Ottoman Beirut: Crisis, History, and Sectarian Memory

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Acute crises give rise to historical reconsideration, as those affected seek explanations for present predicaments. Likewise, historians in time of crisis have the potential to play a key role in the dialogue between past and present. The Lebanese Republic offers many examples of the relationship among historiography, crisis, and reconstruction agendas. This article highlights one such effort, identified with Beirut's established Sunni leadership, which has used Ottoman Beirut as a symbol around which to build a confessional-national vision consistent with this elite's interests. The resulting reevaluation of the Ottoman past runs contrary to predominant inherited historiographic traditions of Arab nationalism.[1]

Background

Amid Lebanon's political disintegration during the war years 1975–90, the doyen of the country's historians, Kamal Salibi, wrote of an ongoing battle over Lebanese history.[2] As institutions of the old republic collapsed or atrophied, Lebanese historians offered contrasting representations of their society's past. The historiographical conflict mirrored a crisis in the older would-be hegemonic Lebanese "national" narrative with its linear and teleological march from ancient Phoenicia to medieval mountain refuge to Druze-Christian emirate to autonomous *mutasarrifiyya* (administrative district), culminating in the twentieth-century republic. The dominance of this older narrative had never been absolute, but during the war years it became just one of a number of contending viewpoints. Salibi deconstructed important elements of the older narrative while appealing for the creation of a new synthesis that could serve as part of a postwar process of national reconciliation. One year later, in 1989, a political and constitutional arrangement for ending the Lebanese war was agreed at Ta'if in Saudi Arabia. Significantly, the Ta'if agreement included language that called for a revision of Lebanon's history curricula in a way that would "strengthen national attachment and integration."[3]

Lebanese historians' sense that they represent their community, or their nation, or both is a recurring characteristic of much recent work. Little wonder, then, that when peace was

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1. For a recent discussion of this inherited tradition, see Suhnaz Yilmaz and Ipek K. Yosmaoglu, "Fighting the Spectres of the Past: Dilemmas of Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans and the Middle East," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44 (2008): 677–93.

2. Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 200–215.

3. Quoted in Munir Bashshur, "The Deepening Cleavage in the Educational System," in *Lebanon in Limbo: Postwar Society and State in an Uncertain Regional Environment*, ed. Theodor Hanf and Nawaf Salam (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2003), 163.

restored after 1990 Lebanon's professional historians turned to the self-imposed task of reconstructing a Lebanese national history. They did so at a time in which, according to the historian May Davie, Lebanese historiographic methods "continuent à écrire le passé en fonction des necessities politiques du present."[4] Some writers placed their hopes in a positivist approach, apparently believing that serious and open-minded academic study would produce a coherent national narrative. For instance, in a welcoming address delivered to a conference convened by the newly inaugurated Lebanese Society for Ottoman Studies, the president of Lebanese University, Hisham Haydar, suggested that "serious and deep study of the sources" was required to develop a Lebanese nationalist framework of inquiry.[5] The society's secretary-general, Munir Isma'il, was optimistic that a renewed interest in Lebanon's Ottoman past would be a first step toward rewriting Lebanon's history on a sound and scientific basis.[6] Likewise driven by a sense of national-social mission, the Lebanese University historian Joseph Antun Labaki wrote hopefully in 1995 that a reexamination of Lebanon's later Ottoman period might help create a sense of Lebanese national unity.[7]

These scholars' sentiments highlight the importance of creating a "usable past" for citizens of a modern nation-state, with particular reference to countries (like Lebanon) whose territory and institutions have emerged from a colonial experience. But whereas in some postcolonial situations national elites appeal to history in attempts to legitimize social hierarchies and the postcolonial state itself, in other contexts "the elements entailed in the process of [modern] identity formation may not be compatible with state formation."[8] If we accept that Lebanon's politically charged confessional identities are products of modern history (i.e., are *not* merely or mainly primordial holdovers from long ago),[9] then attempts to craft state-centered historical representations will exist in tension with the consolidation and assertion of subnational communal identities. Often a desideratum of state-centered representations is to incorporate communities "in a hierarchically organized yet homogeneous nation-state through strategies that . . . tend to naturalize" social and political hierarchies.[10] However, historians and intellectuals who see themselves as tribunes for subnational communities employ similar tropes in their efforts to consolidate modern communal consciousness.

