

The Druze & Arabism

Arabism, as the title of this chapter indicates, is a general term not easily delineated or defined. It is all encompassing and equally vague; and yet the notion of Arabism as an “identity” connected to the Arabs has existed as far back in distant history as when Arabia and the “Arabs”, as its inhabitants, were identified and described.

Thus, “identification” in this context embodies my terms of reference in regard to the notion of “Arabism” itself, as well as the Druzes’ relationship(s) with it. “Arabism” in this context is a notion of traits, phenomena and facets not a model that embodies exclusivity or activism. It certainly does deal with the relatively recent term “Arab Nationalism”, as a socio-political mass movement. No attempt is made to endorse or refute anything wholesale?. The approach adopted is informative and investigative rather than defensive, apologetic, or justificatory.

One aspect of “Arabism” is ethnographic, including the issue of self-identification, and what may follow in terms of limited or qualified interaction both on behalf of claimants and subscribers.

When using the following criteria recognized by many anthropologists as John Gulick (1), “Arabism” is certainly central to the Druze ethnographic character.

These criteria are:

1. Geography.
2. Language.
3. Claimed ancestry or self-identity.
4. Common history.

The Levant: The Abode of The Druze

One undoubted element that ties the Druze to Arabism is geography. Both Druzism, (Madhhab al Tawhid) as a movement, and the Druze as a community, were born and have maintained their core in the heart of what we today call the Arab world. The antecedents of the Fatimi Da’wa started in Arab North Africa, and Tunisia to be precise. The Fatimid caliphate was based in Egypt, and until today, the vast majority of the Druze live in the Arab Levant of the Fertile Crescent, namely Syria, the Lebanon, Palestine / Israel and Jordan (2). A few, according to some other sources live in southern Turkey across the present Syrian/Turkish border (3).

In fact, historical sources suggest that the Druze inhabited the Levant since the beginning of The Call (Da'wa) in the late 10th century and early 11th century A.D. The Da'wa found its most receptive lands in the valleys and mountains of present day Syria, the Lebanon and Palestine. Most of these regions and areas were inhabited by Arab tribes even before the advent of Islam. Tayy', Kalb ibn Wabra, Tameem, Kilaab, Judham and Qidha'a, as well as Lakhm and Ghassaan, settled in Greater Syria and Iraq since Pre-Islamic times.

Ghassaan and Lakhm, both of which were of Yemeni origins, created two Pre-Islamic vassal states in southern Syria and southern Iraq respectively. Other sedentary tribal federations, the most significant of which is Tanukh – the term Tanukh means settled or sedentary tribes or tribal federations - spread out from Iraq into various parts of northern and western Syria.

Some of what the Druze and non-Druze historians and chroniclers describe as "Tanukh" were linked to Lakhm, Qidha'a or Bahraa'. The Tanukhs of Lakhm, however, perhaps had the most significant association with the Druze according to classical sources. The two houses of Buhtur and Arslan are said to have descended from the Tanukhs of Lakhm, and they, along with the house Ma'n of Rabi'a, were at various periods in early Druze history the leading clans of notables or Commanders (Umara) of the community (4).

The heart of the Druze earliest settlement was Wadi al Teym, comprising the present Rashayya and Hasbayya districts in present day Lebanon. Together with al Jabal al A'la, the Acre plain and Damascus (with its environs), Wadi al Teym is regarded as the oldest Druze centre (5), and from this centre al Shouf (or Shoufs), al Gharb and al Matn as well as the Iqlim al Ballan / Golan Heights were settled. Later on, al Shouf, al Gharb and al Matn (collectively making up the major part of the current Mount Lebanon) became the base of the greatest Druze regional powerbase in the community's history (6).

From Mount Lebanon the Druze extended their presence some time later southward to the regions of Iqlim al Tuffah, Iqlim Jezzín and Iqlim al Rihan (7). South of Damascus and al Ghutah (the fertile region around Damascus including the town of Jaramana), the Druze settled the region of Wady al Ajam further to the south and southwest, namely the villages of Sehnaya, al Ashrafiyyah and Deir Ali (8).

