

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20382> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Sommer, Dorothe

Title: Unity is strength : Masonic lodges in Ottoman Syria with special focus on Tripoli and El Mina (1860-1908)

Issue Date: 2013-01-08

Chapter V: Freemasonry on Mount Lebanon

After the French intervention in 1860, Mount Lebanon's administrative and legal system was restructured into a single unit, excluding Beirut, Tripoli and Saida. It may be true that France's action was intended to help Christians who were suffering at the hands of Druzes and Muslims alike. However, another significant reason was that its economic interests were at stake, mainly in regard to the effective production of silk.

Between 1870 and 1914 France imported 40–50% of the worldwide production of silk from Lebanon. Hence, its investment in the Lebanese silk industry was extremely high and seriously threatened by the civic strife in the region.¹

It is still commonplace to view the unrest that beset the Mount Lebanon area in the 1860s as evidence that the various religious communities were unable to live side by side. I would argue, however, that the civil strife that erupted in the 1860s was not caused by religious differences but rather by privileges given to certain groups. Affiliation to a specific religious community only made you an enemy if you received more profitable treatment compared to others.

Gingeras rightly states that the 'perceived "communal" nature of violence and mass mobilization is a product of state intervention (since it is the state that gives significance to the geographical and social characteristics of given territory). [...] When violence in the provinces did erupt, "primordial hatreds" were not to blame'; rather 'the reconfiguration of political, economic, and social networks that pre-date state reform and globalization produce violent returns'.²

¹ Kais Firro, 'Silk and Agrarian Changes in Lebanon, 1860 – 1914', *IJMES*, vol. 22/2, (Cambridge University Press: May 1990), p. 151 – 153.

² Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores*: p. 6.

On Mount Lebanon, Christians were perceived as benefiting most from European economic infiltration. Indeed, mainly Christians received protection from European powers in terms of legal status and commercial deals. They were more likely to be trusted by their French co-religionists, and had always been more willing to adapt to new ways of doing business, working-methods or ways of living. Hence, they had fewer problems learning other languages and to adopt or imitate a western lifestyle.

First, the social gap between Druzes and Maronites widened. The social balance had already been disturbed with newly rich people quickly assuming dominant positions in society. Then, familiar trading habits were uprooted. Old elites rightfully feared for their reputations and for their very survival. This became even more obvious when fights broke out in Damascus shortly after those on Mount Lebanon. Another issue at stake on the Mount revolved around the vexed question of land.

The area only achieved political stability ‘when the land question was resolved in favour of economic actors. The setting up of a Maronite-dominated autonomous area pacified Mount Lebanon and strengthened the market-oriented agricultural units’.³ The mountain rises from the coast, reaching ‘imposing heights within 15 – 20 miles [...] before declining to the east.’⁴ Due to regular heavy rainfall and melting snow, Mount Lebanon is well watered with streams dividing it into separate regional enclaves. Only with industrialisation and the development of the region’s infrastructure in the nineteenth century was it possible to improve travel and transportation links for those regularly using the ports located in Saida, Tripoli and Beirut. Consequently, as Engin Deniz Akarlı notes, ‘commercial relations acquired a

³ Emrence, *Remapping*: p. 46.

⁴ Engin Deniz Akarlı, *The Long Peace. Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920*, (Center for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., London/New York: 1993), p. 7.

greater importance for the Mountain's economy'. The major source of the region's financial income was the production of raw silk and silk cocoons.⁵ The population on the mountain was mainly composed of Maronites, Druzes and Shiites, with some belonging to the Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches.

Greek Catholics had separated from the Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century. The union with Rome had led to a rising socio-economic status for Arab Christians, followed by their rise to more profitable crafts and the 'opportunity to enter international trade in full force' in the eighteenth century. Though sticking to their communal framework, it was an attempt 'to assert local communal autonomy from the Patriarch in Istanbul'.⁶

Greek Catholics comprised approximately 8% of the mountain's population, while the majority of inhabitants (comprising Greek Orthodox and Sunni Muslim communities) lived in urban areas. In general, Greek Orthodox and Catholics from Mount Lebanon tended to settle in the Empire's cities, since their power radiated from these urban areas.⁷

The new laws were introduced in 1861-62 with some revisions enacted in 1864.⁸ Thenceforth the mountain area was administered as a *mutaşarrifiyya* - a district relatively autonomous and governed by a *mutaşarrif*, who was effectively a chief executive directly responsible to the Sublime Porte. The elective administrative council was composed of twelve members according to confessional majorities with five being Christians.⁹ The area was subdivided into seven districts, which were also ruled corresponding to the different confessions. Although the new framework of

⁵ Ibid.: p. 7.

⁶ Thomas Philipp, 'Class, Community, and Arab Historiography in the Early Nineteenth Century – the Dawn of a New Era', *IJMES*, vol. 16/2, (May, 1984), p. 164 – 165.

⁷ Akarli: p. 12.

⁸ Philipp K. Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, (St Martin's Press, London/New York: 1957), p. 442.

⁹ Ibid.

rules promised to break with the power of sheikhs, the clergy and the traditional influence of prominent families, the fact that the districts were subdivided into even smaller units still left these religious and traditional personalities with considerable power over the other inhabitants. What is more, notables and members of significant clans made sure that they were integrated into the new political system in order to secure their positions, after part of the land was confiscated and the administration had been restructured. Without a pool of new landlords, peasants filled the resulting vacuum and became independent landowners.¹⁰

In the nineteenth century the Maronite Church turned to France for help in different cases, fearing that its old privileges were being further corroded. These fears were not only based on the new laws, which abolished its former rights, but also arose as a result of the new challenges faced by the growth of capitalism and the changes to the mountain's economy, which shifted from a subsistence model to a market economy. Other religious communities also tried to gain favour with European powers, which in turn competed for influence. The Druze population asked the British to protect their rights, while the Austro-Hungarian and Russian consuls strengthened their links to the Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox communities respectively.¹¹ Europeans, and particularly the French, were deeply involved in the commercial and economic life of Mount Lebanon, using Ottoman concessions – in the form of capitulations – to widen their sphere of influence. The civil unrest of the 1860s, a follow up of earlier clashes which had already started in the 1840s, spread from Mount Lebanon to Damascus with different opposing groups but similar features.¹²

On Mount Lebanon the conflict was, as Leila Fawaz notes, 'a result of decades of tension' and included the struggle that took place in 1857 between 'peasants and

¹⁰ Firro: p. 157.

¹¹ Akarli: p. 27.

¹² Akarli: p. 27-31.

lords of the Maronite north and spread to the mixed districts of the south as hostilities broke out between Christians and Druzes'. It gripped Damascus 'where Sunni Muslims attacked the Christian (primarily Greek Orthodox) part of town'. Although the initial triggers differed in both of these cases, the hostile activities 'reflected a displacement of traditionally privileged groups by new centers of wealth and power'.¹³ 'While local actors had the upper hand in the age of free trade (1820-1870), the age of imperialism put European companies into an influential position for the next fifty years in regard to the Ottoman coastal economy'.¹⁴

While on the Mount the feudal economy and the economic balance between the Druze and Maronite populations had changed in favour of the latter; a seemingly submissive Ottoman government – vis-à-vis European hegemony – was additionally weakened by the loss of control of its peripheries. This alerted the Sunni Muslim population in Damascus, who traditionally had been a privileged segment of the community.¹⁵ The economic and social changes that occurred at the time of European penetration were experienced by all sections of the communities, either in the form of economic deals or as missionary expeditions.