During the civil war years, confessional representations of Lebanon's history proliferated.[11] Though Lebanon's foundational myths include references to the ancient Phoenicians, the country's Ottoman centuries are the proximate past that matters.[12] Ottoman-era institutions, leaderships, events, and communal identities were implicated with modern state formation and with the onset of French colonial rule. Thus historians' interpretations of Lebanon's Ottoman era relate to present-day adumbrations of identity, legitimacy, and power.

One of the more prolific academic figures to advance a self-consciously sectarian view of the Ottoman period has been Hassan Hallak (Hassân Hallâq), a professor of history at the Lebanese University with an additional affiliation to the Beirut Arab University.[13] Some of his published work in the 1980s dealt with the

4. May Davie, *Beyrouth et ses faubourgs (1840–1940): Une integration inachevée* (*Beirut and Its Suburbs (1840–1940): An Incomplete Integration* (Beirut: Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Sur Le Moyen Orient Contemporain, 1996), 14.

5. *Lubnan fi al-qarn al-thamin 'ashar: Al-mu'tamar al-awwal li-al-jami'iyya al-lubnaniyya li-al-dirasat al-'uthmaniyya* (*Lebanon in the Eighteenth Century: The First Conference of the Lebanese Society for Ottoman Studies*) (Beirut: Dar al-Muntakhab al-'Arabi, 1996), 13–14.

6. Ibid., 18–19.

7. Joseph Antun Labaki, *Mutasarrifiyyat Jabal Lubnan: masa'il wa-qadaya* (*The District of Mount Lebanon: Questions and Issues*) (Beirut: Dar al-Karma, 1995), 2.

8. Eric Davis and Nicolas Gavrielides, "Statecraft, Historical Memory, and Popular Culture in Iraq and Kuwait," in *Statecraft in the Middle East: Oil, Historical Memory, and Popular Culture*, ed. Eric Davis and Nicolas Gavrielides (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991), 127.

9. As persuasively argued in Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

10. Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, "Introduction: States of Imagination," in *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, ed. Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 25.

11. Axel Havemann, "Lebanon's Ottoman Past as Reflected in Modern Lebanese Historiography," in *Islamstudien Ohne Ende: Festchrift für Werner Ende zum 65.Gaburtstag* (*Islamic Studies without End: A Festschrift for Werner Ende on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*), ed. Rainer Brunner, Monika Gronke, Jens Peter Lant, and Ulrich Rebstock (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), 161–74.

12. Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: In Search of Identity in Lebanon* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

13. "Dr. Hassan Ali Hallak," www.wakf.org/member4.htm (accessed 11 June 2010).

Ottoman period, in connection with which he promoted the use of Beirut's Islamic (Sharia) law-court registers and endowment (*waqf*) materials as historical sources. In the past decade Hallak has been a member of the Lebanon National Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Memory of the World program, which "aim[s] at preservation and dissemination of valuable archive holdings and library collections worldwide."[14] He also is a trustee and administrator for the Islamic Center for Education in Beirut (established in 1979).[15]

Examining Hallak's approach to Ottoman history through his published works illuminates a type of confessional historiography produced in Lebanon during the war years. Hallak's selection of topics, his use of evidence, his organization of material, and his conclusions (explicit or implicit) reveal an outlook that foregrounds the role of urban Muslims in defining and defending Beirut's (and Lebanon's) "authentic" Arab identity and orientation. Undifferentiated Muslims (a problematic generalization, but more on that later) are the author's protagonists, while their adversaries typically are foreign, non-Arab Christians and Jews. Indigenous Arab Christians are a subsidiary set of actors, identified either as patriots who followed the Muslims' lead and shared Muslims' perspectives or as bad-faith operators who were loyal to their foreign allies and patrons among Christian powers.[16]

