

## Fares Bozeid Moujaes

At the time of the emara

Alfred woke up in the early hours of the day, as was customary for him. He wore his dark gray striped suit and white shirt that bore his initials, and he sat on the porch on his caned wooden seat. He faced the garden and the Mamluk-style fountain, his back to the household through the entrance door, open as always. He sat there, as did the farm owners in his dear Louisiana on their rocking chairs on a hot day, passing the time and talking to the passersby. His wife, Najibeh, prepared coffee for him, a whole pot, which she placed in front of him with the small, cone-shaped cup that held small measures, enough for just one sip, or *shaffeh* as it is called. Of shaffehs he will have many, whether freshly brewed or cold, as he will sit there all day only moving to the dining table, the *sufra*, when called for lunch, which Najibeh dexterously prepares for her large family. Alfred never set foot in Najibeh's kitchen, not that he couldn't brew his own coffee, but she wouldn't allow it. "Men should be served," she would say and motion him off to his throne whenever he came close to suggesting he help himself. In the house, she laid down the law, to the extent that Alfred more than once suggested, "She should wear the pants." Strong she was, yet she never deviated from the age-old social intricacies that reflected the conservative and patriarchal tendencies so prevalent in the Middle East.

When Alfred stood to shave his beard at the hat stand, the highest piece of furniture in the large sitting room, one of his daughters, Lodi usually, would hold the towel as he chipped off small flakes of soap and lathered them in a bronze cup. And this he did twice every day while humming the tunes of the Byzantine repertoire he had learned at the church next door. Out on the porch, he sipped coffee and smoked the locally manufactured *bafra*s or *tatlis*, consuming no fewer than three packs of these cigarettes a day. He sat there every day and contemplated his success, a landowner now, a holder of large estates across the region. Saint Elias,

the patron saint of the church next door, had looked over him well. The church had been standing for a long time, long enough to see the first of his Shwayri ancestors settle in the village in 1807.

Alfred knew little of his great grandfather, only that Fares Bozeid Moujaes had been a stonemason and had come from Shwayr and was named for his village of origin when he settled here in Hadath. The name *Moujaes* was dropped for the *Shwayri* of convenience. Alfred didn't know that Fares represented a long line of stonemasons that traced its origins to the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Stone cutting and building were crafts his ancestors had mastered, having engaged in large construction projects back in Yemen, the land of riches and abundance. The Dam of Ma'arib in Yemen, described in history books as a jewel of construction since the early sixth century BCE, was but one example of the ingeniousness of these engineers and builders. Then many tribes fled Yemen after the economy plummeted as a result of internecine wars and the meddling of mighty Rome in the trading of commodities, activities that had once made the fortunes of the original inhabitants. Of these commodities, frankincense was most important, but wealth also came from spices and other rare products of Africa and India, and even the distant Far East.

The migrating tribes trekked across the Arabian Peninsula, many settling in the Hauran area, southwest of Damascus, where they developed commercial ties with the Byzantines, then lords of the land. In this new region, the gifted builders developed their skills further and put them to use under the Byzantine emperors, who required many stonemasons and paid them lavishly, as did Justinian, who built fortress after fortress on his eastern flank, which faced the threat of the ruthless Persian Sassanid Empire. But not only fortresses did the ancestors of Fares Bozeid Moujaes build. They also lent their skills to grand realizations ordered by Emperor Justinian who built numerous churches across his empire, the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople being unequivocally the most impressive. But empires decline and give way to newer ones, and the Byzantine Empire was no exception. When the Ottomans swept over Hauran in the early years of the sixteenth century, the Moujaes became refugees again and, after a difficult journey to Akkar in the northern mountains, took refuge in the heights of Shwayr.

Alfred knew the village of Shwayr very well. He was a regular visitor and had family and friends there. He even bought property there. Najibeh knew it equally well, as she had lived most of her life in its vicinity, the daughter of Abdallah Meshrek, a learned man who held high positions under the Ottoman governorship.

Founded on a small cliff (its name means "small cliff"), Shwayr faces inward to the east. It sits in a fabulous gorge, formed by the succession of foothills that run from Mount Sannine and drop sharply from five thousand feet to the blue Mediterranean Sea less than fifteen miles away. The sight of the Sannine from Shwayr, with its satin-white snow in spring, is awe inspiring. These are the everlasting snows that

were praised in the Bible and by early travelers, but with global warming, changes in demography, and the intensive use of modern technology, the snows of Sannine have become rather seasonal. Despite that, Sannine is lovingly said by locals to “wear winter on its head, spring on its shoulders, autumn in its bosom, and to have summer sleep at its feet.” The peak is the sturdy guardian of time and the rearguard of Metn, the large region comprised of the valleys that climb eastward from the sea, cutting into the continuous chain of mountains that run along the longitudinal axis of Lebanon, with Kesrwan to the north and Shouf to the south.

At the time of their migration in the sixteenth century, the Moujaes must have looked at Shwayr as an impregnable fortress, rising three thousand feet above sea level, with a shallow gorge at its feet and facing the mighty Mount Sannine. Facing east, it had its back covered from the sea, invisible to the passing armies and those who sailed along the shores of Lebanon. In a nod to Cairo, it was called Shwayr Al-Qahira (“Cairo” in Arabic), “the Impregnable,” an acknowledgment that the town had never been invaded nor occupied by an army, a striking fact in a land that had been crisscrossed constantly by different civilizations since the dawn of time.

For the Moujaes, Shwayr was the perfect asylum. Coming from Hauran, they saw in the hospitable gorge a hideaway from the sacrilegious invaders who dared to profane Hagia Sofia. The righteous Islam of the early caliphs was done with, they thought, and recent events hinted that a new Islam was being ushered in, one that was ruthless and brutal. Shwayr offered a refuge where the Moujaes could practice their Greek Orthodox faith unafraid. They arrived in successive groups between 1517 and 1532, built a church next to a millenary oak, and settled down. (A detailed history of the Moujaes family is given in appendix 2.)

### Of silk and stone

The great-grandfather of Alfred Nicola was born in Shwayr in 1788, a period of upheaval across the world. Europe was in turmoil and revolution was looming on the horizon. Royalty in France was on the brink of collapse: the Bourbons were soon to walk to the guillotine, leaving the Jacobins to plunge the country into the Reign of Terror. Had television existed in those days, the parents of Fares would have seen a triumphant Napoleon campaigning in Italy against the Austrians and the United States of America coming to life from the womb of a war for liberty and independence. They would have seen a live broadcast from Philadelphia the day the Declaration of Independence was ratified, and they might even have seen the grand drawings of Charles L’Enfant, whose plans for the new nation’s capital were just starting to be put into place when Fares turned five. Great moments in history, certainly, but who in Shwayr was to know? Life at the Moujaes household

revolved around simple things, and when Fares turned five, his hands were put to use. He would spend most of his days picking mulberry leaves to feed the tiny worms that sat in container boxes and squeaked all night long in the sitting room where he also made his bed.