Beirut at this point was still spared from the full brunt of these tensions, mainly due to its significance for Europeans and the Ottoman Empire alike as an economic linchpin. Commercial interests were in general still more important than internal discord. Nevertheless, animosity between various communities existed and increased, mainly as a result of provocative actions carried out by a steadily growing mass of immigrants from Mount Lebanon.¹⁶

¹³ Leila Fawaz, 'The City and the Mountain: Beirut's Political Radius in the Nineteenth Century as revealed in the Crisis of 1860', *IJMES*, vol. 16/4, (Cambridge University Press: Nov. 1984), p. 489.

¹⁴ Emrence: p. 50.

¹⁵ Fawaz: p. 489.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: p. 490.

Under the new laws Mount Lebanon was transformed from a feudal area to a cash-crop system, with Beirut functioning as a trade and economic centre. Peasants and landowners from Mount Lebanon became dependent on services provided by Beirut's intermediaries – mainly Christian traders – while the old social stratum composed of old traditional landlords never completely managed to adapt to this new affluent class.¹⁷

During the unrest Beirut stood aside, playing the role of a detached observer, although it was heavily involved in financial and judicial matters. At this time, most of the Mount's inhabitants, as well as Ottoman and European employees and interest groups, preferred the atmosphere of the urban governing circles as political issues seemed easier to deal with in the city.¹⁸

According to Hitti, the Mount 'maintained its own judiciary and preserved order by a local militia'.¹⁹ Moreover no Ottoman troops were stationed on its soil and its inhabitants were not compelled to serve in the army. All revenues from taxes were dispensed locally. Indeed, none of the Mount's financial budget had to be transferred to the Porte.

The coming years saw different governors with varying talents, who tried to enforce reforms and attempted to participate in the growing industrialisation of the Empire. As elsewhere traditional powers fought against losing their grip over the region. Religious groups were now counted as political communities in a confessional system – a fact that heightened tensions.

On the one hand, Beirut's influence was undermined after the administrative restructuring of the Mount. Yet, on the other hand the area maintained its importance for Christian communities. The Orthodox clergy, who were mindful of the necessity

¹⁷ Firro: p. 160, 166.

¹⁸ Fawaz: p. 491.

¹⁹ Hitti: p. 443.

to show their presence on the Mount, maintained its administrative set up in the area. Beirut's dominance became ever more evident after the establishment in 1888 of the *vilayet*.

This new demarcation of administrative territory included Mount Lebanon as well as Tripoli, and as Fawaz notes, it was really 'the heart of the economic and cultural life of Mount Lebanon'.²⁰ Nevertheless, as will be shown when discussing masonic life on the Mount, it was in places like Shweir and Zahle that forms of cultural engagement like the theatre were able to thrive outside Beirut's limelight.

Masonic Lodges on Mount Lebanon

Sunneen Lodge was established in Shweir in 1904 and within four years it had almost 200 members. As Salim Mujais writes, 'Shweir was once mainly Greek Orthodox, now it is only PPS'. [Pro-Syrian Lebanese party, *D.S.*]. While this might be slightly exaggerated, Shweir and its surroundings were indeed constantly involved in political and religious issues or activities. The village of Shweir lies in the mountains, about 26 kilometres northeast of Beirut. It was in a way 'invisible from the coast', as it lies in a valley. Thanks to several springs nearby, Shweir benefitted from being surrounded by fertile, though limited, land. Thus, the population 'had to rely on other sources of income'.²¹ As mentioned, the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon were involved in the silk trade, but at the end of the nineteenth century they additionally began to benefit from the increasing prosperity of foreigners and Beirutis, who visited the village during the oppressive summer months. Describing Mount Sunneen, which rises nearby Shweir, the Russian Orientalist Agatangel Kremisky wrote: 'It wears

²⁰ Fawaz: p. 491.

²¹ Salim Mujais, *Antoun Saadeh. A Biography. Volume 1. The Youth Years*, (Kutub, Lebanon: 2004), p. 18 – 19.

winter on its head, spring on its shoulders, autumn in its bosom and summer sleeps at its feet'.²²

As observed with the other lodges, almost half of the masons belonging to *Sunneen* Lodge were traders, whereas about a quarter held positions within the Ottoman government and a number were landowners.²³ It is not surprising, considering its rural setting, that *Sunneen* Lodge admitted more landowners than other lodges in Beirut. What is more, only one member – William B. Magelssen – worked for European political bodies. Magelssen was registered as an employee of the United States consulate. Missionaries, although less interested in the hinterland, did build schools in such areas. In his map from 1873 (see figure 14 below), Henry J. Jessup marks three missions in the region: the American Presbyterian mission (in red), schools of the Free Church of Scotland (in green) and Greek and Catholic monasteries (marked as crosses). In an account written in 1899, Shweir is characterised as ‘the city of knowledge because of the large number of schools in it’, which occurred as a ‘result of competition among religious missionaries. The apostate Protestants built a school [...] so how can the Jesuits not hasten to do the same? Indeed, they built two schools. The Maronites were not far behind...’ In addition, between 1896 and 1897 three Orthodox boarding schools opened.²⁴

²² Quoted in Mujais: p. 20.

²³ Archive of the GLoS, Registration books, 1910, *Sunneen*.

²⁴ Mujais: p. 35 - 36



Figure 14: Partial Map of Greater Syria produced by H. Jessup in 1873

In its first years *Sunneen* Lodge was the only lodge in the area and attracted many aspirants from a wide radius. Most of its members belonged to influential Greek Orthodox and Maronite families, which is quite surprising, since the respective ecclesiastical authorities of the Maronite church spoke out strictly against freemasonry.²⁵ This could be interpreted as another sign for the loosening grip religious leaders had over their followers. On the other hand, maybe they deemed it to be wiser to allow some Maronites to join the fraternity, as they in turn could provide

²⁵ Archive of the GLoS, Registration Books, 1904, *Sunneen*.

valuable insights into the activities of the movement. Up until 1912, only ten of the initiated members of *Sunneen* Lodge, apart from its founders, had previously been masons. Hence, *Sunneen* apparently succeeded in appealing to a new audience, but it also suggests that masons from the area preferred to stay in their old lodges for the time being.

The petition of the lodge had been supported by Saad Abu Shahla, who was an early member of *Palestine* Lodge before joining *Peace* Lodge and by Nicolas Haggi and Alexander Barroudi, who belonged to *Le Liban* Lodge and *Peace* Lodge respectively. The petition shows the letterhead of *Peace* Lodge, written in English and Arabic, which states: ‘To the Glory of the Grand Architect of the Universe’ together with the rallying cry of the French Revolution: ‘Liberty (*hurriyya*), Equality (*musāwāt*), and Fraternity (*ikhāʿ*)’. The favourable image enjoyed by French freemasonry among fellow masons in the region partly derived from its association with the French Revolution.

Some of the founders of *Sunneen* Lodge came from Brazilian lodges, as was the case with Faris and Elias Mishriq and Ibrahim Naufal. Others emanated from either *Peace* Lodge or *Le Liban* Lodge.²⁶ Faris Mishriq was a well-known person in Shweir and the surrounding area. It was he who was responsible for arranging a commercial fair to be established in the village, which helped to increase the village’s prosperity.²⁷

The lodge attracted former members from *Le Liban* Lodge, such as Nimr S. Hobaika and George Salhab. The latter was a merchant, who was so fond of freemasonry that he also joined *Peace* Lodge in Beirut between 1905 and 1906.

