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The History of Nusayris ('Alawis) in Ottoman Syria, 1831-1876

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THE HISTORY OF NUSAYRIS ('ALAWIS) IN OTTOMAN SYRIA, 1831-1876

THE HISTORY OF NUSAYRIS ('ALAWIS) IN OTTOMAN SYRIA, 1831-1876

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Art in History

By

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Gaziantep University
Bachelor of Art in History, 2008

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ABSTRACT

The Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire experienced significant events, such as the Egyptian invasion, the Tanzimat Reforms and the increasing activities of Protestant missionaries between 1831 and 1876. In this thesis, I tried to analyze the course of the Ottoman-Nusayri relationship between 1831 and 1876, the treatment of the Ottoman government toward the Nusayris, outcomes of the Egyptians and the Ottoman reforms in the region and among the Nusayris, the reaction of the Nusayris to these reform policies, and the activities of the Protestant missionaries among the Nusayri community.

This thesis is approved for recommendation to
the Graduate Council.

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I am also indebted to the honorable members of the examining committee, namely Prof. Joel Gordon and Dr. Laurence Hare for evaluating and criticizing my thesis thoroughly.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Nusayris are a small minority group that has widely dispersed in western Syria and in southern Turkey, including Adana, Tarsus and Hatay (Alexandretta). Their religious belief is considered a branch of Shia Islam, and like other Shiite groups they believe that Ali and his descendants, who are known as Imams, were the only legitimate heirs and successors of the Prophet. The sect has had a secretive character because its members had to conceal their Nusayri identity in order to avoid oppression by rulers and non-Nusayris within local population groups. Thus they believe that secrecy has been an indispensable strategy for them to survive. The Nusayris also lived in the rural areas and in the mountains roughly between 13th and 20th centuries. The secretive characters of the sect, continuous oppression by rulers and local non-Nusayri populations have discouraged the Nusayris from interacting with non-Nusayris and openly discussing their belief system. Under these circumstances, it has strained historians to collect information and documents on the history and belief system of the sect.

There are several factors that have discouraged scholars from conducting comprehensive research on the social, economic, and political history of Nusayri society between the 9th and the 20th centuries. The first problem with Nusayri studies is the lack of sources. There are just a few sources that provide data for the early period of the sect. Most of the pre-modern and modern

sources that are written in Arabic still need to be critically researched. These sources on the sect need to be dealt with critically and cautiously because they involve a considerable amount of hostility and apology; in addition, the use of sources that focus on the medieval period need careful analysis and an evaluation of their credibility. Yaron Friedman, author of one of the major books that deals with the religion, history, and identity of the Nusayris during the medieval period, used contemporary Arabic texts, a mixture of Imami-Shi'i, Nusayri, and Sunni sources as primary sources. He states that the medieval Nusayri manuscripts are characterized by the use of Middle Arabic, which is a combination of literary Arabic and the local dialect, mainly Syrian Arabic. The texts of semi-educated sheikhs include many mistakes because of the deterioration of their command of written Arabic. The poor state of the sect and its permanent state of oppression and poverty contributed to this deterioration.¹

Secondly, the Nusayris were the weakest, poorest and most rural community of Syria before the 1970s. Their weak position did not attract the attention of scholars, and the historiography on the Nusayri community remained undeveloped until the 1970s when Hafez Al-Assad, a member of the sect, became president of Syria. Samuel Lyde, an English traveler and Protestant missionary who lived among the Nusayris in the 1850s, wrote a paragraph on the importance of the Nusayris in world history. He states that neither their origin nor their secret beliefs are very significant, and they are in no sense people of importance to modern commerce and civilization. In addition when they are destroyed in Syria, which will probably occur before the end of the century (the 19th century), it will not be a momentous loss for the world.²

¹ Yaron Friedman, *The Nusayri-'Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 4.

² Ahmet Bese, "İngiliz ve Amerikan Kaynaklarında Nusayriler." *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi*, Sayı 54. (2010): 168

The weak socio-economic conditions of the sect and their ineffectiveness in the Ottoman Empire limited their presence in Ottoman documents. Historical evidence on the Nusayris as reflected in Ottoman documents between 16th and the first half of the 19th centuries has not been satisfactory. The sect received very little attention in imperial and communal historiographies, and there are just a few documents in the Ottoman archives on the political, social, and economic history of the Nusayris before the 1850s. Most of the Ottoman documents on Nusayris are dated between 1850-1870 and deal with taxation and conscription problems related to the community. Thus, the Ottoman rulers were not interested in the belief system of the Nusayris in the 17th and 18th centuries so long as they paid their taxes and sent recruits to the Ottoman army in wartime because more significant events in the other regions of the Empire prevented the Ottoman authorities from focusing on such a small group living in the mountains. The real interest of the Ottoman Empire in the Nusayris showed a parallel increase of Protestant missionary activities. The strategic importance of the region that they lived in and the fact that their sect was considered an easy target for religious conversion attracted the attention of both imperialist states and missionaries. Because of fear of the conversion of the sect by the American and English Protestant missionaries, Sultan Abdulhamid II took preventive measures both to protect the Nusayris from being targets of missionary activities and to attract them to Hanafi-Sunni Islam. There are many available documents and reports from that time period in the Ottoman archives which make that period more attractive for scholars.

Thirdly, the Nusayris have performed *taqiyya* (concealment of belief) as a cover for their activity among other peoples and kept their faith secret for centuries. *Taqiyya* has been a strategy for the Nusayris in order to escape persecution and save their lives, so their teachings permit them to conceal, lie about, and deny their religious beliefs, and even to ostensibly profess the

belief of their adversaries.³ Concealment of belief deceived travelers, orientalist, and the Ottoman authorities about the belief system of the Nusayris. For instance, the Ottoman Empire in some cases recorded the Nusayris as Sunni-Muslims, and the Nusayris were not subjected to any discrimination. The orientalist travelers and the missionaries who came to the Middle East in the 19th century for the purpose of looking for the origins of Christianity as well as of converting the members of the sect mention Nusayris in their accounts. The secretiveness of the sect did not allow the travelers to enter into Nusayri society, so the travelers could hardly find a Nusayri to interact with, and only a few of the travelers could live among them, so the travelers who could not interact with the community used speculative knowledge of the Nusayris in their notes that they obtained from the neighborhoods of the Nusayri villages which mostly consisted of rumors and accusations about the Nusayris.⁴

³ Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*. (Syracuse, N. Y: Syracuse University Press, 1987.), 410.

⁴ There are several sources that are written by American, British, French and German travellers and missionaries. Most of these accounts are based on their observations, but historians should be wary of these accounts because when the travelers could not settle among the society or interact with them, they used speculative knowledge that were obtained by the local people. Samuel Lyde, *The Asian Mystery Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansairi or Nusairis of Syria*, (Londra: Longmans, 1860); Samuel Lyde, *Ansireeh and Ismaeleeh: A Visit to the Secret Sects of Northern Syria*. (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 1853); Frederick Walpole, *The Ansayrii and Assassins: With Travels in the Further East in 1850 to 1851. Including a Visit to Nineveh Part Three*. (Kessinger Publishing, 2004); Andrew J. McFarland, *Eight Decades in Syria*. (Topeka, Kansas: Board of Foreign Mission of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, 1937); Henry Harris Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*. (Fleeming H. Revell Company, 1910); Henry Harris Jessup, *The Women of the Arabs*, (New York, 1873); Rufus Anderson, *Memorial Volume of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission of the Oriental Churches*. (Boston, 1872); Dupont, Félix, “Mémoire sur les moeurs et les cérémonies religieuses des Nesserié, connus en Europe sous le nom d’Ansari”, *Journal Asiatique*, tom. V, (Septembre 1824): 129-139.; Dussaud, René, *Histoire et religions des Nosairis*. (Paris, 1900); Emmanuel Guillaume Rey, “Reconnaissance de la Montagne des Ansariés”, *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Paris*, XI, (1866): 433-469; Niebuhr, Carsten, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Landern*. (Copenhagen, Vol. 2, 1778); Carsten Niebuhr, “Über den Aufenthalt und die Religion der Johannisjünger und Nassairier”, *Deutsches Museum*, Leipzig 1784, Vol. 1, 539-543.

Radical politics of the 20th century were inseparable from the historiographical account.⁵ One of these significant political events in the Middle East was the coup d'état in Syria in 1970. In Syrian and Western historiography, the study of the Nusayris was not brought to the forefront of Western and Middle Eastern scholars until the 1970s. Before the 1970s, the study of Nusayri history was considered a marginal issue both in Islamic and Middle East studies due to the Nusayris' limited population and influence in the region and difficulty of obtaining knowledge on the sect. The study of the community became popular among scholars after the 1970s when a member of the community, Hafiz al-Assad, came to power in Syria and the community became the dominant sect in the country. Since that time, the study of the history of the Nusayris under the French mandate, and the Alawi (i.e. Nusayri) capture of power in Syria has become popular among scholars.⁶

⁵ Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society*. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 59.

⁶ The sect adopted the name of Alawi (followers of Ali) with the encouragement of French mandate officials in order to make the sect look like a branch of Shia Islam, and show that its principles are more compatible with Islam. The major works that deal with the Nusayri politics during the mandate period are; Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920-1945*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987); Safiuddin Joarder, *Syria under the French Mandate: The Early Phase 1920-1927*. (Bangladesh: Al-Hajj A.K.M. Abdul Hai Asiatic Press, 1977); Stephan Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*. (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1958); G. Yaffe-Schatzmann, "Alawi Separatist and Unionist: The Events of 25 February 1936," *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 1 (1995). The capture of power in Syria by the Asad family, and their policies that have provided benefits to some members of the community have brought the attention of scholars to the Nusayris in Syria. Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society under the Asad and Ba'ath Party*. (New York, London: I. B. Tauris, 1996); Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for Middle East*. (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1988); Moshe Ma'oz, *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus*. (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998); Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy: Syria in Transition*. (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Daniel Pipes, "The Alawi Capture of Power in Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.24, No. 4, (Oct., 1989); Mahmud A. Faksh, "The New Alawi Community in Syria: A New Dominant Political Force", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 20, No. 2 (April 1984).

In Turkish historiography, the Nusayris became a subject of interest to Turkish scholars in the 1930s when the Sanjak Crisis occurred in 1938-1939.⁷ The Republic of Turkey that was established in 1923 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire aimed to construct homogeneity and internal unity inside the new borders, so Turkish republican historians claimed the discourse of one culture, one language and one religion. Under the influence of that discourse a team of state-sponsored scholars conducted some ethnological, anthropological and linguistic studies in order to prove that minorities, in that case the Nusayris, were racially of Turkic origin.⁸

In the 1980s the Nusayris were a target of verbal attack due to the Hama massacre that resulted in the deaths of thousands of people in Syria as a result of government attacks. After that event, several Sunni-Arab and Turkish scholars harshly criticized Asad's policies as well as the belief system of the Nusayris. In that time period, several books that presented the sect as a heretic group and its belief as being incompatible with Islam were published. The main sources of these works were Ibn Taymiyya's fatwas and *Kitab'ul Bakura*, which was written by an ex-Nusayri, Suleyman Efendi, who was converted Christianity.⁹ The Nusayri religious leaders and some members of the community published some books, most not meeting scholarly standards, as an answer to the accusations that were made against the sect. These books do not provide any

⁷ The Sanjak Crisis of Alexandretta occurred when Turkey claimed the Sanjak of Alexandretta including Antioch, which had an important population at that time. The Sanjak was annexed by the Turkish government in 1939, and significant numbers of Nusayris that lived around Antioch became citizen of Turkey.

⁸ There are three books that claimed the Nusayris are racially Turk and that their linguistic patterns are very similar to Turkish. Ahmed Faik Türkmen, *Mufasssal Hatay Tarihi*. (Istanbul: Iktisat Basimevi, 1939); Hasan Resit Tankut, *Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik Hakkında*. (Ankara: Ulus Basimevi, 1938); Ali Tayyar Önder, *Türkiye'nin Etnik Yapısı Halkımızın Kökenleri ve Gerçekler* (Ankara: Onder Yayıncılık, 1999).

⁹ These works are: Ethem Ruhi Figlali, *Çagımızda İtikati İslam Mezhepleri*. (Ankara: Selcuk Yayınları, 1980); Abdülbaki Golpınarlı, *Türkiye'de Mezhepler ve Tarikatler*. (Istanbul: İnkılap Yayınevi, 1997).

significant knowledge about the secrets of the community, and offer no substantial knowledge about its history.¹⁰

In the 1990s, the impact of the United States demands and European Union requirements concerning the Kurdish problem caused officials in Turkey to question the one-nation and one-language discourses.¹¹ The political movement of Kurds and Alevis of Anatolia encouraged scholars to further study the ethnicity, culture, language and belief systems of the minorities in Turkey. Several works have been published on the belief system, origin and social life of the Nusayris since that time. However, most of these works are based on field research and interviews with the religious leaders and members of the community, and they offer very limited information on the history of the sect.¹²

In Turkish historiography, the history of Nusayris has remained largely unexplored. Very limited studies have been produced by Turkish scholars, and these works do not disclose the unique character of the sect. The tendency of Turkish scholars in terms of writing the history of the Nusayris is to treat the Nusayris in the way they approach other minorities in the Ottoman Empire, especially Christians and other Muslim heterodox groups. However, the Nusayris did not have a well-established status that other minorities had in the empire. For instance, they were

¹⁰ The books written by the community members and the religious leaders are: Nasireddin Eskiocak, *İlk Alevi Kimdir*. (Istanbul: Kayhan Matbaacılık, 1997); Serafettin Serin, *Aleviler, Nusayriler ve Siiler Kimlerdir ?* (Adana:Koza Ofset, 1995).

¹¹ According to some researchers, the Kurds constitute 20 percent of the population in Turkey. However, their demands on using their languages, Kurdish, in government agencies, representation in the parliament equal to their population, and having education in their own language were denied until the end of the 1990s.

¹² After the 1990s, these works were published on the belief system and origin of the sect. Huseyin Türk, *Nusayrilik: İnanc Sistemleri ve Kulturel Özellikleri*. (Istanbul: Kaktus Yayinlari, 2005); Inan Keser, *Nusayrilik: Arap Aleviligi*. (Adana: Karahan Yayinlari, 2011); Ömer Ulucay, *Arap Aleviligi "Nusayrilik"*, (Adana: Gozde Yayincilik, 2010); Cahit Aslan, *Fellahlar'in Sosyolojisi*. (Adana: Karahan Yayınevi, 2005).

accepted as members of the Muslim community in Latakia while they were treated as non-Muslims in the Hama court. Thus, approaching the Nusayris in the same ways as other minorities would not provide satisfactory and accurate knowledge of the social and economic history of the Nusayris as well as their relationship with Ottoman authorities. Moreover, although new documents have been discovered in the archives, only a few scholars have conducted comprehensive research on the sect due to their lack of personal interaction with the culture of the sect as well as their biases against the community.¹³ The unfamiliarity of the Turkish scholars with the sect, limited documents in the archives, the secretive character of the sect, and language factors have discouraged Turkish historians from studying the Nusayris. The Ottoman documents are written in Ottoman Turkish, most of the personal accounts on the sect are written in Arabic, and travelers' notes are written in French, German and English. In addition, the reports that were sent from European consulates established in the region, especially French and British, provide valuable information on the Nusayris in the 19th century, but again scholars need to know these languages to use these reports in their research. In recent years some scholars brought together the limited sources and published significant articles on the history of the Nusayris in the 19th century.¹⁴

¹³ In recent years, a team of Turkish scholars conducted comprehensive research in the archives and collected and translated several valuable Ottoman documents that provide significant information on the social and economic life of the Nusayris. Ali Sinan Bilgili, Selahattin Tozlu, Ugur Karabulut and Naim Urkmez, *Osmanli Arsiv Belgelerinde Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik (1745-1920)*. (Ankara: Gazi Universitesi Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Arastirma Dergisi, 2010).

¹⁴ The scholars that combine the limited sources and publish valuable works on the history of the Nusayris in the 19th century are: Stefan H. Winter, "The Nusayris before the Tanzimat in the Eyes of Ottoman Provincial Administrators, 1804-1834." in *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*. Ed. Thomas Philipp, Christoph Schumann. (Beirut: Orient Institute der DMG Beirut, 2004); Yvette Talhamy, "The fatwas and the Nusayri/Alawi of Syria." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 46, 2,(March 2010); Talhamy Yvette, "Conscription among the Nusayris ('Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 38:1 (April 2011); Yvette Talhamy, "The Nusayri and Druze Minorities in Syria in the Nineteenth Century:

In my thesis, I have used several types of primary sources to support my ideas or to formulate new arguments. I have used documents from the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri) in Istanbul from several collections. In addition, notes of travelers who traveled to the region and settled among the community members or worked as missionaries have been utilized. Although some of these sources are based on speculations or misperceptions, they shed light on the Nusayri-Ottoman relations. Moreover, Turkish and a few Arabic narratives as well as scholarly articles on the history of the sect have been used. Combinations of these sources and field work in the region, including interviews with the members of community have helped me to analyze Ottoman-Nusayri relations between 1831 and 1876.

This thesis analyzes the history of the Nusayri community between 1831 and 1876, years that witnessed important developments in Syria. In 1831, Syria was invaded by the Egyptians that lasted until the beginning of the 1840s.¹⁵ In 1839, the Ottomans introduced reform policies, known as the Tanzimat Reforms that lasted until 1876, which introduced new policies and reforms in Syria. In the 1850s, Protestant missionaries increased their activity in the region by opening new schools. I have tried to discuss and analyze the impact of these developments on the Nusayri society and on their relations with the Ottoman Empire.

The Revolt against the Egyptian Occupation as a Case Study”; Talhamy, “The Nusayri Leader Isma’il Khayr Bey and the Ottomans (1854-58).” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44:6, 2008; Yvette Talhamy, “American Protestant Missionary Activity among the Nusayris (Alawis) in Syria in the Nineteenth Century.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 47, (2011); Dick Douwes, “Knowledge and Oppression; the Nusayriyya in the Late Ottoman Period,” in *La Shi’a Nell’impero Ottomano*. (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1993).

¹⁵ The region was occupied by the Egyptian governor of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed Ali Pasha, in 1831, and his son, Ibrahim Pasha, ruled the region between 1831-1840.

Chapter I discusses the origin of the Nusayris, the terms that are used in Western, Arabic and Turkish sources as well as in Ottoman documents to describe the sect, and the geographic features of the Nusayri settlements and their population in the 19th century. In addition, several different claims on the origin of the sect that have been made by Turkish, Arabic and Western scholars, travelers and the members of the society are presented.

Chapter II provides a brief review of the history of the Nusayri community from the 9th century up to 1830. The rise of the Shiite Buyid and the Hamdanid dynasties, the migration of the sect from Iraq to Syria, its history under the Ayyubid and the Mamluk dynasties, and the conquest of Syria by the Ottoman Empire as well as their treatment of the Nusayris are discussed.

Chapter III discusses the Egyptian occupation of Syria between 1831 and 1840 under the leadership of Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt. The reforms that were introduced in Syria, the disarmament and conscription policies of the Egyptians that would trigger revolts in the region, the Nusayri rebellion in 1834 against the disarmament and conscription policies of the Egyptians, and the expulsion of the Egyptians from the region by the Ottomans with the help of a coalition of Western powers are the major themes of this chapter.

In chapter IV, the Tanzimat Reforms and their impact on the social and economic life of the region are discussed. The Tanzimat Reforms period, which dated between 1839 and 1876, introduced new reforms in the fields of provincial administration, taxation, sectarian rights, and conscription. The impact of these reforms in Syria and on the Nusayri society in particular, the reaction of the community to these reforms, and the revolt of Isma'il Khayr Bey are analyzed in this chapter.

Chapter V deals with the increasing Protestant missionary activities in Syria, particularly among the Nusayris after the 1850s. The Tanzimat reforms extended religious freedom as well as the influence of the Western powers on internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire and attracted missionaries to the region. Protestant missionaries opened a lot of schools in Nusayri villages, materially supported the students and their families, and converted students to Christianity. The activities of these missionaries among the Nusayri community, the Ottoman reaction to the activities of the missionaries, and the attitudes of the Nusayris to the missionary schools are discussed

The conclusion summarizes and highlights the major aspects of Ottoman-Nusayri relations between 1831 and 1876.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN OF THE NUSAYRIS AND THE GEOGRAPHY WHERE THE SECT HAS LIVED

A. The Nusayris as an Issue in Scholarly Literature

In academic context, the Nusayris are known as a Ghulat sect (extremist Shiites) which was founded by Muhammad Ibn Nusayr al-Namiri al-Bakri al-Abdi in the ninth century.¹⁶ Historians, missionaries, travelers, and other scholars have used different terms to refer to the sect, and developed different theories on the origin the Nusayris. The sect was known as ‘Nusayri’ until the 1920s, but the name Nusayri has been rejected by the community leaders of the sect since the 1920s. They adopted the name of Alawi (followers of Ali) with the encouragement of French mandate officials in order to make the sect looks like branch of Shia Islam, and show that its principles are compatible with Islam. In this chapter, the origins of the sect, the name of the sect and its usage by scholars, travelers and missionaries, and the locations where members of the Nusayri sect have lived will be discussed.

