

Toward Greater Lebanon:

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(Selection of texts)

Introduction:

“The Lebanese today, citizen of vigor and cleverness, are feeling proud having achieved a dream born in the Middle ages and completed in the 20th century”.

Mutessarif Najib Abou Souan- Beirut, 1920

On September 1st, 1920, General Henri Gouraud, the first French High Commissioner in Syria and Lebanon, declared the establishment of Greater Lebanon.

Standing before a gathering of local and foreign dignitaries for this event Gouraud declared pompously:

“At the foot of these majestic mountains, which have been the strength of your country and remain the impregnable stronghold of its faith and freedom; on the shore of this sea of many legends that has seen the triremes of Phoenicia, Greece and Rome, that, in subtle spirit, carried through the world your fathers, skilled in commerce and eloquence. Now, by a happy return, this sea brings you the confirmation of a great and ancient friendship and the blessings of French peace. In front of all these witnesses of your wishes, of your struggles and of your victory, it is in sharing your joy and pride that I solemnly salute Greater Lebanon in its glory and its force from Nahr al-Kebir to the gates of Palestine and to the crest of the Anti-Lebanon mountains”

Greater Lebanon was not established by coincidence in 1920. The idea of Lebanon, however, was not a French one. For centuries, the Lebanese Christians, mainly Maronites, had been dreaming of Lebanon as a sort of national homeland.

In 1841 Monsignor Nicolas Murad (Maronite priest) published his book, *Notice Historique sur L'origine de la Nation Maronite*, which has long been regarded as one of the first written expression of the 'Lebanonist idea'. The Maronite church had been always regarded as the strongest defender of the idea of a separate and distinct political entity in Mount Lebanon

and the surrounding areas. The history of this community is full of heroic stands and self-protection against the different conquerors since the 7th century. A political process will be initiated from the time of the Imara of Mount Lebanon in the 16th century would culminate in 1920 with the formation of Grand Liban as a Christian western-oriented country backed by France.

Mgr. Murad wrote his book in French and addressed it to the French king, Louis Philippe I. There was nothing coincidental, of course, in the fact that it reflected the long-lasting ties between France and the Maronites, who already then regarded the French as their guardian angels in the Levant since the 13th century.

A- The Imara and the beginning of a new era:

The Ottomans (Turks) Empire conquered Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, from the Mamluks in 1516 under the rule of Sultan Selim 1st, and they established an emirate out of feudal privileges enjoyed by the Druze chieftains of the southern Mount Lebanon since the 13th and 14th centuries, when the Mamluk rulers of Egypt and Syria, to secure the loyalty of the warlike Druzes, recognized hereditary feudal freehold in the Druze mountain (the Chouf, Al-Ghareb).

The Ottomans permitted the Druze chieftains to maintain their privileges under a paramount Druze emir (first recognized in 1591) who was charged with the maintenance of order, the dispensation of justice, and the collection and remittance of the revenue. This gave the southern Lebanon (the Chouf, Al-Gharib, Jizzine) a relative security; and, in time, the Maronites from the northern Lebanon (Today Cazas of Becharree, Barton and Jbeil) came to settle there under the protection of the Druze emir. Fakhreddine al-Ma'ni II (1572- 1635) will benefit from the Ottoman clemency and found the roots of the Lebanese Emirate, roots of Today Lebanon.

In 1697, the Chehabs, a Sunnite Muslim family from the southern Anti-Lebanon inherited the emirate over the Druzes and Christians of the southern Lebanon and had become converted to Christianity according to the Maronite (Uniate Catholic) rite in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century, the Maronite community experienced a significant demographic and geographic expansion from Mount Lebanon to the north of Chouf, Jezzine, and the region of Sidon. It was Emir Youssef Chehab, who was baptized as Maronite and became the first Christian governor to rule Mount Lebanon, under Ottomans.

The Chehabs succeeded in extending their territories over the whole of Mount Lebanon, from the mainly Christian hinterland of Tripoli in the north to the Druze-Christian hinterland of Sidon in the south. A Lebanese entity had thus emerged, separate and distinct from the rest of Syria, bringing the Maronites and Druzes of the country, along with its other Christian and Muslim sects, under one government.

In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the emirate of the southern Lebanon, while it continued to enjoy its political privileges, became further differentiated from its surroundings as a result of its peculiar economic and social development.

B- Social and cultural development:

The relative security of the Mount Lebanon gave the Maronite church the opportunity to modernize its institution and structure. The “Lebanese Synod”, held at the monastery of Our Lady of Louaize in Kesserwan, in September 1736, laid the foundations for modern Maronite Canon Law and had a major impact on the course of the Maronite history. Among this Synod’s decisions, was the establishing of the geographical limits of eparchies and the nomination of episcopal sees. The Synod also enforced compulsory education for youth.