²⁶ Shakir Baddour of *Palestine* Lodge, later *Peace* Lodge; Michel Bitar of *Peace* Lodge; Nahman Kaykati of *Le Liban* Lodge; Georg Hammam of *Le Liban* Lodge; Elias Samaha of *Palestine* Lodge; G. Judei of *Le Liban* Lodge; Ibrahim Shakra of *Peace* Lodge and Georg Dimitri Mounasser of *Peace* Lodge. Source: Petition at GLoS, *Sunneen*.

²⁷ Mujais: p. 41.

Another mason, who was initiated into *Sunneen* Lodge in 1908, was the landowner David Bashir, a former member of *Kadisha* Lodge.²⁸ The Bashir family were originally from Douma, an Orthodox village in Syria and in 1905 Bashir had founded The Doumani National Association of Douma (*Hayat el Watan ed Doumania Douma*). The organisation was affiliated with Douma's Orthodox Church and ensured the funding of Orthodox schools in the Ottoman Empire, thanks to its connections to emigrants from Syria in the Americas.²⁹ Initially known by the name Shalhoub, the family had split into different branches, with some adopting the name Bashir, whilst some kept their original name. One member from the Shalhoub family joined the *Helbon* Lodge in Aleppo in 1887; another, Antoine Shalhoub, worked for the Ottoman government and was initiated into *Le Liban* Lodge in Beirut between 1889 and 1890.³⁰

Disappointment with French policy and the Grand Orient's compliance with its government had set in in Ottoman Syria as early as 1906, when *Sunneen* Lodge turned to *Le Liban* Lodge and asked for help against the Maronite clergy. According to *Sunneen* they were agitating against freemasonry as 'our existence in Lebanon will depend on it. It is therefore important to demonstrate to the sectarian fanaticism and egotism that freemasonry will triumph, because it has the right and humanity, it is strong and the solidarity has provided an admirable triumph in France and Europe in general'.³¹ When no response was forthcoming *Sunneen* Lodge then sent a letter to the

²⁸ Registration Books, *Sunneen* Lodge, 1908. Bashir was allotted to *Kadisha* Lodge. I was not able to find his name among those initiated into *Kadisha* Lodge until 1908.

²⁹ A leaflet at family member Samira Bashir's office in Balamand University, Tripoli, (15.07.2008).

³⁰ Registration books of the Grand Lodge of Italy; [the relations between French or Scottish lodges and *Helbon* Lodge though were not the best and a representative of *La Syrie* Lodge speaks about some unnamed actions of *Helbon* which apparently had degraded the name of freemasonry, (Letter from *La Syrie* to the GODF, *La Syrie*, carton no. 1, Archive of the GODF)].

³¹ [*Notre existence au Liban va en dépendre. Il nous importe donc de prouver aux sectaires du fanatisme et de l'égotisme que la Franc-Maçonnerie triomphera, parce qu'elle a pour elle le droit et l'humanité, et qu'elle est forte de cette solidarité admirable qui lui a assuré le triomphe en France et*

French consul: ‘Faris Mishriq, an important freemason threatened that Greek Orthodox members would turn away from French patronage and engage instead in Scottish lodges should France decide to continue its support of the Maronite community’.³² The circumstances involving this letter are rather strange, as it appears that Mishriq, a member of a lodge under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, was warning France of the dire consequence of its inactivity, whereby all masons in Greater Syria would join Scottish lodges if the country continued to neglect its duty to protect the people of the region from Maronite religious leaders living on Mount Lebanon.

On the other hand, this move is understandable in the light of events: former members of *Le Liban* Lodge indeed aligned themselves with *Sunneen* and other lodges under the jurisdiction of different grand bodies. The likely reason for this trend was an attempt to carry out the idea of spreading masonry undeterred by existing masonic rules regarding affiliations to grand bodies of separate orders. However, since *Le Liban* Lodge continuously stood up for the interests of masons, irrespective of their obedience, and always perceived itself as the mother lodge in the Greater Syria region, it is only reasonable that it preserved its prestige among the majority of masons irrespective of France’s reputation. This was especially true since *Le Liban* could not count on a French masonic grand body, but was dependent on a functioning masonic network inside Ottoman Syria.

en Europe en général], Letter from *Sunneen* to *Le Liban*, (02.01.1906), *Le Liban*, carton no. 2, Archive of the G0dF.

³²[*Faris Mishriq eminent franc-maçon menace du retrait des membres grecs orthodoxes des loges d’obédience française et leur engagement dans des loges écossaises si la France décidait de poursuivre son appui à la communauté maronite*], Souad Abouelrousse Slim, ‘Le rôle de la Franc-Maçonnerie dans le développement des nouvelles idées au Levant’, in: *France – Levant. De la fin du XVIII^e siècle à la première guerre mondiale*, edited by Bernard Delpal, Bernard Hours, Claude Prudhomme, (Collectif/Geuthner, Paris: 2005), p. 220.

The constant commitment of *Le Liban* Lodge to other lodges added to the on-going lodge-hopping tendencies of its own members and testifies to the fact that most lodges before the Young Turk Revolution were established by *Le Liban's* own followers.³³ This resulted in friendly relationships and the establishment of a dynamic network of lodges affiliated with various masonic grand bodies.

Canaan Bey-Dagher - together with Georges Bey Zouain – was named as a member ‘from our lodge in Beirut’ by *Le Liban* Lodge.³⁴ In April 1905 he had been initiated into *Sunneen* Lodge and went on to join *Kadisha* Lodge a year later.³⁵ This means he was not strictly speaking actually one of ‘ours’, that is, a mason who belonged to a French lodge. Instead, he joined the Scottish lodges. The fact that *Le Liban* Lodge crossed boundaries initially set by European masonic bodies, by reaching out to all Syrian freemasons irrespective of their affiliations underlines the main argument of this thesis that in real life in most cases it did not matter which lodge individual freemasons belonged to. What did matter was their general participation in the fraternity. Their choice to join showed their willingness to start something completely new, something that would help to unite the Ottoman people when confronted with internal religious contentions and external challenges. For *Le Liban* this active step alone counted.

Zouain, who indeed belonged to *Le Liban* Lodge, was a Maronite from Ghazir, a village in the north of Beirut. He was a director of a school and served in various positions for the Lebanese administration. Dagher worked as a prefect for the district of Batrun, a small city on the coast further to the north. *Sunneen* Lodge wanted to gather support for Dagher against ‘certain functionaries of the [provincial,

³³ As explained in the introduction, lodge-hopping is my own term which seems to be the most suitable term to grasp the inner dynamics of lodges, *D.S.*

³⁴ Letter from *Le Liban* to the GOdF, (March 1905), *Le Liban*, carton no. 2, Archive of the GOdF; Registration books of the GLoS, *Sunneen*, 1905, *Kadisha*, 1906.

³⁵ Registration books of the GLoS, 1908, *Sunneen*.