Silk growing and trading were common practices among village people in Mount Lebanon, the region in which Shwayr is located. The Moujaes, like many others in Shwayr, depended on this business. It was not their main occupation, as the seasonal sale of cocoons to silk spinners could not possibly feed a family, but it was a source of supplemental income they could rely upon when, come winter, Fares's father returned from the faraway lands where he worked as a stonemason. A master stonemason, Fares's father had built his own house in Shwayr, a simple two-room dwelling walled in stones that he cut himself along with others from the village who shared their labor to build each other's homes. The inside walls were plastered with thick clay, which kept in the warmth in winter when five feet of snow covered the picturesque landscape. The roof was made of earth, piled on a thick mat of straw that rested on large beams and cross poles. It was thick, to keep out the rains, and was compacted with a heavy stone roller during the winter.

Winter months were probably the happiest times for Fares, who had the snow to thank for his father being at home, the only family time they had together. Life in those days was harsh, and nothing came easy. While Fares's father was away most of summer and autumn, his mother spent her time replenishing food stocks for the winter, the *mouneh*, which she kept in the second room, next to the tools, firewood, and other necessities. She stored a large variety of cottage foods in this room: meats, which she diced and fried and kept in clay pots sealed with animal grease; tomato paste in jars; olives and olive oil; all sorts of marmalades; syrups made from blueberries and mulberries; dried fruits such as figs, apricots, and raisins; nuts and pine nuts; oats and wheat. She made her own flour from the wheat, grinding it with a pestle and then baking it in the *mawqadeh*, the fireplace that had so many functions in this same sitting room. The smoke-blackened ceiling contrasted with the chalky white-plastered walls and the floor of packed-down, iron-colored sand.

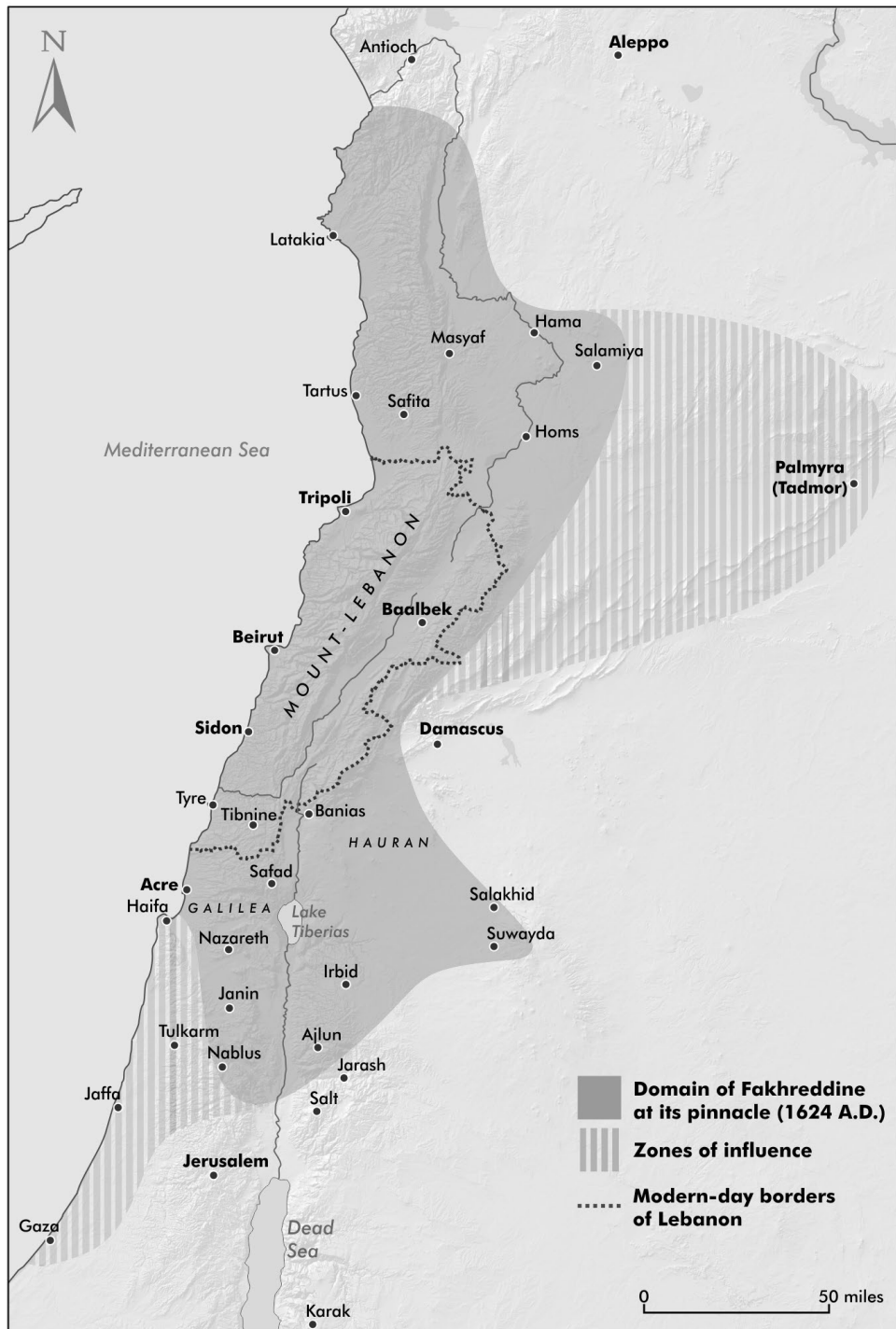
The whiteness of the walls was striking, repainted completely each summer after a season of silkworm nurturing. This season started in spring when the tiny worms were eager to start their metamorphosis, about the time when Fares's father, like every other stonemason of Shwayr, left his family for work in "foreign lands," or *ard al-gherbeh*. The life of the Bozeid Moujaes was orchestrated by the cycle of the seasons. A turning point in Shwayr came at Easter, when Orthodox Lent and its fifty-day fasting period came to an end and the Eid was proclaimed in great pomp. Families celebrated together the resurrection of Christ before the men packed their tools and headed out to a new season of construction work.