Good Ottomans and Bad Ottomans

Hallak typically gives the Ottomans sympathetic treatment. He presents them as protectors and defenders of Beirut and its region; as favorable toward and helpful to his protagonists, that is, Beirut's Muslims; as conscientious upholders and administrators of key Muslim institutions including those associated with *waqfs*; and as progressive administrators who oversaw development of Beirut's infrastructure.[17] Hallak particularly admires Sultan Abdülhamid II, and he is hostile to the sultan's adversaries in the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Hallak portrays Abdülhamid as a consistent defender of Islam and of Arab interests, especially with respect to Zionism, Palestine, and Jerusalem.[18] In contrast, he portrays the CUP members who overthrew Abdülhamid as traitors acting at the behest of foreign powers. Moreover, Hallak says that the CUP was part of an international conspiracy hatched by Jews and Freemasons. Indeed, he asserts, most members of the CUP were not Turks or even Muslims.[19] He emphasizes the influence allegedly wielded within the CUP by Salonika-based Dönmes (crypto-Jews), and alleges Dönme "infiltration" of Ottoman government ministries.[20] The purported identity of interests among foreign powers, Jews, Freemasons, and the CUP is the major theme of a book that Hallak published in 1984.[21] His evidence of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy includes citations of contemporary writings that advanced this interpretation—such as translated passages from the deposed and embittered Abdülhamid's memoirs—plus a limited selection of like-minded secondary sources (including at least one based explicitly on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*) (41n1). Paradoxically (or illogically), Hallak also maintains that the supposedly crypto-Jewish and non-Turkish CUP advocated pan-Turanism (25). The common theme linking the Jewish-conspiratorial and pan-Turanist characteristics of the CUP was, however, the CUP's hostility to Arabs and its advocacy of anti-Arab racist sentiments (25–26).

14. UNESCO, "Memory of the World: Dr. Hassan Hallak," portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17389&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (accessed 11 June 2010).

15. Al Imam Al Ouzai, www.wakf.org/contact_f.htm (accessed 11 June 2010).

16. In fact, they are a variant of the kind of "Manichean and sectarian history" described by Davie, though she does not identify Hallak as one of its practitioners. Davie, *Beyrouth et ses faubourgs*, 15.

17. On Ottomans as defenders of Beirut and helpful to Beirut's Muslims, see Hassan Hallaq, *Bayrut al-mahrusa fi al-'ahd al-'uthmani* (*Beirut the Well-Protected in the Ottoman Era*) (Beirut: al-Dar al-Jami'iyya, 1987), 78, 109. On Ottomans and Muslim institutions, see Hassan Hallaq, *Awqaf al-muslimin fi bayrut fi al-'ahd al-'uthmani* (*Muslims' Endowments in Beirut in the Ottoman Era*) (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Islami fi al-I'lam wa-al-Inma', 1985), 13–21. On Ottomans as administrators of Beirut, see Hallaq, *Bayrut al-mahrusa*, 215.

18. Hassan Hallaq, *Dawr al-yahud wa-al-quwa al-duwaliyya fi khal' al-sultan 'Abd al-Hamid al-thani 'an al-'arsh (1908–1909)* (*The Role of the Jews and the International Powers in the Removal from the Throne of Sultan Abdulhamid II [1908–1909]*) (Beirut: al-Dar al-Jami'iyya, 1984), 13–16, 21, 25–31.

19. Hassan Hallaq, *Dirasat fi tarikh lubnan al-mu'asir 1913–1943: Min jam'iyyat bayrut al-islahiyya ila al-mithaq al-watani al-lubnani* (Studies in the Recent History of Lebanon, 1913–1943: From the Beirut Reform Society to the Lebanese National Pact) (Beirut: Dar al-Nahda al-'Arabiyya, 1985), 13. The trope of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy is taken over from right-wing and reactionary European writers and is without scholarly merit. Margaret C. Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Fact and Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 7, 18–20.