During the eighteenth century, the catholic missionaries established several schools in Mount Lebanon. After the Lebanese Synod, the Maronites were more involved in inaugurating schools in the villages, one of which was the college of “Ayn Warqa” founded in 1789 in Ghosta, which soon became an important pillar in the modern higher educational system.

C- differentiation from the surroundings

The silk production which its emirs encouraged and protected provided a regular (though modest) basis for its economy, enabling its thrifty and industrious peasants, particularly the Christian who were the main silk producers, to buy land and become peasant smallholders of a kind almost unknown elsewhere in the region.

Silk brokers and other entrepreneurs, again mostly Christians, gradually emerged in the larger villages and towns as a small middle class which grew, wealth, and influence as commercial relations with Europe developed.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the political situation in Mount Lebanon experienced many major transformations.

Backed by the growing Christian middle class and by the peasant smallholders, the Chehab emirs, in the course of the eighteenth century, trespassed on the traditional privileges of the mainly Druze feudal chiefs to extend their own power.

With emir Bashir II (1788-1840), the Imara reached its climax. He succeeded in establishing a firm control over an expanded Shihab realm and ruled it in the manner of an enlightened despot.

The involvement of Bashir II in the struggle between Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt (backed by the French), and the Ottomans (backed by the British), brought about his downfall in 1840.

In the following year, a coordinated opposition of Druze and Christian feudal chiefs, encouraged by the Ottomans and the British, brought an end to the Lebanese emirate. The idea of a separate and distinct Lebanese entity, however, remained alive among the Christian middle

class and freeholding peasantry more particularly among the Maronites who enjoyed French protection.

The interference of the Ottoman governor of Acre, Jazzar Pasha (1777-1804) in the internal Lebanese politics, the fluctuation of the politics of Emir Bashir II (1788 – 1840), the conquest of the Egyptians (1831-1840), all destabilized the relations between Mount-Lebanon *components*, especially Maronites and Druze and led to several religious clashes between 1840 and 1845

The heterogeneous political system, called *Qaim Maqamiyatayn*, did not succeed in solving the problems and resulted in many peasants' revolts, namely in 1858 against feudalism and ended with the 1860 massacres, resulting in the death of more than 12000 Maronites in Mount-Lebanon and Damascus.

D- The Mutesarrifate: the small Lebanon

In 1861, following two decades of intermittent civil war between peasants and feudal chiefs, and between Maronites and Druzes, a new settlement was worked out for the country, the *Mutesarrifate* (autonomous province) within the Ottoman Empire. The arrangement was made after a severe defense from the Maronite church and its leaders and a French military intervention to stop the war. It was guaranteed by the European Powers: France, Russia, Austria, Prussia (later Germany), and Sardinia (later Italy).

The establishment of the *Mutesarrifate* of Mount Lebanon gave the Lebanese identity, for the first time, a legal definition. To be Lebanese was to enjoy citizenship in the Mutesarrifate, and the various privileges that went with it. The country appeared as a model Ottoman province - a fact which was reflected by the common saying, still remembered and repeated: 'Happy is he who has a shed to keep one goat in Mount Lebanon'.

The rapid development of Mount Lebanon after 1861, moreover, gave the Lebanese a pride in their identity and a sense of national achievement. Under the enlightened government of the *mutesarriifs*, Lebanese initiative flourished in an atmosphere of relative freedom; the educational and cultural activities of Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries were a major factor in the general development.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the flourishing of higher education in Beirut, especially with the foundation of the American and Jesuit universities that received the Maronite Elites, who were later involved in the political, economic and intellectual life. This era witnessed the blooming of journals, periodicals and printing presses in all regions.

The Christians, namely the Maronites, adhering to Arab Nationalism associations adopted what the French Revolution called for: freedom, justice, and equality, as they were deeply influenced by the philosophers of Europe's Age of Enlightenment.

E- Early emigrants: the Lebanese Diaspora

Maronite's history of emigration has unfolded in various waves, and its diaspora can be characterized as both 'entrepreneurial' and 'conflict induced' as many Lebanese emigrated in search of new economic opportunities and to seek more stable living environments.

Therefore, the connections produced by family and new immigrants to the home country and other Lebanese groups around the world have allowed for the transfer of homeland politics and identification to those residing in diasporic communities.

It was during the second half of the 19th century that the first emigrant reaches the American continent. The first emigrants sought new destinations in Latin, Central, and North America to improve their economic livelihoods and to escape inter-confessional tensions.

