiite communities in the current geography of Lebanon, these communities also developed local and reciprocal economic activities, similar to other groups in the country. The forms of these activities vary depending on the diversity of available or influenced intrinsic elements, and there emerges a multiplicity of prevailing economic patterns in each era that include those that are traditional, legitimate, and/or prohibited. To shed light on this topic and its significance in understanding an aspect of the lifestyle of this sect, we have presented this research.

As for its temporal scope, it covers the period from the
tenth century AD, when significant Shiite communities emerged in Lebanon, up to the present day. As for its spatial scope, it focused on the current geography of Lebanon within its international borders, with glimpses into several countries across continents.

In addition, another aspect to consider is the sources we resorted to in order to enrich this research. They are diverse, ranging from references, journalistic articles, journals, and both general and specialized websites. In light of this, we encountered difficulties regarding historical periods in the middle era due to the scarcity of information at times and its generality in other periods, especially given the limited availability of specialized works on the economic reality of Shiite communities.

We also adopted the historical methodology by narrating information related to the subject within specific temporal and spatial boundaries. Additionally, we employed the descriptive approach, focusing on classification, statistics, and data analysis.

The research is structured with an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter addresses the economic reality of the Shiite community in Lebanon up to the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate phase in the second half of the nineteenth century. The second chapter presents their situation, reaching the conclusion of the Ottoman era in the second decade of the twentieth century. The third chapter covers the period from the disappearance of the Ottoman phase until the beginning of the civil war in 1975. The fourth chapter delves into the era of the civil war. As for the fifth chapter, it sheds light on the economic reality of the Shia from the end of the war in 1991 until today.

Through this research, we hope to have covered as much as possible of the economic history of the Shi'ite sect, which cannot be separated from their other aspects, including political and cultural aspects.
In conclusion, this research has meticulously delineated the economic reality of the Shia in Lebanon from the tenth century AD to the present day.

The first chapter examines the community’s conditions in agriculture, industry, and trade, with a focus on the flourishing cities of Tyre (Sur) and Tripoli at that time, leading up to the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate phase, during which the major Shiite communities became concentrated in the Bekaa and Jabal Amel regions.

The second chapter presents the Shia's economic reality at the end of Ottoman rule: it addresses the beginnings of external migration, internal displacement movements, and the famine that struck the country, as well as the regions of Shiite concentrations during that period.

The third chapter covers the economic situation of the Shia and their domains in the South, the Bekaa, and the southern suburbs of Beirut between the end of the Ottoman period in 1918 and the beginning of the civil war in 1975. It also addresses the increasing cases of internal displacement towards the suburbs of Beirut and the initial entry of the Shia into the world of banks and various government positions.

The fourth chapter discusses their reality during the
civil war, addressing the impact of the Israeli invasions and the role of the Shia diaspora in bolstering the community’s economy. It also dives into the war economy adopted by the two Shiite parties, the Amal movement and Hezbollah.

As for the final chapter which extended chronologically to the present day, it covers the fields of agriculture, industry, and trade, expanding into the realm of banks and financial institutions. It also addresses the parallel economy that gained strength after the financial collapse that hit Lebanon in 2019, along with its local and international repercussions, including sanctions targeting Shiite individuals and entities.

The research necessitated significant efforts due to its importance in shedding light on the economic reality of the Shia throughout history up to the present time. It required considerable effort, given the lengthy time span it covered and the absence of detailed materials on various periods. Additionally, it faced challenges in exploring aspects of the parallel economy that are not always clear, especially during the post-war period when the Shia deviated from traditional economic patterns in their parallel and partisan economy.

This research aimed to cover a significant portion of the posed challenges and serves as a future incentive for more detailed studies in this field. These subsequent studies could