20. Hallaq, *Dirasat fi tarikh lubnan al-mu'asir*, 26n1.

21. Hallaq, *Dawr al-yahud*.

This depiction of the CUP is crude and unnuanced, but it serves Hallak's narrative. The Arabs did not betray the Ottoman Empire, it says; rather the empire's post-Abdülhamid leadership betrayed the Arabs. As long as the Ottoman Empire represented the ideals and realities of an Islamic state, Arabs had no problem being a part of it. But when the CUP with its Zionist-Jewish-Freemasonic and pan-Turanist agendas displaced the faithful Ottomans of old, Arabs of Beirut and elsewhere could remain true to themselves and to their interests only by advocating Arabism and administrative decentralization (13–14, 21).

Beirut as a Muslim and Arab Space

The major theme emerging from Hallak's published work on Ottoman Beirut is his portrayal of the city as a timeless Muslim and Arab space. Different historical events, rulers, and personages have come and gone, but Beirut's essential character has endured. At an early point in his monographic study of Ottoman Beirut published in 1987, Hallak observes that the city has repeatedly been attacked and besieged by foreigners: Byzantines in 969, Crusaders in the Middle Ages, and Europeans in 1840 and 1912.[22] He uses ellipses (not a period or full stop) to end the paragraph, implying that the story of siege and attack has continued to the present day. As if to drive the point home, he juxtaposes the old Martyrs' Cemetery (for Muslims who died fighting the medieval Crusades) with the Muslims' new Martyrs' Cemetery created in 1985 to honor those who died defending Muslim Beirut against its present-day enemies (79).

Hallak's descriptions and characterizations of historic Beirut emphasize its links to a wider Arab and Muslim environment. His work repeatedly asserts the Muslim orientation and essence of the city. The 1987 book's discussion of Beirut's *suqs*, or markets, links their spatial pattern and organization to wider Islamic-Arab urban traditions (37). An Islamic theme also contextualizes the extension of the Damascus railroad line to Beirut's port (1900), since this development made Beirut an attractive gateway for pilgrims traveling to Mecca (34). Hallak associates the presence of public baths (*hammams*) in Beirut with Muslim practices and forms of ritual purity (rather than, say, to a Mediterranean city-building archetype) (94). His chapter on Sufi lodges, or *zawiyas*, begins with an assertion about Beirutis' piety from the early days of Islam, a passage that cites Imam al-Uwza'i (d. 774) as a representative example of Beirutis' historic devotion to the faith (61). The text then immediately jumps to the nineteenth century, extolling and listing names of learned Muslim luminaries during the later Ottoman period, men whom Hallak portrays as heirs to al-Uwza'i and the early Beiruti Muslims. Hallak rhapsodizes: "The presence of this learned Beiruti elite [nukhba min 'ulamâ' Bayrût wa-fuqahâ'ihâ] filled the city's *zawiyas* with devotion and piety. Muslims continuously went to them to obtain and increase their knowledge" (62). Though *waqfs* of all confessions are acknowledged, the Muslim *waqf* institutions are framed in a pietistic and nonhistorical way (121–22). He begins his discussion of an Abdülhamid-era public fountain with references to the Sharia and to prophetic hadith, underscoring the "Islamic" nature of this public works project (113). A chapter on Beirut's medical facilities acknowledges contributions made by foreign missionaries and their local Christian associates. However, Hallak's narrative emphasizes Muslims' efforts to "catch up" with Christians in obtaining modern medical training, and he lauds these early Muslim medical pioneers for their Islamic service (103–9). In his account of the then extramural quarter of al-Raml, Hallak mentions owners' names of nearby gardens, and readers can thus infer that al-Raml was confessionally mixed. Yet when he writes of urban development in this area and the new construction that it witnessed, he names two mosques exclusively (85–86). Turning to another extramural quarter, what became predominantly Christian Ashrafiyya, Hallak does not reference urban growth or construction but instead dwells on the Muslim origins of its name, associated with warriors (mujahideen) of the Crusader era (86). For the garden suburb of Hamra he mentions confessionally mixed family names associated with the area, and he identifies its major Ottoman-era landmarks as "the famous Hamra tower" (for defense/mili-