While his father was away, Fares's mother filled the walls of her sitting room with a framework of poles made of mulberry tree branches, tying them into a grid in which the mulberry leaves were positioned. In this, the worms were placed, and they ate the leaves with an ogre-like appetite. Fares helped pick the large, thick, crunchy leaves and bring them to the framework every day, and the worms grew bigger by the hour. From tiny, squeaking bugs, the silkworms grew massive and then stopped eating to begin the pupal transformation into chrysalides. After forty days, the tiny insects yielded a forest of large silk cocoons that Fares's mother sold by the bundle to spinners who crisscrossed the countryside on buying trips.

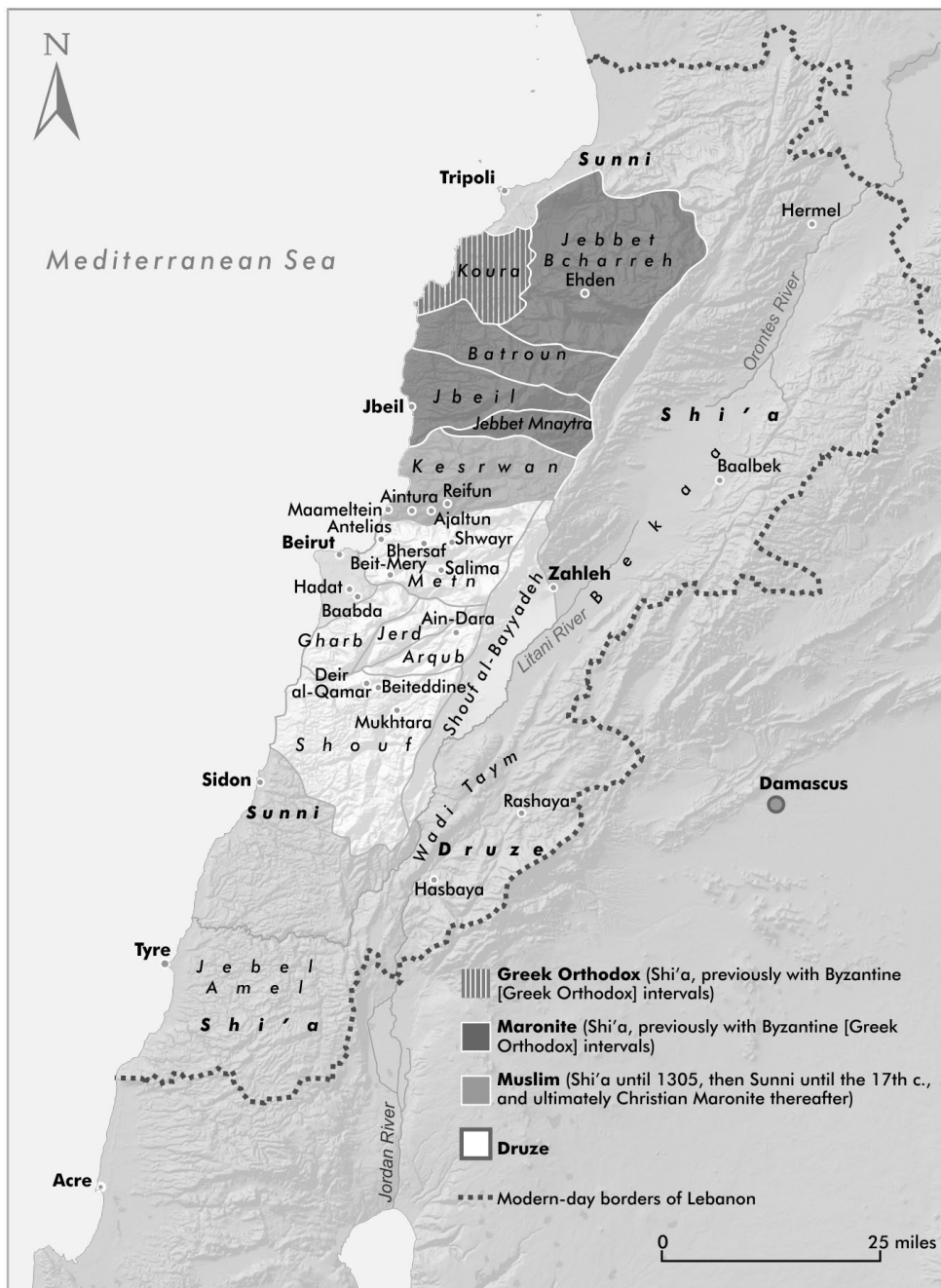
The silk industry was very prosperous then and would develop further in the coming century to become the main source of wealth in Mount Lebanon. Sericulture had existed there since the seventeenth century, thanks to the forward thinking of Amir Fakhreddine (1572–1635), the ruler of a large territory that extended in its heyday from Gaza in the south, to Latakia in the north, and deep into the Syrian hinterland as far as Palmyra in the east. He governed under the tutelage of the Ottomans, who confirmed him in his role of governor of the *sanjak* of Saida, a province that fell at that time under the auspices of the *wali* (the provincial governor) of Damascus and included all the mountains extending from Kesrwan to the Shouf. Saida, the biblical Sidon, was a harbor city that served these highlands, as did Tripoli, in the north, serve the Syrian hinterland.

Being so powerful, Fakhreddine managed to sign the tax-farming contract, the *muamala*, with the wali, which gave him the right to manage the territories to his benefit and, from the standpoint of the Ottomans, to enrich the imperial treasury in Istanbul from levies on the local populations. For the Ottomans, the rationale was clear: who other than a local and powerful dignitary could levy taxes across a rugged and inaccessible terrain and hold the populations in check? Fakhreddine was the obvious choice. The amir, however, had other plans, and taking advantage of the war that was raging between the Ottomans and the newly established Safavid dynasty in Persia, he turned his emara into a socioeconomic model that gave birth to a new system of governance. He collected less tax, improved the conditions of the working class, developed irrigation systems with the help of the Venetians (with whom he openly maintained relations), organized a standing army, and built fortresses across his ever-enlarging territories.

The Ottomans soon grew disenchanted with this exuberant and indomitable amir, and for a time Fakhreddine had to lay low, and so sailed for Tuscany. He remained in Florence for four years, where he learned from his friends, the Medici, the intricacies of governing a transforming society where art and architecture coexisted with modern economics and riches poured in from newly discovered continents. By extending their hospitality, the Medici befriended a potential ally who could be useful if, come the day, they mounted a new crusade to liberate the Holy



Map 1. The territorial expansion of Fakhreddine the Great



Map 2. The seven fiefdoms (emara) in the times of Amir Fakhreddine

Shrines of Jerusalem. Amir Fakhreddine also spent time in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in Napoli as a personal guest of the king of Spain. Exiled Fakhreddine may have been, but the four to five years he spent in the bustling lands of the Renaissance gave the amir alliances and food for thought.

