

In the name of

Allah,

the Beneficent,

the Merciful

Al-Furqān

the bi-weekly electronic newsletter from the office of
Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi

O Allah,

Bless

Muhammad

& his progeny

The Shī'as of Lebanon

(part one of two)

Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi

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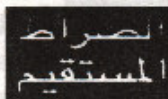
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The Shi`as of Lebanon

(Part One of Two)

Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi

The Shi`as of Lebanon became famous world-wide during the political upheaval in that country in the eighties. S.M. Rizvi presents in the first part of this article, the historical background of Shi`ism in Lebanon & its contribution to the Shi`a academic world. In part two, the religious and socio-political circumstances of the present-day Shi`as will be brought to light in order to understand the on-going events of that country whose capital, Beirut, was once known as "the Paris of Middle East."



The Emergence of Lebanon

Lebanon, the gate-way to the Middle East, makes the shore-line of the Mediterranean sea on the west, borders Syria on the north and east, and co-exists precariously with the present state of Israel on the south.

Prior to the First World War, Lebanon was part of the Syrian province of Ottoman Empire. Syria, in pre-war period, included Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine (now known as "Israel"); it was ruled by governors appointed from Istanbul. But when European imperialism penetrated the Middle East, it started dividing the Muslims by arousing Arabs against their Turkish brethren. Most of the Arabs revolted, with Britain's instigation, against the Ottoman Empire which ended in the First World War. The Arab revolt was led by Sharif Husain bin `Ali, the governor of the Ottoman caliph in Hijaz. (Hijaz was a province on the Red Sea consisting of Mecca, Jeddah and Medina.)

Sharif Husain and the Arab nationalists supported the Allies in the hope that the British will fulfill its promise and recognize the Arab land as an independent country.¹ However, the Allies divided up the Arab Middle East among themselves: Britain acquired mandate over Iraq and Palestine.

As a token fulfillment of its promise, Britain recognized the Hashimite Kingdom of Hijaz under the rule of Sharif Husain bin `Ali; and it also made Faisal, son of Husain, the King of Syria (which included Lebanon). But at the same, Britain had also promised its French ally the control over Syria! The short-lived Syrian Arab government, under King Faisal bin Husain, collapsed in 1920 when the French occupied Syria by force. The British, then, took Faisal and

1. See Antonious, *The Arab Awakening*, (1938); Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth* (1976); Hourani, "The Arab Awakening Forty Years After" in *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East*. (1981).

installed him as the king of Iraq. (Abdullâh, another and more calculating son of Sharif Husain, occupied the eastern part of Palestine with the help of his bedouin troops—this became Jordan.) As for Palestine, after the Second World War, it was given by the West to the Zionists as their homeland known as Israel.

Traces of Shi'ism in Lebanon go back to the early Islamic Period.

Lebanon, as part of Syria, was occupied by the French in 1920. And in 1926 it was declared as a separate constitutional republic under the French mandatory control. In June 1941, Lebanon was formally declared an independent country.

Shi'ism & Lebanon

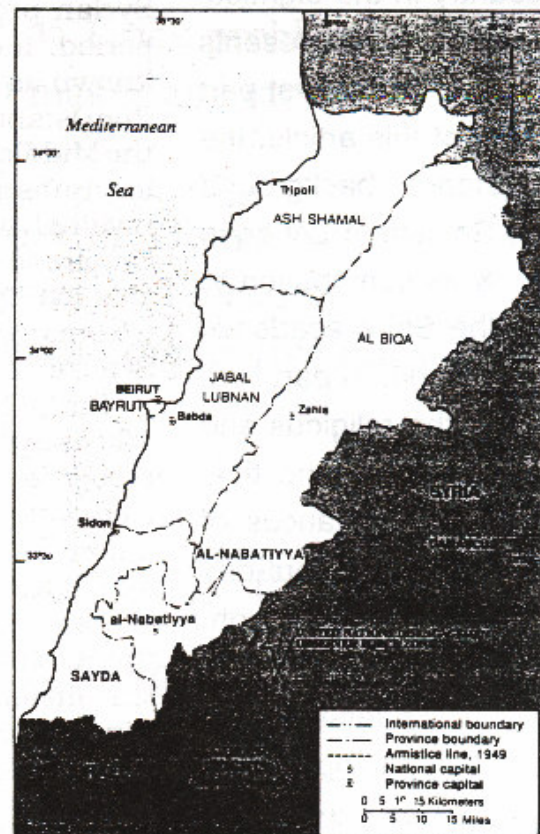
Traces of Shi'ism among the people of Lebanon go back to the early Islamic period—much longer before Iran became a Shi'a state. Abu Dharr al-Ghifârî, a close companion of the Prophet and a strong supporter of Imam 'Ali, was exiled during the 3rd caliphate to Rubzah which was located in Greater Syria.