Today Druze villages are found as far north as al Jabal al A'la (Jabal al Summaaq) in the extreme northwestern part of modern day Syria and the plain lying south east of

the said Jabal, in the districts of Harem and Idlib of the Idlib province (9), and as far south as al Azraq oasis in Jordan (10). The villages of Dalyat al Carmel and Isfiya on Mount Carmel mark the westernmost limit, while the easternmost villages on the eastern foothills of Jabal al Arab (Jabal al Druze), namely, al Rushaydah, al S'ana and ah Shbekeh, mark the easternmost limit of Druze habitations are the (11).

The largest Druze concentration of population, however, is in the Suwayda Province (Jabal al Arab or Jabal al Druze) which is the most recent centre, fed since the late 17th and early 18th centuries by waves of Druze immigrants (12) from northern Syria (making up the "Halabiyyah", i.e. Aleppine clans), Mount Lebanon (the "Shawafneh", i.e. those who hail from the Shouf), Wady al Teym (the "Rashaniyyah" related to Rashayya) and northern Palestine, (the "Safadiyyah", denoting the link with the Safad district in northern Palestine). Furthermore, tens of thousands of Druze today live in the capital cities of Beirut, Damascus and Amman, many of whom are local, the rest seasonal or migrant residents.

The Language

The Arabic language is definitely a fundamental part of the Druze Arab identity. The Druze epistles were written in Arabic, as were the major religious chronicles and poems (13). Arabic is also the mother tongue of the Druze and the national language of the present political entities they inhabit.

Amir Shakeeb Arslan, famous throughout the literary Arab circles as "Amir al Bayan" (The Prince of Speech) points particularly to the impeccable Arabic as spoken and pronounced by the Druze (14). Many Druze cherish an unusual attestation of their Arabism in this respect made by the Lebanese Christian man of letters Maroun Abboud, who lived for years among the Druze in the town of Alayh. In a long poem about the Druze Abboud says:

What runs through their arteries is pure Arab blood,
the proof of this is their impeccable speech

15) (يجري الدم العربي في أعراقهم صرفا صراحا والدليل المنطقُ

Several Druze poets, authors, writers and journalists, all writing in Arabic, have left indelible marks on the Arab cultural and literary life, whether in the Arab East or in

Europe and the Americas. Many clans [families] such as the Nasser Eddin of Kfar Matta, the Taqi Eddins of Ba'aqlin, the Arslans of Shouweifat, the Ubayds of Suwayda, and al Qassems of al Rameh in Galilee, have produced famous literary figures like Amin Nasser Eddin, Sa'id and Amin Taqi Eddin, Shakeeb Arslan (16), Ali and Salaameh Ubayd (17), and Samih al Qassem (18).

Also in the field of Arabic calligraphy, several Druzes were among the most famous in the Arab world, led by Nassib Makarem, and Fahd and Bahij al Andary (19). In the Americas, Druze figures such as Farid Abu Musleh (Fred Massey) in the United States (20), and Najib al Asrawi (21) in Brazil, were known both as men of letters as well as brilliant translators of Arab and Islamic heritage to English and Portuguese.

Claim of Ancestry and Self-Identity

The vast majority of Druze clans claim descent from Arab tribes and entertain no other origin, although a confirmation of most of these genealogical claims would be difficult. Historical sources disagree widely about whether the Druze are really descendents of Arab tribes. Richard Pococke, Henry Maundrell, G W Chassaud, Canon Joseph T. Parfitt, as well as the Lebanese American historian Philip Hitti, dismissed the Druze claims of Arab descent (22); while others like Carsten Niebuhr and anthropologists quoted by Najla Abu-Izzeddin, in addition to almost all Druze historians and chroniclers maintained that the issue of Arab descent is beyond doubt. Abu-Izzeddin in turn makes the argument that long before the Muslim conquest in the 7th century A.D., the Arabs had been at home in Greater Syria, and the fact that this Arab presence facilitated the conquest (23). She also advances another argument, namely, that in the case of the Druzes, their claim to Arab origin was not motivated by consideration of self interest, for when the Druze community was constituted during the first half of the 11th century AD the Arabs were no longer in the ascendant. Non- Arab dynasties like the Ayyubids, Saljuks, Mamluks, and eventually the Ottomans were the dominant powers (24).