After brokering a deal with the Ottomans to return home, in 1618, Fakhreddine spent time organizing his administration and rebuilding his village of Deir al-Qamar, turning it into the power center of his dominions. And when it came to construction, Fakhreddine knew where to get good stonemasons. If his architects and engineers were mostly Florentines, the stone workers were from Hauran and Shwayr, many of the Moujaes family, ancestors of Fares Bozeid Moujaes and Alfred Nicola.

At the time of Fakhreddine, the southern part of modern-day Mount Lebanon was inhabited by the Druze, a dissident sect that had splintered from Muslim Shi'a in the eleventh century in Fatimid Egypt and sought refuge in the hills that took their name. Until the nineteenth century, the part of Mount Lebanon extending from Kesrwan to the Shouf was called the Mountain of the Druze; at that time, "Mount Lebanon" only referred to the northern part that had come to be inhabited by Maronite Christians about the same time (see "Mount Lebanon in history," appendix 1, for a discussion of the origins of the different communities of Lebanon). Communities lived separately and had very little interaction until Amir Fakhreddine, enlightened most probably by his years in exile, endeavored to build an agrarian economy based on crop and silk production. For this, labor was needed, and Fakhreddine saw the hard-working Christian Maronite community living in the north as a good source of workers. The Maronites had come to the region after having been persecuted by the Byzantines and were pushed into Mount Lebanon from their lands on the Orontes River, in western Syria near the northern frontier of modern-day Lebanon. In the mountains, where rains were plentiful, they mastered terrace agriculture, which made them experts at subduing the inhospitable, cold, and hilly terrain.

Manpower was not all Fakhreddine wanted, however; he also had political reasons to usher the Maronites into the lands of the Druze. The amir was himself a Druze, and although he lived and governed among his coreligionists, they did not enjoy unity. The Druze community was divided by power struggles among families, and also by tribal differences that separated those who identified with their Yemeni ancestry from others who traced their origins to the north of the Arabian Peninsula, the Qaysi. Simply put, Fakhreddine needed allies to balance his lack of popularity among a large portion of the Druze. He could not turn to the Sunni community, as it was too close to the Ottomans, who shared their religion. He could not turn to the Shi'a either, because they were close to the Persian Safavid dynasty; such a move would be interpreted as a *casus belli* by the Ottomans, who were at war with their neighbors. He also could not turn to the Greek Orthodox, who answered to



the Patriarch in Phanar, in Istanbul itself, and were therefore equally close to the Sublime Porte, the seat of Ottoman power. So Fakhreddine chose the Maronites, who formed an indigenous church in the highlands up north and who were less likely to respond to Ottoman overtures. To improve relations with them, he gave their clergy swathes of land in the Druze Mountains to build churches. It is at this moment in the history of Lebanon that religion started to interfere with politics, a state of affairs that is intrinsic to the power balance of Lebanon today. Modern politics in Lebanon is in many ways the continuation of the sociopolitical system that came into play in these early times. Away from their homes and living among a fierce and combative population (one valley in the Metn Mountains is called the valley of skulls, *wadi jamajem*, after the high number of fighters who fell during a battle between Druze families), the Maronite workers needed protection, and their rallying point, the church, amassed power and never lost it.

### Palace builders

The Ottomans did not approve of Fakhreddine and his methods, but their hands were tied after losing so much territory to the Europeans at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. Their hands were also tied by the Persian enemy marauding on their eastern flank, and more by the economic losses they had suffered as a consequence of the inflation in Europe that accompanied the flow of riches from the Americas. The Ottomans needed to maximize tax collections to offset these losses and left the Druze amir alone as long as he paid his dues to the Porte on time.

This state of affairs changed when Europe was drawn into a war of its own, the Thirty Years' War, which started in 1618 and diverted the European chancelleries' attention away from their Ottoman neighbors. Another stroke of good fortune for Istanbul was the death in 1629 of Shah Abbas, the strong leader of the Safavids in Persia, and the subsequent decay of his empire. Thus, two threats to the Ottoman Empire, the Europeans and the Safavids, were lifted without any effort on the part of Istanbul. This sudden change of fortune gave the Ottomans the time they needed to reorganize internally, and soon the clock started to tick for the impetuous amir who had dared to mock the sovereignty of the House of Othman for nearly half a century.

Fakhreddine was arrested in 1634 and sent to Istanbul, where his fate was sealed a year later along with three of his sons. His legacy, however, remained, although his direct successors, approved by the Porte, did not rise to the standard of his greatness. Not until the end of the seventeenth century, when Fakhreddine's family, the Maans, had no male heirs, was an alternative line of succession sought. Was it the Druze dignitaries who proposed it, or the Ottomans who imposed their

will? Either way, the succession was given to the Shihab family, cousins by marriage to the Maans.

Rustum Moujaes, a master stonemason from Shwayr, arrived one April morning in 1804 to pay the parents of Fares Bozeid Moujaes a visit. He had work to offer and Fares's father was all ears. The two men had worked together before on a number of construction projects across the country, and Fares's father was eager to begin another one. Lent was approaching, and no job offers had yet come his way, not surprising given the difficult economic times. The ruthless wali of Saida, Al-Jazzar, had forced the new master of the mountains, Amir Bashir, to flee on more than one occasion, leaving the country in the hands of incompetent power-mongers from his own family, and the people of Mount Lebanon suffered the consequences. What Rustum had to offer was a grand project, the grandest possible perhaps: nothing less than a palace for the great Amir Bashir himself in Beiteddine.

Bashir II Shihab, also called Bashir the Great, was the strongman of the family, and one who was by many accounts the only notable successor to Fakhreddine. He was seventh in line to govern after the Shihab came to replace the Maan in the emara, and he proved to be both an enlightened leader and a ruthless despot, governing by force and intimidation. The amir had asked Rustum to gather his workers at Beiteddine immediately after the Eid. Fares Bozeid Moujaes turned sixteen that year, and his father decided he was old enough to make the trip as one of the workers.