¹⁶ *Ghulat* is the plural form of *Ghali* which means “exaggeration” in Persian. The Ghulats that are a branch of Shia Islam exaggerate the status of their Imam and they regard their Imam as divine. In addition, the belief in metempsychosis (tanasukh) is part of their belief system. See, Nabiollah Ghasemikhatir and Hasan Bigonah, “Shia Ghulat in Khorasan and Mawarannahr in the First Islamic Centuries.” *Journal of American Science*, 8:4 (2012), 412-413., Heinz Halm, *Shiism (Second Edition)*, trans by. Janet Watson and Marian Hill (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 154.

There is no widely agreed upon theory for the origin of the Nusayris. Many theories based on various ideas have been posed for the origin of the sect. Heinz Halm and Louis Massignon trace the Nusayri belief back to the Ghulat of Kufa in the 8th century. They both agree that these mystics attributed their doctrines to the famous sixth Imam of the Shi'a, Ja'far al-Sadiq. Massignon claims that the Nusayris are the sect that preserves and develop doctrines of the *ghali* Abu 'l Khattab, a leader of the Mukhammisa, a sect which deified the *ahl al-bayt* (Household of the Prophet). Halm claims the influence of al-Mufaddal Ibn 'Umar, author of most Ghulat doctrines, over the Nusayris. Friedman states that the doctrines of both the activities of Abu 'l-Khattab and the literature of al-Mufaddal gave shape to the Nusayri religion.¹⁷

The German traveler Heinrich Paulus visited the Nusayri settlements in the late 18th century, observed them and made a claim about the origin of the sect. He argues that the Nusayris originated from the Qarmatians that were established by Nasrier in Kufa and Basra in 891. The region hosted Muslims, Christians and the Mandaeans (Sabaeans). According to Paulus Nasrier mixed Christianity, Islam, and Mandaeism to create a new belief system which was known as Qarmatian. The sect at first was known as the Qarmatians, but the name of the sect changed and has since become known as the Nusayris, whose doctrines attracted people from these three groups.¹⁸

Since Europeans started to show their interest in Syria and Lebanon, they tried to demonstrate that the Nusayris who mostly lived in and controlled these areas had relationship with Christianity. Some of these travelers claim that some Nusayris, who have brown hair and

¹⁷ Yaron Friedman, *The Nusayri-‘Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, 6.

¹⁸ Necati Alkan, “Alman Kaynaklarına Gore Osmanlı Nusayrileri,” *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Arastirma Dergisi*, Sayı 54. (2010): 138.

blue eyes, have a European-like appearance which is considered to come from Frankish (Europe). Therefore, R. Hartman, Ernest Renan and Le Pere Henri Lammers argue that the people who came to the area with the Crusaders stayed in the region, and mixed with the local community which resulted in the creation of the community. They also establish a correlation with the words Nusayri and Nasrani, the latter of which is a word that has been used to define Christians in Arabic.¹⁹ In the Qur'an the Christians are referred to as *nasara*, meaning followers of the Nazarene, that is, Jesus who lived in Nazareth (al-Nasira) as a child. Al-Nasiri refers to Jesus, which means a person from *Nasira*; therefore, his followers are *nasara*, those from Nazareth.²⁰ Nusayris have some similar rituals with Christians, but these similarities are exaggerated by orientalists who came to the region to look for the origins of Christianity. They observed many Christian rituals that were practiced by the members of the sect, including New Year's Day, Easter, Santa Barbara's Day, Epiphany, Pentecost and Palm Sunday. The Nusayris honor many Christian saints: St. Catherine, St. Barbara, St. George, St. John the Baptist, St. John Chrysostorn, and St. Magdalene.²¹ Other practices, including visits to local Christian saints, the usage of candles and incense in rituals, permitting wine drinking while forbidding drunkenness are thought to be of Christian origin and attracted the attention of missionaries and Orientalists.²²

Al-Tavil, a Nusayri historian, states that the term Nusayri comes from the Nusayriyya Mountains (Jabal-i Nusayriyya). During the conquest of Syria under the commandship of

¹⁹ Neset Çağatay and Ibrahim Agah Çubukçu, *Islam Mezhepleri Tarihi*. (Ankara: Ankara Universitesi Basimevi, 1976), 67-68.

²⁰ Fuad I. Khuri, "The Alawis of Syria: Religious, Ideology and Organization," in *Syria: Society, Culture, and Polity*. Ed. By. Richard T. Antoun and Donald Quataert.(Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991) , 51.

²¹ Daniel Pipes, "The Alawi Capture of Power in Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.24, No. 4, (Oct., 1989): 431.

²² Khuri, "The Alawis of Syria: Religious, Ideology and Organization," 51.

Umar, the second Caliph, the Muslim forces faced challenges. An Alawi group which was called *nusayra* (small aid), around 450 soldiers, made a campaign to Syria with the purpose of assisting the Muslim forces. The territories between the Hulu Mountains and Umarineye which were conquered with the aid of the Alawi forces were provided to them. The Alawis who settled in that region are considered as ancestors of Nusayris and the regions that they have settled have been known as the Nusayriyya Mountains.²³

Dussaud, author of *Histoire et Religions des Nosairis*, propounds a new claim on the origin of the Nusayris. He argues that the claims that consider the Nusayri religion as part of Christianity or Islam have no historical value. In fact, their rituals and belief system show very similar pattern with the Ismailis and pagan belief of Harran, so this religion is a combination of the astral pagan religious system of Harran and Ismailism.²⁴

In the 1930s, a team of Turkish scholars conducted some craniofacial anthropometric and linguistic surveys in order to demonstrate that the Nusayris were racially of Turkic origin.²⁵

Tankut claims that the Nusayris have the same ethnographic characteristics as the Anatolian Alawites, and the skull models of the Nusayris are similar with the Turcoman Alevis, *Tahtacıs*.²⁶

²³ Muhammed Emin Galib Et-Tawil, *Nusayriler, Arap Alevilerin Tarihi*, trans, Ismail Ozdemir (Istanbul: Civi yazıları, 2000), 81.

²⁴ Abdullah Er, "Fransızca Yazılı Kaynaklarda Nusayriler," *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi*, Sayı 54. (2010): 151.

²⁵ Zeynep Türkyılmaz, "Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire." (Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles, 2009), 167., Huseyin Türk, *Nusayrilik: İnanc Sistemleri ve Kültürel Özellikleri*. (Istanbul: Kaktus Yayınları, 2005), 34.

²⁶ The terms 'Alevi' and Alawi refer to different groups. The term 'Alevi' refers to the main Kurdish and Turkish speaking Anatolian Alevis whose main branch is called 'Bektasi Alevi' after Hacı Bektaş Veli, who is founder of Bektashiyya order. In order to distinguish the Alevi of Anatolia and the Alawis (Nusayris), the latter used the terms of 'Arap Alevileri' or 'Nusayri'. For more information see: Gisela Procházka-Eisl and Stephan Procházka, *The Plain of Saints*

Tankut also claims that the Nusayris were among the earliest societies which settled in Anatolia, and the root of the sect goes back to the Hittites.²⁷ The Nusayri sect was settled around Hatay, Adana, Tarsus and Mersin by the Abbasid in the 9th century, and because of endogamy among the sect members, they preserved their Turkish identity. Another claim that supports the Turkic origin of the sect is that the linguistic pattern of the Nusayris is very similar to Turkish because the sect was speaking Turkish before the Ottoman conquest of Syria; however, they adopted Arabic in order to protect themselves from Ottoman pressure. Turkmen states that the Arabic that is spoken by the sect still has Turkish marks.²⁸ These racialist claims that were backed by ethnographic and linguistic works were posed between 1930 and 1938. In addition, Tankut's book was published in Arabic in order to distribute it among the Nusayris who lived in Syria and to serve the republic's propaganda.²⁹

The Nusayri leaders and researchers who have conducted comprehensive studies on the Nusayri sect and its principles define the Nusayri community as Arab Alawiyyun (Arab Alevisi) because their tradition, culture and languages are much closer to Arabs.³⁰ Their language has Assyrian and Lebanese accents, and their culture and tradition is quite different from Turkoman Alevis.³¹ In fact, the most important thing is how the Nusayris describe themselves. Most of the

and Prophets The Nusayri-Alawi Community of Cilicia (Southern Turkey) and its Sacred Places. (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 20.

²⁷ Hasan Resit Tankut, *Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik Hakkında*. (Ankara: Ulus Basimevi, 1938), 8-10.

²⁸ Ahmed Faik Türkmen, *Mufasssal Hatay Tarihi*. (Istanbul: İktisat Basimevi, 1939), 177-219., *Türk, Nusayrilik: İnanc Sistemleri ve Kültürel Özellikleri*, 34.

²⁹ Türkyılmaz, "Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire," 167.

³⁰ İbrahim Guler, "Türkiye'de Arap Alevileri" *Kervan Dergisi*, No: 42, (1994). Cevded Rende, "Türkiyeli Arap Alevileri," *Kervan Dergisi*, No: 42, (1994).

³¹ Turkoman Alawites, known as Qizilbash, is a Shiite group whose doctrine was developed by the early Safavid sheikh Haydar and his son Shah İsmail during the 15th century. The Qizilbash Alawites are a coalition of Turkic tribes that lived in Eastern Anatolia and the Tajik tribes that lived in the 15th century.

population identifies themselves as Alawi and Arab, so it is the most common and valid identification for the ethnicity of the Nusayris.

In modern times, the sect has been known as Nusayris among scholars.³² Modern scholars offer no additional knowledge for the origin of the sect, and they offer what ancient scholars proposed before them. In the academic area, the Nusayris are known as *Ghulat* (extremist Shiites) which was founded by Muhammad Ibn Nusayr al-Namiri al-Bakri al-Abdi in the 9th century. They believe that Ali and his descendants, known as Imams, are the only legitimate heirs and successors to the Prophet of Islam in governing the Muslim community. Their linguistic, cultural and traditional patterns show great similarity with Arab culture and traditions.

B. The Terms That Were Used by Scholars to Refer to the Nusayris

In Western, Turkish, and Arabic literatures, the Nusayris have been defined with different terms. French missionaries, travelers and scholars have used many different terms to refer to the sect. Maundrel uses the term of *Neceres*, Pococke expressed them as *Nocires* and *Noceres*. Other terms based on French sources which have used for the Nusayris are: Niebuhr, *Nassariens*; D'Anvill, *Nassaris*; Delisle, *Ensyriens*; Volney, *Asarie* and *Ansariens*; and Burckhardt, *Anzeyrys*.³³

³² For example, Yaron Friedman, *The Nusayri-‘Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), Heinz Halm, *Nusayriyya*. Encyclopedia of Islam, VIII (Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1995).

³³ Er, “Fransızca Yazılı Kaynaklarda Nusayriler,” 151.

In American and English sources that were written in the 19th and early 20th centuries, many different terms were used for the Nusayris. Dupont, when he mentions individuals in the sect, uses the term of *Nesserie*³⁴, William Jowett, a member of the Church Missionary Society, refers the sect as the *Ansari*. Other terms which are based on the American and English sources are: Samuel Lyde, the *Ansaireeh* and for the members of the society *Nusairis*,³⁵ Ainsworth, the *Ansarians*;³⁶ R. E. Conder, the *Anseiriyeh*;³⁷ Bernard H. Springett, *Nusairis*.³⁸

In the Turkish context, many terms refer to the Nusayris. *Nusayriler* (the Nusayris), *Nusayri Alevileri* (the Nusayri-Alawites), *fellah* (peasant), *Arap Alevileri* (the Arab Alawites), *Arap Usagi* (servant of Arab), *Suriye Alevileri* (the Syrian Alawites), and *Cukurova Alevileri* (the Cukurova Alawites) are the main terms that refer to the sect. In Ottoman documents and court records the terms “Nusayri taifesi” and “Nusayriler” were often used. In some cases the Ottoman officials used the term *fellah* to refer the sect. In a document, dated 2 February 1745, the term *fellah* was used to describe the sect, *fellah ta'bir olunur Nusayri ta'ifesi* (the Nusayri group known as *fellah*).³⁹ The term *fellah* did not refer of the Nusayri faith. In Western Syria and Egypt, the term was used for uneducated common peasants in general. Most of the Nusayris, except for those who lived in the cities, were farmers, so this term came to mean both “ignorant

³⁴ Bese, “Ingiliz ve Amerikan Kaynaklarinda Nusayriler,”160.

³⁵ Samuel Lyde, *The Asian Mystery: Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria*. (Forgotten books, 2012).

³⁶ Ainsworth William Francis, *A personal Narrative of the Euphrates Expedition*. (Londra: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1888), 43.

³⁷ Claude Reignier Conder, *Heth and Moab: Explorations in Syria in 1881 and 1882*. (Forgotten Books, 2012), 33.

³⁸ Bernard H. Springett, *Secret Sects of Syria and Lebanon*. (London: Geroge Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1922) , 8-9.

³⁹ Bilgili, Urkmez, Tozlu, Akbulut, *Osmanli Arsiv Belgelerinde Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik (1745-1920)*, 32.

rustic” and “heretic Alawi (Nusayri).” The term even today refers to the Nusayris in the southern part of Turkey and it is still used to insult members of the community.⁴⁰

In the Arabic context, the terms of *al-Nusayriyya*, *al-Ansariyyun* and *Alawi* were used for the sect. The term Nusayri is the most common one among the jihadists because Ibn Taymiyya who has been an influential person among them used this term for the sect.⁴¹

Some people in the society are against the usage of the term Nusayri because the term has been abused by Sunni Muslims, and has been used to insult the society.⁴² The members of the sect have suggested new terms and the Nusayris who live in Turkey have started to use terms, such as *Guney Alevileri* (*Southern Alawites*), *Akdeniz Alevileri* (*Mediterranean Alawites*), *Alevi* (*Alawi*), *Hasibiler* (*Hasibis*), and *Muwahhidun* (*Monotheist*).

C. Life in Rural Areas: The Geographic Features of the Nusayri Settlements and Their Population

Nusayris have settled around the most northwestern area of the Eastern Mediterranean. The sect emerged around Kufa in the 9th century, and the members of the sect moved to Syria to spread their doctrines.

⁴⁰ Gisela Procházka-Eisl and Stephan Procházka, *The Plain of Saints and Prophets The Nusayri-Alawi Community of Cilicia (Southern Turkey) and its Sacred Places*, 22-23.

⁴¹ Nibras Kazimi, *Syria Through Jihadist Eyes: A Perfect Enemy*.(Hoover Institution Press, 2010), 8.

⁴² Inan Keser, *Kent, Cemaat, Etnisite: Adana ve Adana Nusayrileri Orneginde Kamusallik*. (Ankara: Utopya Yayınevi, 2008), 215.

The Nusayri minority in Syria are spread to the south of Hims, on the plateau between Masyaf and the Orontes, to the northeast of Hama and in the region of Ma'arrat al Nu'man, Idlib, Aleppo, and Damascus.⁴³ On the other side of the border, in Turkey, the sect settled in the southern part of the regions, called Cilicia Region. Their population has spread to Adana, Mersin, Tarsus, and Hatay (Alexandretta). Since the 18th century, the Nusayri colonies became established in the Cilicia region. As al-Tawil states that the civil war among the Nusayri tribes, the destructive earthquake in Latakia in 1785 or 1786 that demolished Nusayri villages, and the policies of Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt were the reasons of the migration from Syria to the Cilicia region.⁴⁴

In Syria, the center of the Nusayris has been the Djebel Nusayriyya (the mountains of Nusayriyya). From this nucleus, they have spread to the coastal plains in the West, the Ghab to the East and the plain of Akkar in the southwest. However the towns around the mountains have always been dominated by the non-Nusayri population.⁴⁵ The Nusayri villages in the mountains can be described as exceptionally poor. These mountains have few rivers and other water resources. However, the lack of fertile soil and hard erosion caused by heavy rain have been the main problems that the society faces, but despite the weak conditions of the area, the Nusayris have continued to live in the area. Although they constitute the majority in Latakia, only 11 per cent of them lived in the city.⁴⁶ In fact, living in the rural areas as farmers was better than moving to the city centers because Syria, like other Middle Eastern countries, was predominantly

⁴³ Heinz Halm, *Nusayriyya*. Encyclopaedia of Islam, VIII (Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1995). 146.

⁴⁴ Al-Tawil, *Nusayriler, Arap Alevilerin Tarihi*, 297-298.

⁴⁵ Massignon, *Nusayriler*, (Islam Ansiklopedisi, MEB., IX, 1997). 366.

⁴⁶ Tord Olsson, "The Gnosis of the Mountaineers and Townspeople. The Religion of Syrian Alawites, or the Nusairis," in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*. Ed. By Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Ozclalga and Catharina Raudvere. Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1998.), 167-168.

rural in nature, and the Nusayris could not make an adequate living in the urban centers of Syria.⁴⁷

Another reason that encouraged them to live in the mountains was to avoid the possibility of persecution by the Sunni rulers. Syria was under control of Sunni empires, respectively the Ayyubids, the Mamluks, and the Ottomans, since the 12th century. The sect was always seen as a threat for establishing order around the Nusayri Mountains, and because of their belief system, they were threatened by both the Sunni rulers and society. Due to the possibility of persecution, they remained in the area shielded from the world at large, and did not migrate in large numbers to the towns until the 1970s when the al-Assad family came to the power in Syria.⁴⁸

The Nusayris lived as a closed religious community, performed *taqiyya*, avoided interaction with strangers, and lived mostly in rural areas. The characteristic of their lifestyle and conditions obstruct the scholars and travelers from estimating the population of the society. It is rare to find information on the population of the sect during the early period of its establishment, the medieval period, and the early modern period.

There is no exact indication of the Nusayri population in the Ottoman records because, in some cases, members of the society were not subject to any discrimination in the records. In Haleb (Aleppo) salnames (yearbooks), the society was not recorded as a member of a distinct religious group, and was accepted as a part of the Muslim community.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 257.

⁴⁸ Pipes, "The Alawi Capture of Power in Syria," 436.

⁴⁹ Naim Urkmez, Aydin Efe. "Osmanli Arsiv Belgelerinde Nusayriler Hakkinda Genel Bilgiler," *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Arastırma Dergisi*, Sayı 54. (2010): 128.

Since Europeans started to show interest in Syria and Lebanon in the 19th century, many travelers came to the region and lived among the Nusayris. These travelers and missionaries estimated the Nusayri population in the region. In German sources, the population of the society was estimated to be around 80,000 in 1820, but in another source written in the 1830s the Nusayri population was estimated to be around 69,000. In his article, *Die Heidengemeinden der Nosairyer im nördlichen Syrien und in Cilicien*(1872), Kremer states that the Nusayris who lived in Adana were around 5000, and in Syria they were between 120,000 and 180,000.⁵⁰ Springett, the author of *Secret Sects of Syria and Lebanon*, states that “about 1856 Dr. Vandyck, of the American Board of Mission at Beyrout, while giving the number of Druzes as 100,000 gave that of the Ismaeeli and Nusairis together as 200,000, of which the largest proportion would be Nusairis.”⁵¹ E. G. Rey, who traveled the Nusayri Mountains in 1864, numbered the Nusayris at approximately 66,000. This estimation was based on information obtained from the vice president of French ambassador of Tripoli, and the numbers did not include the Nusayris who lived in Hatay, Adana and Mersin. Felix Dupont, who travelled to the region, published his observation in 1900. He estimates the number of Nusayris to be around 150,000 and 20,000 of them lived in the Cilicia region.⁵²

D. Conclusion

The issue of the origin of the sect has been a controversial subject among scholars. Several different theories have been claimed by Western, Arab, and Turkish scholars. Most of

⁵⁰ Alkan. “Alman Kaynaklarında Gore Osmanlı Nusayrileri,” 143-144.

⁵¹ Springett, *Secret Sects of Syria and Lebanon* , 119.

⁵² Er, “Fransızca Yazılı Kaynaklarda Nusayriler,” 152.

these claims show parallelism with the political or religious purposes of the Western and Middle Eastern countries at that time period. Most of the theories that were developed by the Western travelers or missionaries in the 19th century are based on the similarities between the Nusayri belief system and Christianity. The travellers used these similarities to convince the members of the community to convert to Christianity and to make them a tool for their political purposes in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Parallel to the political developments in Turkey in the 1930s, the Nusayris were claimed to be racially Turkic in origin. In the 1970s, when the Asad family came to the power in Syria, Syrian scholars demonstrated greater efforts to present the community as a branch of Shia Islam.