D.S.] Lebanese government’, who supposedly acted against freemasons. The French consul in Tripoli, who is not named,³⁶ was accused of being a particularly suspicious freemason.³⁷ It remains unproven if France indeed influenced the behaviour and treatment of freemasons in Mount Lebanon. In this regard, the end of the affair gives no further hint: Canaan Bey-Dagher was transferred to Matn in order to continue working in its district ‘which is more important than the one of Batrun’.³⁸

Irrespective of this affair and the question of whether the freemasons in the region received help the campaign against them died down. Indeed, the brotherhood grew stronger. ‘Regarding the attacks against our brothers, they partly stopped but continue in a persistent and ignominiously from the side of the Maronite Church. Now without consequences as we are strong enough through our principles to dispose them and the few documents we published in our mother language brought us the sympathy of many, even from supporter of the broken clergy’.³⁹

Here it is significant and worthwhile to further analyse the issues related to local politics in the region at the time. *Sunneen* Lodge was founded in a tense period in the region’s history. From 1902 Mount Lebanon was governed by Muzaffer Pasha, who was less experienced than his predecessors and lacked European allies. Moreover, he was far more dependent on cooperation and support from locals than other governors before him.⁴⁰ He found himself wedged between a Maronite patriarchate desperate to maintain its strong position in local politics and to retain the

³⁶ Only in a later letter *Le Liban* informs the GOdF that it was M. Armez, Vice-Consul in Tripoli, mason and secretary of M. Combe, (27.05.1906), *Le Liban*, carton no. 2, Archive of the GOdF.

³⁷ *Le Liban*, (02.01.1906), carton no. 2, Archive of the GOdF.

³⁸ [qui est plus important que celui de Batrun], *Le Liban*, (27.05.1906), carton no. 2, Archive of the GOdF.

³⁹ [Quant aux attaques contre le dit F., elles ont cessé d’une part mais continuent avec persistance et ignominies de la part du clergé maronite, maintenant sans conséquences, car nous sommes assez forts, par nos principes, pour le confondre et les quelques imprimés que nous avons publiés en langue du pays nous a attirés les sympathies de beaucoup de monde, même partisans de la prêtraille en déconfiture], *Le Liban*, (27.05.1906), carton no. 2, Archive of the GOdF.

⁴⁰ Engin Deniz Akarli, *The long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861 – 1920*, (University of California Press: 1993), p. 64 – 71.

backing of France, and the so-called liberals, who were allies of the former governor. As Akarli states, ‘bureaucrats and politicians saw the Administrative Council as the keystone of a fully autonomous Lebanon under their leadership.’⁴¹ Rivalries between competing families, which involved the clergy and the governor, had already forced Vasa Pasha to look for other sources of support. However, unlike Muzaffer, Akarli notes that Vasa ‘was backed by a cross-sectarian alliance of the Lebanese leadership who managed to keep the affairs of the Mountain under control and the opposition literally at bay in Beirut’ until his death in 1892.⁴² Naum Pasha was a follower of Vasa and had to defend himself before the Ottoman government when confronted with petitions emanating from his own subjects: he was accused of smuggling and corruption, but seemingly his main misdemeanour was his closeness to the Kusa family, who were perceived as being in cahoots with the Maronite Church. According to Akarli, the petitioners denounced the fact that the Pasha was ‘behaving as if he were a princely ruler and Mount Lebanon a principality of the Kusa family and its local supporters’. Behind these allegations stood secular-minded Maronites and Greek Orthodox believers, who for perhaps the first time in such a movement called themselves *Lebanese*.⁴³ Their enmity against the power of the clergy resulted in Muzaffer’s election in 1902. As Hobsbawm states, regarding the socio-political changes in early political entities, even if this kind of formation ‘as yet faced no serious challenge to its legitimacy or cohesion, and no really powerful forces of subversion, the mere decline of the older socio-political bonds would have made it imperative to formulate and inculcate new forms of civic loyalty’. Growing possibilities for political influence and interference on the Mountain had turned

⁴¹ Ibid.: p. 68.

⁴² Ibid.: p. 55.

⁴³ Akarli: p. 64.

subjects into citizens with a ‘populist consciousness’ that displayed early efforts to organise their *Lebensraum* independent of the Ottoman Government.⁴⁴

Sunneen Lodge assembled a large percentage of the men responsible for the petitions. They were Ottoman officials, court members and military officials – an explosive mix. In lodges outside Beirut whole families formed clusters, but the Maronite and also some Greek Orthodox freemasons tended to enter *Sunneen* Lodge individually. Early exceptions were the Daghers, the Lahouds and the Shehabs.⁴⁵ Elias Lahoud and his son Faris Gibrael belonged to one of the major local silk exporters, which traded with Lyon. The Shehabs, who provided land and mulberry trees for the silk industry, were also represented by some family members in the lodges.⁴⁶ As Kais Firro states, silk entrepreneurs during the second half of the nineteenth century had risen ‘to the top of the economic and social ladder, a position formerly occupied by the landowners’.⁴⁷ One branch of the Shehab family had converted to Maronism, like some Druzes of the Abi-l-Lama family.⁴⁸ Another member of *Sunneen* Lodge, Habib Sa’ad, served as deputy chairman of the Administrative Council. Moreover, Canaan Bey-Dagher was Muzaffer’s most trusted district governor, which was also one of the reasons for his relocation to Batrun. He was supposed to confront the defiant clergy. According to Akarli, Muzaffer moved him to ‘the heartland of Maronite clerical power, because as he argued in a letter to the Porte, Batrun’s district governor had been unequal to the pressure of the bishops there’.⁴⁹ George Zouain, of *Le Liban* Lodge, likewise received an administrative position.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, (Cambridge University Press: 1990, 17th edition 2010), p. 85, 88.

⁴⁵ Archive of the GLoS, Registration book, 1904 – 1908, *Sunneen*.

⁴⁶ Kais Firro: p. 158, p. 160.

⁴⁷ Firro: p. 163.

⁴⁸ Akarli: p.17.

⁴⁹ Ibid.: p. 70.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: p. 68, Archive of the GLoS, Registration books, 1904 – 1908, *Sunneen*.

Another member of *Le Liban* Lodge – Jerjes Hammam – was one of the founders of *Sunneen* Lodge. Hammam was a teacher at one of the first secondary schools in Shweir. Apparently he was not content with the available books for teaching Arabic. Having spent some time in England, he published an Arabic-English dictionary in collaboration with Salim Kassab. Furthermore, in 1908 an Arabic-Arabic dictionary for students was brought out and financed by Hammam, Dagher Khairallah, Moussah Merhej and Nehmeh Jafet. Afterwards, Hammam went on to teach, as Mujais notes, in ‘the most important schools in Lebanon and Syria.’⁵¹

It would seem that the so-called liberals were often not liberal at all. According to Akarli, they ‘usually responded negatively or reluctantly to the various reform projects that Muzaffer himself advocated’.⁵² At the same time, some of them were less anti-clerical and more anti-dogmatic and preferred cooperation with the church. Also some liberal-minded clerics advocated a change in the church’s relationship to secular authorities. Muzaffer had to tread a fine line in order to survive politically, whereby he had to make concessions to the church as well as to the traditional, influential families.⁵³ This was the fate of most of the governors of Mount Lebanon, where, as Akarli notes, ‘fifty years of relatively autonomous and peaceful development had led to the rise of institutions and traditions that helped its people launch organised political action and also provided them with self-confidence in their ability to run their own affairs’.⁵⁴

Sunneen Lodge, and later *Zahle* Lodge, managed to unite rival families, like the Mujais and the Sawayas, although as Mujais notes, Shweir was presumed to be

⁵¹ Mujais: p. 42.