Amir Shakeeb Arslan, like almost all Druze historians, confirmed in an editorial that appeared in Al Shura newspaper that the Druze were pure Arabs. He went on to say: "No Arab outside the Arabian Peninsula is as close to Arab purity than the Druze". However, he also notes that few families of notables are of Turkish and Kurdish origin, a fact not denied by the Druze. He also says that historical records possessed by the Lebanese Druze and their neighbours suggest that the Druze of Mount Lebanon descended from twelve Arab tribes that used to inhabit the Aleppo – Ma'arrat Al Nu'man region in northern Syria before many migrated south during the Abbasid period (25).

A more recent researcher, Nadeem Hamzeh also confirms that the Tanukh federation from which the Tanukhs of Mount Lebanon descended was made up of sub-tribes from al Azd, Qidha'a and Lakhm, although he disputes the full account of the Sijill al Arslani (i.e. the Arslan amirs genealogical tree) (26). A further point that merits mention in this respect is that, perhaps with the exception of the inhabitants of Palestine, where such a rivalry and related alliances survived well into the early 20th century (27), the Druzes of Mount Lebanon have been the most loyal to – or rather afflicted with - the traditional Arabian Pre-Islamic Qays - Yemen rivalry.

Classical Druze and “Lebanese” historians and chroniclers have made of this Qays - Yemen rivalry a hallmark of the Druze-dominated Mount Lebanon. The much-mentioned battle of Ain Dara of 1710 / 1711, where it is said that a Qaysi grouping defeated the Yemeni leadership, has been portrayed as “the beginning of the end” of the Druze unchallenged supremacy in today’s Lebanon, and the event that allowed the non-Druze Shehab clan to become the powerbrokers, and eventually, the real governors of Mount Lebanon (28).

As for the more detailed Druze sources on the earliest specific settlements, the Druze Religious Epistles, as well as works such as al Ashrafani’s Umdat al A’arefin, mention several Arab clans or sub-clans as the first converts who accepted the Da’wa. They include Al Abdullah in al Gharb and al Shouf, Al Turab in northern Palestine and Al Sulayman in Wadi al Teym. Al Ashrafani also mentions the “mashayekh (plural of Sheikh) of al Bustan” in greater Damascus and “mashayekh of Jabal al Anwar” (i.e. al Jabal al A’la) near Aleppo, and relates to them the beginnings of their respective communities (29).

A Brief Political History

“Arab Nationalism” as we know it today was born in the second half of the 19th century. George Antonious in explaining how the “Arab Awakening” took place said: “Patriotism in the national sense was unknown. All creeds and sects, had, it is true, much in common: language, customs, racial kinship; and, above all, hatred of the Turkish rule of which they all desired to be rid. But in their aspiration towards freedom they were moved by different impulses; ...” (30).

According to Antonious, in a drive towards westernisation and emancipation from Turkish rule, a crucial role was played by foreign missionaries, especially, the Americans and French Jesuits.

Christian intellectuals like Nassif al-Yaziji and Butrus al-Bustani also assisted this drive, which, eventually gained momentum under younger nationalists educated at the missionary colleges, such as the Syrian Protestant College - later to become The American University of Beirut. No Druze joined the first two societies established to promote western culture, namely the American inspired Society of Arts and Science of 1847 and the Jesuit supported Oriental Society of 1850. However, things began to change after the founding of the Syrian Scientific Society (al Jam'iyya al 'Ilmiyya al Suriyya) in 1857. In fact, Amir Mohammad Arslan, a prominent Druze intellectual, headed this society which was independent of missionary influence for several years (31).

The Amirs Amin and Adel Arslan were involved later in forming al Qahtaniya Society [Qahtan is the alleged forefather of the Yemeni Arabs, or al Arab al 'Aariba, meaning the original Arabs] (32), against the background of the growing process of Turkification in the Ottoman Empire.

Other Druze Arabists like Amir Shakeeb (33), Adel's brother, believed that the dividing line between upholding Arabism and maintaining support of the Islamic caliphate as embodied by the Ottoman Sultan, was too thin an argument to support. The dynamics of this issue was evidently being decided by the overall regional and international political developments. Eventually, after the end of the First World War, the nationalist or secular Arabists had to contend, to their grave disappointment, with what were to them the new disappointing realities of the French and British mandates, and of course the Balfour Declaration.