22. Hallaq, *Bayrut al-mahrusa*, 5.

tary purposes) and the Hamra mosque (86). He asserts that the open space to the east of the city walls—known popularly as the Burj (after a tower that once stood there)—was in Ottoman times called by its modern name of Sahat al-Shuhada' (Martyrs' Square). He bases this early dating of the name Martyrs' Square on an unspecified (i.e., not footnoted) reference in Beirut's Sharia law-court registers. The historic martyrs in question, he adds, were those who defended Beirut against the Crusaders (97–98). (A more widespread explanation of the name Martyrs' Square is that it is post-Ottoman and that it refers to the nationalist "martyrs" executed by the local Ottoman authorities during the First World War.)[23] A chapter in the 1987 monograph dedicated to the morality and virtues of Beirutis illustrates Hallak's theme about the essentially Islamic character of the city, by highlighting the biographies of two Muslim notables who lived and worked during the last Ottoman decades. (One was elected to the first Ottoman parliament and served the Ottoman civil authority, and the other was a religious figure.)[24] The normative Beiruti is a Muslim.[25]

Hallak's major monographic work on Ottoman Beirut presents it as a place defined first and foremost by its affiliation with and fealty to the cultural and religious norms associated with the identities "Muslim" and "Arab." Behind this emphasis on norms of culture and identity lies Hallak's anxiety that they are in jeopardy of being lost or overlooked in his own day.

Ottoman Beirut between "Heritage" and Confessional Assertion

As noted earlier, Hallak posits continuity between historic threats to Beirut from foreign (Christian) powers of old and current threats emanating from present-day non-Muslim and non-Arab sources. His three book-length publications on Ottoman Beirut appeared in quick succession during the 1980s—one monograph and two collections of documents—emerging out of this defensive crouch.[26] Hallak describes his monograph as a contribution to the preservation of heritage (*turath*): the book grew out of his duty as a scholar, as a Lebanese, and as an Arab. Scholarly work on Ottoman Beirut is necessary, he says, because Beirut's historical characteristics have been erased by the ongoing war (a reference to the Lebanese conflicts of 1975 onward). The new generations need to be taught about Beirut's and Lebanon's history. Their lack of knowledge, he writes, poses a problem for national cohesion or "belonging" (*intima'*).[27] But what kind of cohesion or "belonging" is meant?

Introducing his collection of Sharia law-court documents from Ottoman Beirut, Hallak asserts that publishing these sources can revive the Islamic and Lebanese heritage and overturn traditional historical understandings.[28] A similar sense of mission frames his published collection of Ottoman-era *waqf* documents from Beirut. According to Hallak, they will revive the Islamic and Lebanese heritage in its civilizational and human aspects, cast light on Muslims' rights and presence in the country by presenting historical testimony and evidence regarding Muslims' present and former properties and endowments, and demonstrate "the human aspects of the endowment system that shepherded and protected all social elements without distinction according to religion, race and sex."[29] He explicitly appeals for revival of the Muslim *waqf* institution to provide for society's various needs.[30] So by inference, the preferred (and historically accurate) representation of Lebanon's history would place Muslims at its center, rather than relegate them to the periphery as mountain-centric Lebanese histories have been wont to do. A sense of national cohesion and belonging will emphatically include Muslims, fully cognizant of their historical role and rights. Moreover, Muslims' laws and institutions

23. Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siécle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 255n69.