⁵² Akarli: p. 68.

⁵³ Ibid.: p. 70 – 71.

⁵⁴ Ibid.: p. 78.

‘traditionally divided into two major clans centered on the two larger families’.⁵⁵ Consequently, at the beginning of the twentieth century, that is during the early years of *Sunneen* Lodge, new and aspiring members of the middle and upper classes gathered with those who had lost out in the bear pit of global capitalism.⁵⁶

Almost immediately after having been ‘erected and consecrated’ on 2nd July 1904, by Alexander Barroudi and others, *Sunneen* Lodge commenced a troubled relationship with the Grand Lodge of Scotland.⁵⁷ The lodge welcomed a steady flow of about ten new initiates per year, but nevertheless complained in 1908 about ‘the persecution’ its members were allegedly subjected to, ‘owing to their connection with the craft’.⁵⁸ *Sunneen* also sent a petition to Edinburgh against its own lodge master. As the petition was not accompanied by the appropriate fee, the Grand Lodge of Scotland took no action. The normal procedure in such circumstances would have been to use the Grand Lodge as a mediator between the dissatisfied members and their master. According to the proceedings of The Grand Lodge of Scotland, a copy of the petition was sent to the master ‘asking him to reply sending answers within eight days of receipt’.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, *Sunneen* or its leader did not dwell further on the issue – it either did not want to spend the requested sum of money or the matter was otherwise settled.

About a year later, the lodge appeared in a letter sent to Edinburgh from Esper Shoucair, who wrote in his function as past master of the *Peace* Lodge. He agreed therein ‘to act as commissioner for the Grand Lodge in enquiring into the matters

⁵⁵ Mujais: p. 25. Here he also mentions the first marriage between a Mujais and a Sawaya that took place in 1929.

⁵⁶ Landowners like Mikhail Dagher, Moussa Bakhus Ghanem and Hannah Ibrahim Milki together with the former mentioned ‘liberals’, some literati from Shweir, as well as those from villages close-by, this alludes to a peculiar position of a lodge, supposed to shun any political or religious matters, *D.S.*, Archive of the GLoS, Registration books, 1904-1908, *Sunneen*.

⁵⁷ *Proceedings*, GLoS, (1904 – 1905).

⁵⁸ *Proceedings*, GLoS, (1908 – 1909).

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

arising out of the Petitions, etc., from Lodge Sunneen, [...] and from certain members thereof'.⁶⁰ Again no further clues are given. The Grand Lodge of Scotland confirmed that it had empowered Shoucair to enquire into all matters and 'to take such evidence, either documentary or oral, as may seem to him necessary and for that purpose to have full power to cite witnesses and call for production of all books and documents he may think fit'. Results were supposed to be handed out in the form of a report to the Grand Lodge. If required Shoucair was also asked 'to conjoin with himself' fellow masons, such as George D. Sursock, Alexander Barroudi, Assad Ofaish and David Nahoul. Costs incurred were to be covered by the Grand Lodge.⁶¹ The most interesting and astonishing fact is the mention of George Dimitri Sursock, who was Worshipful Master of *Le Liban* Lodge between 1891 until 1913. Thus, Sursock was affiliated with the Grand Orient of France, a grand body formally not recognised by the British grand lodges. It seems likely that the Grand Lodge of Scotland knew about the circumstances in which the different lodges in Greater Syria were founded, and hence was aware about their longing for unity and stability. This supposition is strengthened by the inclusion of David Nahoul in the list – another mason from *Le Liban* Lodge. Nahoul was a pharmacist and originally came from Deir el-Qamar and joined the lodge in its early years before 1880.⁶² Assad Ofaish and Alexander Barroudi, both physicians, were respected members of *Peace* Lodge.⁶³ Barroudi assisted many lodges during their foundation and inaugurations. He was thanked for his services with regard to *Zahle* Lodge, No. 1047, in 1908 and the *Light of Damascus* Lodge, No. 1058, in 1909. Barroudi, a graduate of the SPC, originally came from Saida. His career included being an instructor at the Saida School for Girls, at the SPC

⁶⁰ *Proceedings*, GLoS, (1909 – 1910).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Correspondence between *Le Liban*, and the GOdF; carton no. 2, Archive of the GOdF.

⁶³ Archive of the GLoS, Registration books, 1906 – 1908, *Peace*.

and at the *Zahrat al-Ihsān* (*flower of charity/social responsibility*), a social charity. He was also a private practitioner in Homs, Hama and Souk el-Gharb and a physician at Ba'aklin Hospital and at Burj el-Barajni and Hadath clinics. During World War I he was a Red Cross physician. Moreover, he was a member of his local district court for 22 years. What is more, he founded and edited a medical journal, wrote several books, contributed articles and poems to other publications and served as president of the Alumni Association of the SPC. Barroudi was one of the founders of the Medical & Pharmaceutical Society and a member of the Syrian Education Society.⁶⁴ With this background, it is not surprising that masons and grand lodges alike trusted this pillar of the community.

Esper Shoucair was born in 1843. He was a founding member and past master of *Peace* Lodge, although he was first initiated into the craft at *Le Liban* Lodge. At the age of nearly 70, Shoucair was still a valuable intermediary for the Grand Lodge of Scotland and he continued to be a court representative for Great Britain.⁶⁵

The Grand Lodge of Scotland did not reveal any further information about the petitions or any subsequent investigations. But *Sunneen* Lodge was not the only lodge that attracted negative publicity in Edinburgh, as only a year later *Zahle* Lodge reported the expulsion of Nicholas Habarjeb, one of its members. In this instance, as before, it did not elaborate on the reasons for the decision.⁶⁶

In the following years the internal storms at *Sunneen* Lodge seemingly abated. As Mujais notes, the Shweir district had become a 'favourite summer resort for returning Lebanese immigrants and for rich Egyptians and other foreigners'.⁶⁷ *Sunneen* Lodge only turned to the Grand Lodge on one other occasion, in order to ask

⁶⁴ *AUB – Directory*, p. 13.

⁶⁵ *GODF, Le Liban*, carton no 2.

⁶⁶ *Proceedings*, GLoS, (1911 – 1912).

⁶⁷ Mujais, p. 40.

for an allowance to change facilities during the winter months. Such requests were not uncommon. As the proceedings of the Grand Lodge note, ‘by old custom, wealthy families from the middle zones of Mount Lebanon wintered in Beirut, and many Beirutis summered in the neighbouring hills in Mount Lebanon’. During the 1920s, the members of *Sunneen* Lodge favoured meeting in Beirut, preferring the facilities available via *Peace* Lodge to the icy mountains. They received permission on a yearly basis to meet in Beirut until 1926.⁶⁸ Afterwards, the agreement was renewed for another year, when they met in rooms at the American lodges in Beirut. However, the desire of members of *Sunneen* Lodge ‘to confer degrees in cases of emergency at intervals of not less than one week instead of two weeks’ was turned down.⁶⁹

In regard to Ottoman Syria, no Provincial Grand Master of the region supplied the customary annual report to the Grand Lodge of Scotland in Edinburgh, which subsequently became suspicious of the activities of *Sunneen* Lodge. When officials from *Sunneen* Lodge once again asked to renew their right to meet in Beirut during winter, the Grand Lodge of Scotland asked for details. As the proceedings from 1927-1928 make clear, ‘the Master and Secretary having failed, after repeated applications, to furnish this information, the Committee recommend that permission to meet in Beirut be not granted’. At this point Edinburgh had also received a report by Shoucair (which alas is no longer extant): ‘The Committee had also before it a Report from the Petitions, Complaints, and Appeals Committee regarding irregularities in the working of this Lodge, and concur in the finding’ that it has to ‘suspend the Lodge and recall its Charter’. It added that the expulsion of one of the members – Wadih Berbari— from *Sunneen* Lodge would not come into effect until the lodge was able ‘to give information supporting its action’. In addition, the Grand Lodge of Scotland

⁶⁸ *Proceedings*, GLoS, (1922 – 1925).