The Western, Arabic and Turkish sources use different terms to refer to the Nusayris. Matti Moosa compares the usage of the term of Nusayri by European, Shiite and Sunni writers, and states that the name of al-Nusayriyya was used as a preferred name of the sect after the tenth century. Before that time, they were known as al-Namirriyya.⁵³ The name Nusayri was widely accepted by scholars and societies until the 1920s. Since 1920, the community has refused the usage of Nusayri, and with the encouragement of French mandate officials they adopted the name Alawi (followers of Ali), but in academic context the term Nusayri is used to describe the sect.

⁵³ Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 262., Hasan ibn Musa al-Nawbakhti, *Firqat al-Shi'a* (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa', 1984), 93-94.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF THE NUSAYRIS FROM THE 9TH CENTURY TO 1830

In the Shia context, it is believed that the Islamic caliphate, of which esoteric guidance and spiritual leadership are inseparable elements, belongs to Ali and his descendants. The Imam, the title given to a person who led a community, must interpret the divine law and its esoteric meaning. The ability of interpreting the divine law and its esoteric meaning was to be provided by the members of the *ahl al-bayt* (the family of Prophet), so the Shi'is believe that male descendants of the Prophet, through his daughter Fatima and son in law, Ali, had abilities to rule the community of believers. The first Imam was Ali ibn Abi Talib. He was succeeded by his son Hasan, and then by Husayn. From Husayn to the last Imam, the twelfth Imam, the eldest and living Imam succeeded the previous Imam. It is believed that every Imam had his *bab* (gate) following the hadith related to the Prophet words: "I am the city of the religious knowledge and Ali is its door," and "Whoever seeks religious knowledge, has to rely upon the door."⁵⁴ The *babs* perform the same role as the Imam without having the divine quality, and they are equal to top religious position.

Shia Islam is divided into several branches. The division is based on the different line of Imamate. The largest branch of Shia Islam is that of the Twelvers, derived from the doctrine of

⁵⁴ Khuri, *The Alawis of Syria: Religious, Ideology and Organization*, 55.

believing in twelve divinely ordained leaders, the Twelve Imams. They believe that the line of Imamate started with Ali ibn Abi Talib and continued to the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, the Hidden Imam, who disappeared in the 9th century. It is believed that the last Imam is still in occultation, and he will return to lead the community. Twelver Shiism represents the most common form of Shi'ism today, and the Nusayris, Anatolian Alevis, most of the Shi'as in Iran and Lebanon are the followers of the Twelve Imam. Although all of these Shiite groups follow same line of imamate, they have different doctrines.⁵⁵ Another sect of Shia Islam is Isma'ilis, the Seveners. The name Isma'iliyya refers to Isma'il who is son of the sixth Imam, Jafar es-Sadiq. Isma'il died before his father in 755, so his brother Musa al-Kazim succeeded his father. However, a group of Shiites believed that Isma'il who died before his father was a rightful Imam. Thus, after the death of the sixth Imam, a son of Isma'il, Muhammad b. Ismail was accepted as spiritual successor of the sixth Imam by that group. The group followed the son of Isma'il and his successors as the line of Imamate. The Isma'ilis split into several branches, such as the Druzes, the Nizaris (Assassins), the Qarmatians and the Bohoras.⁵⁶ The Zaidis (Fivers) is another significant branch of Shia Islam. They follow the same first four Imams that the Twelvers and Seveners recognize; however, they follow Zayd ibn 'Ali, the grandson of Husayn

⁵⁵ See: Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, trans by. Janet Watson and Marian Hill (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 29-156., *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*. Ed. By Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Ozclalga and Catharina Raudvere. Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1998).

⁵⁶ See: Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, trans by. Janet Watson and Marian Hill (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 162-206., Farhad Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines, Second Edition*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

who was the third Imam, as an Imam. They believe that any descendants of Hasan or Husayn ibn Ali could be Imam if they have qualifications for that position.⁵⁷

The belief system of the Nusayris is characterized by mystic belief originating in *ghulat* (exaggerators) circles within Shi'a. The central idea of the belief is the divinity of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.⁵⁸ Heinz Halm claims that the belief system of the Nusayris was also influenced by Persian, gnostic and pagan belief systems.⁵⁹ He also states that the Nusayris are the only branch of extreme (ghuluw) Kufan Shi'ism that has survived into the contemporary period.⁶⁰ Rene Dussaud claims that several external influences worked upon them during the development of the belief system. Isma'ili Shi'ism, the Sabaeans, gnostic sects and pagan belief were considered among the external influences on the Nusayri belief system.⁶¹

The Nusayris believe in the Trinitarian concept AMS (Ali-Muhammad-Salman al-Farisi). Ali represents the meaning (al-ma'na) that is God. Muhammad represents the name (al-ism) whose task was to give the creator a definition and to keep the creator veiled and secret. Salman al Farisi, one of the Prophet's companions, was the door (al-bab) that was also called *salsal*. It is through the *bab* that the Nusayris could get the ma'rifa (deep grasp of the spiritual world).⁶² According to the Nusayri belief system each Imam had a gate, and Muhammad ibn Nusayr was *bab* of the eleventh Imam and he had the esoteric knowledge to lead the community.

⁵⁷ See: Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, trans by. Janet Watson and Marian Hill (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 206-211., Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 99-110.

⁵⁸ Yaron Friedman, "al-Husayn ibn Hamdân al-Khasîbî: A Historical Biography of the Founder of the Nusayrî-'Alawite." *Studia Islamica*, 93, (2001): 91-92.

⁵⁹ Heinz Halm, *Nusayriyya*. Encyclopaedia of Islam, VIII (Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1995). 147-148.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 145.

⁶¹ Friedman, "al-Husayn ibn Hamdân al-Khasîbî: A Historical Biography of the Founder of the Nusayrî-'Alawite." 92.

⁶² Friedman, *The Nusayri-'Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, 77.

Transmigration of souls (tanasukh, naql, radd) is one of the fundamental doctrines in Nusayrism. They believe that the soul transfers from one human body into another body.⁶³ The community celebrates several festivals which are celebrated by Christians, such as New Year's Day, Easter, Santa Barbara's Day, Epiphany, Pentecost and Palm Sunday. The community is considered as *ghulat* (extremist Shi'ites) by the Shia and infidels by the most of the Sunni Muslims. Therefore, the community has kept their belief secret in order to escape persecution. In times of danger, the community is allowed to practice *taqiyya* that is concealment of belief.⁶⁴

The Nusayris follow the doctrine that was firstly developed by Muhammad ibn Nusayr (d. 883) who was accepted as the door of eleventh Imam, Hasan al-Askari (d. 873), and he continued this capacity during the reign of the hidden Twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi.⁶⁵ The Nusayri sect was founded by Muhammad Ibn Nusayr in Iraq in the mid-9th century. According to Nusayri tradition, ibn Nusayr was the favorite disciple of the eleventh Imam, who entrusted him with a new revelation which was to constitute the nucleus of the Nusayri doctrine.⁶⁶ In his book, *Hidaya al-Kubra*, al-Khasibi states that the rescripts, letters and proof of sanctity of the vanished Imam were received by Ibn Nusayr.⁶⁷

Two available images can be constructed for Ibn Nusayr. For followers, he was a charismatic leader with supernatural powers, while for his rivals he was a heretical imposter. Ibn Nusayr's doctrines attracted many people who were leaders of large groups. Friedman states that

⁶³ Ibid., 102-105.

⁶⁴ For more information on belief system of the sect: M. Bar Asher and A. Kofsky, *The Nusayri- 'Alawi Religion: An Enquiry into Its Theology and Liturgy.* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002)., Friedman, *The Nusayri- 'Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria.*

⁶⁵ Khuri, *The Alawis of Syria: Religious, Ideology and Organization,* 55-56.

⁶⁶ Halm, *Nusayriyya,* 146.

⁶⁷ Friedman, *The Nusayri- 'Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria ,* 8.

the members of the group refer to themselves as *muwahhidun* or *ahl al-tawhid* (monotheist) because monotheism can be achieved only by combining *zahiri* (exoteric) and *batini* (esoteric) knowledge.⁶⁸

Although the sources do not provide numbers for the followers of Ibn Nusayr, his doctrines were accepted by a considerable number of people in the region. It is a fact that his sect could not be maintained without strong economic power. Friedman claims that the majority of the members of the sect were middle class Kufan *Mawalis* (non-Arab converts to Islam) as well as some upper class *Mawalis*. In addition, the Shi'i vizier of the caliph, and the secretary and relative of the vizier of the Caliph al-Muqtadir backed Ibn Nusayr.⁶⁹ There is no written record on the formulation of Ibn Nusayr's creed, so all of our information about him and his teachings derive from what others wrote about him.

After his death, Ibn Nusayr was succeeded as the door to the Imam by Ibn Jundab, about whom not much is known. He was then succeeded by Abdallah al-Jannan al-Junbulani (d. 900), who was born between Kufa and Wasit in southern Iraq.⁷⁰ During that period, in the 9th century, the number of followers decreased because they lacked charismatic leadership and knowledge.

Al Khasibi became the leader of the community after the death of al-Jannan. Al-Khasibi, considered the real founder of the sect, worked in al-Karkh, the Shi'ite suburb of Baghdad, but then led a vagrant life and made propaganda of his teaching in Mosul and Aleppo.⁷¹ Al-Jannan transmitted to al-Khasibi the principles that he received from Ibn Nusayr in the 9th century. Al-

⁶⁸ Ibid. 11.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

⁷⁰ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 62.

⁷¹ Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, trans by. Janet Watson and Marian Hill (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 157.

Khasibi had a broad spiritual worldview. As a result of his mystical studies, al-Khasibi saw himself as a mediator between the human world of his disciplines and the spiritual world. When he became a leader of the sect, he rejected *taqiyya* (a form of religious dissimulation) and spread his message via open propaganda. However, his propaganda placed himself and his sect in severe danger because instability in Iraq, the center of the Islamic empire, reached its height in the first half of the 10th century.⁷² But the instability in the region did not restrain al-Khasibi's propaganda. He continued to spread his message with open propaganda, but the governor of Baghdad imprisoned al-Khasibi for his activities, which can be dated to the period between 926 and 945.⁷³ Different stories have been produced on his escape from prison. Jowett states that the server of the governor stole the keys of the prison and helped him to escape from the prison.⁷⁴ The other story accepted by the members of the disciple is that the Messiah (Christ) rescued him from the prison and that Christ was none other than Muhammad.⁷⁵ Al-Khasibi's persecution, imprisonment, and attraction to Jesus encouraged him to move to al-Sham (Damascus). The first center of the community in the region was established in Harran where he moved with 51 followers, 17 Iraqis, 17 Syrians, and 17 "people of secret standing at the gates of Harran."⁷⁶

In 947, the seizure of power by the Persian Shi'ite Buyid dynasty created an opportunity for extremist Shi'ites to survive in Iraq. In addition, with the rise of the Buyids to power, Shi'ism gained power and became more or less able to carry out its activities. Under the dynasty,

⁷² Yaron Friedman, "al-Husayn ibn Hamdân al-Khasîbî: A Historical Biography of the Founder of the Nusayrî-'Alawite." *Studia Islamica*, 93, (2001): 100.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁷⁴ William Jowett, *Christian Researches in Holy Land in MDCCCXXIII. And MDCCCXXIV.* (London: R. Watts, Crown Court, Temple Bar. 1826) 50-51.

⁷⁵ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 265.

⁷⁶ Friedman, "al-Husayn ibn Hamdân al-Khasîbî: A Historical Biography of the Founder of the Nusayrî-'Alawite," 101.

scientific and scholarly debates were encouraged until the end of the 11th century.⁷⁷ There are indications that the Buyid Izz al-Dawla Bakhtiyar (d. 978) who was appointed as a ruler of Baghdad in 955 because of his father's illness, supported the Nusayris and other Shi'ite groups because he was not a powerful leader, so he backed them to gain their support.⁷⁸ The situation in Iraq convinced al-Khasibi to return in 947 and establish a *muwahhidun* community, numbering 140 people, in Turba.⁷⁹ This time, he adopted the principles of *taqiyya* when he was preaching his message. Al-Khasibi established two centers; the Iraqi center under the leadership of al-Jisri, who was his pupil and had comprehensive knowledge of the belief, and the center of Aleppo. The second center was founded in his last years in Aleppo because the Shi'ite Arab dynasty, the Hamdanids, provided him an opportunity to live in the country under his respectable Shi'ite identity, while he was secretly spreading his propaganda in Aleppo.⁸⁰ Moosa states that al-Khasibi won the favor of the Hamdanids. According to Nusayri authorities, the Hamdani ruler Sayf al-Dawla (944-967) helped al-Khasibi to propagate his teachings, and al-Khasibi dedicated one of his most important books, *Kitab al-Hidaya al-Kubra*, to Sayf al-Dawla.⁸¹ The Nusayris praised both the Buyid Bakhtiyar and the Hamdanid Sayf al-Dawla, regardless of their political rivalries. Al-Khasibi died in Aleppo in 957, and his tomb, known as Sheikh Yabraq, has still been visited by the followers of the sect.⁸²

⁷⁷ 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*. Trans by. Seyyed Hossein Nasr. (Albany: State University of New York press, 1975), 84.

⁷⁸ Friedman, *The Nusayri-'Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, 29.

⁷⁹ Friedman, "al-Husayn ibn Hamdân al-Khasîbî: A Historical Biography of the Founder of the Nusayrî-'Alawite," 102.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 106.

⁸¹ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 264.

⁸² Massignon, *Nusayriler*, IA, IX, 368.

After al-Khasibi death, Muhammad Ali al-Jilli became the leader of the *muwahhidun* in Aleppo. The center of the sect in Aleppo continued under the leadership of al-Jilli, and then his successor Abu Said al-Maymun Ibn Qasim al-Tabarani (d.1034). Al-Tabarani was a more prolific writer than al-Khasibi and a distinguished Nusayri leader. The situation of constant warfare and turmoil in the region forced him to move the center to Latakia where they have remained dominant since 1031.⁸³

Al-Tabarani was a symbolic leader of the society because he was the last religious leader who kept the whole Nusayri community united. After his death, the sect divided into distinct factions, and each faction was ruled by the local independent sheikhs. This division was characterized by theological debates, which resulted in accusations of heresy and the divergence of several groups from the mainstream. This process led to a significant weakening of the Nusayri sect.⁸⁴ The weak position of the sect augmented the oppression by the Sunni rulers and local population, which forced the sect to seek a safer place to live. They settled in the rugged mountain of Bargylus or al-Lukam, which would bear their name, Jabal al-Nusayriyya.

During the Crusades, the Nusayris and the Crusader forces encountered on another in 1097. Many Nusayris were killed by them because they considered that the Nusayris to be members of the Sunni Muslim sect that they were fighting against; however, when they realized the truth, they became more tolerant to the Nusayris. The Nusayris cooperated with the Crusaders in order to protect their position in the mountains and regain their castles.⁸⁵

⁸³ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 267.

⁸⁴ Friedman, *The Nusayri-'Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, 47.

⁸⁵ Ilyas Uzum, *Nusayrilik*. (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfi İslam Ansiklopedisi, XXXIII, İstanbul, 2007), 271.

Following the conquest of the Jabal Ansariyya (the Nusayri Mountains), Latakia, and the Frankish fortresses of Saone (Sahyun) by Saladin Ayyubi in 1188, the mountains became part of the Ayyubid sultanate.⁸⁶ The permanent battles between the Crusaders and the Ayyubids, and the attacks by Nizaris upon both sides weakened all three warring parties while the instability in Syria and lack of strong Muslim control in the region permitted the Nusayris a certain degree of autonomy.

An extraordinary event took place at the end of the Ayyubid period. In the first half of the 13th century, some Kurds that were brought by the Ayyubids and Ismaili groups moved to the Nusayri populated territories and challenged the very existence of the Nusayris. The Nusayri delegates decided to ask for assistance from Sheikh Hasan al-Makzun, Prince of Sinjar in northern Iraq, in either 1218 or in 1220. Al-Makzun organized a campaign against the Kurds and Isma'ilis; however, his troops were defeated. In 1222/1223, al-Makzun again marched into the Nusayri territories with larger troops, but this time the Isma'ilis deserted the Kurds, which forced the Kurds to flee back to Akkar in the south. The people who accompanied al-Makzun increased the Nusayri population in Syria, and they were regarded as the ancestors of the Nusayri tribes of Haddadiya, Matawira, Muhaliba, Darawisa, Numaylatiyya, and Banu Ali. Syrian president al-Assad who belongs to the Numaylatiyya branch of the Mutawira tribe is, then, Iraqi in origin.⁸⁷

In the mid-13th century a new ruling power emerged in Egypt, the Mamluks. The dynasty expanded its territories to Syria in a short time that brought two robust dynasties against each other. Under the leadership of Hulagu's, the Mongols controlled most of the regions in Syria.

⁸⁶ R. Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubid of Damascus: 1193-1260*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 82.

⁸⁷ Al-Tawil, *Nusayriyer, Arap Alevilerin Tarihi*, 246. Heinz Halm, *Nusayriyya*, 147., Khuri, "The Alawis of Syria: Religious, Ideology and Organization," 60-61., Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 270.

Baybars' forces destroyed Hulagu troops at 'Ayn Jalut on September 3, 1260, killed General Kitbugha who was a trusted general of Hulagu's, and terminated the Mongol hegemony in Syria.⁸⁸ The inhabitants of the coastal mountain ranges of Northern Syria, Nusayris, Druzes, and Maronites, sometimes co-operated with the Franks against the Muslim powers. The campaigns of Baybars against those groups were presented as a part of the jihad of Sunni Islam. The notion of jihad extended to cover not only wars against the heterodox groups but also the struggle against all kinds of prostitution, hashish eating, wine drinking, and Christian and Jewish functionaries lording over Muslims.⁸⁹ Three important fatwas were issued against the Nusayris by Ibn Taymiyya, the most famous and in many ways most important religious scholar in all Mamluk history. His fatwas are significant for understanding Nusayri-Alawi history, as well as for comprehending the Sunni Islamic view, mainly that of the Hanbali School, of the sect's religious identity.⁹⁰ His fatwas were to provide religious and moral support for the two raids aimed at oppressing the Nusayris and other rebel elements that show the relationship between political purposes of the Mamluks and ibn Taymiyya fatwas.⁹¹

Ibn Taymiyya's fatwas indicate that he did not have detailed knowledge of the Nusayris because he confused the Nusayris and Isma'ilis. While the request of fatwa focuses on Nusayris, his answer clearly shows that he considers the Nusayris to be a branch of the Shi-Isma'ili Qarmatian sect. Ibn Taymiyya accused the Nusayris of killing pilgrims on their way to Mecca, stealing the Black Stone of the Ka'ba, being in allegiance with enemies of Islam, taking over

⁸⁸ Stephen R. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubid of Damascus: 1193-1260*, 357-358.

⁸⁹ Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate, 1250-1382*. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 49-50.

⁹⁰ Yaron Friedman, "Ibn Taymiyya's Fatawa against the Nusayri-Alawi Sect." *Der Islam*, 82 (2) (2005), 350.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 360.

Egypt for two centuries (969-1171), and helping the Mongols to murder one of the caliphs of Baghdad in 1258.⁹² The Nusayris, the Nizari branch of Isma'iliyya, and Isma'ilis shared the same geography, the Nusayri Mountains, for centuries, and their theology as well as traditions showed similarities that were the main reasons for ibn Taymiyya's confusion about the Nusayris. In his fatwas he declares the Nusayris heretics, prohibited Muslims from marrying their daughters to them and eating meat of an animal slaughtered by them. He also mentions that their warriors should be killed and their property confiscated, as well as it was allowed to take their children as captives.⁹³ His fatwas have been adopted by a large majority of the Muslims, and they are the most important source of inspiration for today's jihadist (radical Sunnis).⁹⁴

During the Mamluk period, the Nusayris were target of conversion activities. Baybars made many attempts to convert the Nusayris to Sunnism. He prohibited initiations into the sect, and ordered the construction of mosques, whose expenses were paid by the Nusayris, throughout the country.⁹⁵ Moreover, the Mamluks obligated them to pay heavy taxes to their new *iqta* landlords, to use mosques for public prayers instead of their private houses, and prohibited the usage of wine for their mystical prayers.⁹⁶ However, the Mamluks failed to convert the Nusayris because the rulers underestimated the devotion of the sect to their religion.

The Mamluks witnessed the first Mahdistic movement in Nusayri society, which had been common in the Shi'ite history. In the first centuries after its birth, the Shi'ite doctrine

⁹² Ibid., 252-253

⁹³ Yvette Talhamy, "The fatwas and the Nusayri/Alawi of Syria." *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46, no. 2(March 2010): 180.

⁹⁴ Nibras Kazimi, *Syria Through Jihadist Eyes: A Perfect Enemy*, 9.