24. Hallaq, *Bayrut al-mahrusa*, 231–35.

25. Hassan Hallaq, *Al-tarikh al-ijtima'i wa-al-iqtisadi wa-al-siyasi fi bayrut wa-al-wilayat al-'uthmaniyya fi al-qarn al-tasi' 'ashar* (*Social, Economic, and Political History of Beirut and the Ottoman Provinces in the Nineteenth Century*), vol. 1, *Sijillat al-mahkama al-shar'iyya fi bayrut* (*The Islamic Law Court Records of Beirut*) (Beirut: al-Dar al-Jami'iyya, 1987), 20–21.

26. Hallaq, *Awqaf al-muslimin*; *Bayrut al-mahrusa*; *Al-Tarikh al-ijtima'i wa-al-iqtisadi*.

27. Hallaq, *Bayrut al-mahrusa*, 7.

28. Hallaq, *Al-tarikh al-ijtima'i wa-al-iqtisadi*, 5.

29. Hallaq, *Awqaf al-muslimin*, 9–10; quotation on 10.

30. Ibid., 34.

can potentially be at the heart of an inclusive definition of Lebanon.

Methods and Assumptions of a Sectarian History

Hallak's 1987 monograph, on the face of it, does not meet typical expectations for academic publishing, although it is identified as an academic work. The book's tone and structure remind one of "memorial books," that is, detailed reconstructions of facts or data about lost places and lost communities.[31] The book is replete with narrative, anecdotes, and lists of names and places, but it lacks historical narrative and analysis. Throughout there are almost no notes or citations, even though the text does occasionally mention travelers' names, historians' writings, and document collections as sources for specific quotes or general information. The reader often has no way to explore or verify the data and assessments that Hallak offers. For instance, the book's section on Beirut's port jumps across decades and even across centuries.[32] Chapters on *suq*s and mosques move back and forth in time, building up an image of Ottoman and pre-Ottoman Beirut as a timeless Muslim, Arab city (37–58). The lists go on and on—individuals associated with the *suqs*; the city's public ovens, orchards, and gardens in and around Beirut; the public baths; the buildings, streets, and extramural districts; caravanserais; public squares; Beirut family names, and so on. No significant historical forces, conflicts, or changes ripple the surface of this meticulously crafted composite portrait of the "traditional" city that was submerged or destroyed by the forces of the post-Ottoman twentieth century. Hallak appears to rely on the Ottoman-era Sharia court registers (nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) for much of this information, but he gives no specific references.

A simple "traditional-modern" dichotomy provides the unstated organizational framework for Hallak's book, where "tradition" is associated positively with Ottoman, Arab, and Islamic legacies. Yet he conflates later Ottoman "modernity" with this older vision of the traditional city. The first modern hospitals, the early-twentieth-century electric tramways, and the various periodicals, scientific societies, and associations that grew up in late-Ottoman Beirut are recounted as evidence of Ottoman-Muslim-Arab achievements that form a part of the lost or threatened heritage of the Ottoman city (103–9, 139–42, 203–7). A specific point that Hallak makes is that developments like these prove that Ottoman Beirut was not culturally and intellectually "stagnant" (139). The reader detects here a renewed presentation of the theme that traditional Beirut, Ottoman Beirut, Muslim-Arab Beirut was a dynamic civilizational and cultural center across the centuries, with "dynamism" here demonstrated via evidence of technological and intellectual modernity in the later phases of Ottoman rule. The implication is that Hamidian-era modernization (technical, organizational, and administrative) was respectful of Beirut's Arab and Islamic heritage in ways that post-Ottoman transformations were not. Hallak's account elides the role of foreign (e.g., French) capital in Beirut's late-Ottoman growth and expansion, and instead he folds these changes into his understanding of tradition and "heritage." This kind of ideological positioning creates its own tensions. In the 1990s one of Hallak's students wrote an account of Saida, in which he noted Beirut's partnership with foreign capital in undermining this port town, which earlier had prospered as an Ottoman-protected Islamic City. Whereas Hallak presented Ottoman modernity as a progressive enhancement of Beirut's Arab and Islamic heritage, his student saw this project as a danger to the same heritage in a neighboring town.[33]