⁶⁹ *Proceedings*, GLoS, (1925 – 1926).

recommended closing the lodge, suspending its working and ordaining ‘that the Charter, books, papers, jewels, clothing, paraphernalia, and funds (including the *Benevolent Fund*) of the Lodge, be returned to Grand Lodge forthwith’.⁷⁰

This marked the end of *Sunneen* Lodge. No one really knows what happened during these years. Did the lodge become involved in local politics, lodge competitions and religious struggles? It may well have been that *Sunneen* ignored the stipulated refrain from politics during lodge meetings and violated masonic principles. It would not be an isolated case as in comparison with members of grand bodies. A contemporary English freemason, for example, had warned before that ‘it must be borne in upon the conscience of Grand Lodge members that they exist for Masonry, and that Freemasonry is not just *their* servant’.⁷¹

However, only rumours in local lodges that are still working continue to tell of a connection between the lodge and a number of politicians who allegedly tried to put their fellow masons in high government positions. It is said that in attempting such a course of action they started a fight with the Maronite clergy. Yet, only a few years after *Sunneen* came into being many other lodges around Shweir were established and masons had no difficulties in finding a new home.

Zahle Lodge, No. 1047, was founded in 1908 and started to officially operate on 5th November.⁷² Until the eighteenth century, *Zahle* was just a small village of a thousand inhabitants that bordered the Beqaa Valley, halfway between Beirut and Damascus. The population worked in the agricultural sector and engaged in local trade. By the late nineteenth century the town had a population of between twelve and fifteen thousand.

⁷⁰ *Proceedings*, GLoS, (1927 – 1928).

⁷¹ John George Gibson, ‘The Policy of Colonial Freemasonry’, *The Freemason*, (London: 25.07.1908), p. 56.

⁷² GLoS, Registration book, 1909, *Zahle*.

As early as 1711 the Abi-l-Lama family had become the most important authority in the area. Two centuries later the family also placed members in *Sunneen* Lodge. Zahle turned from being a relatively small village, dependent on agrarian activities, into a small town involved in commercial activities.⁷³ Its trade was oriented more towards Damascus than to Beirut, due to a better infrastructure in the direction of the former. In political terms, the town stood between the governor of Damascus and the Emir of Mount Lebanon. Since no direct representative of the Ottoman government was present in the town, power resided with the old and prestigious families until the onset of political restructuring.

In the 1860s, Zahle experienced massacres against its Christian inhabitants, although rivalry had already intensified in the mid-1840s, when the Jesuits arrived in the town and built a school and church. As Farrah notes, the Jesuits pushed ‘constantly south, into the Druze and Muslim country, and establishing themselves also in Deir el-Qamar and Saida, they unwittingly contributed to discord by arousing the suspicions of non-Christian elements and the scenes of their religious and educational activities became during the civil war also the scenes of strife and massacres’.⁷⁴

Fights erupted between Muslims and Christians, who according to one observer of the Damascene Al-Hasibi family, ‘openly cursed the Prophet and called their dogs by the names of his Companions’, while ‘Muslims arriving in Zahle on horseback were forced to dismount before entering the town.’ Finally, it was the Druze community that seized control and marked ‘the climax of a Christian-Druze

⁷³ Axel Havemann, ‘Die Entwicklung regionaler Handelszentren und die Entstehung eines Händlertums im Libanongebirge des 19. Jahrhunderts’, *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, XXII, no 1/4, (1982), p. 53.

⁷⁴ Caesar E. Farah, *The Politics of Interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830 – 1861*, (Center for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris Publishers, London/New York: 2000), p. 710.

conflict which had been raging in Mount Lebanon for several weeks'.⁷⁵ Christians lived in fear for some weeks afterwards and foreign Protestant missionaries were among the first to be ejected. Fuad Pasha's punishment of notable Damascene Muslims and the feeling among Christians that they would be protected by European powers encouraged the latter group to return or to stay in Zahle.

At the end of the nineteenth century three different missions were active. The American Presbyterians had the largest presence, followed by the British Anglicans and the Free Church of Scotland with its school system.⁷⁶

With steadily growing trade, a new trade bourgeoisie climbed the social ladder, soon exerting more authority than leading religious figures. Most of the prominent families had one or more members with a foot in the door of masonic lodges: the Maronite Doumani clan, originally from Deir el-Qamar, was represented by the teacher Alex Doumani. Fatik Shehab, also a teacher, was a member of *Sunneen* Lodge and Malik Shehab joined *Peace* Lodge in 1909. The Druze Assad Abu-Nakad was among the many founders of *Zahle* Lodge. The Shama'un family, which belonged to the new bourgeoisie, was also represented: Assad Shama'un, a merchant, for example, had joined *Zahle* in its first year in 1908.⁷⁷

Unlike in Shweir, Zahle's inhabitants were mainly Greek Catholics and Druze, who traditionally belonged to the affluent sections of society.⁷⁸ *Zahle* Lodge was chartered under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. Of the initial thirty-two members, some were former members of *Peace*, *Sunneen* and *Le Liban* lodges.

⁷⁵ Kamal S. Salibi, 'The 1860 Upheaval in Damascus as seen by al-Sayyid Muhammad Abu'l-Su'ud al-Hasibi, Notable and Later Naqib al-Ashraf of the City', in: *Beginnings of Modernisation in the Middle East*, edited by William R. Polk, Richard L. Chambers, (University of Chicago Press: 1968), p. 191.

⁷⁶ Map of Syria by Henry H. Jessup made for the American Presbyterian Mission by (1873), C.M.S. Archives, C.M.S. Gr. 3, Vol. 6, CM/012/29D, The University of Birmingham, Birmingham.

⁷⁷ GLoS, Registration books, 1908, *Zahle*.

⁷⁸ [L ''église grecque catholique, qui recrute ses membres parmi les chrétiens les plus riches et les plus considérés, est sous la juridiction d'un patriarche résidant à Damas et portant le titre de patriarche d'Antioche], in Baedeker, (1912), p. LX, Havemann: p. 54.