⁹⁵ Ayse Atici Arayan, "Suriye bölgesinde iki inanc Hareketi:Nizari ismailileri ve Nusayrilik." *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Arastirma Dergisi*, 54, (2010): 192.

⁹⁶ Friedman, *The Nusayri-'Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, 57.

discouraged political involvement, so during this early sectarian period the Shi'ites constituted a minority group with no political power in the Sunni world. They were living under the leadership of the Imams, but the death of the Eleventh Imam, whom they have considered to have had no son, produced a serious crisis among them, so the scholars suggested new ideas on the Twelfth Imam problem which was solved by the doctrine of *Ghaybat* (occultation). It was believed that the Hidden Imam would return and bring justice to Shi'ite society and establish a perfect government. Arjomand states that, according to Shi'ite doctrine, perfect government is impossible without the leadership of the Hidden Imam. Shi'ite history has encountered many individuals, the leading figures of the Mar'ashi order, the Sarbidars, the Hurufiyya, and finally the Safavids, who claimed to be the anticipated Imam, his representative, or his forerunner, used the legal opportunity that had been created by the doctrinal developments of the previous centuries.⁹⁷

The first acclamation of Mahdi in Nusayri society was in 1317, a man whom they called Muhammad ibn Hasan, the Mahdi. He rebelled against the Mamluk order and claimed that the Sunnis to be infidels. Scholars argue that the religious pressure of Mamluks and heavy taxes played a significant role in the uprising. However, the Nusayris from other areas of Syria did not support the uprising because the sheikhs, religious leaders, decided to take responsible measures to protect the sect from possible Mamluk oppression.⁹⁸

In the first half of the 14th century, the Mamluks tried to integrate the Nusayris into social life. Al-Malik al-Nasir, the Mamluk sultan of Egypt (d. 1341), ordered the Nusayris lives to be

⁹⁷ See: Said Emir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Social Change in Shiite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984)

⁹⁸ Friedman, *The Nusayri-'Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, 58-62.

spared because the community was productive and devoted, cultivated their lands, fought together with Muslims against foreign invaders, married with local Muslims, and were buried beside them. These facts shows that the fatwas of ibn Taymiyya were not taken into consideration at that time by the Mamluk rulers because the economic benefits derived from the community for the empire was much important than their religious belief system.⁹⁹

At the beginning of the 15th century Damascus and Aleppo were occupied by Timur's forces whose policies reduced the political and social pressure of the Mamluks on the Nusayris. However, his authority in Syria did not last for a long period. The country again fell under the control of the Mamluks until 1516 when the region was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. The occupation of Syria by the Ottomans brought misfortune to the Nusayris who would face oppression by a powerful Sunnite enemy.¹⁰⁰

The beginning of the 16th century witnessed the rise of a Shi'ite state, the Safavids, under the leadership of Shah Ismail. The Ottoman and Safavid Empires held opposing religious views that were skillfully used for political purposes. Shah Ismail established Shi'ism as the religion of the state, and his religious views became widespread among the tribes in the east part of Anatolia. The tension between Sultan Selim and Shah Ismail increased when a great number of Shi'ite (Kizilbas) tribes in eastern Anatolia followed the Safavid order, spreaded propaganda of Shah Ismail, and threatened the eastern border of the Ottoman Empire. In 1515, the two empires fought at Chaldiran, resulting in a victory for the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the battle, the Ottoman forces entered Tabriz, but they then changed their route to the southwest in order to

⁹⁹ Ibid., 63-64.

¹⁰⁰ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 274.

move against the Mamluks.¹⁰¹ The Ottoman sultan had a wish to inherit the heartland of the caliphate of the past. Burns argues that without Syria, indeed Damascus, the journey to Mecca was almost impossible. Moreover, Egypt was ripe for the taking and Syria and Palestine lay in the path of that objective. The Sultan's dream came true only by occupying Syria due to its strategic location.¹⁰²

Being a branch of Shia Islam, the Nusayris naturally supported Shah Ismail against Sultan Selim. Moosa states that Sultan Selim, who was extremely suspicious of all Shi'ites, extended his suspicion to the Nusayris, and took some preventative measures against them due to their sympathies towards the Safavids.¹⁰³ Since the domination of the Ottoman Empire in Syria, the Nusayris had been marked for their differences. The fatwas issued against the Kizilbash that declared them infidels, whose blood could be shed and whose property, women and children could legitimately be confiscated, were also implemented for Nusayris.¹⁰⁴ According to Nusayri historian Al-Tawil, Sultan Selim obtained a particular fatwa from the mufti of Aleppo to fight the infidel Shi'is in Syria. Sultan Selim promised to confirm the Shi'ite leaders and local people authority over the townspeople in order to gather them. Al-Tawil claims that around 9,400 people who assembled in Aleppo were all executed on the basis of that fatwa and Sultan Selim's orders.¹⁰⁵ After this massacre, many Nusayris fled to the Nusayri Mountains that provided them with a natural refuge from the cruel policies of the Sultan. Sultan Selim moved more than half

¹⁰¹ Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 21.

¹⁰² Ross Burns, *Damascus: A history*. (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 224.

¹⁰³ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 274-275.

¹⁰⁴ Selahattin Tansel, *Yavuz Sultan Selim*. (Ankara: Milli Egitim Basimevi, 1969), 34-38. Türkyilmaz, "Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire," 167.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Tawil, *Nusayriyer, Arap Alevilerin Tarihi*, 270-271. Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 275.

million people, most of them from Anatolia and Khorasan, to the Nusayri territories to weaken the Nusayris. These newcomers spread all around Latakia and the Nusayri Mountains. Although at the beginning this strategy worked to decrease the power of the Nusayris in the region, the Nusayris retook control of the region after fifty years because the poor condition of the mountains as well as the weather conditions weakened the Turks. Therefore, most of them perished due to poor conditions and the Nusayri attacks.¹⁰⁶

Contrary to Al-Tawil's opinion, Talhamy states that this fatwa did not specifically target the Nusayris but rather all of the heretical groups in Syria, including Druzes and Nusayris. In addition, this fatwa was used to legitimize their attacks against the Shi'a which were considered as a potential threat to the Ottoman Empire due to their sympathy to the Shi'ite Safavids. The fatwas issued by Nuh al-Hanafi during the 16th century legitimized the massacre of Nusayris that led to the migration of the community to the mountain areas and the Cilicia region.¹⁰⁷ The Nusayris suffered from both the Ottoman Sunni rulers and the local Muslim community who adopted those fatwas. Since the 16th century, the Nusayris have continued to live mainly in the mountains, in small villages, or in areas surrounding the coastal cities such as Tripoli, Latakia, Jablah to avoid the interaction with the local Muslim community and the Ottoman authorities.¹⁰⁸

Both in the imperial and communal historiographies, the four Ottoman centuries of the community received very little attention. There are no satisfactory documents for the social, economic, and politic life of the Nusayris in the 17th and 18th centuries. Therefore, the historical transformation of the Nusayris and their experience as a heterodox community under the Ottomans has not only remained unexplored, but also further blurred under guessworks, political

¹⁰⁶ Al-Tawil, *Nusayriiler, Arap Alevilerin Tarihi*, 272-273.

¹⁰⁷ Talhamy, "The Fatwas and the Nusayri/Alawi of Syria," 182.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

contestations and speculations.¹⁰⁹ The limited documents indicate that the Nusayris demonstrated their obedience to the Ottoman Empire and paid their taxes on time until the 19th century because in the Ottoman records, there are no significant complaints about the community. However, since the beginning of the 19th century, a change started in terms of the relationship between the Nusayris and the empire. Talhamy states that some Nusayris who refused to pay taxes, attacked neighborhood villages, plundered and injured the villagers.¹¹⁰

With the beginning of the 19th century, the Nusayris began to appear in the Ottoman documents. Between 1804 and 1834, there were many occasions that triggered conflicts between the Nusayris and Ottoman administrators in Syria. The Ottoman Pashas in Syria organized many attacks against the Nusayris to prevent their attacks upon neighborhood villages, to force them into paying *miri* (tax) on time, and prevent thievery. In addition to the problems related to the Nusayris' attacks, their belief system and attitudes towards Sunnis were also a reason for the perpetual Ottoman retaliation against them between 1804 and 1834.¹¹¹

Although the Nusayris were considered a problematic community by the Ottomans, some members of the community enjoyed high positions in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the first century of the 19th century. Kara Mehmed Pasha, a native of Antakya, had a brilliant military and administrative career and was the most prominent Nusayri of the 19th century. Kara Mehmed Pasha, was also known as "Kara Cehennem" (Black Hell), served the empire as chief of the palace doorkeepers, master general of the imperial artillery, vizier, grand admiral (kaptan-i

¹⁰⁹ Türkyılmaz, "Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire," 164.

¹¹⁰ Yvette Talhamy, "Conscription among the Nusayris ('Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 38 no.1 (April 2011): 25.

¹¹¹ Stefan H. Winter, "The Nusayris before the Tanzimat in the Eyes of Ottoman Provincial Administrators, 1804-1834," in *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*. Ed. Thomas Philipp, Christoph Schumann. (Beirut: Orient Institute der DMG Beirut, 2004). 106-110.

derya), and governor of the rich provinces of Ankara and Cankiri. He played an active role in the destruction of the Janissary barracks in 1826, known as *Vak'a-yi Hayriyye* (Auspicious Event), and encouraged the Nusayris to move in Bursa and Istanbul.¹¹² Mahmud Bey, son of Kara Mehmed Pasha (d. 1841) was another Nusayri that served the Sublime Porte.¹¹³ Another Mehmed Pasha, from Latakia, started his career as a *kethuda* and was finally promoted to agha of the Janissaries in the fall of 1811. After his retirement from that rank, he continued his active duty with the rank of *beylerbeyi*, and some years later and finally was appointed governor of Tripoli in 1823-1824. As soon as his Nusayri identity was recognized by the Sunni population, an uprising rose up against him that resulted in his death and the death of some members of his family.¹¹⁴

A. Conclusion

The Nusayri sect was founded by Ibn Nusayr who was considered *bab* of the eleventh Imam, but the doctrines of the sect were developed by al-Khasibi. In the early years of the establishment of the sect, the Nusayris used the advantage of the tolerance provided by the Shi'ite dynasties, the Buyids and the Hamdanids. However, the sect suffered from the oppression of the Sunni rulers and population between the 13th and 20th centuries. They experienced two massacres, by the Mamluks in 1317, and by the Ottomans in 1517, so they found a solution by fleeing to the mountains that provided them with a natural shield. The geography that they lived

¹¹² Al-Tawil, *Nusayriler, Arap Alevilerin Tarihi*, 301. Mehmed Sureyya, *Sicil-i Osmani*. (Istanbul:Tarih Vakfi Yurt Yayinlari, vol. 4, 1996), 1058-1059.

¹¹³ Sureyya, *Sicil-i Osmani*, vol. 3, 909.

¹¹⁴ Winter, "The Nusayris before the Tanzimat in the Eyes of Ottoman Provincial Administrators, 1804-1834," 110-111.

in shaped their individual characters, and their social and economic life. Living a primitive life in the mountains, coupled with the suppression of the authorities and local people, made them more aggressive.

The Ottoman documents offer very limited knowledge about the social and economic life of the sect in the 17th and 18th centuries. They were mentioned in the beginning of the 19th century when they refused to pay tax and attacked the neighboring villages. Their aggressive activities continued until the beginning of the 1830s when both the Nusayri Mountains and Syria experienced invasion by the Egyptians.

CHAPTER IV

THE EGYPTIAN PERIOD IN SYRIA AND THE NUSAYRIS

Syria was occupied by Mehmed Ali Pasha who was governor of Egypt in 1831, and the region was ruled by the Egyptian government until 1841. Mehmed Ali Pasha was born in Kavala in 1769. His descendants were from a family that had migrated from south east Anatolia and settled in Kavala in southern Macedonia. Mehmed Ali served for military service, and when the town of Kavala was ordered by the Ottoman authorities to send 300 men to join the Albanian contingent that was forming part of the Ottoman troops sent to defend Egypt against France, he joined them.¹¹⁵ In 1801, Mehmed Ali served as second in command of the contingent that were sent Egypt for the purpose protecting Egypt from the invasion of Napoleon's troops. In a short period he became commander of the Albanian contingent in Egypt, and struggled to restore order and law there. From the beginning, Mehmed Ali established close relationships with local notables and *ulama* in Egypt and provoked them against the Ottoman policies and officials in the region. After a short time, the Egyptian *ulama* and notables asked the Sultan to appoint Mehmed Ali as the governor general of the province.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 29.

¹¹⁶ Butrus Abu-Manneh, "Mehmed Ali Pasa and Sultan Mahmud II: The Genesis of Conflict." *Turkish Historical Review* I (2010): 5.

In the beginning of the 19th century, Egypt suffered from internal conflicts between the Mamluks (the notables of Egypt), *ulama* and the Albanians, who were always hated by everyone in Egypt.¹¹⁷ Mehmed Ali used these conflicts to his advantage. He played the Mamluks against the Ottoman administration in Egypt, and the Albanians against the Mamluks. At the same time, he convinced the *ulama* of Egypt to support his policies while he was issuing new laws that restricted influence of the *ulama* over the population and administration.¹¹⁸ All of these policies helped Mehmed Ali to consolidate his power in Egypt.

Mehmed Ali Pasha implemented reform policies as soon as he consolidated his power in Egypt. Firstly, he modernized the irrigation system of Egypt and encouraged Egyptians to produce agricultural and industrial products, including rice, sugar beets, opium and cotton. After the establishment of industries in Egypt, Mehmed Ali forced the producers to sell their products to the state in order to meet the raw material demands of the newly established industries. He then resold these products to Egyptians and foreign countries. In a few years the policies increased the annual income of Egypt from 13,000 *kese* (purse) to 400,000 *kese* of which just 12,000 were sent to the Ottoman government in Istanbul.¹¹⁹ Another reform of Mehmed Ali was to establish a regular army in Egypt. He used most of the state revenue to build a modern army and navy under the supervision of French officials and technicians. Those Egyptians that were trained by French instructors would serve as officers in the new army. Abu-Manneh argues that the establishment of a modern and loyal Egyptian army and navy was significant for securing his power and the

¹¹⁷ Khaled Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt*.(Oxford: One World Publications, 2009), 29.

¹¹⁸ Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanli Tarihi: Nizam-i Cedid ve Tanzimat Devirleri (1789-1856)*. (Ankara, 2007), 125-126.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

new Turco-Egyptian elites in Egypt.¹²⁰ Mehmed Ali also sent several Egyptians to Europe for training and to make them familiar with the industrial, cultural and political developments in Europe. The aims of the training program were to use the trained people in state administration and to establish a professional bureaucracy in Egypt. Mehmed Ali worked for the Ottoman sultan, Selim III, who was a great reformer. It is clear that the military reforms of Selim III (Nizam-i Cedid) that depended on establishing a European-style modern army and importing military instructors from the West in order to instruct the Ottoman troops, as well as the educational reforms that were sending students to the West in order to make them familiar with European culture and politics, influenced Mehmed Ali Pasha's reforms.

From his appointment in Egypt in 1805 until the mid-1820s, Mehmed Ali showed complete loyalty to the sultan. He paid the annual tribute on time, suppressed the Wahhabi revolt in Arabia that lasted for seven years (1811-1818), and sent his troops to Morea in order to help the Ottoman troops in suppressing the Greek revolt in 1824.¹²¹ However, the tension between Mehmed Ali and Mahmud II steadily increased by the late 1820s. Firstly, after the destruction of the Janissaries in 1826, Mahmud II asked Mehmed Ali to provide him with officers from the Egyptian army to help in training the newly established army, the *Asakir-i Mansure-yi Muhammediyye*, but Mehmed Ali refused the sultan's request. Secondly, after the battle of Navarino in 1827, in which the Ottoman and Egyptian fleets were destroyed by England, Russia and France, Mehmed Ali withdrew his forces from the region without the permission of the

¹²⁰ Butrus Abu-Manneh, "Mehmed Ali Pasa and Sultan Mahmud II: The Genesis of Conflict," 8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

sultan. Lastly, Mehmed Ali refused to send 12,000 Egyptian troops to assist in the war that was between the Ottoman Empire and Russia.¹²²

The Ottoman Empire was challenged by ethnic rebellions in the Balkans at the beginning of the 1820s. The Greek rebellions, which started in 1821, forced the Ottoman Empire, whose army proved its ineffectiveness to suppress the revolt, to negotiate with Mehmed Ali Pasha of Egypt. Sultan Mahmud II offered the Island of Crete in exchange for the support of the Egyptian army, so Mehmed Ali Pasha sent his son, Ibrahim Pasha, with an army to suppress the revolt. With the support of the Egyptian army, the Ottoman Empire successfully entered the Peloponnese where the revolt had started and other strategic location that had been controlled by the Greek rebels. The Western powers that favored the formation of an independent Greek state intervened in the conflict by sending their navies that destroyed the Egyptian navy in the battle of Navarino on October 20, 1827 to Greece. After losing his navy in the battle of Navarino, Mehmed Ali requested Syria as compensation for his loss, but this was refused by Mahmud II. Mehmed Ali Pasha decided to conquer Syria to compensate for his loss at Navarino. Mehmed Ali needed a reason to justify his actions, so he claimed that some local governors in Syria protected Egyptian army fugitives that were wanted back by the Egyptians.¹²³

This campaign was the most significant of his military operations in terms of its geographic and strategic importance. Firstly, the sense of insecurity about the Ottomans' policies against him encouraged him to invade Syria as that region would serve as a barrier to Ottoman attacks upon the Egyptian heartland. Secondly, controlling Syria would give him the opportunity to gain control of Jerusalem, another holy city of Islam, which would increase his

¹²² Ibid., 9.

¹²³ Talhamy, "Conscription among the Nusayris ('Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century," 28.

prestige in the Islamic world.¹²⁴ Thirdly, Syria had rich natural resources, including rich forests that could supply Egypt with the much-needed timber for his fleet.¹²⁵ In addition to its rich natural resources, Syria had a thriving international trading community with well-developed markets throughout the Levant, and it would be a market for Egyptian-made products.

Mehmed Ali organized what would become his largest military operation, involving more than 25,000 troops, for the invasion of Syria at the end of October 1831.¹²⁶ After he captured Syria, his armies crossed into Anatolia and defeated the Ottoman armies at Konya and Kütahia. With the intervention of the European powers, the Ottomans and Egyptians signed the Peace of Kütahya that granted the provinces of Egypt, the Hijaz and Crete to Mehmed Ali and his descendants. In addition, the provinces of Acre, Tripoli, Damascus and Aleppo were granted to Ibrahim Pasha. Ibrahim Pasha ruled over Syria between 1831 and 1840, and he implemented many reforms during this period. This chapter will discuss the reforms of Ibrahim Pasha, the reaction of the local population to his policies, and the Nusayri revolt in 1834.

A. The Reforms of Ibrahim Pasha

The government of Mahmud II was able to control neither the mountainous areas of Syria and Palestine, which were ruled by semi-independent local chiefs, and were held by two heterodox Islamic minority groups, the Nusayris and Druzes, nor in the cities and towns which experienced the conflict between the Ottoman government and local powers. Under Mahmud II,

¹²⁴ Henry Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 106.

¹²⁵ Khaled Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt*, 83..

¹²⁶ Fred H. Lawson, "Economic and Social Foundation of Egyptian Expansionism: The Invasion of Syria in 1831." *The International History Review*, Vol. 10:3, (August 1988): 378.

the regime failed to maintain security, utilities and public works were neglected, heavy taxation and confiscation took place, and sudden devaluations of the Ottoman currency often occurred. Mahmud II attempted to solve these problems; however, the Russian-Ottoman War in 1828-29, rebellions in the Balkans, and the revolt of Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt in 1831 prevented the Sultan from focusing on problems in the Syrian provinces.¹²⁷ Because of increasing problems in Syria, the Egyptian invasion was welcomed and supported by the Syrian people. After the Egyptian invasion of 1831, Syria and Palestine became completely isolated from Ottoman rule and reforms up to 1840.

The Ottoman government aimed to destroy the feudal order and centralize all legislative and judicial authority in the empire. However, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828 and other internal problems prevented the sultan to accomplish these policies in the Syrian provinces. After the occupation of Syria by Mehmed Ali Pasha, the Pasha accomplished what the sultan had planned. Mehmed Ali Pasha abolished the decentralized *paşalık* system, reduced power of *muqata'jis* (tax farmers), implemented regular taxation policy, and enforced recognition of the rights of non-Muslim in local government. Before the Egyptian rule, Syria was divided into four eyalets, that of Aleppo, Tripoli, Damascus and Sidon. After the occupation, the administrative divisions of the Ottoman Empire were kept, but the term *müdiriyet* was used instead of eyalet. Administratively, the entire Syria region, including Mount Lebanon, placed under the governor-generalship of vali in Damascus. However, the governor-general was still under the command of Ibrahim Pasha.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reforms in Syria and Palestine, 1841-1861*. (Oxford University Press, 1968), 4-11.