The biographies of our 'ulama and travelogues of past historians show that Shi'ism was wide-spread in Syria and Lebanon. For example, Sayyid Murtaza, a famous scholar of the fifth century AH, wrote two books entitled *al-Masâ'ilu 't-Trablusiyyah I & II*. The titles—'The Problems of Tripoli'—indicate that they were written in answer to the questions from the Shi'as of Tripoli in Lebanon. He also wrote *al-Masâ'ilu 's-Saydawiyyah* ('The Problems of Sidon') in answer to the questions of the Shi'as of Sidon. Ibn Barrâj (d. 481AH), another famous scholar, lived in Tripoli as a judge for at least twenty years.

Similarly, Abul Fath al-Karajaki (d. 449AH), a student of Shaykh al-Mufid, lived for some time in Sidon and Tyre. There are also indications that even Jerusalem and Amman had large number of Shi'as in the past.²

The present day Syria also had a very large presence of Shi'as. For example, al-Qatfi writes in *Ta'rikhu 'l-Hukamâ'* that in 420 AH "the 'ulamâ' of Aleppo were making decisions according to the [Shi'a] Imamiyya sect." Ibn Kathir,

Lebanon and its Muhafazat



Source: Adapted from Thomas Callelo, ed., *Lebanon: A Country Study*, Area Handbook Series (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office for the Library of Congress, 1989).

2. Al-Muhajir, *Ja'far, al-Hijratu 'l-'Amiliyyah ila Irân fi 'l-'asri 's-Safawi* (Beirut: Dâr ar-Rawzah, 1989) p. 53.

while describing the events of 570 AH, writes in *al-Bidâyah wa 'n-Nihâyah* that when Ibn Nuru 'd-Din Zangi incited the people of Aleppo to fight against Salahu 'd-Din al-Ayyubi, they agreed on the condition that "*hayya 'ala khayril 'amal* be reinstated in the *adhân*, that *adhân* would be said openly in the market place... that the names of the 12 Imams be mentioned in their burial rites..." Ibn Jubayr mentions in his travelogue that in the second half of the sixth century AH, there were more Shi'as in Damascus than the Sunnis.³ Such presence of Shi'as in Syria is a great tribute to Shi'ism since Syria was the heart-land of the Umayyid who fought against the Ahlu 'l-bayt with all means possible!

The reason for minority status of the Shi'as in that region during the last centuries can probably be attributed to the political circumstances which forced many Shi'as to adopt the policy of *taqiyyah*; and, consequently, the later generations did not fully inherit the legacy of their ancestors.

Presently the Shi'as are mostly located in two areas of Lebanon: in the south and the north. In south Lebanon, they are to be found in large numbers in Sidon, Jabal 'Âmil and Tyre (Sûr). In the north, or more precisely in the Bekaa Valley, they are found in large numbers in Baalbeck and Hermel.⁴

Among all these places, Jabal 'Âmil deserves a special mention. It was the main link between the Shi'a world and Lebanon.

The Contribution of Jabal 'Âmil to Shi'ism:

Jabal 'Âmil is an area located in southern Lebanon, and is today divided between the provinces of Sidon and Nabatiyyah.

The number of 'ulama and literature produced by Jabal 'Âmil is more than its geographical proportion. It is said that during the heyday of Jabal 'Âmil, in the funeral of one mujtahid, at least 80 local mujtahids had gathered! There is a separate biographical book on the 'ulamâ' of Jabal 'Âmil known as *Amalu 'l-Âmil fi 'Ulamâ' Jabal 'Âmil*.

The geographical location of Jabal 'Âmil played an important role in the growth of Shi'a leaving in that area: Jabal 'Âmil was considered a secure place from harassment of the rulers. Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin believes that most 'ulama of Jabal 'Âmil before the 6th Islamic century were actually immigrants who came from Aleppo, Tripoli and Sidon because they considered Jabal 'Âmil as a safe heaven from the persecution of the Sunni rulers.⁵

Some among the 'ulamâ' of Jabal 'Âmil have gained prominence throughout the Shi'a world. Below, I will just mention a few of them.

(1) Shaykh Shamsu 'd-Din Muhammad bin Makki al-'Âmili, famous as ash-Shahid al-Awwal (the First Martyr).

He was born in the third decade of the eighth Islamic century in Jizzin, Jabal 'Âmil and received elementary education under his father. In 750 AH, he left his home for Hilla, Iraq which was the center

In 8th cent. AH, Jabal 'Âmil surpassed Hilla (Iraq) as the center of Shi'a studies.