Interestingly, four of the initiates had previously been freemasons in Brazil, among them Faris Abu-Jamra, who was either the son or the nephew of Sa'id Abu-Jamra.⁷⁹ The latter was also an initiate and had been a member of *Le Liban* Lodge. Faris Abu-Jamra was a journalist from Al-Kfayr, who had gone to the SPC and received his doctorate in medicine from St. Louis University in the United States. He was also the owner and editor of the *Al Afkar (the idea, opinion)* newspaper. He probably became a member of the press association of Brazil and Vice-President of the Brazil Alumni Association before the whole family moved to Sao Paulo. Additionally, he is remembered as an author and contributor to newspapers and journals.⁸⁰

These Syrians were introduced to freemasonry during the time they spent in Brazil. In Brazil they succeeded in forming a Syrian-Lebanese community at the beginning of the twentieth century. They were members of this expatriate community who returned to Syria as masons and continued their masonic membership in lodges at home. Abu-Jamra and Ibrahim el-Abed were co-founders of *Zahle* Lodge and had been members of the Brazilian *Philantropia* Lodge. One can also cite Khalil Kadre, who was a member of the *Union de Charité* Lodge in Brazil, prior to joining *Zahle* Lodge. What is more, the two Antakly brothers, who were co-founders of the *Kadisha* Lodge, No. 1002, in Tripoli in 1906, had been members of the *Deus et Union* Lodge in Brazil.⁸¹ According to Jeffrey Lesser, Ottoman Syrians and Brazilians had so much in common that 'Brazil had assimilated to the older Middle Eastern culture as much as the actual Middle Eastern immigrants assimilated to Brazil: in other words that

⁷⁹ For more information on freemasonry in Brazil: Internationales Freimaurer Lexikon, edited by Eugen Lennhoff, Oskar Posner, Dieter Binder, (Amalthea, Wien: 5th edition, 2006), p. 150 – 151; Daniel Ligou, *Dictionnaire de la franc-maçonnerie*, (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris: 1987), pp. 164.

⁸⁰ AUB *Directory*, p. 25.

⁸¹ Registration books, 1906, *Kadisha*,; 1908, *Zahle*,.

acculturation, and not assimilation, has taken place on both sides'.⁸² A stereotype was dominant in Brazil, however, whereby the passivity of the Muslim immigrants had led to Brazil's backwardness. Hence the immigrants from Syria saw in freemasonry not only the chance to connect to other Syrians, but also a way to bind with Brazilians, while also striving to be on a par with them.

Syrian emigration to Brazil started at the end of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, in 1925 a Brazilian visitor to Beirut and Zahle noticed Portuguese speakers everywhere and the singing of the Brazilian national anthem in his honour: 'in the mid-1930s some seventy percent of the inhabitants of Zahle spoke Portuguese and the main thoroughfare's name, 'Rua Brazil', was painted in enormous letters on the pavement itself'.⁸³

The petition of *Zahle* Lodge was supported by three members of *Sunneen* Lodge (Faris Mishriq, David Mujaes and George Nasser), as well as four members of *Peace* Lodge (Alexander Barroudi, Habib Shahlaoui, Kamil Abu Nasser, who worked for the Ottoman government, and Ahmed Ashi). Mishriq, by this time, had climbed the ladder and served as Provincial Grand Master.⁸⁴

During its formative years, *Zahle* Lodge prospered in a conducive cultural environment and likely also benefitted from the experience gained by former members of *Sunneen* Lodge. In addition, the lodge gained much from radical ideas, enlightened concepts and reformist plans that were circulating in the surrounding atmosphere. In short, it thrived during the peak period of the *nahda*. Lodges on Mount Lebanon were ideal meeting places for those living in the area and visitors. As Ilham

⁸² Jeffrey Lesser: '(Re)creating Ethnicity : Middle Eastern Immigration to Brazil, in' : *The Americas*, vol. 53/1, (Academy of American Franciscan History : July 1996), p. 48.

⁸³ Lesser: p. 54.

⁸⁴ Petition of *Zahle* to the GLoS, (sent 08.10.1908). Next to his signature on the petition where a Provincial Grand Master was supposed to sign, no further proof regarding Mishriq's position had been found to confirm his title, *D.S.*.

Makdisi notes, ‘professional actors, Syrians and non-Syrians alike, maintained a strong connection with Syria; went on tours there, and even spent entire summers in Beirut and pleasantly cool Mount Lebanon, fleeing from the Egyptian heat’. On the other hand, these short stays may have been one of the reasons why freemasons decided not to join *Sunneen* or *Zahle*: if they only wanted to visit some of the lodge meetings, they could do so without being a member.

It was probably no exaggeration when the playwright David Mujais, who was a member of *Sunneen* Lodge, assured his fellow author and playwright, Amin al-Rihani, in their correspondence ‘that if he wished to have his play on the 1908 Unionist coup *‘Abdul Ḥamīd fī Athīna* performed in Zahle, all of Zahle’s inhabitants’ would be his soldiers.⁸⁵

In 1910, a certain I. E. al Khouri wrote a short report for *The Freemason*, giving an overview of the state of freemasonry in the Empire. Born in Zahle, Khouri had left the country in 1891 and headed to the United States. However, he was curious to see how freemasonry had developed in his homeland. As he observes: ‘masonry over there during the last few years has been more than the regular meeting of the Brethren, more than the friendliness and pleasantries toward each other. Masonry, of necessity, in the Orient has entered into the affairs of the State, of the Church, of the Home, and of every kindred institution’.⁸⁶ For Khouri, the masonic heyday in his homeland had only just started, as ‘during the three-and-thirty years the light of

⁸⁵ Ilham Makdisi, *Theater and Radical Politics in Beirut, Cairo, and Alexandria: 1860 – 1914*, (Center of Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University: 2006), p. 24.

⁸⁶ I. E. Ul Khouri, ‘Freemasonry in Turkey’, *The Freemason. A weekly Record of Progress in Freemasonry*, (John Denyer Hand, London: 17.12.1910), p. 398. Unfortunately, up until 1910 there are more than ten Khoury’s listed as being members of *Sunneen* Lodge and at least two Khoury’s are listed as being initiated into *Zahle* Lodge. Hence, I was not able to identify the author of this report. Moreover, he possibly joined freemasonry in Boston and was not necessarily member of a lodge in Ottoman Syria. Consequently, his name would not appear among the French and Scottish registration lists, *D.S.*.

Masonry in Turkey and Syria was dim', but with the ratification of the constitution under the Young Turks, 'all this suffering came to an end'.⁸⁷

Although his impressive description seems distended, the end of Abdulhamid's reign did indeed produce momentum for the germination and expansion of masonry all over the region. Freemasons interpreted the overthrow of Abdulhamid as a positive sign and gave impetus for augmented and extended activities. As Khouri continues, 'lodges were reopened, and new ones were formed, and in my own city of Zahle[n] in the Mountains of Lebanon, of 30,000 inhabitants, we have now three new Lodges with a total membership of over five hundred, within two years. I shall never forget the beautiful dedication ceremony of the reforming of the Lodge *Noor*, or *Light in Damascus*. This lodge has been closed for thirty years'.⁸⁸

Until World War One, *Zahle* Lodge had over 150 members, with the majority having joined between 1908 and 1910. It was the first of the early lodges in which artists were listed as members. Fahd Lyon was the artist in question and was 34 years old when he was initiated in 1910.⁸⁹ Co-member, David Mujais, a Greek Orthodox Syrian, who had studied at the Protestant school in Shweir, was the founder of *Al Noor* magazine in Alexandria and the *Al Hurriyat* daily newspaper. Mujais was imprisoned for six months and was excommunicated from the Greek Orthodox Church after he had delivered a speech to freemasons in Saida. This event marked the culmination of a long-running dispute between him and the governor of Lebanon, Youssef Pasha, who objected to Mujais's anti-clerical and reformist views.⁹⁰ Mujais then went to South America. Together with George Sawaya, he published the *Al Islah*

⁸⁷ Ibid.: p. 396.