¹²⁸ Caesar E. Farah, *Politics of interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830-1861*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 15.

A mutasallim was appointed over each important city by Mehmed Ali Pasha in Syria. Duties of the mutasallims were to head the local administrative machinery and to maintain security in these cities. Mübasher were appointed to supervise the financial situation in the region and to levy and collect taxes as well as to keep accounts. Several committees were formulated in Syria after the Egyptian occupation. The first *majlis* was the consultative commission, *majlis-i istishari*, that helped Ibrahim Pasha in the decision making process. The second commission was *diwan-ı mashwara* that focused on issues, such as taxes, revenue, commercial differences and civil depts. The third commission was *majlis-i shura* that were opened in the cities whose inhabitants were over 20,000. Each *majlis* had twelve to twenty members whom were selected among the notables and leading merchants of cities, and represented the different religious groups in the cities- Muslims, Christians and Jews.¹²⁹

When Ibrahim Pasha entered Jerusalem, he declared that all distinctions between non-Muslims and Muslims as had been stipulated by earlier policies would be abolished.¹³⁰ The non-Muslims in Syria enjoyed full equality with Muslims, were appointed to local *majlises* (councils), were employed by the civil services, occupied high positions in the Syrian administration, were allowed to build and repair their place of worship, and were permitted to ride horses and wear the same clothes as Muslims.¹³¹ In addition, under Egyptian rule, Syria and Palestine were widely opened for the first time to European activities and influence, after a long period of traditionally isolated life. Ibrahim Pasha made commercial treaties that lowered and unified import duties and disseminated monopolies amongst European powers. These treaties

¹²⁹ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "The Administrative and Economic Policies of Ibrahim Pasha in Palestine, 1831-1840." (Unpublished Master Thesis, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1972), 29.

¹³⁰ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 222.

¹³¹ Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reforms in Syria and Palestine, 1841-1861*, 17-18.

provided advantageous to non-Muslims in Syria because the European consuls provided security for them, and they enjoyed privileges that were provided them according to the terms of the capitulatory treaties between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers.¹³²

The Egyptians reformed the taxation system by removing some old ones and implementing new taxes. Mehmed Ali Pasha promised the local people that he would abolish some of the taxes with which the Ottomans had burdened them; however, he did not fulfill this promise because he realized that he needed money, soldiers and workers in order to sustain his power in the region. The inhabitants of Crete, Adana and Greater Syria were to be a source of tax revenue and manpower. In addition to taxes that had been levied by the Ottomans, the *miri* (land tax) and *kharaj* (toleration or poll tax) that was paid by non-Muslims, the Egyptians imposed new taxes, such as *ferdah* (capitation tax) and the *balta* (house tax).¹³³

The reforms of Egyptians minimized the frequent occurrence of bribery, secured property, and provided security to all the great routes throughout the country. The reforms also reduced the abuse of power of the government officers, and prevented unfair punishment.¹³⁴ In addition, Ibrahim Pasha provided loans and equipment to peasants in order to increase the extent of cultivation and enhance the export of agricultural products. These reform policies gained the support of the Syrian and Anatolian people, and the populations provided logistical support to Ibrahim Pasha. In fact, there were two reasons that encouraged these people to back Ibrahim

¹³² David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10-11.

¹³³ Yvette Talhamy, "The Nusayri and Druze Minorities in Syria in the Nineteenth Century: The Revolt against the Egyptian Occupation as a Case Study," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 48, No.6 (November 2012): 974-975.

¹³⁴ John G. Kinnear, *Cairo, Petra, and Damascus, in 1839. With Remarks on the Government of Mehemet Ali, and on the Present Prospects of Syria*. (London: Bradbury and Evans, Printers, Whitefriars, 1840), 331-332.

Pasha's policies: the reaction of the Anatolian and Syrian people to the reforms and centralization policies of Mahmud II, and the promises of Ibrahim Pasha. However, dissatisfaction among the Syrian people arose when they learned about the policies of Mehmed Ali's which were in favor of Christians, and that his armies were trained by French officials.¹³⁵ The Nusayris welcomed Ibrahim Pasha's policies at the beginning, and they praised him and his policies by saying that Ibrahim Pasha did not discriminate against anybody in Syria.¹³⁶

The next step in Ibrahim Pasha's reforms was the disarming of the local community. The Egyptians started to collect the weapons of the local people. The Egyptians had their own estimate of what and how many weapons that every tribe, town, and district had, and they expected to collect the numbers that they had estimated. In some areas, the numbers of the weapons were less than the Egyptian government estimate, so people found a solution in buying weapons and delivering them to the Egyptian officials in order to protect themselves from Egyptian punishment. Disarming people caused disturbances because carrying weapons was a regular matter for local people, especially the mountaineers and the villagers. They used weapons for several purposes, such as protecting themselves and their villages from attacks, protecting their herds from wild animals, and hunting.¹³⁷

The conscription policies of the Egyptians led to an uprising of the local people. Ibrahim Pasha mercilessly conscripted the Nusayris, the Druzes, Muslims and Christians, and treated them as if they were "the fellahin of Egypt." He required everybody to obey his commands without question, without consultation, and he implemented his commands without regard for the

¹³⁵ Sebahattin Samur, *Ibrahim Paşa Yönetimi Altında Suriye*. (Erciyes Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1995), 65.

¹³⁶ Al-Tawil, *Nusayriler, Arap Alevilerin Tarihi*, 307.

¹³⁷ Yvette Talhamy, "The Nusayri and Druze Minorities in Syria in the Nineteenth Century: The Revolt against the Egyptian Occupation as a Case Study," 975.

local population. He interpreted all of the rebellions as being not against his policies, but against the state itself. In his view, one was either loyal, or one was rebel; there was no middle way. He warned the local population “Woe to you, who disobey me or who delays in doing my bidding.”¹³⁸ Because of these policies, the community of Syria and Aleppo complained to the Ottoman government in Istanbul about the oppression of Ibrahim Pasha.¹³⁹ Although his reforms improved sanitation, secured the roads, and disciplined tribes, officials and notables through the presence of standing army units, the policies of conscription, disarmament, and deforestation triggered uprisings in Palestine, Syria, and the Mount of Lebanon that began in 1834 and continued until the collapse of Egyptian regime in Syria in 1840.

B. The Conscription Policy of the Egyptian Regime and the Nusayri Uprising

During the reign of the Mahmud II, the Ottomans started to discuss general conscription in the empire. This idea was implemented for the first time by Mehmed Ali Pasha of Egypt who built a powerful independent army which showed its success on the battlefields. When Syria was granted to Mehmed Ali after the Treaty of Kütahya, he ordered Ibrahim Pasha to conscript Syrians into the army. Ibrahim Pasha who recognized the possible negative reactions to that policy warned his father because their regime was newly established in Syria, and treating the

¹³⁸ Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 53-54.

¹³⁹ BA. (Basbakanlik Osmanli Arsivi), HAT. 451/22354-C, 03 Şaban 1250.

population as if they did in Egypt would cause an uprising of Syrians, but Mehmed Ali did not listen to Ibrahim Pasha's advice.¹⁴⁰

The military conscription measures of Mehmed Ali carried the Syrian conscripts sometimes to Sudan, sometimes to the Hijaz, Egypt and to the southern borders of Asia. In addition, they did not always understand the purpose for which they were fighting. In the earlier times, typically, when the army had obtained a victory, the soldiers benefited from it; however, under Mehmed Ali Pasha they were asked to fight against African Sudanese, the Hejazite Bedouins, and against the Ottoman Sultan whereby they would not get any benefit as a result of their victories. Moreover, when they had fought before, they would return to their homes for a certain amount of time, but under the Egyptians, they served constantly and were not allowed to visit their homeland in peace time.¹⁴¹

There was no system, no plan for the conscription. The only appearance of a system consisted of fixing the number of men required from each town or village; people were conscripted without considering their age, station, or employment.¹⁴² In addition to the above abuses, another reason to resist conscription in the mountain areas was the widespread existence of large families. Conscription meant poverty and unsafe conditions for these people because families frequently lost the only member who was capable of supporting the rest. Walpole states that a man complained about the conscription policy of Ibrahim Pasha by saying "I have three

¹⁴⁰ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 235., Talhamy, "Conscription among the Nusayris ('Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century," 26.

¹⁴¹ Asad Jibrail Rustom, "Syria under Muhammad Ali." *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 41 No.1, (October 1924): 46.

¹⁴² John G. Kinnear, *Cairo, Petra, and Damascus, in 1839. With Remarks on the Government of Mehemet Ali, and on the Present Prospects of Syria*, 330.

wives and nine children; how I can go? Must I shut my house? Oh God, What am I to do?"¹⁴³ In addition, the conscription policy damaged the economy of the region. The people of the region were either conscripted, or fled the region to avoid conscription, so the number of economically active population declined which resulted to the decrease of economic productivity and an increase in market prices.¹⁴⁴

When the first call for military service was made, hundreds of young men fled to the Sultan's territory, and many left the towns of central Syria and moved to the mountains. Young people found a solution in maiming and blinding themselves, as well as cutting their fingers in order to avoid conscription.¹⁴⁵ According to Bazili, over 100,000 subjects left their homes within a period of 8 years to avoid conscription.¹⁴⁶

The policy of disarmament and the call for mass conscription caused many revolts in different part of Syria, such as Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli, Beirut, Antioch, and Kilis. The main revolts occurred in three places; Jerusalem, mainly in Jabal Nablus in May 1834; among the Nusayris in Latakia and the Nusayri Mountains in September 1834; and among the Druzes in Mount Lebanon in 1835.

The Nusayris refused to disarmament policies of the Egyptians and sent recruits to the army that created conflict between the Egyptians and the Nusayris. This conflict was not the first interaction between them. In 1832, the Nusayri leaders, such as Dahir Seqr al-Mahfuz, the governor of Safita, arranged an armed forces of 3000 Nusayri fighters to both show their loyalty

¹⁴³ Frederick Walpole, *The Ansayrii and Assassins: With Travels in the Further East in 1850 to 1851. Including a Visit to Nineveh Part Three*. (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 183.

¹⁴⁴ Sebahattin Samur, *Ibrahim Paşa Yönetimi Altında Suriye*, 68.

¹⁴⁵ Asad Jibrail Rustum, "Syria Under Muhammad Ali," 44. Al-Tawil, *Nusayriler, Arap Alevilerin Tarihi*, 307.

¹⁴⁶ Talhamy, "Conscription among the Nusayris ('Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century" 29.

to the Ottoman Empire and to help them to recapture Tripoli from the Egyptians. However, their help was not sufficient to repulse the Egyptians from Tripoli, so they expanded their domination in Syria.¹⁴⁷ The second interaction happened when the Nusayris revolted against the disarmament and conscription policies of Ibrahim Pasha in 1834 when Ali Beg, the commander of the cavalry regiment, reported the revolt to Ibrahim Pasha. The first offensive attack of the Nusayris upon the Egyptians took place in 1834 when 4000 warriors attacked Egyptian soldiers who were marching from Aleppo to Latakia. This attack caused the loss of half of the Egyptian soldiers and forced the Egyptians to retreat to Latakia. The Nusayri warriors then attacked Latakia and destroyed government buildings, laid siege to the house of the *Mutasallim* Antepi Said Agha, captured the *miri* (land tax) money, the houses of the *Mutasallim*, and some belongings of the soldiers. In addition, they freed Nusayri prisoners.¹⁴⁸ Talhamy states that the Nusayris were still loyal to the Ottoman Empire, and they did not accept the *mutasallim* who had been appointed by the Egyptians.¹⁴⁹

At the time of the Nusayri attack on Latakia, the disarmament policies continued in Tripoli. The Nusayris who had settled in that region were asked to deliver their arms, but they refused to hand in their weapons, so they fled to the mountains that provided them a natural refuge from Egyptian attacks. Salim Beg, the commander of the artillery corps and governor of Homs, threatened them with the destruction of their homes, vineyards and fields if they continued to resist disarmament and conscription policies. Some of the Nusayris agreed to hand in their weapons, but neither the number of weapons that were handed in nor the number of the

¹⁴⁷ Talhamy, "The Nusayri and Druze Minorities in Syria in the Nineteenth Century: The Revolt against the Egyptian Occupation as a Case Study," 981.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 982. Sebahattin Samur, *Ibrahim Paşa Yönetimi Altında Suriye*, 75.

¹⁴⁹ Talhamy, "The Nusayri and Druze Minorities in Syria in the Nineteenth Century: The Revolt against the Egyptian Occupation as a Case Study," 983.

Nusayris who gave up resistance were sufficient to convince Salim Beg. With the help of his agents, he discovered the hiding place of the Nusayris, and attacked them. This unexpected attack led to the defeat of the Nusayri rebels. At the end of the raid, many weapons and flocks of sheep were captured, the Nusayri leaders were executed, several Nusayri rebels were captured and later conscripted, and the villages of the Nusayris burnt to punish the entire people and discourage other Nusayris from resisting.¹⁵⁰ Talhamy states that 400 rifles, 100 pistols, and many other weapons were collected from that region. In addition, 865 armed Nusayri warriors were captured.¹⁵¹

When Ibrahim Pasha was informed about the Nusayri attacks on his troops in Latakia, he ordered Salim Beg to move from Tripoli to the region. As soon as the Nusayris heard of the arrival of Salim Beg's forces to Latakia, they fled towards the Nusayri Mountains. Many of them were killed by the Egyptians and five leaders of the community were taken to prison.¹⁵² Salim Beg attacked al-Mreqib and the contiguous villages, including al-Khawabi, Qadmus, and Sultan Ibrahim where 3,200 rifles, 260 pistols and many other weapons were obtained. However the Egyptians did not gain total control of the mountains because they were not trained to fight in mountain areas, and some of them had likely never been in the mountain areas.

Ibrahim Pasha asked his allies in the region to provide him with soldiers that were skilled in fighting in the rocky mountains. Vast forces were sent in to the mountains under the leadership Amir Khalil, son of Amir Bashir al-Shihabi, Mehmed Ali's ally in Syria.¹⁵³ With the arrival of new troops, the size of the Egyptian army reached 10,000 soldiers. At the beginning,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 983.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 983.

¹⁵² Ibid., 983.

¹⁵³ Stefan H. Winter, "The Nusayris before the Tanzimat in the Eyes of Ottoman Provincial Administrators, 1804-1834," 105.

the Nusayris captured five hundred Druzes who had been sent to the region with the new troops and killed all of them on a round rock, which has since been called the Blood Rock, near al-Murayqib.¹⁵⁴ However, with the help of the new troops, Salim Beg subjugated the region within a week, and forced the Nusayris of the northern part of the mountain to accept his authority after disarming them and destroying several of their villages.¹⁵⁵

Meanwhile, Ottoman agents had been supporting the rebel groups in order to weaken the Egyptian authority in the region and prepare a base to retake Syria from their hands. During the clashes between the Nusayris and the Egyptians, the Ottoman agents in Syria sent messages to the Nusayris to encourage them to continue their resistance and not to accept the disarmament policy of Mehmed Ali Pasha. The agents spread the rumor that Ottoman troops were soon going to attack Syria and regain control of the region.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the Nusayris who lived in the mountain requested that they not be required to submit their weapons and provide recruits. Instead, they accepted to pay taxes that were required of them; however, their request was not taken into consideration by the Egyptians.¹⁵⁷ In fact, the Ottoman officials exaggerated the extent of the Nusayri uprising against the Egyptians. Although the Nusayri uprising did not result in the victory of the community, the Ottoman officials stated that “numerous and powerful” Nusayris were strategically powerful. The aim of the exaggerations was to inflame the hatred of the local

¹⁵⁴ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 277., Al-Tawil, *Nusayriler, Arap Alevilerin Tarihi*, 307., Sebahattin Samur, *Ibrahim Paşa Yönetimi Altında Suriye*, 76.

¹⁵⁵ Talhamy, “The Nusayri and Druze Minorities in Syria in the Nineteenth Century: The Revolt against the Egyptian Occupation as a Case Study,” 984.

¹⁵⁶ Talhamy, “Conscription among the Nusayris (‘Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century,” 31.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

people of Syria towards the Egyptian regime and their wish to see the Ottoman rule back in Syria.¹⁵⁸

The Nusayri uprising lasted until mid-April, 1835. The Ottomans neither came to help nor sent sufficient material to strengthen the Nusayri resistance against the Egyptian rule. After eight months of continuous conflict, the Nusayris were disarmed and conscripted. Ibrahim Pasha ordered the arrest of every Nusayri rebel in order to control their suitability for the army, and to collect their weapons. Around 4000 Nusayris were conscripted and many of them were forced to leave the mountains¹⁵⁹ In addition, the Egyptians destroyed their villages and wells, cut down fruit trees, and pillaged.¹⁶⁰ Talhamy states that during the uprising, the Egyptian soldiers enslaved some Nusayri women although enslavement is prohibited by Islam. They adopted the fatwa of al-Mugrabi that was issued in 1820s that allowed the enslavement of the Nusayris.¹⁶¹ After controlling the region, Ibrahim Pasha tried to lighten his cruel policies on Nusayris by appointing the sons of chieftains as officers and granting privileges to their fathers.¹⁶² However, these policies did not remove the trace of occupation. The Protestant missionary, Samuel Lyde, who traveled to the region in the 1850s still observed the signs of Egyptian occupation. He states that “We looked through the vast arched cellars in which the remains of burn wheat still testified the occupation of the troops of Ibraheem Pasha.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Necati Alkan, “Fighting for the Nusayri Soul: State, Protestant Missionaries and the ‘Alawis in the Late Ottoman Empire.” *Die Welt des Islam*, 52, (2012): 28.

¹⁵⁹ Talhamy, ” Conscription among the Nusayris (‘Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century,” 30-32.

¹⁶⁰ A. L. Tibawi, *A Modern History of Syria*. (McMillan: St. Martin Press, 1969), 74.

¹⁶¹ Talhamy, “The fatwas and the Nusayri/Alawi of Syria,” 183., *Samuel Lyde, The Asian Mystery: Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria*, 196.

¹⁶² A. L. Tibawi, *A Modern History of Syria*, 75.

¹⁶³ Samuel Lyde, *Ansireeh and Ismaeleeh: A Visit to the Secret Sects of Northern Syria*. (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 1853), 157.

Ibrahim Pasha then proceeded to Mount Lebanon to disarm and conscript the Druzes. However, the Druzes whose warriors were more organized resisted the conscription and disarmament policies. Because of the possibility of an Ottoman campaign in Syria and the possibility of alliance between the Druzes and Ottoman forces, the Egyptians decided not to conscript the Druzes with on the condition of having some Druzes as soldiers to serve in the Egyptian army.

There were some differences between the Nusayri Revolt in 1834 and the Druze Revolt in 1838. Talhamy states that the Druze revolt in Hawran was organized and led by distinct leaders while the Nusayri revolt had lack of a distinct leadership that caused the suppression of the revolt. Secondly, the Nusayris revolted in 1834, shortly after Ibrahim Pasha defeated the Ottoman troops in Konya and Kutahya, so it was impossible for the Ottoman government to organize an attack against the Egyptians in that time. Thus, the Nusayris were supported morally, not materially by the Ottoman Empire. The Druze revolt of 1838 that happened when the Egyptian government decided to conscript the Druzes in late 1837 overlapped with the campaign preparation of the Ottoman government to Syria. Due to the possibility of the Ottoman attack and collaboration between the Druzes and the Ottomans, the Egyptian government in Syria did not successfully implement conscription and disarming policy among the Druzes.¹⁶⁴

The expected Ottoman campaign in Syria began in 1839. In February, Hafiz Pasha assured his sovereign that his army was prepared to take Syria, and that the population that complained of the policies of Ibrahim Pasha was ready to rise up against Egyptian rule. The Egyptian armies had not been paid for 18 months, so Hafiz Pasha planned to encourage revolt

¹⁶⁴ Talhamy, "The Nusayri and Druze Minorities in Syria in the Nineteenth Century: The Revolt against the Egyptian Occupation as a Case Study," 991.

around Antep in order to attract the Egyptian soldiers to his army.¹⁶⁵ Even though the Egyptian soldiers were not paid for months, it is clear that they were well organized, well equipped, and better positioned than the Ottoman armies. The Ottomans line was too thinly deployed; in addition, the Kurdish recruits created problems by disregarding the Pasha's commands and trying to flee.¹⁶⁶ On the morning of 24 June 1839, the Ottoman and Egyptian armies met at Nizib. The Egyptians again defeated the Ottomans, and they proceeded to occupy Antep, Maras and Urfa by June 28, but then they were stopped by Mehmed Ali Pasha's order because the army started to lose power, and they were not ready to control such a wide area. By June 27, the European powers, France, Britain, Prussia, Russia and Austria, showed their willingness to help the new Sultan, Abdulmecid, to end the conflict with Mehmed Ali Pasha. On 15 July 1840, four of the Western powers, without the participation of France, signed the London Treaty. According to the treaty, Mehmed Ali and his family could continue to rule Egypt if he agreed to give Syria, Adana, Arabia, and Crete back to the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶⁷ If he delayed beyond ten days, he would receive Egypt alone; if he refused the agreement, the four powers would blockade him.¹⁶⁸

These conditions were unacceptable for Mehmed Ali Pasha because he wanted to establish his own independent country. On May 25, 1838 he had made a formal declaration of his intention to the French and British consul-generals, and later to their Austrian and Russian counterparts. He declared that he wanted to establish his own independent country for two reasons: his family's future, and the continuity of his reforms. However, the Europeans opposed

¹⁶⁵ Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged*. (London: Pearson Longman, 2007), 390

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 390-391.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁶⁸ Pierre Crabites, *Ibrahim of Egypt*. (London: George Routledge&Sons, LTD., 1935), 234.

his quest for independence.¹⁶⁹ Refusing the conditions of agreement meant the attack of European coalition upon the Egyptians. The British agents in Syria provided money and arms to the local people, and encouraged them to revolt against the Egyptians by saying that Britain and France would help the Sultan to recapture Syria.¹⁷⁰ The provocation of the agents triggered several uprisings in Greater Syria, including the Nusayris in the Nusayri Mountains and around Antioch, the Druzes in al-Laja and Hawran, and the Christians of Mount Lebanon. At the same time the coalition of Britain-Austria bombarded Syrian coasts while the Ottoman troops defeated Ibrahim Pasha in the northern part of Syria. With the Strain of Convention of 13 July 1841, signed by all after the defeat of Ibrahim Pasha in Damascus and Beirut, the Egyptians were finally compelled to evacuate Syria.