For all his devotion to the notions of tradition and heritage, however, Hallak the historian is mostly unconcerned with historical context or processes of historical change. Take, for instance, his treatment of the public fountain unveiled in 1900 during the era of Sultan Abdülhamid in the open extramural square previously known as Sahat al-Sur ("Walls Plaza"; today Riyad al-Sulh Square). The construction of Ab-

31. Cf. Susan Slyomovics, *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), xiii–xiv.

32. Hallaq, *Bayrut al-mahrusa*, 29–34.

33. Muhammad Hasan al-Rawwas, "Al-hayat al-iqtisadiyya fi Sayda al-'uthmaniyya, 1840–1888" ("Economic Life in Ottoman Saida, 1840–1888") (PhD diss., Lebanese University, 1997), 222.

dülhamid's fountain in this busy carrefour was part of an Ottoman project to remake Beirut and to place the imperial government's stamp on the city in a new way. Abdülhamid's fountain represents turn-of-the-century Ottoman attempts to redefine relations between state and society by reshaping the use of public space.[34] But Hallak does not acknowledge any wider significance to Abdülhamid's fountain. Except for some opening references to Sharia, to prophetic hadith, and to Beirutis' need for water, Hallak makes no attempt to explain the timing, location, and form of the fountain through any kind of analytic or historical framework.[35] It simply becomes another part of Beirut's Ottoman *turath*. The fountain issue illustrates a broader point, that Hallak is uninterested in contextualizing the history and development of Ottoman Beirut except in generalized cultural-essentialist terms.

If one effect of Hallak's oeuvre is to "naturalize" a history of Beirut so that it fits easily into a composite Islamic and Arab nationalist paradigm, another effect is to ratify and valorize social hierarchies within Muslim Beirut. Hallak's Muslims are by and large an undifferentiated mass, whose views, outlooks, values, and interests are more or less identical and internally cohesive at any given time. The leaders or representatives of this Muslim identity are the notables who rose to positions of political and religious leadership in the later Ottoman period and whose influence continued afterward in the periods of the mandate and the independent republic. Dominant themes are these families' Ottoman or Arab origins and their activities, roles, and preeminence in various administrative, institutional, and sometimes military fields. What was good for these families was good for Beirut. So in Hallak's representation, the politics of notable representation and leadership are givens and the recitation of the families' names, origins, and achievements are points of pride and praise.[36] Along with asserting Beirut's Arab and Islamic historical essence, Hallak's work naturalizes the Muslim social hierarchies that accompanied late-Ottoman state formation and that carried over into the Lebanese Republic.[37] His work expresses a kind of religious-ethnic nationalism, where the basic unit of history is the primordial Arab and Muslim subject, whose identity and shared interests with other Arabs and Muslims are expressed in the seamless emergence of a "natural" social and political leadership group. By implication, Beirut's Muslims who possess the "proper" consciousness of their group interest should defer to these natural leaders. We may infer implications of Hallak's line of thought for his own day as follows: non-Muslims who challenge the prerogatives and status of this group identity are part of a continuum of "outside threats" to the integrity of Muslim Beirut; radicals who see the emergence of Beirut's notability as a product of conflicting social interests arising from class conflict and/or the imperatives of modern state formation (e.g., Marxist and comparative historical writers) potentially threaten the integrity of the religious-national community and its sanctioned hierarchies; and the guardians of Beirut's Muslim identity are, by history and by right, drawn from the ranks of its established Sunni families. For Hallak's "Muslim" Beirut, read Sunni Beirut. His work offers readers a solid example of the communal-primordialist and communal-absolutist turn that some Lebanese historiography took during the war years.[38]