⁸⁸ Ibid.: p. 396; no information has been found to confirm the statement about the lodge's existence 30 years earlier, *D.S.*

⁸⁹ Registration books, 1910, *Zahle*.

⁹⁰ Mujais: p. 59.

(Reform) periodical in Buenos Aires.⁹¹ His friendship with Sawaya had probably already been established during their days in Shweir. Sawaya came from the same city and was also a member of *Zahle* Lodge; and like Mujais, he had also joined *Sunneen* Lodge.⁹²

Freemasonry functioned as the common denominator upon which reform-minded men were able to meet in a secluded setting away from the gaze of the public. However, the theatre stage, as Makdisi notes, served to ‘disseminate these ideas to a larger audience, but it also allowed the masses to learn their part in the [French] Revolution and rehearse their role as the revolutionary crowd’.⁹³ Mount Lebanon and Beirut were hotbeds of anticlericalism. And, according to Makdisi, ‘the theatre was the main vehicle for the expression of anticlerical ideas’.⁹⁴ Unlike Damascus, Aleppo or Tripoli, the Mount and Beirut did not carry the dominantly conservative heritage of the powerful and religiously-minded traditional families. Thus, reformist voices were strong enough to continue fighting the dogmatic supporters of the church.

This tension between clerical and anti-clerical viewpoints was already discernable at the end of the nineteenth century and is illustrated by many of the letters sent by *Sunneen* Lodge to *Le Liban* Lodge. In the letter freemasonry is described as the focus of intellectual and moral enlightenment, which was fighting ignorance, fanaticism and atavistic egotism. The intention of the fraternity is described as being to improve mankind in moral, intellectual and material ways.⁹⁵ In another letter, Sursock wrote to the Grand Orient of France that members of *Le Liban* Lodge had translated *Le Juif Errant*, a play based on the novel of the same name by Eugène Sue. ‘We have to say that the fulfilment of our duties towards our citizens

⁹¹ www.shweir.com/did_you_know.htm, (24.08.2008).

⁹² Registration books, 1906, *Sunneen*; 1910, *Zahle*.

⁹³ Makdisi: p. 23.

⁹⁴ Makdisi: p. 26.

⁹⁵ Letter from *Sunneen* to *Le Liban*, (02.01.1906), carton no. 2, *Le Liban*, Archive of the GOdF.

while at the same time challenged to defend ourselves against attacks leaves a lot to be desired. It is out of our reach to bring about even more enlightenment – the only way to unmask our enemies – hence we deemed it a good idea to translate *Le Juif Errant*'.⁹⁶ Sursock regarded *Le Juif Errant* as a call for social justice against the overwhelming influence of Jesuit circles. But its performance in 1911 was interrupted by pro-Jesuit students and their campaign 'was so effective that it gathered nearly four thousand signatures from Beirut and Mount Lebanon, as well as remote villages, the great majority of whose residents would never see the play'.⁹⁷ Notwithstanding its title, the play was not so much directed against Jews as it was against Jesuits. Its story is about a Jewish boy and his sister, who both do not know that their forefathers had been Protestants. Helped by the shrewdness of another Jew, these forefathers had amassed a fortune. The Jesuits are cast in a highly unflattering light as they try to get hold of the money, and put all kind of obstacles in the way of the true owners. However, they are undone by their distrust of one another. The storyline concludes with an open ending: the audience is informed that the *Wandering Jew* and his sister finally found some peace, but no clue is given as to the remains of the fortune.

Accusing the Jesuits of greed, while at the same time absolving the Jews who usually were connected to financial matters, highlighted how the dogmatic interpretation of religion and the bigotry displayed by many members of the Jesuit order was jeopardising the development of common social bonds.

The theatre, the press, different societies and freemasonry all expressed similar signs of politicisation prior to the Young Turk Revolution. Its actors and members

⁹⁶ [Nous remarquons pourtant que ce moyen d'accomplir nos devoirs envers nos citoyens et de nous défendre contre l'agresseur, laisse à désirer sous plusieurs rapports et n'étant pas à la portée de donner plus d'impulsion aux lumières, seul moyen efficace pour dévoiler nos ennemis; nous avons cru bien de traduire 'Le Juif Errant'], *Le Liban* to the GOdF, (20.04.1881), Archive of the GOdF, carton no. 1.

⁹⁷ Makdisi: p. 27.

belonged to the middle and upper classes and formed elitist circles, which under Abdulhamid attracted an increasing number of followers. All associations and activities served as channels to promote change and reform throughout society. The press dominated in Beirut, and later on in Cairo, but benefitted from the rather liberal and open atmosphere of Mount Lebanon in order to champion the campaign against authoritarian rule in general and imperialism in Alexandria.

With the emergence of what Makdisi refers to as ‘radicalism within the growth of mass politics’, the theatre was an ‘effective tool for the education of the masses’ and ‘provided the necessary space for a rising radical bourgeoisie to constitute itself by constructing a coherent ideology that greatly relied on the promotion of an alliance between the middle and working classes’.⁹⁸ The press served as the perfect channel to deliver this message to the public. And though probably not all men shared common political views, all of them were singing from the same hymn sheet: *nahda*. Wake up and do something! Do something against the omnipresent enervation!

The secular press, including journals and newspapers owned by freemasons, supported all the plays that expressed enlightened ideals in their articles in the form of announcements. Reports and reviews had already started to appear from the early stages in *Al Jinan (the garden)* owned by the Bustani family, *Al Ahram (the pyramids)* which belonged to the Taqla family, and Jurji Zaidan’s *Al Hilal (the crescent)*.⁹⁹ And again, though these publications were not masonic outlets, their outlooks more often than not coincided with dominant masonic opinions reasoned by the fact that such a high number of journalists had at the same time joined various lodges. Pioneers like actors, photographers, printers and all the others asserting themselves on new fields –

⁹⁸ Makdisi: p. 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid.: p. 9 - 29. For masonic affiliations, see appendices III - V.

all those constituted at the same time a clientele receptive for the ideas of freemasonry, for an institution that would connect them all, through which they would be able to cultivate local and regional business contacts, would be linked with same-minded men and would be striving for the realisation of universally valid principles. Members of *Sunneen* were swearing by continuing work for the ‘emancipation of the Syrian spirit from this state of moral atrophy’ due to ‘fanaticism and aberration’. According to them freemasonry’s main concern was ‘tolerance in matters of religion’.¹⁰⁰

A thorough examination of the connections between men related to the theatre, the press and freemasonry, is beyond the scope of the present work. However, the networks which were established by means of these overlapping activities certainly existed.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ [...à l’émancipation des esprits des Syriens de cet état d’atrophie morale où les avait jetés un passé séculaire de fanatisme et d’erreur [...] la loi primordiale de cette honorable association était la tolérance en matière de religion], Letter from *Sunneen* to *Le Liban*, (02.01.1906), *Le Liban*, carton no. 2, Archive of the GOdF.

¹⁰¹ See also Appendices III and IV. These overlaps were not restricted to Greater Syria but also existed in Egypt and Constantinople. They become even more striking with regard to artists or creative jobs in general. Antonio Beato, the brother of Felix Beato, both photographers in Constantinople, had joined *Bulwer* Lodge in Cairo in 1865 and served as Petitioner for *Grecia* Lodge in 1864. (Registration books, 1865, Petitions, 1864, UGLoE).