C. Conclusion

The Egyptians ruled Syria between 1831 and 1840. During this time period, Syrians witnessed Egyptian reforms in government, economy, education, military affairs and social life. In general, these reforms were more advanced and well-organized than the reforms that had been implemented before 1830 by the Ottoman government. The reforms not only introduced to the local community equal rights between Muslims and non-Muslims but also prepared a basis for the coming reforms of the Tanzimat period. However, the policies of disarmament and conscription created some problems. The local people, notables, and mountaineers did not accept to submit their weapons to the Egyptians because their lifestyle depended very much on using arms. In addition, there was not a clear conscription policy at that time. People neither knew the period of time that they would serve in the military nor where they would serve. In

¹⁶⁹ Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt*, 171.

¹⁷⁰ Talhamy, "Conscription among the Nusayris ('Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century," 33.

addition, the local people of Syria were conscripted without considering their age and occupation that resulted with the loss of the only family members who were capable of supporting the others. These policies triggered uprisings in Syria that started in 1834 and continued until the last year of Egyptian rule in Syria. The Nusayris revolted against the regime in 1834. At the beginning of the revolt, the Nusayris could resist the Egyptian armies, but with the help of the local powers that were qualified with fighting in the mountains, the Egyptians suppressed the Nusayri revolt, destroyed their villages and lands, and disarmed and conscripted most of them. During the Nusayri rebellion and after the evacuation of the Egyptians, the Ottomans armed the local population. Ibrahim Pasha warned the Ottoman officials to give up this policy. He told Ömer Pasha, the Ottoman Commander, “You, with the assistance of English, have expelled me; you have again put arms into the hands of the mountaineers; it cost me nine years and ninety thousands men to disarm them. You will yet invite me back to govern them.”¹⁷¹ The Nusayris appreciated the British aid to the Ottoman Empire for helping to evacuate the Egyptians from the region. One of the Nusayri villager told Walpole that “it was God’s work. We could not stand against them, so he ordered you –his tributaries- to do it for us.”¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Walpole, *The Ansayrii and Assassins: With Travels in the Further East in 1850 to 1851. Including a Visit to Nineveh Part Three.* 127.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 195-196.

CHAPTER V

TANZIMAT REFORMS, THE NUSAYRIS AND THE REVOLT OF ISMA'IL KHAYR BEY

The first attempt to introduce reform into the Ottoman Empire started before Mahmud II's era, roughly in the 18th century. The earlier reforms were mainly concerned with military affairs due to successive and decisive defeats suffered by the Ottoman army at the hands of its European rivals since the Ottoman retreated from Vienna in 1683. Developments in Europe during the 18th century brought military superiority to the West, and when the Ottoman rulers realized that fact, they began to import European style weapons, training, and techniques; and from time to time during the 18th century, the empire imported instructors for the army, established an engineering school, and trained Turkish soldiers in the methods of European warfare. The first large-scale reforms in the army were made during the time of Selim III, the *Nizam-ı Cedid* (New Order) Period. In 1792-93, Selim III promulgated whole series of new instructions and regulations for raising new troops who were organized, trained, and equipped with French help. However, these reform attempts resulted in revolt. The residents of Istanbul and the Janissaries, with the encouragement of the *ulama*, revolted in 1807 and forced the sultan to abolish the *Nizam-ı Cedid* reforms. Selim III was deposed upon the request of the Janissaries. The second series of large scale reforms were made by Mahmud II. After consolidating his power, he decided to abolish the Janissaries that often revolted against the empire, and succeeded

in crushing the Janissaries in 1826. This event has been known as *Vakay-i Hayriye* (the Auspicious Event). Mahmud II also introduced new reforms in the system of government and administration of the provinces, in areas such as education, clothing, and taxation. He also ordered the establishment of a modern army, called *Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye* (the Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad) which were trained by Prussian and British instructors. These reforms did not deliver fruitful results because internal problems, such as rebellions in the Balkans, Mehmed Ali Pasha's revolt in Egypt and external problems such as the Ottoman-Russia war in 1828-1829 coincided with the Mahmud II period.¹⁷³

The first great reforming edict of the Tanzimat Era, the *Hatt-ı Hümayun of Gülhane* (the Imperial Rescript of the Rose Chamber), was promulgated on 3 November 1839. The reforms of the *Gülhane* decree can be separated into three parts: administration and government; the welfare of the Ottoman subjects; and the status of the non-Muslim citizens and legal basis of the Empire. The most remarkable part of the decree was, for the first time in the Ottoman history, the promise of equality before the law for both the Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The passage read as follows: "The Muslim and other peoples (ahal-i Islam ve millet-i saire) who are among the subjects of our imperial sultanate shall be the object of our imperial favors without exception."¹⁷⁴ The program of the Tanzimat started with Mahmud II's reforms. These reforms became more comprehensive with the contribution of Mustafa Rashid Pasha in the era of Abdulmecid. The time period of the proclamation of the decree coincided with the threat of Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt, so the proclamation was calculated to gain the support of the European powers against the rebelliousness of Pasha of Egypt. The edict was read by Mustafa

¹⁷³ Ma'oz, Moshe, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861*. (Oxford University Press: 1968), 4-11.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

Rashid Pasha, and the Sultan, viziers, notables, ambassadors of foreign countries and local people were gathered in the garden of Gülhane to hear the principles of the new edict. In 1856, the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* (The Imperial Rescript) was promulgated. Clearly influenced by the *Gülhane Edict* of 1839, the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* reaffirmed its principles, and went so far as to declare in both specific and categorical terms the equal rights of the Christian communities and other non-Muslim subjects. In this chapter the impact of the Tanzimat Reforms in Syria, taxation and conscription policies of the Ottoman Empire and the reaction of the Nusayris to these policies, and the Nusayri Revolt against the Ottoman rule in 1854 will be discussed.

A. Tanzimat Reforms in Syria

The Imperial Edict of Gülhane, Tanzimat Fermanı (November 3 1839) introduced the Ottoman Empire with new reforms in the areas of education, culture, literature, law, economy, military and society. The Imperial Edict of Gülhane was divided into five parts. In the first part it was stated that because the state originated from commitment to the Qur'an and its principles in the early days of the empire, the state became powerful and its citizens lived in prosperity. In the second part it mentioned that since the last 150 years, for some reasons, the people and the Ottoman rulers had shown respect neither to the Qur'an nor to the sharia laws, so their attitudes brought poverty and weakness to the empire. In the third part it stated that with the mercy of God and the help of the Prophet new rules were needed to be implemented in order to govern the empire better. In the fourth part the principles of the new laws were introduced: the empire's guarantee of security of life, honor and property of all the Ottoman subjects; the establishment of

systematic methods for collecting taxes; and the organization of the army and a regular method of recruiting. In the fifth part, the bases of new laws in principle were stated.¹⁷⁵

The traditional ruling class in Syria, whose interests were threatened, did not support the Tanzimat reforms. Most of the inhabitants of Syria who were Muslims did not approve of the reforms because they believed that the principles of the reforms would give new rights to the non-Muslim population, and it was imposed from above against the will of majority of the population that had revolted a few years ago against the Egyptian reforms that had provided the same rights to the non-Muslim population in Syria. In addition, the process and pace of modernization were largely determined by the struggle between the reforming class and local conservative authorities.¹⁷⁶

1. Provincial Administration

The Tanzimat Edict had three purposes: to bring direct rule of the central government to the provinces, to raise the social and economic conditions of the subjects, and to provide equality between the Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Until the beginning of the Tanzimat Period, the Ottoman Empire had significant problems in the provincial administration, especially in its Middle Eastern provinces. The Ottoman government faced many uprisings of the local elements in these provinces, and centralization was regarded as a solution for preventing province-related problems. As a part of the Tanzimat reforms, the state appointed officials from

¹⁷⁵ Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanli Tarihi: Nizam-I Cedid ve Tanzimat Devirleri (1789-1856)*, 170-171.

¹⁷⁶ Moshe Ma'oz, "The Impact of Modernization on Syrian Politics and Society during the Early Tanzimat Period," in *The Beginning of Modernization in the Middle East*. Ed. R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 333.

Istanbul in order to decrease the influence of local elements. In addition, delegates were called from the provinces to the capital, some commissioners were sent out to provinces to check the situation on the ground, and the Ottoman state attached to each provincial governor a council somewhat representative of the local population.¹⁷⁷ Lewis states that from each provinces two men, who were respected and trusted, were people of intelligence and knowledge, and knew the demands of the population, were sent to Istanbul in order to consult with the High Council of the Tanzimat (Meclis-i Ali Tanzimat).¹⁷⁸ Another reform measure in the provincial administration was the restriction the authority of governors (*valis*). Their authority was limited in order to centralize Istanbul's rule over the provinces. Other high ranking officials were allowed to check the activities of governors, the relationship between the governors and senior government officials was regulated on favor of the latter, and the legal powers of the governors were restricted. The Tanzimat reforms introduced a new administrative system in the provinces, the provincial councils (*majlis*) that checked activities of the governors.¹⁷⁹ However, these reforms did not enhance the influence of the empire in Syria because the duty of the implementing of the Tanzimat reforms in Syrian provinces fell upon the local administration, particularly governors whose powers were limited to deal with those who were against the reforms. Therefore, with the ferman of November 28, 1852, the restrictions on the position of the governors were removed.

In the early 19th century, there were two major areas of political power in Syria; one was controlled by external officials that were appointed by Istanbul, including governors and imperial troops; and internal officials, filled by local groups who had religious, politic and economic

¹⁷⁷ Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 46.

¹⁷⁸ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 110.

¹⁷⁹ Ma'oz, "The Impact of Modernization on Syrian Politics and Society during the Early Tanzimat Period," 335-338.

influence over the local population. The external officials were not familiar with the Arabic language, local custom and culture, and usually did not have sufficient power to impose the direct power of the central government upon the provinces. At that point local people filled that space in Syria. The Ottoman Empire used the power of the local elements in order to stabilize the order in Syria.¹⁸⁰ However, these local elements began to behave independently, especially after the 19th century when the Ottoman Empire struggled with battles and rebels in the other parts of the Empire.

The Tanzimat reforms did not diminish the influence of local elements, especially the ulama, in Damascus. During the Egyptian invasion, Ibrahim Pasha reduced the influence of the ulama in Damascus, but when the Ottomans came back, they restored the rights that the ulama had experienced before the 1830s. Between 1840 and 1860, the ulama regained their power, and used it to implement reform measures in a way congruent with their interest. Commins states that the application of conscription and new fiscal measures that put an extra burden on poor people was manipulated by the ulama and the notables. While the ulama were exempting the wealthy people from conscription and minimizing their tax, they put an extra burden on the poor people of Syria.¹⁸¹

The officials were also paid fixed salaries, and promoted according to their merits. It seems that the Ottoman government could not arrange the salaries well, so a big gap between senior and junior officials' salaries occurred. In addition, the salaries were not paid regularly. Ma'oz claims that corruption now become more extreme than during the pre-reform era because

¹⁸⁰ Philip S. Khoury, "Syrian Political Culture: A Historical Perspective," in *Syria: Society, Culture and Polity*. Ed. Richard J. Antoun and Donald Quataert. (Albany: State University New York Press, 1991), 14-15.

¹⁸¹ Commins, *Islamic Reforms, Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria*, 12-13.

junior civil servants who were ill-paid started to accept bribes, and exploited every possibility of extorting money from the population. Thus, almost all of the governmental offices in provinces from the Governor-General, lieutenant governors, *defterdars*, military officers, to tax collectors, chiefs of irregular troops, and many others were engaged in corruption in one way or another.¹⁸²

With the Tanzimat, councils (*majlises*) were formed at the centers of sancaks and provinces, and the members of the councils were both Muslims and non-Muslims.¹⁸³ In Syria, the local councils were opened in several districts, and both Muslims and non-Muslims participated in the councils to represent their community. However, the numbers of the non-Muslim and lower classes in the local councils did not reach the desired level while members of the upper classes and religious leaders were over represented. Between 1849 and 1851 the Ottoman government made a general reorganization of local councils in Jerusalem, Aleppo, Beirut and Damascus. The number of Muslims notables and religious leaders in the councils reduced to the official numbers, and the number of the non-Muslim members in the councils increased.¹⁸⁴ Representation in some of the councils in the Latakia district was granted to the Nusayri community by the provincial administrators. Instead of the tribal chiefs of the community, the sheikhs were invited to the councils in order to represent the community due to the fact that they had both a respected place in the community and they often mediated between local notables, the state officials and the leaders of the Nusayri tribes. In addition, the Ottoman officials supported the invitation of the sheikhs to the local councils because their relationship with the sheikhs was much better than that with the leaders of the Nusayri tribes.¹⁸⁵ In September

¹⁸² Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine*, 65.

¹⁸³ Ahmet Akgündüz and Said Öztürk, *Ottoman History Misperceptions and Truths*. (Rotterdam: IUR Press, 2011), 528.

¹⁸⁴ Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine*, 91-95.

¹⁸⁵ Douwes, "Knowledge and Oppression; the Nusayriyya in the Late Ottoman Period," 162.

1852, the provincial authorities showed their reaction against the appointment of a Nusayri in the council of the district.¹⁸⁶ Both Muslims and Christians were against the representation of the Nusayris in the provincial council, even though the Nusayris constituted two thirds of the district population in Latakia, because the Nusayris were always considered as peasants, rebels, robbers and heretics by both the Muslims and non-Muslims of Syria. In addition, the secretive character of the community caused speculations about their belief system and life style that were considered immoral by the Christians and Muslims. This fact shows that the Tanzimat, in terms of representation in the local councils, provided some rights to the Nusayris, but the Sunni Muslims and Christian dwellers of the region did not agree to have equal rights with the Nusayris.¹⁸⁷

2. Taxation

The Tanzimat Edict introduced the Ottoman citizens to a new taxation system. In the days following the promulgation of the edict, it was announced that taxes would be collected by state collectors who would assume sole authority over direct tax collection throughout the empire. The tax collectors, *muhassils*, were assigned the task of determining fair tax rates, and surveying the property values and revenue potential in the regions that were under their control. They were prohibited from collecting any additional fees or bribes. The new taxation system, in theory, was more equitable than the old system, *iltizam* (tax-farming), because it was based on individual capital and actual income. However, in reality, this system was more complicated than it was thought. The taxes were standardized according to agricultural production affords. Before

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 163.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 163.

the Tanzimat reforms, the farmers in the Ottoman Empire paid *tithes* that changed from one-tenth to one-half of their crops, depending on their region. However, the new reforms that fixed a universal rate of one-tenth ignored the varying productivity of land and this created significant problems.¹⁸⁸ In addition, this new direct taxation system did not work well because there were not sufficient numbers of officials who wanted to fill this position, the *muhasils*, the government tax collectors, had neither connections with local people nor knowledge about tradition and culture of the regions that were appointed to, and they were assigned huge areas that they could not deal with. Under these conditions, it was impossible to increase the tax revenues; thus, the government was forced to return to the tax farming system, *iltizam*, at the end of 1840.¹⁸⁹ The office of *muhasil* was closed, and the governors once again had to be entrusted with the authority of both providing security and regulating the financial matters of provinces.¹⁹⁰ The Tanzimat reforms also abolished all taxes imposed in the name of the Sharia, except for the sheep tax (*agnam resmi*) and the poll tax (*cizye*) that would also be abolished in 1856.¹⁹¹ The poll tax was transformed into a payment for exemption from military service.

The peasants in Syria were oppressed not only by the state but also by bedoin tribes, rapacious tax collectors, and money lenders. The Bedouin periodically attacked villages to collect money or quantities of grain as a protection tax. However, this would not protect peasants from future raids of other Bedouin tribes. The tax collectors squeezed from the peasant a much higher sum than the official tax rate, and the moneylenders lent the peasants money at an interest

¹⁸⁸ M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 89.

¹⁸⁹ Stanford Shaw and Evin Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 2, 1976), 96.

¹⁹⁰ Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: Conquest, Organization and Economy*. (London: Variorum Reprints, 1978), 19.

¹⁹¹ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 95-96.

rate amounting sometimes to fifty percent per annum. Although a ferman issued in 1851 fixed the interest rate on loans at 8 percent in order to protect the peasant, the moneylenders did not accept that rate and continued to lend money at higher interest rates. These high interest rates caused the bankruptcy of peasants and forced them either to desert their land or to work for the moneylenders.¹⁹²

The introduction of the new land code in 1858 was considered to be the continuation of the earlier Tanzimat reforms. The purpose of the land code was to encourage land owners to register their landownership for two reasons: to increase tax revenues and to reduce the influence of local leaders and control over the provinces by creating a small ownership on the land. However, many peasants were unwilling to register their land due to fear of conscription or of having to pay more taxes, so they registered their land in the name of their chiefs or powerful urban notables that made the latter owners of freehold lands with full rights of disposal and succession that was confirmed by the government.¹⁹³ The notables became owner of peasants' lands, and consolidated their rule over the society and peasants.¹⁹⁴ Gerber states that the consequences of the 1858 land law in Syria are not very clear due to lack of materials.¹⁹⁵

The Nusayris were oppressed both by the Ottoman officials and their tribal leaders and their religious leaders, the sheikhs. The Nusayris did not pay their tax regularly due to various factors, such as bad harvest and internal conflict between tribes that caused attacks on each other's lands. Local chiefs and sheikhs were appointed as tax collectors, but while they were not

¹⁹² Ma'oz, "The Impact of Modernization on Syrian Politics and Society during the Early Tanzimat Period," 344-345.

¹⁹³ Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861*, 162-163.

¹⁹⁴ Haim Gerber, *The Social Origin of the Modern Middle East*. (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987), 75

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

able to collect the taxes, the Ottoman officials with the help of the troops came to the region and forced the community to pay their tax. The local governors of the region sent several reports to the governor of Sayda and Damascus with a request for local troops to collect tax from the Nusayris.¹⁹⁶ The Nusayri chiefs implemented unjust policies of collecting taxes by exacting double tax rates from the weak and powerless. The sheikhs whose first duty was to offer moral support to their local people spent most of their time collecting taxes from the community.¹⁹⁷ Being oppressed by the chiefs and sheikhs, as well as by the Ottoman government and the local Sunni Muslim population, the Nusayris sank to a low point. The solution for them was tax erosion, escaping conscription, robbing villages and caravans, and attacking other tribes.¹⁹⁸

3. Sectarian rights

The first attempt to seek equality between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire was made during the reign of Mahmud II (1808-1839). The words of Mahmud II “I wish that from now on the Muslims at mosques, the Christians at churches, and the Jews at synagogues would not differ from one another” suggested that he let them be equal in other fields.¹⁹⁹ With the Tanzimat reforms, for the first time in the Ottoman history, equality before the law was promised to both the Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

¹⁹⁶ B.A. A.MKT.MHM. 757/110 Belge 3.10 Ramazan 1272 (15 May 1856), B.A. A.MKT.UM. 395/98, 19 Receb 1276 (11 February 1860), B.A. A. MKT.MHM. 349/68. Belge 2. 26 Saban 1282(14 January 1866).

¹⁹⁷ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 278., Lyde, *The Asian Mystery: Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria*, 222.

¹⁹⁸ Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, 277-278.