The Shihab knew the Moujaes, having been neighbors in Hauran in the early times. Originally, the Shihab came from Najaf, valiant fighters whose elder was a Companion of the Prophet and fought many wars under his banner, not least that of Yarmouk against the Byzantines in what is today Syria. For compensation, the Caliph Omar, friend and successor of the Prophet, endowed them with wide swathes of land across Hauran and the lowlands southwest of Damascus. They lived there for nearly five centuries and relied on the Moujaes to build their homes. Then, when pressured in the eleventh century by both Nureddin Zengi and Saladin, the rulers of Syria and Egypt, to take sides in their internecine wars, the Shihab chose instead to leave Hauran and crossed the Anti-Lebanon Mountains to settle in the valley called Wadi Taym. As Sunnis, the Shihab were related to the Prophet, a fact that could legitimize either Zengi or Saladin, for supremacy in the Near East, were the Shihab to take sides. They also had a standing army of fifteen thousand warriors, no less a reason for the two contenders to make overtures to them and try to gain their support. On arriving in Wadi Taym, the Shihab picked a long fight with a crusader's army and took hold of its fortress, which they refashioned as a palace, again with the help of the Moujaes from Hauran. This palace of the Shihab, recently refurbished, still stands in the town of Hasbaya.

The Ottomans were content to see the Shihab family assume the succession in the mountains. First, they were Sunni, which meant the Shihab would be less inclined to deny them their allegiance. They also came from Wadi Taym, far from the Druze Mountains, and so did not take part in the internecine fights among the Druze families. From the standpoint of the Ottomans, the Shihab would have no reason to take sides with either the Yemeni or Qaysi groups; they would only levy taxes for the Porte and gain ascendancy for themselves in the process. The first Shihab to govern, however, were rather weak, many acting treacherously toward one another. Some went as far as poisoning their next of kin in order to be able to sign the *muamala* with the Ottomans themselves and so become *multazim*, or tax farmers.

One of the Shihab, Amir Haidar, did quell the ancient contention between the two Druze clans. At the Battle of Ain Dara, in 1711, he affirmed the dominance of the Qaysite clan over the Yemeni. The defeated were either massacred or exiled to Hauran, while the triumphant families divided the spoils that the Shihab were happy to bestow. The Abillamah, a princely family that was given the whole sanjak of Metn for tax-farming by the Maan in the early seventeenth century, was promoted to the title of amir from that of *muqaddam* (the titles are all from the military and were introduced by the Ottomans: *sheikh* is the lowest rank, followed by *muqaddam*, *caimaqam*, and *amir*, which has come to signify “prince” in the vernacular). They lived in Mtein, in the vicinity of Shwayr, the village of the Moujaes, and when tax time came, the parents of Fares Bozeid Moujaes settled their dues and paid the *miri* to the collectors of the Abillamah. Their palaces are still there to see, built around a square used for horseback riding and where the population attended the amirs’ celebrations.

The year 1711 was an important one in the history of modern Lebanon. The outcome of the Battle of Ain Dara and the triumph of the Qaysites consolidated the emara, the socioeconomic system that Fakhreddine had scrupulously built and that Amir Bashir, with his political maneuverings, would anchor permanently in the Lebanese political ethos for the next two hundred years. This ethos has survived, practically unchanged, to the present day.

No sooner had the Qaysi-Yemeni conflict been more or less resolved than another political division arose that would poison Druze relations for years to come. One fast-rising family after Ain Dara was the Jumblatt family, who had fought on the side of the Shihab family and helped consolidate power after inheriting the substantial wealth of the Qadi family, which had died out without a direct heir. All the estates and wealth of the Qadi went to a son-in-law, Ali Jumblatt, a turn of affairs that a large group of Druze families resented. New alliances were formed over this controversy, each striving to control the mountains by seeking to appoint its own candidate to the succession of the emara. Divided as they were, members of

the Shihab family ended up aligning against each other, siding with the antagonistic families, the Jumblatti and Yazbaki.

Bashir II Shihab entered the scene at a crucial time in the history of Lebanon. For a long time he had lived in Deir al-Qamar, the seat of Amir Youssef Shihab, his uncle. Young Bashir came to his uncle at an early age, after being orphaned and raised in the Christian family of Chidiac in the Kesrwan Mountains. His father had converted to Christianity as was the trend among non-Christian muqataaji, who were surrounded by growing numbers of Maronite serfs in the second half of the eighteenth century. If *cujus regio, ejus religio* was the standard in the Germanic principalities of sixteenth-century Europe, the muqataaji of the Druze Mountains had every reason to go the other way and follow the religion of their subjects.

The landowners operated their estates by employing peasants, a form of serfdom but one regulated by social norms that were appropriate to the mountains. Unlike serfs in Europe or Romanov Russia, peasants were free to move and settle anywhere, which meant the landowners needed to indulge their subjects to a certain degree to keep them in their employ. Conversion to Christianity made for good employee relations. This did not mean that social interactions were not held to a strict and formal protocol. To the contrary, when Fares Bozeid Moujaes and his father decided to leave Shwayr for Beiteddine and take the job offered by Rustum Moujaes, they certainly had to visit the Abillamah amir and ask for his permission to do so. Muqataajis made law and gave protection. The Abillamah, by the way, also converted to Christianity when the Metn Mountains came to be densely inhabited by Christians, a second conversion for them, given that they already turned Druze earlier, relinquishing the Sunni religion into which they had been born in the Arabian Peninsula. Plural communities formed as a consequence of this religious blending, affecting the social and political landscape. At this time, Mount Lebanon came to refer to the entire chain of mountains that encompassed the previously all-Christian and Druze parts, while the name Mountain of the Druze fell out of general use and became identified only with the mountain in Hauran.

It was from Hauran that young Bashir II Shihab came to Deir al-Qamar and lived under the protection of his uncle Amir Youssef until he developed ambitions of his own. He soon struck an alliance with his namesake from the Jumblatt family, Sheikh Bashir, who was an important strongman of the mountains at the end of the eighteenth century.

Of strongmen, the period had many, and one to contend with was the ruthless Ahmad Al-Jazzar, the governor of Saida, which had become an independent *pashalik* in 1660. Bosnian by birth, Al-Jazzar, whose nickname (“butcher,” in Arabic) testified to his coldblooded personality, had merits in the eyes of the Ottoman sultan. He defended astutely the harbor town of Beirut against the Russians when their ships shelled the Ottoman troops stationed there in 1772. The ramparts he built in record

time did not yield despite the severity of the attack. (In the end, the Russians did capture Beirut in 1773 and kept the flag of the tsarina flying for a year.)

Al-Jazzar received the governorship of Saida as a result of his valor and gained the favors of the Ottomans, who turned a blind eye on his rapaciousness: after the Russians left, he confiscated Beirut from Amir Youssef and relocated the seat of his pashalik to Acre. In doing so, he captured two thriving maritime merchant cities that were serving the blossoming sericulture economy of the mountains. By the time Fares Bozeid Moujaes and his father came to Beiteddine, exports of raw silk accounted for nearly half of the economy of Mount Lebanon. Another quarter of the economy was the trade in olives and olive oil. The landscape had changed radically by the turn of the century, with cereal crops giving way to mulberry trees, olive groves, and vineyards. Al-Jazzar understood the importance of the coastal lands to the people of the mountains and apportioned for his benefit the stretches that fell from Acre to Tripoli. That way, he could control access to the Mediterranean and tax the routes used by marine merchants across a number of port cities in the Levant.