During the first half of the 20th century, a strong and steady political-cultural activity circled the Lebanese expatriates in the American continent and Europe. The idea of an Independent and sovereign Lebanese state had its theoreticians abroad, acting individually or in organized groups or by committees. Political clubs were organized: *The Lebanese Union in Cairo, the Lebanese Committee in Paris, the North American League for the liberation of Lebanon and Syria... etc.* lobbying to support the Lebanese historical demands. Not to forget the foundation of different journals and newspapers (e.g. *Al-Huda*-1898 Philadelphia, *Kawkab America*-1892 New York, *Brazil* -1898 Sao Paolo) that were the spoken words of the Lebanese Diaspora.

F- Toward Greater Lebanon:

Back to the 19th century Mutesarrifate era, it was among the Maronites, by far the largest community, that the sense of Lebanese identity developed most strongly. While the majority of the Maronites saw in the *Mutesarrifate* a Maronite national homeland, an imaginative minority among them, composed mostly of leaders associated with the government, saw in it a free association of communities which the Maronites, as the major community, were called upon to lead.

To these Maronite leaders, the *Mutesarrifate* was not an end, but a step towards full Lebanese statehood. While admitting that the arrangement made in 1861 were in keeping with the Lebanese social and economic development as it then stood, they insisted that these arrangements were seriously restrictive of further development. The territorial limits of the *Mutesarrifate*, which deprived the country of ports for its commerce and suitable land for its agriculture, were to them particularly unsatisfactory. Lebanon, they maintained, could not develop to its full potential unless its territory was enlarged to include the coastal cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, and Tyr, along with the Biqa' and the plain of Akkar, to the north of Tripoli.

The Lebanese Christians, however, and more particularly the Maronite majority among them, wanted more: an expanded Lebanese territory, and full independence. To justify their claims, they resorted to historical, geographic and economic arguments:

On grounds of history, they demanded for Lebanon the whole territory, from the crest of the Anti-Lebanon to the sea, which had once felt the impact of the rule of the Lebanese emirs of the Ma'n and Chehab dynasties.

Geographically, they argued that the frontiers of this historical Lebanon were natural ones.

Economically, they stressed that the expansion of the territory of Lebanon to these natural frontiers was indispensable to its viability.

In a book published in Paris in 1902 under the title *La Question du Liban*, a Maronite lawyer associated with the government of the *Mutesarrifate*, Boulus Noujaym (pseudonym M. Jouplain), eloquently put forth the arguments for the expansion of Lebanon and called upon France, traditional friend of the Lebanese, to help them achieve full statehood and, ultimately, independence. The arguments of Noujaym were repeated and developed in the years that followed by a number of other Christian Lebanese nationalists who organized themselves in committees and, from the safety of Egypt or France, solicited international support for their cause. A great opportunity for the fulfilment of the Lebanese nationalist demands came in 1918, with the victory of the Allies in the first world war and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The First World War heralded the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, one of whose consequences was the creation of the Lebanese Republic within its existing borders. In 1914 the autonomy of Mount Lebanon was suspended, and the province placed under military rule. The war years were years of hunger, and of repression: literary circles and political societies in Beirut and the mountains, that had been making plans for the future of the Arab Orient, were brutally suppressed and many of their leading members were hanged in 1915 and 1916.

Mount Lebanon witnessed a "Great Famine" that was the devastating result of both political and environmental factors, the combination of a severe drought and locusts and a suffocating blockade. One third of the Lebanese population perished.

After the Ottoman forces joined Germany, the Allies enforced a blockade of the entire Eastern Mediterranean to cut the supplies to the Ottomans.

In return, a blockade was introduced by General Jamal Pasha, commander in chief of the Turkish forces in Greater Syria, where cereals and wheat were prevented from entering Mount Lebanon.

In a letter to Mary Haskell, dated May 26, 1916, Gibran Khalil Gibran wrote: "The famine in Mount Lebanon has been planned and instigated by the Turkish government. Already 80,000 have succumbed to starvation and thousands are dying every single day. The same process happened with the Christian Armenians and applied to the Christians in Mount Lebanon."

Gone are my people, but I exist yet,

Lamenting them in my solitude...

Dead are my friends, and in their Death my life is naught but great

Disaster.

The knolls of my country are submerged

By tears and blood, for my people and

My beloved are gone, and I am here

Living as I did when my people and my

Beloved were enjoying life and the

Bounty of life, and when the hills of

My country were blessed and engulfed

By the light of the sun.

Khalil Gebran- Dead are My People- Written in exile during the famine in Lebanon in world war I

When French troops entered Beirut in 1919 the debate reopened with renewed intensity. It concentrated on three mutually exclusive conceptions: Arab unity, a Greater Syrian state and an independent Lebanon.