Druze Syrian Arab Unionists, as opposed to Lebanese "Kayanists" (from the term "kayan", meaning entity) – supporters of a Lebanon fully independent of Syria -, like Adel and Amin Arslan and Rashid and Sa'id Tali', were now in open confrontation with the French mandatory authorities in Beirut, which indeed passed the death sentence on Adel Arslan and Rashid Tali' (34). The Great Syrian/Arab Revolt, started by Sultan al Atrash, the Druze leader in Jabal al Arab insured deeper Druze involvement in Arab causes.

In Syria and Lebanon more Druze became involved in Arab and anti-mandatory groupings, such as al Nadi al Ahli (the National Club) of 1929 whose leadership included Sa'id Taqi Eddin and Mohammad Ali Hamadeh; Hizb al Istiqlal al Jumhuri (the Republican Independence Party) of 1931 whose leadership included Amir Sami Arslan and Mohammad Ali Hamadeh; Usbat al 'Amal al Qawmi (the League of National Action) founded after the Qurnayel Congress in 1933 in the Druze Metn

village of Qurnayel, was also led by a the Druze Ali Nasser Eddin (35). The 'Usbat al 'Amal al Qawmi expanded into Syria and became the largest party organisation in Jabal al Arab joined by thousands of young Druze men(36).

The Druze Arabists were not, however, limited to those living in the Levant. In North America, Hizb Souriyya al Jadeeda (the New Syria Party) under its secretary general 'Abbass Abu Shakra played a pivotal role in aiding the Great Syrian/Arab Revolt of the 1920s. Sultan al Atrash corresponded with Abu Shakra with regard to the Party's continued aid to the Revolt (37). The Party, which was based in New York City had around 50 branches in North America, primarily in the United States, and provided the Revolt with almost half its funds (38).

In addition to his involvement with Hizb Souriyya al Jadedda, Abu Shakra was also active in the oldest of the two nationalist Arab American newspapers: Al Bayan (the Manifesto) and Nahdat al 'Arab (the Arab Renaissance). Al Bayan was founded in Detroit, Michigan in 1910 by Sulayman Baddur, a Druze from the town of B'aaqlin, and was aided in editing and publishing it by 'Abbas Abu Shakra. Nahdat al 'Arab was founded by the two Druze brothers Amin and Sa'id Dawoud Fayyadh in 1947(39).

More Druze were active in Arab causes in various capacities throughout the Americas, including Salman Yusuf 'Azzam and his son Mahmud in the USA, Amir Amin Arslan the editor of al Istiqlal (the Independence) newspaper in Argentina, Mohammad Sa'id Mass'oud in Canada, and Najib al Israwi in Brazil (40).

The Ba'th Arab Socialist Party

In the Post-Second World War period, and the establishment of the State of Israel, many Druze continued to identify with the two main rallying causes of Arabism: Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine. Two pan-Arab political parties in particular, attracted the Druze of Syria and Lebanon and provided them with powerful vehicles in the political arena. In both, the Ba'th Arab Socialist Party in Syria, and the Progressive Socialist Party in Lebanon Druze members have been prominent, and have reached the highest positions.

After the Sixth National Congress held between 5 and 23 October 1963 in Damascus a Syrian Druze, Hammoud al Shufi, joined the enlarged 13-members National Command of the Ba'th Arab Socialist Party. Two new Druze members, Mansur al Atrash and Shibli al Aysami joined the National Command after the

Seventh Congress, held between 12 and 18 February 1964, also in Damascus, which reversed the Leftist trend – led by al Shufi.

Al Atrash and al Aysami maintained their positions after the Eighth Congress held in May 1965 less than one year before the major split between the Syrian Regional faction that took over political control in Syria and the National Command now in control in Iraq.

As for the Regional Commands, al Shufi was a member of the Provisional Regional Command in Syria appointed by the National Command in June 1962. In fact al Shufi became Secretary of the First Regional Congress between September 10 and 16, 1963 with two more Druze, Mahmud Nawfal and Hamad Ubayd joining the leadership. However, between February 1st and 5th, 1964, in An Extraordinary Session, the new Regional Command included three Druze members: al 'Aysami (Secretary of the RC), Ubayd and Jamil Shayya. 'Ubayd and Shayya maintained their position in the Second RC in 1965 before the dismissal of the RC by the NC. The provisional RC appointed later included al Atrash, al 'Aysami. Salim Hatum. Another Druze Ba'thi officer had joined the RC earlier that year [see Devlin]. Both Ubayd and Hatum were members of the Military Committee which brought the Ba'th party to power in 1963 (41). While Fahd al Sha'er, then one of the highest ranking officers, also a Druze, was the leader of what was known as the Military Bureau (42).