Impressed by Al-Jazzar's strong personality, the sultan appointed him governor of Damascus in 1780. The ruthless wali seemed unstoppable. In his new post, he could easily dispose of Amir Youssef since it was he, Al-Jazzar, the governor of Saida now in Acre, who would decide with whom to renew the muamala, the tax-farming contract that Amir Youssef now enjoyed. The contract was renewed every year, and the Ottoman governor could review the terms and play the contenders, usually from the same families, against one another in order to extract larger payments, since the amount for the contract was set in advance. It also granted the wali the advantage of maintaining a grip on local politics by dividing the families and ruling them. Sheikh Bashir Jumblatt knew this too, and when the time for renewing the muamala came, he presented the younger Bashir as a candidate, even though his protégé was a poor and inexperienced young man whose only virtue (or so they thought) was belonging to the Shihab family.

Spotting a golden opportunity, Al-Jazzar pitted the two Shihab against one another, using the young Bashir to force Amir Youssef to offer a larger payment, the muamala being signed off to the highest bidder. Finally, with the promise from young Bashir to pay an incredible figure (which Bashir intended to levy on the peasants over a number of years), Al-Jazzar granted him the muamala for the Druze Mountains. More rounds of offers and counteroffers took place, prompted by the voracious greed of Al-Jazzar, until Amir Youssef was finally summoned to Acre and assassinated on the orders of the wali. As soon as Amir Bashir was confirmed in his new position, he purged the mountains of all potential rivals, and after another round of power struggles, again fomented by Al-Jazzar, he went as far as disfiguring the sons of the deceased Amir Youssef, blinding them and exiling

them to Jbeil. (The worst thing that could befall a member of the gentry was disfigurement, usually having the eyes plucked out and the tongue cut off, as this meant falling from grace. “Gentry” in Arabic is synonymous with “face,” *wujaha’a*.)

The real test of force for Al-Jazzar, however, came in 1798 in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte. It also turned out to be a real test of government for Amir Bashir. Bonaparte was campaigning in Egypt, and after his swift defeat of the Mamluks at the Battle of the Pyramids, he took his army east, only to come face to face with Al-Jazzar. The French laid siege in front of Acre, attempting to force an opening to the north. That way, Napoleon’s army could circumvent the English, who controlled the Mediterranean, and be first to arrive at the gates of Istanbul.

Al-Jazzar, the “soldier-adventurer” as Engin Akarli calls him, resolutely held his position, surprising the French general, whose Italian campaign against the Austrians in 1796 had set him on his legendary course. To turn the situation in his favor, Napoleon needed local help, a diversion in the form of an attack on the flank of the Ottomans. The obvious choice to lead the diversion was Amir Bashir, and Napoleon sent an officer to Deir al-Qamar with a clear message to rally him.

The amir, however, was a master of brinksmanship and used astute political maneuverings to keep both contenders in check. Helping Napoleon meant earning the harsh reprisals of Al-Jazzar in case the Frenchman failed; neglecting the appeal of Napoleon meant Amir Bashir would be marginalized if the general did win the battle and occupied Mount Lebanon. Not wanting to deceive either of them, the amir managed to satisfy both by reassuring each of the contenders of his undivided allegiance.

About this time, news of the Empress Josephine’s infidelities arrived, adding to the bitterness of the military stalemate that Napoleon was enduring under the walls of Acre. With his navy broken and his army decimated by disease, Napoleon surrendered his command to General Kléber and left for Paris aboard a frigate. (This ship came within an ace of falling into English hands, and probably would have, if the infatuated Admiral Nelson hadn’t been determined to spend time with Emma Hamilton on the island of Sicily.)

With Napoleon gone, the triumphant Al-Jazzar was now in a position to cash in on his victory from his overlord, the sultan of the Ottomans, who confirmed him as a wali for life. Amir Bashir fled for Egypt, anticipating the wrath of Al-Jazzar, but eventually worked his way back to the wali’s grace through diplomacy. The price to pay for this leniency of the wali would prove to be full of consequence for Mount Lebanon.

The cat-and-mouse interplay between Amir Bashir and Al-Jazzar continued for a few more years, until the aging Bosnian passed away in 1804. The more moderate Suleiman Pasha replaced Al-Jazzar as wali of Saida, a seat he would keep for fourteen years. These were years of prosperity for Mount Lebanon as

Amir Bashir, without Al-Jazzar breathing down his neck, was free to develop his dominions, starting with the building of his Beiteddine palace.

Fares Bozeid Moujaes and his father came to Beiteddine in the company of Rustum Moujaes and some forty other workers in early May 1804. They joined others from Hauran and many more from across the Syrian lands, a large contingent of construction workers who were placed under the direction of master architects and engineers, many of whom had traveled from Florence. The relations that Mount Lebanon amirs maintained with Italian principalities and duchies since the times of Fakhreddine were very strong. The doge of Venice, for example, was a regular supplier of weapons (the Arabic name for Venice is *boundoukia*, which means “rifle”), and Tuscany supplied illustrious architects and shipped construction materials, such as granite and stained glass, especially for Beiteddine. Amir Bashir started work on the palace in 1788, but progress was intermittent and took eighteen years to complete. On more than one occasion, he had to flee Mount Lebanon, as he did between 1800 and 1804, when no fewer than five amirs were appointed successively in his stead to rule the mountains. The construction really took off after Al-Jazzar passed away in 1804, when the amir was no longer pressured by the powerful wali of Acre.

With its multiple squares, different levels, imposing volumes, and impressive character, the whole organized with a refined and cohesive identity, the palace was intended as a power center where Amir Bashir not only resided but managed his dominions. Here he oversaw secretaries and clerks, devised a modern administration, and entertained a court that lived by the regal protocols observed by distinctive European royalties. Some two thousand people were employed at Beiteddine, and the stables had stalls for fifteen hundred horses.

Shwayr and its people enjoyed a privileged relationship with Amir Bashir, who exempted them from taxes, not a common act and one that suggests the close bonding that united the Shihab and the Shwayr families. A popular ode of the period that still lives in oral memory alludes to the work achieved by Rustum Moujaes in Beiteddine:

My lord has erected a palace, was not content with bare buildings,  
He brought a Shwayri stonemason, and had him work the edifice.  
(*Sayyidi a'mmar amara, ma kaffa amareta,*  
*Wa jabla maallem Shwayri, yen'eshla hajara.*)

Oral tradition and poetry have more to share on this subject, some of it fictitious but equally interesting in what it tells us about how the people, mostly peasants living on muqataaji estates, viewed their amir. The stonework turned out

to be so grand, says one story, and Amir Bashir was so charmed by the result, that he asked to have the hands of all the Shwayri stonemasons chopped off to keep them from replicating the jewel of Beiteddine. This never happened, of course, yet this was the kind of hearsay that added mystery to the enigma that was the amir.