¹⁹⁹ Ahmet Akgündüz and Said Öztürk, *Ottoman History Misperceptions and Truths*, 527.

The first attempt of seeking equality between Muslims and non-Muslims in Syria was made by the Egyptians between 1831 and 40. Thus, in terms of equality the Tanzimat reforms were the continuation of Ibrahim Pasha's reform policies. In an attempt to prove its sincerity to Europe, the Ottoman government issued a new reform edict, the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* (The Imperial Rescript) in 1856. The promulgation of the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* of February 1856 caused a decisive change in relations between Muslims and Christians. Unlike the *Gülhane Edict* in 1839, the 1856 decree granted, for the first time categorically, full equality of status to the non-Muslim subjects of the empire²⁰⁰. The decree openly provided the *reaya* with complete freedom of worship, and equality in administration and taxation. In addition, the poll-tax and the prohibition to carry arms were abolished with that decree. The new rights provided to the non-Muslim population were under the guarantee of the Western powers. Europeans and Syrian Christians had religious and cultural connections, and commercial ties between each other for many centuries. From the beginning of the 1830s till the first two decades of the Tanzimat Era, the European religious-cultural and commercial activities increased greatly, and spread into the Syrian hinterland, and while further strengthening the position of the Christian communities, caused great anger and anxiety among the Muslim population. After the 1856 decree, the right of opening taverns and performing dances, selling wine and opening wine shops, the growth of missionary activities in the region, the increasing number of foreign consuls in all the country's provinces and their intervention in the internal affairs of the country, and European flags in all Syrian towns greatly irritated Muslims. Moreover, while the Christians were growing richer through foreign trade and

²⁰⁰ Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861.*, 202

government employment, the Muslims were suffering from economic problems and unemployment.²⁰¹

The reaction of the Muslim community of Syria against the Tanzimat reforms was more destructive than their previous reactions to Ibrahim Pasha's reforms. The Muslim population of Syria that constituted the majority of the population could not accept to have equal rights with the non-Muslims, and the non-Muslim population abused the rights that had been provided by the Egyptian and Tanzimat reforms. The provocative behavior of the Christians, the Muslims' anger, the rumors that spread in Damascus that the Empire was threatened by Western powers and the news that Muslims had been attacked by Christians in some parts of Syria were the reasons which triggered the outbreak against the Christians.

In the case of the Nusayris, the Tanzimat reforms did not have a great impact Nusayris. The Nusayris mostly lived in the Mountains and were ruled by their tribal leaders. They were accepted neither as Muslim nor non-Muslim, and their status depended on the region where they lived. For instance, while their testimonies were accepted in Latakia court, they were not valid in Hama courts. The mixed courts, which had been only commercial courts, were organized in 1847 and they started handling civil cases. According to Sharia law, the testimonies of non-Muslim were not accepted against the Muslims in the courts; however, their testimony began to be accepted in the mixed courts. The Nusayris were not equal to Muslims in front of the court both before and after Tanzimat reforms. Their testimonies sometimes were not accepted because they were considered as adherents of *aqida-i fasida*, a corrupt faith. In addition, while testimony of Christians against the Muslim was not accepted, their testimony against the Nusayris was valid

²⁰¹ Ibid., 226-228.

in Hama court.²⁰² The discrimination against the Nusayris continued even after the Tanzimat reforms. Türkyılmaz states that their testimonies were valid in neither Sharia (Islamic) nor Nizamiye (Secular) courts of Alexandretta in the 1890s.²⁰³ In addition, their participation in the local councils angered both the Sunni Muslims as well as the non-Muslim population. In addition, both Muslims and non-Muslim dwellers of the Safita that were ruled by the Nusayri leader, Isma'il Khayr Beg, revolted against him because they did not want to be ruled by a Nusayri leader. In short, the Tanzimat reforms changed neither the attitude of the state nor that of the Muslim and Christians against the Nusayris, but the policy of the Ottoman Empire would change when missionaries showed their attention to the sect after 1850s.

4. Conscription

The Syrian provinces first experienced disarmament and conscription policies in the 1830s when Egyptians ruled in Syria. The local population of Syria suffered from the conscription policies of the Egyptians because the period of service in the military was not clear, they were sent to fight outside of their region, they were not allowed to visit their families during peace time, and they did not obtain any benefit when they experienced victory. In addition, when they returned home, they were unarmed, exhausted and hungry. After the withdrawal of the Egyptians from Syria, the new regular forces of the Ottoman Empire, *nizams*, were sent to the region. However, taking position in the region, the collecting of arms and conscription of Syrians did not start until the mid-1840s. The Ottomans were not as successful as the Egyptians in terms

²⁰² Douwes, *Knowledge and Oppression; the Nusayriyya in the Late Ottoman Period*, 165-167.

²⁰³ Türkyılmaz, "Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire," 182.

of implementing these policies due to the limited number of the Ottoman troops in the region. While the number of the Ottoman troops was around 17,000 in the end of the 1840s, the Egyptians had previously garrisoned between 50,000 and 70,000 regular troops in the Syrian provinces in the 1830s.²⁰⁴

A new army regulation was prepared by the Ottoman officials and promulgated in September 1843 by Riza Pasha. He established a *nizamiye* army that was regular and based on the conscription policy. The conscripted soldiers would serve for five years that this time span would reduce to four, three and finally two years in the future. The system of conscription was first established in detail under the *Kur'a nizamnamesi* (regulation of the drawing ballots) of 1848. According to this regulation, people who were eligible on the basis of sex, health and age participated in *kur'a*.²⁰⁵ People who were eligible for conscription were invited to draw a paper slip that had been put into a bag. One tenth of these slips of paper were black, and the person who drew a black slip was conscripted.²⁰⁶ The people who participated in *kur'a* were aged between 20-25, and families' only sons and those who engaged in study were exempted.²⁰⁷ In order to decide who had to participate in *kur'a*, the empire had to conduct a census. However, at that time, it was very hard to count people because of the lack of man power, the resistance of the people in the provinces, and the high number of people who fled to the mountains and other areas that officials were not able to check.

²⁰⁴ Dick Douwes, "Reorganizing Violence: Traditional Recruitment Patterns and Resistance against Conscription in Ottoman Syria," in *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia 1775-1925*. Ed. Eric J. Zürcher. (New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1999), 123.

²⁰⁵ Eric Jan Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1884-1918," *Arming the State: Military in Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia 1775-1925*. Ed. Eric J. Zürcher. (New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1999), 82.

²⁰⁶ Talhamy, "Conscription among the Nusayris ('Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century," 34.

²⁰⁷ Ma'oz, Moshe, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861.*, 82.

Another reform measure of the 1848 regulation was the opportunity of buying an exemption for Muslims. Zürcher states that the conscription law of 1848 allowed people to send a personal replacement (*bedel-i şahsi*). To clarify, the person could send someone else if he could convince, force, or pay him to go in his place.²⁰⁸ The 1856 edict allowed non-Muslims to serve in the military and replaced the *cizye* (poll tax) with *bedel*. Non-Muslims, who did not want to serve in the military, could pay an exemption tax of *bedel-i askeri* (in-lieu of military service). The amount of *bedel* that was required from non-Muslims was lower than that which was required from Muslims.²⁰⁹

The general conscription in Syria that was based on an inaccurate census started in 1850. The dwellers of the Syrian provinces refused to serve in the army because of the fear of not being able to return home and the memory of the cruel conscription policy of the Egyptian government. They reacted with violent armed resistance to the attempts of conscription. The Ottoman officials took some measures, such as limiting military service to five years and organizing public ceremonies for those that would serve in the military to soften the Syrians' reaction. However, when the Ottoman officials made a second attempt to carry out a census, many Syrians again fled to the mountains or outside of the region, many others showed armed resistance, and some of communities asked helped to British and France councils.²¹⁰ In one case, when the Ottomans decided to implement the conscription policy among the Druzes in 1852. The Druzes who learned of the upcoming conscription policy fled to the highlands of Wadi al-Taym and declared rebellion. The Ottoman government did not break the resistance of the Druzes, so they decided to incite the Maronites to fight against the Druzes. At that time period the Druzes were supported

²⁰⁸ Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1884-1918.," 87.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

²¹⁰ Ma'oz, Moshe, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861.*, 81-82.

by Britain while the Maronites were protected by France. Because of the support of Britain for the Druzes, the Ottoman government did not implement the conscription policy.²¹¹ In another case, the Maronites asked France for help against the conscription policy of the Ottoman government. The Hatti Humayun of 1856 abolished the *cizya* (poll tax), but forced non-Muslim subjects of the empire to pay either *bedel* for exclusion from military service or to serve in the military. In Beirut, Christians reacted negatively to the new tax, but they did not show armed resistance, as the Nusayris did many times, against the Ottoman government because they were under the protection of France. The Christians called on France for help to abolish the tax, *bedel*.²¹²

The position of the heterodox groups in the Ottoman Empire was not quite clear. Douwes states that the Ottoman identity was re-Islamized in the 1850s, and members of the heterodox groups, the Druzes and the Nusayris, in Syria started to be accepted as Muslims, or, rather, molded into correct Muslims. The motive behind that integration policy was to force them to serve in the military. Some of the members of these societies called themselves non-Muslim in order to be allowed to pay taxes instead of being conscripted. In addition, some members of the Druze and Nusayri communities were converted to Christianity, mainly Protestantism, and they demanded to be treated as Christians. The converted people were also protected by British and American missionaries.²¹³

²¹¹ Charles Winslow, *Lebanon: War and Politics in a Fragmented Society*. (New York:Routledge, 1996), 34

²¹² Caesar E. Farah, *Politics of interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830-1861*, 530-531.

²¹³ Douwes, "Reorganizing Violence: Traditional Recruitment Patterns and Resistance against conscription in Ottoman Syria."

When the general conscription started, the Nusayris did not accept participation in the *kur'a*, and prevented the officials from learning who was eligible for conscription. However, with the measures that were taken by the officials, *kur'a* (ballot) was carried out.²¹⁴ In some parts of Latakia, the Nusayris did not create any problems for implementing the conscription policy, so the Ottoman officials neither faced armed resistance nor people who reacted negatively to the policy.²¹⁵ Since the Egyptian period, the Nusayris often resisted conscription and disarming policies because the memory of cruel conscription policy of the Egyptians was still in their minds, and due to conscription policy families had often lost the only members who were capable of contributing to the support of the rest. The Ottoman officials realized the difficulty of implementing this policy among the Nusayris. Therefore, implementing the conscription policy in the province of Sayda highly pleased the Ottoman officials.²¹⁶ However, in some places in Syria, the Nusayris resisted conscription. The reaction of the Ottoman officials was as severe as that of the Egyptians, they burned villages, cut down fruit trees, destroyed houses, and took hostages some of whom were executed.²¹⁷

In the beginning of the 1850s, the Nusayris in Syria were struggling with domestic conflicts between tribes. There were several Nusayri tribes in the region, and the most powerful of tribes were the Kalbiyya, Matawira, Khayyatin and Haddadin coalitions.²¹⁸ The Nusayri community was also divided into several major religious factions: Haydarriyya, Kalazziyya, Shimalis and Gaibis. The most dominant factions have been Haydarriyya and Kalazziyya. The Haydarriyya consisted of the remainder of the original Syrian Nusayris while Kalazziyya

²¹⁴ B.A. A. } AMD. 37/66. 14 Receb 1268 (May 4, 1852)

²¹⁵ B.A. A. AMD. 37/70, 16 Receb 1268 (May 6, 1852)

²¹⁶ B.A. A. } MKT. MHM. 46/84. 30 Receb 1268 (May 20, 1852)

²¹⁷ Talhamy, "Conscription among the Nusayris ('Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century," 34.

²¹⁸ Douwes, "Knowledge and Oppression; the Nusayriyya in the Late Ottoman Period," 154.

comprised the descendants of Nusayris that migrated from Sinjar and Aleppo to the Latakia region between the 13th and 16th centuries.²¹⁹ The antagonism between the Nusayri tribes was caused by the distinction between the Haydariyya and Kalaziyya.²²⁰ Because of disunity, the tribes fought against each other more than outsiders.²²¹ The Ottoman officials took advantage of the disunity among the tribes to implement their conscription policy and to disarm them. In 1851, the Ottomans sent 1200 troops to Latakia in order to conscript the Nusayris. Shemseen, one of the powerful Nusayri leaders, tried to unite the Nusayri tribes because disunity would enable the Ottomans to spoil, oppress and conscript the Nusayris.²²² Talhamy states that according to Werry, the Council-General in Aleppo, if the Nusayri tribes that lived in the different part of the mountains decide to unite, they could easily master 12,000 warriors, and could have an easy victory against the Ottoman troops whose numbers were limited in that time period.²²³ However, the Ottoman officials were aware of the possible threat, so they implemented their traditional policy of playing the Nusayri tribes against each other to prevent their unification.

In the following years of the 1850s, the Ottoman Empire had to deal with uprisings in the Balkans and the Crimean War in 1854-55. The Ottomans sent the troops that settled in Syria to the Balkans, and the numbers of the available regular and irregular troops in Syria were not

²¹⁹ Ibid., 157-158.

²²⁰ The differences based on different interpretation of the nature of ‘Ali and the role of Prophet Muhammad.

²²¹ Lyde, *The Asian Mystery: Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria*, 109-206.

²²² Walpole, *The Ansayrii and Assassins: With Travels in the Further East in 1850 to 1851. Including a Visit to Nineveh Part Three.*, 340.

²²³ Talhamy, “Conscription among the Nusayris (‘Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century,” 35.

sufficient to maintain law and order, collect taxes, disarm tribes, and conscript new soldiers. The Nusayris used this opportunity, and they refused to pay taxes and attacked villages.²²⁴

B. The Revolt of Isma'il Khayr Bey and the Ottoman Conscription Policy after 1860

The Nusayris suffered not only from the pressure of the government but also from the oppression of their chiefs and sheikhs.²²⁵ In the 1850s, the sheikhs, whose influence was very high among the members of the community, indeed, even today their recommendations in terms of social relations are still taken into consideration did not do their duties of arranging social relationships between tribes and family members because they were busy with other duties that spoiled the relationships between the community members. Lyde states that “every morning and evening there was a perfect Babel of quarreling. Brother would draw sword against brother, and father or mother without fear or shame.”²²⁶ The conflict was more intense between the Nusayri tribes. However, in the 1850s when the Ottomans sent the Syrian troops to the Balkans, one of the powerful Nusayri chiefs, Isma'il Khayr Bey, benefited from the weaknesses of the Ottomans in Syria, united the Nusayri tribes and rebelled against the Ottoman Empire.

²²⁴ B.A. A.MKT.MVL.74/84., 1271 (1856)., B.A. A.MKT.MHM. 757/10, Belge 2. 10 Ramazan, 1272 (May 15,1856).

²²⁵ Sheikhs had an important role in Nusayri society. They were religious leader of the community, and it is believed that Sheikhs know the inner reality, the hidden world to which the lay society had no access, but through the sheikhs. They were also effective in social life. They mediated between government and local people, determined the suitable dates for significant events, such as harvesting, and decided name of the newly born children as well as date of brides. See: Dick Douwes, Knowledge and Oppression, p, 150-159.

²²⁶ Lyde, *The Asian Mystery: Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansairi or Nusairis of Syria*, 223.

Since the beginning of the 1850s, prolonged violent conflicts had been taking place in the Nusayri Mountains. Some of the local elements started to regain their power. The Ottoman officials did not collect taxes, disarm the tribes, or prevent the Nusayri attacks to the neighborhood villages. The Nusayris even raided the government buildings in Latakia. The absence of Ottoman regular troops in the region put the governor of Latakia in a difficult situation because the irregular troops were not powerful enough to defeat the Nusayri warriors. In 1854, Qardaha villagers organized an attack against Latakia, and killed its governor.²²⁷ The weak position of the central government in Syria encouraged the Nusayri leaders to rebel against the Ottoman Empire and to change the prevailing status quo.

Isma'il Khayr Bey (d. 1858) was employed in the service of the Ottoman Empire as *delibaş* (commander of auxiliary forces) in the Hama district.²²⁸ The absence of regular troops in Syria provided a chance for Isma'il who dreamed of becoming governor of the whole of the Nusayri mountains to attack Safita where most of its dwellers were Nusayris. When the Ottomans realized that they could not defeat Isma'il, they implemented their popular policy since the 18th and 19th centuries that of granting high positions to rebels whom they were not able to suppress. The Ottomans granted him the position of governor of Safita.²²⁹

Isma'il restored his power around Safita and in most of the Nusayri settlements in Damascus. Several Nusayri tribes appreciated Isma'il's success and supported him. In a short time period, he established control over 120,000 people, including Christians and Sunni

²²⁷ Douwes, "Knowledge and Oppression; the Nusayriyya in the Late Ottoman Period," 160.

²²⁸ Talhamy, "The Nusayri Leader Isma'il Khayr Bey and the Ottomans (1854-58)" *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44:6, (2008): 897.

²²⁹ Talhamy, "The Nusayri Leader Isma'il Khayr Bey and the Ottomans (1854-58)," 897., Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861*, 110.

Muslims. Naturally, the Sunni population caused some problems because they did not want to be ruled by a Nusayri leader who was considered a member of a heretic sect. Isma'il who was the first Nusayri leader that ruled a large community was a powerful, wealthy, and fearless leader, and he was respected by the Ottomans. His qualities helped to solve the problem of leadership among the Nusayri tribes, put an end to the internal bloody fights among the tribes, and unify them. Isma'il succeeded unifying most of the Nusayri tribes. While some of them supported him due to their admiration of him, others supported him because of fear.²³⁰

In the days following the end of the Crimean war in 1856, the regular Ottoman troops, *nizams*, began to come back to Syria. However, in that year, the number of the Ottoman soldiers was not sufficient to subdue Isma'il's bandits. The Ottoman government was concerned about the increasing power of Isma'il and his rebellious behavior. He did not pay his taxes on time and his bandits attacked villages and caravans. They attacked Cisir-i Sugur and the village of Seyh Sindiyan between 1856-1858.²³¹ In their attacks against Seyh Sindiyan, they pillaged property, stole animals, killed one person and injured three dwellers of the village. The report that was sent to the central government in order to inform them about the attack starts with the words of a group of infidel Nusayris (*kafir Nusayrilerin bir firkasi*) that indicates the common perception of the Nusayris among the Sunni population of the region.²³² Under these conditions, it was not difficult to encourage the Christians and Sunni Muslims to resist Isma'il Bey. Due to his cruel policies, the complaints of the Christians and Sunni Muslims intensified forcing the Ottomans to

²³⁰ Talhamy, "The Nusayri Leader Isma'il Khayr Bey and the Ottomans (1854-58)," 898.

²³¹ B.A. MVL. 750/107. 16 Şevval 1274 (May 30, 1858), B.A. I.DH. 409/27058, Belge 1, 22 Zilkade 1275 (July 4, 1858).

²³² B.A. MVL. 750/107. Belge 3, 16 Şevval 1274 (May 30, 1858).

deal with these complaints.²³³ The Ottomans decided to make a new agreement with Isma'il that increased his prosperity and expanded the numbers of the districts under his domination in exchange for his loyalty to the Empire.²³⁴ Although he accepted the offer, he did not fulfill the demands of the Ottomans, and became even more aggressive. He intensified his attacks against the villages and the subjects while he refused to pay tax to the empire.²³⁵ Talhamy states that the Ottoman Empire avoided possible conflict with Isma'il because if Isma'il's well-trained warriors defeated the Ottoman troops, the rebellion might extend to the south, including Mount Lebanon. Therefore, the Ottomans waited until the arrival of new troops in Syria.²³⁶ While the Ottomans were waiting for the arrival of new troops, they asked the religious leaders of the Sunni Muslims to declare *jihad* against the Nusayris because they realized the fact that their military power would not obtain a victory if they were not supported by the non-Nusayris.

There were several reasons behind the preparation of an attack against Isma'il by the Ottomans. Talhamy states that according to British diplomats Isma'il refused to abide by the demands of the Ottomans, and he offered bribes to them to ignore his rebellious and cruel policies.²³⁷ The dissatisfaction of the Sunni population that lived in the district of Isma'il was also a reason for Ottoman attack. Farah asserts that Isma'il refused to pay his dues to the governor of Damascus. The governor required Isma'il to pay arrears to him although Isma'il's district was part of province of Sidon.²³⁸ A member of American Presbyterian Missionary, Henry

²³³ Lyde, *The Asian Mystery: Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria*, 15.

²³⁴ Talhamy, "The Nusayri Leader Isma'il Khayr Bey and the Ottomans (1854-58)," 900.

²³⁵ Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861*, 110-111.

²³⁶ Talhamy, "The Nusayri Leader Isma'il Khayr Bey and the Ottomans (1854-58)," 901.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 901.

²³⁸ Caesar E. Farah, *Politics of interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830-1861*, 540.