Kamal Junblatt and the PSP

Kamal Jumblatt, a scion of one of the richest and most influential Druze families, founded The Progressive Socialist Party (43). Junblatt always felt that the Lebanese political system based on confessionalism proved unworkable in terms of social justice, equal rights and secularism. What began as a tentative liberal approach to politics in the late 1940s (44), metamorphosed into an idealist ideological quest during the 1950s (45).

The 1958 uprising supported by the Arab unionist-Nasserist popular groundswell against the then President Camille Cham'oun and his Pro-Western policies guaranteed for Junblatt not only the foremost Druze leadership but also a central position in the political system as a "kingmaker"(46).

The 1950s added to the PSP principles and stances a clearer pan-Arab flavour, when the Arab Near East found itself an arena of regional superpower rivalry

manifesting itself in the Eisenhower Doctrine and the Suez Crisis. Junblatt became an admirer of

the late Egyptian president Jamal Abdel Nasser, whom he met for the first time near Cairo in 1955(47). He also established political links with the Ba'th Party in Syria in 1954 (48). This was not at all an unlikely development in the light of widening co-operation between socialist, communist and Arab nationalist forces throughout the area, and their alliance with Nasserist Egypt.

Indeed, this phenomenon is perhaps best exemplified in the creation of the Ba'th Arab Socialist Party itself by the merger of the former "The Arab Ba'th Party", very much a nationalist intellectual group, led by Michel Aflaq and Salah al Bitar, and "The Arab Socialist Party", a class-conscious and activist socialist group led by Akram al Haurani (49).

Judging by the results of the general elections, the PSP is still, until today, by far the strongest political entity in the Druze areas throughout present-day Lebanon. And most of its senior leadership and deputies in the Lebanese parliament are Druze (50).

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Nadeem Hamzeh. Al Tanukhiyyun (Beirut: Dar al Nahar li al Nashr-1984) p 15

3 – Kamal Junblatt. I Speak for Lebanon (London: Zed Press, 1982) [trans. By Michael Pallis], p 27

* [Junblatt, d.1977- claims that then around 60000 Druzes lived in southern Turkey]-

4 – Shakeeb Arslan (ed. By Sa'ud al Mawla). Banu Ma'ruf Ahl al Uruba wa al Islam (Beirut: Dar al Awda / al Majlis al Durzi li al Buhuth wa al Inma, 1990) pp 34-35 and 71-73
also Hamzeh, pp 15-18, also Abu Saleh, pp 19-23, also Abu-Izzeddin, pp 6-10

5 – Mohammad al Ashrafani. Umdat al A'arefin fi Qisas al Nabiyyin wa al Umam al Salefin [manuscript]

6 – Abu Saleh, pp 133-138

7 – Yusuf Abu Shakra, al Harakat fi Lubnan ela 'Ahd al Mutasarrifiyya (Beirut: -, 1952) pp 151-159

8 – Hafez Abu Musleh. Waqe' al Duruz (Beirut: al Maktaba al Haditha li al Tiba'a wa al Nashr-.....) /2nd Edition, p 244

9 - The villages of al Jabal al A'la and the neighbouring plain are: Bnabel, Qalb Lozeh, Tal Titha, Kfar Kila, Bshindalaya, Kukku, Hilleh, Ibraita, Illatha, Jed'in, Kfar Mares, Tall al Doweir, Arshin, Kfar Binneh, Keftin, Biret Keftin and Martahwan [also known as Ma'arret al Ikhwan]-

see:

Kamel ibn Hussein Bali al Ghazzi. Nahr al Dhahab fi Tarikh Halab (Aleppo: al Matba'a al Maruniyya-1962), pp 214-216