One of those mysteries was religion; the exact religion of the amir was not common knowledge, and he was careful to accept all religions but belong to none: he had serious inclinations toward Christianity, but probably for the political reasons explained earlier. In the Hammam that he built in Beiteddine and where he spent a whole day every week with his close counselors, Amir Bashir had a cross formed in a constellation of stained glass, cleverly concealed in the ceiling of the shower rooms, which glowed radiantly when the sun was at its zenith. (The tourist guides at Beiteddine regularly make a stop there to show the visitors the reflection of the cross on their sunglasses.) In short, Amir Bashir was from Sunni Muslim stock, born a Christian, and lived among the Druze. He built a small chapel in Beiteddine, a mosque, and a *khalweh*, a community space for the Druze *uqqal*; so he could practice all three religions. A common joke in this regard claims, "Amir Bashir was born a Christian, lived a Druze, and died a Muslim." Although, during his time in power, religious differences were increasingly causing problems, he handled them with relative ease, being a resolute and strong character. It is unfortunate that we cannot say the same of his successors. For while Amir Bashir was able to suppress people's excess anxiety from sectarian strife, others only exacerbated it.

A true people's man, Amir Bashir received whomever came to see him, always dressed in his grandiloquent robes, observing etiquette carefully. A layman always bowed on entry as a sign of reverence and never came close to the amir, who remained seated in the *diwan*. The higher a visitor's rank, the more affable the amir would be, the closest encounter being reserved for a muqataaji, who was entitled to kiss the shoulder of Amir Bashir while the amir stood a few steps from his seat. He listened with genuine concern to the complaints of the people who solicited his help, especially the less fortunate, and gave orders to his secretaries to resolve their problems immediately. The meetings with his ministers and counselors took place in the government rooms, spacious diwans with red velvet seats, with walls and ceilings covered with cedar wood and decorated with fine paintings. Most of the meeting rooms had a water curtain built into the walls that flowed continuously. A precursor of air conditioning systems, the water curtain also had the useful effect of camouflaging sound. Weary of spies around him, the amir spoke firmly but kept his voice low when he spoke of confidential matters, always standing next to the water curtains. When receiving ambassadors with important messages to convey, he often used small cubicles that were soundproofed with highly decorated thick cedar planks.

Over time, Amir Bashir erected another four palaces, less grandiose though equally refined, in Deir al-Qamar and Beiteddine, three for his children and a



dowager palace intended for his wife. One of them has been converted into a boutique hotel by the Ministry of Tourism of Lebanon and has one of the best views of Beiteddine. It is called (A)Mir Amin, after one of the amir's sons. If you cannot stay overnight, I recommend you sip a shaffeh of cardamom coffee at the hotel terrace and enjoy the marvelous views over this part of Mount Lebanon.

One cannot speak of Beiteddine without referring, if only briefly, to the "idiot of Shanay," a Chaplinesque character intimately associated with the palace. A frequent visitor of the amir who was seen as a kind of court jester, he is said to have found a solution to the amir's water shortage problem. His suggestion: drag the nearby Safa water source to Beiteddine by having all the men of the amir stand side by side across the distance and dig one length of earth each. In this way, a canal was dug and water flowed; so, on the suggestion of the alleged village idiot of Shanay, Beiteddine became self-sufficient in water (which still flows to this day). The epic *Akhwat Shanay* was brought to the stage by an ingenious theater director in the 1970s and dramatizes with wit and simplicity much of the wisdom of a past century. Included in that wisdom is the amir's own observation, "Among the idiots, I have found the wisest of men."

Unlike his father, Fares Bozeid Moujaes did not remain to see the work on Beiteddine palace completed. He left in 1807 to start a new life of his own, having just turned nineteen.

### From Beiteddine to Hadath

The sons of Amir Youssef were not the only members of the Shihab family who were blinded at the hands of Amir Bashir's men. Many others received similar treatment, two of whom were Bashir's cousins, Fares and Selman, the sons of Sid Ahmad Melhem Shihab. Sightless and unwelcome, the two brothers followed other members of the family and came to live in Baabda. On the recommendation of his father, Fares Bozeid Moujaes went with them. Now a skilled stonemason, having earned his experience at his father's side at Beiteddine, he could lend a hand, with others that Rustum Moujaes designated, to build the Shihab residences in their new retreat.

A three-day ride from Beiteddine, Baabda would be the seat of the Shihab in winter when the snows fell on Deir al-Qamar. This small coastal mountain overlooked a fertile plain on the southern edge of Beirut called Hadath, where the Shihab raised crops and produced silk. Standing on their balconies on the heights of Baabda, they could see the large swathes of land in Hadath that were theirs.

Beirut at this time was only a small fishing harbor, of little importance compared with the seafaring towns of Saida and Tripoli. Fewer than seven thousand

souls lived inside the walls and seven gates of the ancient city, within which were such landmarks as the casern of Fakhreddine (occupied by Ottoman troops at that time), Saint George's Orthodox Church, the Mosque of Omar, and the *Burj*, one of the towers that dotted the city's walls, which had its base in the Mediterranean Sea. Fares Bozeid Moujaes resided at the construction sites in Baabda before moving into a rented house in Hadath. There he dropped his family name and came to be called Shwayri after the village of his origins. He lived next door to Saint Elias Church.

In the meantime, Amir Bashir's power was expanding over all Mount Lebanon. The tax-farming muamala signed with the wali of Acre gave him rights over the southern mountains; another, signed with the wali of Tripoli, put the northern mountains under his control (a river between the northern and southern mountains still retains the name Maameltein, the "two muamalas"). On the strength of these two muamalas, Amir Bashir governed a large dominion, the largest to regroup under a local amir since Fakhreddine. Yet, unlike Fakhreddine, who held the rank of wali, a title bestowed by the Sultan in Istanbul, Bashir was only a signatory of the muamalas and was entirely subject to the whims of the walis in Acre and Tripoli.