G- Emir Faisal and Patriarch Howayek:

During the WWI, apart from its agreement with France over the partition of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman empire, Britain had made promises during the war to other parties concerning the same area. In central Arabia, there was a standing British alliance with Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud, the Wahhabi Emir of Riyadh who was subsequently to become the founder of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism was a movement of militant Islamic religious revival which had appeared in central Arabia in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, and the house of Saud had been politically associated with it since that time. In conflict with this British-Saudi alliance was the wartime alliance reached between Britain and Sharif Husayn, the Emir of Mecca, who enjoyed a special Arab and Islamic prestige as a recognized descendant of the Prophet, and whose family were called the Hashemites. In return for leading an Arab revolt against the Ottomans, the Sharif had been promised recognition as the head of an Arab

kingdom the exact nature of which was left undefined. The Sharif, however, was led to understand that it would include all of Mesopotamia; all but a negotiable strip of coastal Syria; and the whole of peninsular Arabia.

King Faisal, son of Sherif Hussein, entered Damascus in 1918, and raised the flag over the public buildings and sent his Arab army to Beirut in a sign of annexation of Lebanon. The united Arab kingdom under his rule seemed imminent. This state would have included present-day Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, but not the Hejaz.

As Arab Muslims, they had not always been happy with Turkish pre-eminence in this state; they would have preferred a federation under Ottoman rule, or better still a new Arab Islamic state, and a minority would even have preferred a secular Greater Arabia or at least an Arab Greater Syria. What they did not want on any account was a Lebanese state in which they -for the first time in their history - were no longer part of the ruling group but at worst the minority, at best one minority among others.

At the General Syrian Congress in 1919, King Faisal called for an independent Greater Syria which would include Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine and the Arabian Peninsula. He went on to accept the Balfour Declaration on 3rd January 1919, with Dr Chaim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organization, which was called the Faisal-Weizmann Agreement. The Maronite Patriarch Elias Howayek was concerned by these and other moves against Lebanese independence.

Following these events, the Administrative Council of Mount Lebanon, which represented all Lebanese sects during the Mutesarrifate, met on 1st December 1918, where they decided to send a delegation to the League of Nation Peace Conference held in Paris on 18th January 1919. The delegation of seven members was headed by Daoud Ammoun. He presented the four Lebanese demands of the Administrative Council before the conference on 13th February 1919:

- Restoration of Lebanon within its historical and natural boundaries.
- Asking support of France, based on the right of Minorities to determine their future.
- Declaration of the independent Lebanese State based on the principles of liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

When there was no evident outcome of this appeal, Patriarch Elias Howayek headed the second Lebanese delegation to the Peace Conference. On 15th July 1919, the Patriarch left Lebanon. He was 76 years old at the time. His famous words before reaching Paris: *'I do not comprehend relying on politics but rather on God and this rosary'*

At Paris, the Patriarch and his delegation were hosted by the French government. He met with many political notables, including the French President Raymond Poincare, and the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau. On 27th October 1919, he presented to the Peace Conference a lengthy memorandum which demonstrated the right of Lebanon to independence

and the ability to exercise national sovereignty. He also requested the full restoration of Lebanon's natural and historical borders including the regions usurped by Turkey

In demanding the formation of Greater Lebanon as a separate Christian entity, Patriarch Elias Howayek used the Phoenician idea to demonstrate the non-Arab ethnicity of the Lebanese. In arguing that modern Lebanese were descendants of ancient Phoenicians, he was addressing Western ears. The Maronite Church provided the foundation for a separate non-Arab ancestry

On 10th November 1919 the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau wrote to the Patriarch confirming France's approval of the demands submitted and concluded, 'with the help and support of France... the Lebanese are assured of preserving their traditions, of developing their political and administrative institutions, of reclaiming completely their country, and of seeing their children educated in their proper schools for public service in Lebanon... France will give the greatest consideration that in determining the boundaries of Lebanon, it is necessary to include the 'Mountain', the territories of the plain, and access to the sea, as indispensable to its prosperity'.

Upon his return to Lebanon, Patriarch Elias Howayek was received as a victor.

H- Declaration of Greater Lebanon

Prime Minister Clemenceau offered Prince Faisal a compromise wherein he would rule over Syria, but not Lebanon. However, this agreement was voted down by the Syrian General Congress in January of 1920. Subsequently, the Second General Syrian Congress in March 1920, declared an independent Greater Syria which encompassed Lebanon and Palestine, with King Faisal as constitutional monarch. During San Remo meeting, a special agreement was reached between the Allies. The French occupied Beirut and the coastal zone, then received from the League of Nations a Mandate over the territory of present-day Lebanon and Syria.

On 1st September 1920, the French High Commissioner, General Henri Gouraud, proclaimed in Beirut the State of Greater Lebanon with its present boundaries.

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