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Also

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10 – Abu Musleh, p 243

11 – Kais Ferro. A History of the Druzes (Leiden: E .J. Brill- 1992), pp 31-42 and 47-53

also

Lewis, pp 77-95

[see maps in Ferro and Lewis's works]

12 – Estimates of Druze population in the Levant are quotes by Gabriel Ben-Dor and Intissar Azzam (Syria –mostly the Suwayda Province- 170000, Lebanon between 130000 and 135000, Palestine / Israel 35000, Jordan between 6000 and 10000)*

figures for Syria, Lebanon and Palestine / Israel were published in 1981)
see: Gabriel Ben-Dor. The Druzes in Israel: a Political Study (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University-1979), p 255
also Intissar J. Azzam. Change for Continuity: The Duzes in America (Beirut: M.A.J.D. Entreprise Universitaire-1997), p29

13 – The Epistles, and all other religious Druze texts are scribed in Arabic, as are all religious poetry and chronicles by the likes of al Sheikh al Fadhel Mohammad Abu Hilal, Sheikh Zein Al Din Abdul Ghaffar Taqi Eddin, Sheikh Yusuf al Kfarquqi, and others.

See also the poetry of the Buhturid amirs in:
Saleh bin Yahya, Tarikh Beirut (Beirut: Dar al Fikr al Hadith li al Tiba'a wa al Nashr), p 58 and pp 65-74

14 - Sh. Arslan / al Mawla , p 71
also Abu-Izzeddin, 14

15- al Dubeissi - Vol 4, pp 208-209

16 – Najib al Be'aini. Rijal Min Biladi (Beirut: Mu'assat Dar al Rihani-1984), pp 40-50 and 98-112 and 136-142 and 154-160,

17 – al Dubeissi – Vol 5, pp135-136 and 225-236

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20 - al Basha, Vol 1, pp103-104

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22 – Sadik Asaad. The Reign of Al-Hakim Bi Amr Allah, 966-1021 (Beirut: The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing-1974), pp156-157

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23 – Abu-Izzeddin, pp 4-9

24 – Abu-Izzeddin, p11

25 - Sh. Arslan / al Mawla [written in Geneva on September 12th, 1925] pp 71-72
[for a run down of clans' descent, see al Basha's Mu'jam A'lam al Duruz]

26- Hamzeh, p 10 and pp 22-26

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(Jerusalem: the Magnes Press, The Hebrew University-1975) pp 284-291 and
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28 – Kamal Salibi. A House of Many Mansions (London: I.B.Tauris-) pp

also

Abu-Izzeddin, pp 198-203

also

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29 – al Ashrafani

30 – George Antonious. The Arab Awakening (New York: Capricorn Books-1965),
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also al Basha, Vol 1, pp164-166

32 – Antonious, p 110

also al Be'aini, pp 149-151

33 – N al Be'aini, pp 35-38

also al basha, Vol 1, pp 146-149

34 – Raghid Solh. 'Attitude of the Arab Nationalists towards Greater Lebanon
During the 1930s' Lebanon: A History of Conflict and Concensus (ed. By Nadim
Shehadi and Dana Haffar Mills) (London: The Centre for Lebanese Studies / I B
Tauris-1988), pp151-152

* [Adel Arslan became a prominent statesman in Syria, serving as a deputy and cabinet minister, and Rashid Tali' became Transjordan's first premier]

35 - Solh, pp 154-155
also N al Be'aini, pp199-213

36 – Hassan Amin al Be'aini. Duruz Suriyya wa Lubnan fi Ahd al Intidab al Faransi, 1920-1943 (Beirut: al Markaz al Arabi li al Abhath wa al Tawthiq-1993), pp 368-369

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[George Antonious declared that what started with Sultan al Atrash as a Druze

Revolt became a national insurgency, p 377]

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also:

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39 – al Qandilchi p 58 and pp 61-64

also H al Be'aini, p 219

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also: Devlin, pp 64-68

50- <http://www.lp.gov.lb/> [see: the Official Results of the Lebanese General Election in 2000, particularly, in the Shouf and Alayh-Ba'abda constituencies. A PSP candidate, Ghazi al Aridhi, won the Druze only seat in the Labanese capital Beirut, and a Anwar al Khaleel, former ally of Walid Junblatt, won the only Druze seat in South Lebanon].