3. Ibid, p. 44-46.

4. Smock, D.R. & Smock, C.S., *The Politics of Pluralism* (N.Y.: Elsevier Co., 1975) p. 96.

5. Al-Muhâjir, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

his death, he became famous as ash-Shahid ath-Thâni (the Second Martyr).⁸

This scholar is connected to the previous Shahid in more than one ways: both are from Jabal `Âmil, both died as martyrs, both travelled to different cities: Damascus, Jerusalem and Cairo. The Second Shahid also travelled to Istanbul where he was martyred.

And the final connection between the two is that Shaykh Zaynu 'd-Din annotated the *al-Lum`a ad-Dimishqiyyah* of the Shahid and named it as *Sharh Lum`ati 'd-Dimishqiyyah*. The annotations of the Second Shahid has transformed the original short treatise of the First Shahid into a detailed text on Shi`a jurisprudence. It is to the credit of this great scholar that to this day, *Sharh Lumati 'd-Dimishqiyyah* is the only complete text on jurisprudence taught in Shi`a religious seminaries.

Another important book of the Second Shahid is *Masâliku 'l-Afhâm* which is a detailed commentary on *Sharâyu 'l-Islâm* of Muhaqqiq Hilli. This also is an important reference for the later mujtahids.

(3) Shaykh Muhammad bin Husayn al-Bahâ'i (953-1030 AH).

At the turn of the 16th Christian century when Shah Ismâ'il Safawi declared Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran, he faced difficulty in enforcing it because of the dearth of Iranian Shi'ah `ulama. He turned —of all places— to Lebanon. This historical fact is an eye-opener for those who equate Shi'ism with Iranian nationalism!

During Shah Ismâ'il Safawi's time, many Shi'ah scholars migrated from south Leba-

non to Iran. Besides the attraction of living in a society ruled by the Shi'as, there was another factor which caused many `ulama to migrate from Jabal `Âmil to Iran: the increasing oppression upon the Shi'as by the Ottoman rulers. The martyrdom of the Second Shahid in Istanbul actually marks the decline of Jamal `Âmil as a center of Shi'a studies. With the migration of its `ulama to Iran, the center shifted to Isfahan which was the capital during the Safavid period.

Among those who migrated to Iran was Shaykh Husayn al-`Âmili, a student of the Second Shahid.⁹ Husayn's youngest son, Bahâ 'd-Din al-`Âmili (1546-1622) became a very famous Shi'a scholar. He was known as Shaykh Bahâ'i. He studied in Isfahan and Qazwin; and later on he also travelled for 18 months to Hijaz, Jerusalem, Cairo, Damascus and Istanbul. Like the First Shahid, during his journey, he used to present himself as a Shâfi'i.

He became Shayku 'l-Islam (read *marja*) during the reign of Shah `Abbâs the Great in 996 AH till he died in 1030 AH. His body was carried, on insistence of Shah `Abbâs, to be buried in Mashhad at the shrine of Imam `Ali ar-Riza (a.s.).

Shaykh Bahâ'i was a scholar of great reputation. He authored many books on diverse subjects. He is, probably, the first `âlim to have written a text on shari'ah laws in Farsi in a style which could be easily understood by lay Iranians. It was known as *Jâmi` `Abbâsi*. His another book, *al-Fawâ'idu's-Samadiyyah* on Arabic grammar, is still an important text taught at the elementary level in the Shi'a theological centers.

8. Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, p. 410-411.

9. Ibid.

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(4) Shaykh Hasan bin Hurr al-`Āmili. (d. 1104 AH)

Shaykh Hurr has authored more than 27 books. He is best known for his *Wasā'ilu 'sh-Shī'ah*, a 20 volume collection of *fiqhi* ahādith arranged in subject-wise order. This book is result of twenty years of hard work in which the author has compiled 35,850 ahādith. This is the most referred to book of hadith by the mujtahids in our time.

He is also the author of *Amalu'l-Āmil fi 'Ulamā' Jabali'l-`Āmil* on the biography of the `ulamā of Jabal `Āmil.

(5) Syed `Abdul Husayn Sharafu 'd-Din al-Musawi (1873-1957 AD).

During this century, the most famous `ālim produced by Jabal `Āmil was Syed Abdul Husayn Sharafud Din al-Musawi. Syed Sharafud Din was very active in social works as well as academic fields in Lebanon; he initiated quite a few philanthropic projects for the Shi`as of south Lebanon.

During the First World War, Syed Sharafu 'd-Din successfully resisted the Ottoman government's attempt to draft the Shi'a `ulama while exempting their Sunni and Christian counterparts since the latter were the only recognized clerics in the empire.

