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The Disastrous Ride

This article was previously published in The Monthly issue 65 of December 2007. It is republished in the wake of the current incidents in Lebanon.



A descendant of Mohammed Bin Shu'aib⁽¹⁾, having read the letter of Al-Saifa descendant, wished to clarify that A'arqa fortress was ruled by his grandfather Mohammed and not by Al-Saifa. He accused Al-Saifa of conspiring against Qurqumaz, the father of Fakhreddine II, adding that Mansour Assaf was responsible for killing his ancestor, Mohammed Shu'aib, the ruler of A'arqa.

Naturally, the descendant of Al-Shu'aib did not bother to mention the early history of A'arqa since the Bronze Age and long before the emergence of his family or their rivals and how his family acquired A'arqa.

Al-Shu'aib descendant says, and to his credit, that neither his ancestors nor Al-Saifa contributed to Trablous' (Tripoli) golden age; it was Shia'a Judge Abi Taleb of Bani A'ammur, who was praised by Ibn Khaldoun for establishing "Madrasat al-'Ilm" (the school of science) and a library in 1069 A.D., before the crusaders took over the city.

Shu'aib hopes that a judge from "Ahlu al-Sunna" (the Sunni people) would be able someday to restore Trablous' glory.

Al-Shu'aib descendant recalls when Janbulad (Jumblat's ancestor) followed Youssef Saifa to Damascus: "The wise men of Damascus offered Al-Janbuladi 125,000 piastres. He accepted the offer and reconciled with Saifa". Janbulad said: "The soldiers of Damascus did not fight us but welcomed us peacefully"⁽²⁾.

The following are lessons that must be learned:

- 1- Alliances are not sacred: Jumblat family forged an alliance with the Tanukhs, who were close to the Persians, and with the Shehab family. Later on, Bashir ash-Shehabi and Bashir Jumblat had a feud with the Hamadeh family backing the Shehabs in destroying the Mukhtara castle (1824) and sending Jumblat to the guillotine.
- 2- Borders and identities are not timeless: The province of Trablous (or its jurisdiction) reached Latakia, sometimes old A'akkar and other times Kesrouan, depending on the circumstances. Moreover, the province of Damascus (or its jurisdiction) reaches Lebanon and its cities. So there is no harm in saying that Tartous was part of the province of Trablous or that Gibran Khalil Gibran was a "Syrian from Bsharri".
- 3- Confessions are not necessarily "religious" but "political": "When the Ottomans entered Lebanon, the Harfoushs, allies of the Sunni Hanash family, were ruling over the Beqa'a, the Christian Shehabs were controlling Wadi Haramoun and Wadi al-Taym, the Druze Ma'an were ruling over the Chouf and the Turkmen Assaf were protecting Kesrouan and A'akkar"⁽³⁾. It is said that the Shehabs (1697-1841) were either descendants of Bani Quraish, Kurds or Druze but what is sure is that they have succeeded the "Persian" Tanukhs and "converted" to Christianity.
- 4- History, in particular the history of Lebanon and this region, is replete with absurdities and fiction. Quoting Hamad Khaled as-Safadi and Kamal Salibi, Dr. Abdallah al-Mallah says:

"It is no longer possible to say that Fakhreddine I was the ruler of the Ma'an Emirate in 1516..."⁽⁴⁾ Then what about the story of Al-Shu'aib and Al-Saifa? Perhaps the whole thing was a fiction!

Those who do not see the relevance of these stories can just read the following: the "Shia'a" are imposing a siege on Riad as-Solh Square, the "Sunni" are blockading Qoreitem and the Protestant College and the "Druze" have quarantined Clemenceau and Trad Hospital. Furthermore, Kouchner is dancing the traditional Dabkeh in a "Shia'a" wedding and Bush reassuring "Sanioura's Cabinet", which is detained in the "Turkish Serail", where Sa'id Jumblat was once arrested for committing massacres against the Christians in 1860. Jumblat was asked by the British to say that Khorshid Pasha, the Ottoman High Commissioner, incited him to perpetrate the massacre, so they would hold an "international trial" against the Turks.

The Wahab family⁽⁵⁾, who are accused of killing Fouad Jumblat (1921), are visiting Franjeh family, the leaders of the Marada, (Aramaean, Syriac, Persians and Maronites) "in support of the Persian-Arabic front against the imperialist and Zionist front".

Under the slogan of "liberating Palestine", the Shia'a welcome the invasion of Iraq and "Ahlu al-Sunna" are asking for Bush's protection.

Having said that and after skimming through the results of a recent Information International poll, we should not be surprised that the Lebanese are prepared to hold a referendum on the identity of Lebanon, but reluctant to do the same on civil marriage, for example. Moreover, a significant percentage wishes that the Army takes temporary command of the country.

On a different note but still in the same context, why all this commotion on "Al-Ra'is al-'Atid", which figuratively means "the Prospective President" and literally means someone "ready to be ridden", according to Lisan Al-'Arab, the most important Arabic dictionary.

This is not the story of a president, but the story of a people's disastrous ride from the 16th century until today.

(1) Rulers of A'arqa and Trablous (1523-1528)

(2-3) "Banu Saifa, the Rulers of Trablous: 1579-1640", Joseph Alian, Beirut 1987

(4) "Fakhreddine al-Ma'ani I: A fact or a legend? - 1516", Abdallah Mallah, 2004

(5) Wahab family in this text does not refer to the family of former Deputy Wi'am Wahab.

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