Under Suleiman Pasha, Amir Bashir had faced no serious threats; however, the successor to the passive wali at Acre proved to be, if not as ruthless as Al-Jazzar, at least his equal in the thirst for power and money. Abdallah Pasha succeeded the aging Suleiman in 1818 and within two years imposed on Amir Bashir a significant increase in the muamala. To raise these funds, the amir had to levy additional taxes on the muqataajis; they, in turn, imposed the financial burden on the peasants who actually farmed the land. In the southern mountains where the Druze muqataajis still made the law, the tax increase went unnoticed. It was paid by the amir's namesake, Sheikh Bashir Jumblatt himself, the wealthy man of the Druze Mountains, who understood the dangers of imposing higher taxes on the peasants.

In the north, the story was different. There was no Sheikh Bashir to step in and pay the tax, and the muqataajis in the Christian Mountains either did not understand the threat that was posed or did not have the means to cushion the surtax. As a result, the peasants in the north, faced with an impossible debt to settle, fomented a rebellion. The Maronite Church became the cornerstone of this political movement, and its zealous clergy encouraged the aggrieved populace. Led by a bishop, the Maronite peasants in the north went rogue in 1820, and Amir Bashir had to use force to quell the uprising. Riding with Sheikh Bashir and his men, the amir finally defeated the rebels. Although the bishop was killed, the amir did not use punitive measures against the peasants themselves, who ended up paying the surtax.

The peasant resistance of 1820 reignited in 1821 with another round of armed grievances; these Amir Bashir also tamed by force, again with the help of Sheikh Bashir and his private army. The outcome may have seemed satisfactory at the time,

as the walis of Tripoli and Acre received the full amount of taxes they imposed and Amir Bashir got to keep his seat as ruler of the mountains, but these events had ushered in a new and unexpected religious divide in Mount Lebanon. By bringing the Christian Maronite peasants to bay under the arms of the Druze in order to extract a surtax to benefit the Ottoman walis, Amir Bashir opened a denominational fracture that still deeply divides the identity of Lebanon today.

The wali of Acre, Abdallah Pasha, faced other troubles in his domain; the large cities in the Syrian hinterland were growing weary of his excesses. By controlling the trading routes across the coast and the ports of Acre and Sidon, the wali could tax all goods that boarded ships or mounted camels across his dominions. At this time, the economy of Mount Lebanon was flourishing. So was that of Damascus and a number of other towns such as Zahleh, the *haut lieu* of the fertile Bekaa plateau, then under the governance of the wali of Damascus. The general prosperity prompted Abdallah Pasha to increase taxes on all products that transited his regions, sometimes even seizing shipments and attacking caravans that transported goods to Damascus.

Irritated by the demands of his insatiable colleague, the wali of Damascus started preparations for war and called for the two Bashirs, the amir and the sheikh, to support him. Having earned the governance of Mount Lebanon from the wali of Acre, Amir Bashir chose to stand by Abdallah Pasha, probably weighing the consequences of siding against him. For his part, Sheikh Bashir, seeing his chance to strike a blow at Amir Bashir, whose dominion surpassed his own, swore allegiance to the wali of Damascus. By standing against him, the sheikh hoped to undo the Amir and replace him with another Shihab, one he could control, and so regain the power that his onetime ally and namesake had taken from him. And for a time, the sheikh's plan did work. Amir Bashir had to leave Beiteddine and sought asylum in Egypt, disembarking at Damietta. (It is interesting to note that Amir Bashir made the journey aboard a frigate made available to him by Admiral Sydney Smith, the British naval officer who controlled the Mediterranean.)

Amir Bashir arrived in an Egypt that was developing at a quick pace to the colorful rhythms of its *nahda*, the cultural renaissance that accompanied a series of reforms. Against all expectations, it was not an Egyptian who was responsible for this renewal, but an Albanian military man. He had been sent to Egypt in 1801 by the Ottoman Sublime Porte, after the army of Napoleon Bonaparte had left, to silence the remaining Mamluks who, still under the sway of the French general, were attempting to regain control. Muhammad Ali was the man's name, and he was to occupy the center stage of Middle Eastern politics for half a century.

In record time, Muhammad Ali reorganized the Egyptian army, built a navy that outshone any other in the Mediterranean, developed his administration, and sent officials for special training in France. He did this with the active participation

of French officers who had fought in the army of Bonaparte and stayed behind, some changing their names to sound more Middle Eastern. After the fall of Bonaparte and the restoration of the Bourbons in France, Muhammad Ali welcomed wholeheartedly any officers of Napoleon who were incapable of coping with the *de facto* regime in Paris. Colonel Joseph Sève was probably the most important of these. He had fought valiantly in Russia and came to Egypt after the emperor was exiled to take command of the army. He was known thereafter as Suleiman Pasha, also the *frensawi*, or Frenchman. Before long, Muhammad Ali became too strong for Istanbul to deny him the sovereignty that the people of Egypt had already granted him, and he became the sole ruler of the land while still reporting to the Sultan in Istanbul. In time, the viceroy of Egypt would gain complete independence from the Porte.

Muhammad Ali received Amir Bashir in great pomp. He had every interest in seeing the amir of Mount Lebanon reinstated and strong, for he viewed him as an ally in a struggle looming on the horizon, a struggle that might eventually engulf all of Syria and steal it from the Ottomans. But that time had not yet come, and for now, Muhammad Ali was still pledging allegiance to the Sublime Porte, coming with his army to aid the sultan when needed. Muhammad Ali sent his son, Ibrahim Pasha, for example, on a campaign to restrain the Wahhabi movement that was causing strife in Najaf; this brought Mecca and Medina into Muhammad Ali's fold for a time, defusing a threat to the Ottomans' power that came at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The ultra-fundamentalist Wahhabi movement was started by an imam, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and, after 1790, started to spread to Aleppo and Damascus before being fought back in 1811 by the Ottomans and none other than Amir Bashir, who had been called in to the rescue. The threat was lifted, but many clerics in Damascus had been converted to the new teachings and started preaching a return to Orthodoxy. As a result, a number of Christians from Damascus and Syria, mostly tradespeople, were forced to seek refuge in Mount Lebanon, settling in commercial hubs such as Zahleh in the Bekaa plateau, where they introduced a cosmopolitan *savoir faire*.

Eventually, Muhammad Ali interceded with the sultan on behalf of Amir Bashir, who duly regained his seat in Mount Lebanon. On his return, he was received by the wali of Acre in triumph, the Sultan in Istanbul having relieved the wali of Damascus of his duties (to the dismay of Sheikh Bashir Jumblatt, who had bet on the wrong outcome). The sheikh tried to regain the favors of the amir, his ally from previous times, but to no avail. In the end, the sheikh was detained and killed by the wali of Acre in 1825. Amir Bashir was once again the strongman of Mount Lebanon, having rid himself of every possible contender and normalized the balance of power with the wali of Acre. Soon, though, he would have to repay