Conclusion: Ideological Uses of the Ottoman Past

How much does this matter, and how important is this particular historian? From the perspective of international scholarship, Hallak's greatest contribution has been his role in drawing attention to and publishing Ottoman-era primary sources, including selections of Beirut's Sharia law-court documents and *waqf* materials. The documentary aspect of his work is likely one of the factors behind Hallak's aforementioned membership on Lebanon's National Committee

34. Davie, *Beyrouth et ses faubourgs*, 60–61; Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 255–60.

35. Hallaq, *Bayrut al-mahrusa*, 113–18.

36. Ibid., 239–76. Only two Christian families—Sursuq and Tuwayni—make the cut.

37. Cf. Hansen and Stepputat, "Introduction: States of Imagination," 25.

38. These tendencies are identified in Kais M. Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 45; and in Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 238.

for UNESCO's Memory of the World program. For the most part, though, Hallak is not widely cited in international studies of modern Lebanon.[39] Hallak's approach to and presentation of history (by turns anecdotal, essentialist, and conspiratorial) limit his ability to contribute in any case.

Hallak's ideas are worth noting, though, because he is not a marginal figure in his own communally defined setting. In addition to the UNESCO affiliation at the Lebanese national level, he has worked with some leading figures in Beirut's Sunni clerical hierarchy to advance and develop his perspectives and the documents that support them.[40] And in 2003 he headed a delegation from the Beirut Arab University Alumni Association at a meeting with then prime minister Rafik Hariri.[41] He appears, in other words, to be a kind of tribune for the historical self-image of Beirut's Sunni communal leaders. In this sense Hallak's oeuvre represents a reworking of the Ottoman past to assert a particular present-day elite's authority and agenda. Hallak's use of Ottoman history to underline the historical fealty of Beirut's Sunnis to Islam and to Arabism, and to underscore the Sunnis' role as defenders of Beirut's Muslim identity in the face of aggressive and oft-conspiratorial challenges, demonstrates how the Ottoman past becomes a mirror to the concerns and preoccupations of the historian's present. His work represents historical and ideological self-assertion on behalf of Beirut's Sunni communal leadership.

The result is not good academic history, but it is good material for studying the uses of history in the construction of nationalist-religious ideology. Such currents of confessionally based historiography represent a significant challenge to those aspiring to define an elusive "unified" national historical narrative. Indeed, since 1990 Lebanon's professional historians have been unable to develop a standardized history textbook for use in the country's schools.[42] Modern Lebanese civic and national identity remains multivalent and sharply contested.

Developments in the 1990s and early twenty-first century demonstrated the continued relevance of the Ottoman legacy for elite projects adumbrating one or another kind of Lebanese identity. The principal Beirut Sunni figure of this period, the aforementioned Hariri, oversaw redevelopment and reconstruction of Beirut's historic downtown. His company's efforts destroyed most remaining physical vestiges of the intramuros Ottoman city, while privileging and restoring colonial-era architecture of the French mandate. Yet in one of the cleared spaces, on the eastern perimeter of the old walled-city boundary fronting on Martyrs' Square, Hariri's architects and engineers erected a large Ottoman-style mosque that overnight became a symbol and landmark of the "new" downtown Beirut. This architectural evocation of the Ottoman Empire dwarfs other, older religious buildings in the downtown core. Its Ottoman style is unmistakable and is quite distinct from the vernacular style of mosque architecture in Lebanon. The new mosque became a site of political pilgrimage after Hariri's assassination in 2006, when he was buried at a site next to it. The Muhammad al-Amin mosque (its formal name, taken over from an earlier more modest religious structure) is both a statement and an assertion of Sunni elites' reclamation of Beirut's downtown space. Bricks, mortar, and refractions of the Ottoman past animate the continuing "war over Lebanese history."

39. Though Hallak's professional Web profile (www.wakf.org/member4.htm) implies otherwise.

40. Hallaq, *Awqaf al-muslimin*, 10.

41. "Rafic Hariri—The Official Website," www.rhariri.net/news.aspx?ID=1543&Category=Press Releases (accessed 11 June 2010).

42. Bashshur, "Educational System," 167.