When the French took over Syria, the Christians were pressuring their co-religionist colonialists to separate Lebanon from Syria. The Muslims, on the other hand, were for the unity of Syria. Syed Sharafu 'd-Din was in the fore-front of the movement which advocated the cause of Syrian unity. His agitation against the mandatory power led to the looting of his home in Tyre by French soldiers and to the razing of another residence in his native

village, Shhur.¹⁰ The greater tragedy than the loss of Sharafu 'd-Din's material possessions was the destruction of his very rich library which also contained 19 manuscripts of his unpublished works.¹¹

Thereafter, the Syed was forced into exile in Damascus, but had to quit the city on 26 July 1920, after the Arab government was defeated. From there, he travelled to Haifa (Palestine), then Cairo which he had visited eight years ago and had become well-known to the `ulama of the city, in particular Shaykh Salim al-Bishri, the rector of al-Azhar University from 1900 to 1904 and then from 1909 to his death in 1916.¹² Then he returned to `Alma al-Buhayra, a village on the Palestinian-Lebanese frontier and lived there for fourteen months before General Henri Gouraud invited him back to Lebanon. He returned to Tyre on 24 June 1921.¹³

His reputation in the Shi'a world, however, is more for his publications, especially *al-Murâji'ât* and *an-Nass wa'l-Ijtihād*. *Al-Murâji'ât* is a collection of the correspondence between the writer and the above-mentioned Shaykh Salim al-Bishri of Egypt. Both persons approached the Shi'a-Sunni differences in a scholarly and amicable manner without involving their emotions. It is a master-piece of open-mindedness and unbaised discussion on the very sensitive issues dividing the Muslim world.

Al-Murâji'ât has been translated into Persian, Urdu, and English languages. Its English translation, *The Right Path*, was done by the late Muhammad Amir Haider Khan and was published in Pakistan. It has since been reprinted many times in Iran and USA.

10. Halawi, M., *A Lebanon Defied* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1992) p. 122.

11. Murtaza Āl Yasīn, in his preface to Sharafu 'd-Din's *al-Murâji'ât* (Beirut, 1982) p. 30.

12. Ibid, p. 31.

13. Halawi, *op. cit.*, p. 122; Āl Yasīn, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

of Shi'a studies. In Hilla, the Shahid studied under the students of 'Allamah Hilli, in particular 'Allamah's son Fakhru 'l-Muhaqqiqin. Because of his interest in comparative jurisprudence, after Hilla, he moved to Baghdad to study Sunni jurisprudence.

After Baghdad, the Shahid went on a long journey: to Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, Mecca and Medina; and in all these places he benefited from the learned Sunni 'ulama of those cities. The Shahid succeeded in his study of comparative jurisprudence by letting the people believe that he was a Shâfi'i Sunni.

The Shahid emerged as a great scholar in the Shi'a as well as the Sunni world. He returned to Lebanon and established a study circle in Jabal 'Āmil which attracted students from far away places and soon surpassed Hilla (Iraq) as the new center of Shi'a studies.

He was put to death at Damascus in 786 AH (1384 AD) on basis of *fatwas* of a Mâlîki and a Shâfi'i mufti.⁶ The circumstances surrounding his death are not very clear. A contemporary scholar, Shaykh Ja'far al-Muhâjir, provides circum-stancial evidence to prove that it was the political activism of the Shahid which brought the reprisal of the rulers who found it easy to solicit a death *fatwa* against a Shi'a scholar from the Sunni muftis. The Shahid was killed, then his body was crucified and finally burnt.⁷

Among the works of Shahid al-Awwal, the most famous is *al-Lum'a ad-Dimishqiyyah* which is a concise but complete book on the Islamic jurisprudence. This book was written by the Shahid for 'Ali ibn al-Muayyad, a Shi'a ruler of Khurâsan from 766-783 AH. Al-Muayyad

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'Abd al-Husayn Sharaf
al-Din al-Mūsawī

had sent an emissary to invite the Shahid to Khurasan, but the latter, probably considering his local responsibilities, declined. Instead, the Shahid wrote *al-Lum'a ad-Dimishqiyyah* and dedicated it to al-Muayyad.

(2) Shaykh Zaynu 'd-Din 'Ali bin Ahmad al-'Amili.

Shaykh Zaynu 'd-Din was born in year 911 AH in Jabal 'Āmil. He was put to death in Istanbul in 966 AH (1668 AD) by the Ottoman rulers. Because of the nature of

6. Hitti, P., *Lebanon in History*, p. 410-411.

7. Al-Muhâjir, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-81.