Jessup, who lived in Syria for several years, claims that the Ottomans attacked Isma'il because he was not a Muslim and he did not pay enough bribes to the government.²³⁹

In 1858, several small clashes occurred between the Nusayris and the Ottomans, but neither side achieved a clear victory. Due to the propaganda of the Ottomans and the cruel policies of Isma'il, he began to lose his supporters, and when the Ottomans realized that fact, they dismissed Isma'il from his position, declared him a rebel, and invited the Christians, Sunni Muslims and Nusayris in the area to fight against Isma'il. In addition, an internal conflict erupted between the Nusayri tribes that were on Isma'il's side, and they withdrew their support from him. Isma'il was in desperate straits, and asked British and French diplomats to mediate between him and the Ottoman Empire. However, neither French nor British diplomats could guarantee a fair trial for Isma'il. While the situation became more complex, most of his warriors left Isma'il, and he did not trust his available warriors that were mostly members of different tribes.²⁴⁰

Isma'il requested pardon from the Ottomans, but when his request was denied, he left the area and resided in 'Ain al-Kurum where his maternal uncle lived. The Ottomans promised to nominate al Shila, the maternal uncle, as a governor of Safita in place of Isma'il if he agreed to kill or deliver him. Henry Jessup states that "while at the village Ain Keroom one of his party died, and the funeral was attended at once. While they were weeping at the funeral, the uncle Ismaeel approached and asked why they were weeping? 'We are weeping for the dead,' said Ismaeel. 'Who will weep when you are dead?' said the uncle, and drawing his pistol, shot Ismaeel through his heart. He fell and as he was expiring, pled with his uncle to take care of his son. The

²³⁹ Henry Harris Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*. (Fleeming H. Revell Company, 1910), 152.

²⁴⁰ Talhamy, "The Nusayri Leader Isma'il Khayr Bey and the Ottomans (1854-58)," 904.

ruffianly, heartless uncle seized the boy and shot him before his dying father's eyes, and then seized all his property and his wife whom he made his own wife at once.”²⁴¹

The number of the Nusayri warriors was higher than the that of Ottoman troops, but the lack of the unity among them, the eruption of internal conflict as well as successful Ottoman propaganda were the main reasons behind Isma'il's defeat. The disunity of the tribes was related to both different interests of each tribe and the policies of the Ottoman Empire over the Nusayri tribes. Lyde states that the Ottomans were setting tribes against tribes in order to weaken them and keep order in Syria. After defeating Isma'il, the Ottomans intensified their attacks and pressure in the mountains to regain their power in the region. They arrested and killed many Nusayris, destroyed the villages until it looked as if the land would be left without habitants.²⁴²

After the suppression of the revolt, the Ottomans again started conscripting the Nusayris. In the mid- 1860s, the Nusayris refused to pay tax and participate in *kur'a* (conscription ballot). Although they had been informed by the officials about participation in *kur'a*, the Nusayris did not attend. The main concern of the Ottoman officials was that other people that lived in the same district with the Nusayris were reluctant to participate in *kur'a* because of the Nusayris' attitudes.²⁴³ The Nusayris in Latakia and Cebel-i Kelbiye had complained for 20 years, and although they killed the *kaimakam* (governor) of Latakia, they were not punished. In addition, since that time period they did not regularly participate in the *kur'a*. The troops that were sent to the region to conscript soldiers and collect taxes, created more expenses than the taxes that were collected from the region. In addition, the Nusayris had not paid their taxes since 1841-1842

²⁴¹ Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, 152.

²⁴² Lyde, *The Asian Mystery: Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria*, 209.

²⁴³ B.A. A.MKT.MHM. 349/68 17 Ramazan 1282 (February 13, 1865).

(hijri 1257), and they would leave the district on the day of *kur'a*. The numbers of the *firaris* (deserters) reached six hundred. Although some of them were punished by 'Ali Pasha in Hama, this punishment would not be enough to force them to pay taxes and participating in drawing lots for conscription.²⁴⁴

The Ottomans continued their aggressive policy against the Nusayris. In 1870, the Ottomans sent troops to the Cebel-i Kelbiye district to conscript the Nusayris. However, the houses and agricultural lands of the Nusayris who resisted conscription and fled to the mountains were burnt down.²⁴⁵ Between 1871 and 1878, there was instability in the administration of Syria. In this short period, the Ottomans appointed eight *valis*, (governors) to the Syrian provinces, and each of these governors implemented different policies to stabilize the region. In addition, in the early 1870s, Syria suffered from drought, famine, and plagues, so the dwellers were not able to pay the taxes that were required of them.²⁴⁶ Due to limited sources in Syria, the Nusayris attacked other villages and plundered travelers in order to survive.

In 1875, the activities of the missionaries intensified in the Syrian mountains, so the Nusayris found refuge in the Missionary schools when they had trouble with the state. At that time, four Nusayris accepted Protestantism and entered the school that was opened by the missionaries in order to be exempt from military service. The Ottomans sent troops to the school and requested the return of the deserters because their situation might serve as an example for future deserters, and encourage more people to accept Christianity and enter missionary schools. Although the consulate of the United States and workers of the school did not want to return

²⁴⁴ B.A. A.MKT.MHM. 349/68 17 Ramazan 1282 (February 13, 1865).

²⁴⁵ B.A. DH. MKT. 1311/27 3 Rebiulevvel 1287 (June 3, 1870).

²⁴⁶ Talhamy, "Conscription among the Nusayris ('Alawis) in the Nineteenth Century," 38.

these people, the Ottoman officials insisted on their return. In addition, according to the report changing their belief did not exempt them from serving in the military.²⁴⁷

C. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Tanzimat Reforms Era captures the years between 1839-1876. During the Tanzimat reforms the government issued two main edicts: the Imperial Edict of Gülhane in 1839 and the Imperial Rescript in 1856. The purposes of these two edicts were to prevent European intervention in to the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, and to establish close relationships with the Europeans, especially in the beginning of the 1840s when the Ottomans required the help of the Western powers against Mehmed Ali Pasha of Egypt's rebellion and the Crimean War. The Tanzimat Reforms also had the purposes of bringing direct rule of the central power to provinces, uplifting the social and economic conditions of the subjects, and providing equality between Muslims and non-Muslims subjects of the empire. The *Tanzimat* Reforms were not implemented in the Syrian provinces until the 1860s because the Egyptian reforms between 1831 and 1840 which provided almost the same rights as the *Tanzimat* reforms would later provide in 1839 annoyed the Muslim population in Syria and Palestine. In the early years after the restoration of Ottoman authority in Syria, the Ottoman governors of Syria removed the Egyptian policies, such as abandoning conscription, disarmament and direct taxation. However, from the mid-1840s onwards, new policies that were very similar those of the Egyptians were introduced.²⁴⁸ The reforms did not have a great impact on the social and economic life of the

²⁴⁷ B.A. I. HR. 266/15960-1. Belge 2/a 10-11 Muharrem 1292 (February 16-17, 1875)

²⁴⁸ M. E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East, 1792-1923*. (London and New York: Longman, 1987), 133.

Nusayris. Although they had the right to be represented in the local councils, the Sunni Muslim and Christians were against the Nusayri representation in the council. The status of the Nusayris was still vague during the Tanzimat period. While they were accepted as Muslims in Latakia, they were considered members of a heretic sect and their testimony was not accepted in some courts.

In the beginning of the 1850s, the Ottoman governors implemented new policies to impose direct rule in the countryside and mountains of Syria. With the general conscription everybody in Syria was forced to serve in the military. Unlike the Druzes and the Maronites that lived in the Syrian provinces, the Nusayris were not backed by any Western powers, so the only solution for them was to show armed resistance against the Ottoman policies. The Nusayris did whatever they could to avoid conscription and paying taxes because they suffered very much from the conscription policies of the Egyptians, and they were oppressed by the tax collectors who often extracted double taxes from the weak and powerless people.

The disunity of the Nusayris during the Tanzimat reforms era prevented them from politically dominating the region. Isma'il Khayr Bey, an outstanding and powerful Nusayri leader, united the tribes and took advantage of the Ottomans' deteriorating position in the region. Isma'il ruled not only his tribe but also other Nusayri tribes, and within his district lived many Sunni Muslims and Christians in the 1850s. Isma'il was defeated not because of the attacks of the Ottomans, but because of the disloyalty of the Nusayri tribes. After the defeat of Isma'il's rebellion, the Ottomans continued their aggressive policy of conscription and collecting taxes until the end of the Tanzimat era.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACTIVITIES OF PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES AMONG THE NUSAYRI COMMUNITY

The Tanzimat Edict (the Gülhane Edict) of 1839 was issued to guarantee equality before the law to all of the Ottoman subjects. The Imperial Edict of 1856 (Islahat Fermanı) expanded the rights that had been provided to the non-Muslim subjects of the empire. According to this edict “[A]s all forms of religion are and shall be freely professed in my dominions, so subject of my empire shall be hindered in the exercise of the religion that he professes, nor shall he be in any way annoyed on this account. No one shall be compelled to change their religion.”²⁴⁹

Deringil states that although the common belief among travelers and observers was that the edict of 1856 abolished the law of execution of apostates, there is no specific mention of apostasy anywhere in that document.²⁵⁰ The missionary activities in the Ottoman Empire began in the early years of the 19th century. Until the 1850s, they were not very active among the Nusayris in Syria. Their activities increased during and after the 1850s, and the Ottomans took some measures to prevent their activities. In this chapter, the activities of Protestant missionaries among the Nusayris between the 1830s and 1876 will be discussed.

²⁴⁹ J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record: 1535-1914*. (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, INC., 1956), 151.

²⁵⁰ Selim Deringil, “There is No Compulsion in Religion: On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839-1856,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42:3(July 2000): 556.

The activity of protestant missionaries goes back to the early 19th century. The first protestant who came to the Ottoman lands in 1815 was sent to Egypt by the Church of Missionary society. In 1820, Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons members of the American Board of Commissionaires for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) came to Izmir. ABCFM that represented the Calvinist tradition was highly placed and one of the largest missionary organization in the United States.²⁵¹ Hans-Lukas Kieser states that "ABCFM eschatological view of history during the first half of the 19th century was related to four expectations of great import to the Ottoman Middle East 1. The future global spread of the Gospel. 2. The return of the Jews to Palestine and their restoration (acceptance of Jesus Christ). 3. The fall of the Pope. 4. The collapse of Islam."²⁵² When missionaries entered to the Ottoman territories they could not interact with Muslims because Muslim apostates were subject to capital punishment. Therefore, while the American missionaries directly interacted with the Eastern Christians, they hoped to influence Muslims through their teaching and good example.²⁵³

The general attitude of the Ottoman Empire towards conversion from Islam to Christianity was that the apostate was liable to execution according to Sharia. One of the most respected *Şeyhulislams* of the sixteenth century, Ebu's Su'ud Efendi, issued a fatwa on this matter: "Question: What is the Şer'i ruling for a dhimmi who reverts to infidelity after having accepted Islam? Answer: He is recalled to Islam, if he does not return, he is killed."²⁵⁴ In addition, the male apostates were given three day before the execution. During this time period,

²⁵¹ Dr. Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, *Kendi Belgeleriyle Anadolu'daki Amerika: 19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki Amerikan Misyoner Okulları*. (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1989), 16.

²⁵² Hans Lukas Kieser, "Muslim Heterodoxy and Protestant Utopia. The Interactions between Alevi and Missionaries in Ottoman Anatolia" *Die Welt des Islams*, 44:1, (March 2001): 92.

²⁵³ Jeremy Salt, "Trouble Wherever They Went: American Missionaries in Anatolia and Ottoman Syria in the Nineteenth Century." *The Muslim World*, 92, (Fall 2002), 288

²⁵⁴ Selim Deringil, "There is No Compulsion in Religion: On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839-1856," 550.

if the apostates return back Islam they would be reprieved by the government; otherwise, they would be executed.

The Protestant missionaries came to the Middle East for the purpose of the evangelization. Before they came to the Middle East, their target had been converting the non-Protestant Christians, the Muslims, the Jews, and other minorities of the Middle Eastern provinces. In the early 19th century, probably due to the lack of communication between the United States and the Ottoman officials, American missionaries did not know that proselytizing to Muslims was prohibited in the Empire.²⁵⁵ However, at that time, non-Muslims were allowed to change their religions. Therefore, the target of the missionaries in the early 19th century was converting the non-Protestant Christians of the Syrian provinces.²⁵⁶ In the late 1820s, the American missionaries found a new target for their efforts; the Nusayris and the Druzes. The Nusayris and the Druzes had been subject to Ottoman oppression for centuries, and what they needed was a safe and stable life.

The American Board discovered Syria's potential because the region hosted Eastern Christians, the Druzes, the Maronites, the Nusayris and Sunni Muslim populations. The American missionaries came to the region to convert people; however, the local people of the region did not interact with them, so the missionaries opened schools in order to penetrate the society. The first school was opened in the mid-1820s in Beirut. Beirut was chosen rather than Jerusalem because it had a better climate, was close to the mountains where the minorities lived, and provided better communication with Europe and other significant locations around the

²⁵⁵ See for more information: Selim Deringil, "There is No Compulsion in Religion": On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839-1856."

²⁵⁶ Alkan, "Fighting for Nusayri the Nusayri Soul: State, Protestant Missionaries and the 'Alawis in the Late Ottoman Empire," 36-37.

Mediterranean Sea.²⁵⁷ The strategy of the missionaries was to concentrate their efforts on education in order to both approach and impress the local population. These schools attracted many students among local Christians and even Muslims. The curriculum of the first missionary schools concentrated on reading and writing texts of the Bible that taught students the basics of Christianity. The purpose of the missionaries was to convince the students that were taught the main texts of the Bible to accept Protestant belief.²⁵⁸ Lindsay states that they could establish close relationships with the children and their families through the schools to propagate their faith.²⁵⁹

The first school that was established by the missionaries in Beirut was closed down because the situation in Syria became intolerable in 1827. After the destruction of the Egyptian and Ottoman fleet in Navarino in October of that year, there was speculation of war between Turkey and Britain. In 1828, Russia declared war against the Ottomans, so the British consul, the friend and protector of the missionaries, left Beirut for safety reasons. On 2 May, the Protestant missionaries together with some converts evacuated Beirut to move to Malta with the British council.²⁶⁰ The end of the Greek war of independence and the Ottoman-Russian war of 1828-29 made the conditions safe to re-open the British consulate in Beirut. As soon as the consulate was opened the Protestant missionaries came back.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Rao H. Lindsay, *Nineteenth Century American Schools in the Levant: A Study of Purposes*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1965), 89.

²⁵⁸ Yvette Talhamy, "American Protestant Missionary Activity among the Nusayris (Alawis) in Syria in the Nineteenth Century." *Middle Eastern Studies*, 47, 2011): 217.

²⁵⁹ Lindsay, *Nineteenth Century American Schools in the Levant: A Study of Purposes*, 98.

²⁶⁰ Abdul Latif Tibawi, *American Interest in Syria, 1800-1901*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 50.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

The region witnessed the Egyptian occupation in the 1830. During the Egyptian period the foreign missionaries were supported by the Egyptian government. They were allowed to expand the number of their schools. When the Egyptians began to implement the cruel policy of conscription, some members of the local population fled to the missionary schools, or were converted to Christianity in order to benefit from the exemption tax that were provided to the non-Muslims.²⁶²

In the 1840s, several missionaries travelled in the region, and they sent several reports to the American board in order to open a school in the region before other missionary boards discovered the Nusayris. At that time, the number of the Nusayris was between 150,000 and 200,000. In 1847, Thompson sent reports to the Board to inform them about the region and its dwellers. Thompson states that the Druzes and the Nusayris professed themselves to be Muslims, but they were neither Christian nor Muslims, and their ignorance and pagan-like belief system would help the missionaries to distribute the word of God among them. He also asserted that “The ignorance and wretchedness of the people (Nusayris) is very great, they are, therefore, the appropriate objects of Christian benevolence. There is no reason to think that any serious opposition would be made to evangelical efforts among them. Preaching, Bible and tract distribution, schools-all these means of doing good, it is believed, might immediately be put in operation among them, if only we had men to do it.”²⁶³ In 1847, Thompson sent another report to convince the Board to send missionaries to work among the Nusayris that were considered poor,

²⁶² Yvette Talhamy, “American Protestant Missionary Activity among the Nusayris (Alawis) in Syria in the Nineteenth Century,” 218.

²⁶³ Kamal Salibi and Yusuf K. Khoury (eds.), *The Missionary Herald: Reports from Syria 1819-1870*, Vol. 3, 65.

miserable, hated, oppressed, ignorant and vicious.²⁶⁴ However, the Board did not give its attention to these reports because the purpose of their mission was Eastern Christians that were living in ignorance and oppression.

Since the beginning of the 1840s, the Syrian provinces witnessed the increasing competition of the Western powers. In fact, this competition started in the 1820s when Russia declared its dissatisfaction with the missionary activities of the Protestants among the Orthodox (Greek) Christians that were under Russian protection. The leader of Greek Orthodox sent several petitions to both the Ottoman government and Russia in order to complain about the increasing activities of Protestant missionaries among the community. After being pressured by Russia, the Ottoman officials arrested a Protestant missionary. The head the Russian consulate, Boutinev, told Dr. Schaufle, head of the American Mission in the Ottoman Empire, that “Our leader, the Tsar, would never let you to spread your mission in the Ottoman Empire.”²⁶⁵ In general, the minorities of the regions, except for the Nusayris, were protected by the European powers. While the Druzes were supported by Britain, the Maronites were enjoying the protection of France. Since the religious similarities as well as the political interests of the Western powers provided protection to those minorities, the Nusayris began to look for a powerful country that would back them and provide them diplomatic support. The Nusayri leaders hoped the missionaries who were supported by the United States would provide this protection. In one case, the community required Rev. Lyde to mediate between them and the Ottoman officials. "On the plains below were about two hundred horsemen, who were gradually approaching the hill-side. I rode up to our men (the Nusayris) and asked them what was going on. One of them replied that

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Vol. 3, 270.

²⁶⁵ İlber Ortaylı, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Amerikan Okulları Üzerine Bazı Gözlemler.” *TODAIR Dergisi*, Cilt:14, No. 3 (1982): 88.

the government attacking them without right. I said you will not pay your taxes. Yes he said, we will. I asked him if I might tell the commander of the horse as much. They said yes; so I rode down to him, and asked him to delay attacking the district for a day or two till I had seen what could be done in Ladikeeh."²⁶⁶

Samuel Lyde, who lived among the Nusayris in the mountains in the 1850s, wrote many reports to H. L. Dr. Gobat in order to encourage him to open a school among the Nusayris. He reports that the Christian missionaries of diverse churches or sects labored among them. In addition, the members of the community regarded Jesus as a great prophet, the community still kept the festivals of Christianity, and they started to realize the advantages of being Franks (Christians) that would protect them from future oppression.²⁶⁷ Lyde believes that there were several factors that would help to convert the Nusayris to Christianity. First of all, European civilization and influence in the last years had made a great impression on the Eastern communities because these civilizations provided the non-Muslim inhabitants of Syria regions with many rights. Therefore, the Nusayris also had high respect for Britain because the general belief among the people in Syria was that Britain would gain possession of the country in the future. In addition, the British expelled Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt who had oppressed the Nusayris for a few days in 1841.²⁶⁸ Another factor that encouraged Lyde to request the opening of schools among the Nusayris was that the Nusayris treated the Bible as they treat the Quran.²⁶⁹ Lastly, the

²⁶⁶ Lyde, *The Asian Mysteries*, 207.

²⁶⁷ Lyde, *The Ansyreeh and Ismaeleeh: A Visit to the Secret Sects of Northern Syria*, 281-297

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 302-304.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

Nusayris were strongly tied together, so an impression made on one part of them would influence the whole body.²⁷⁰

Lyde opened the boarding school in Latakia in 1860. The purpose of the school, at the beginning, was to have a few Nusayri students and, after teaching them principles of Christianity, to send them back to their villages in order to spread the Christian teachings. Although they expected only a few students, they had around 30 students, most of them were Greeks. The school was opened in Latakia, so the number of the Nusayris was very limited because most of the population lived in the mountains at that time, and coming to the city center was a dangerous and an expensive activity for them. Türkyılmaz states that two students that were living in the same district where Rev. Lyde had been living in the 1850s attended the school.²⁷¹ The schools started bearing fruits. In December 1860, they baptized a Nusayri , Hamoud, and in 1864, Yusuf Jadeed, a Nusayri and another of Rev. Lyde's pupils, were baptized. The third convert was a Nusayri woman, Maryam, who was baptized in 1865.²⁷²

In the following year, the interests of the community in the missionary schools stepped up. The sheikhs, religious leaders, began to send their children to the schools, and even girls were sent to the missionary schools. The missionaries answered the demand for schools by opening several schools in the mountains, one of which accepted girls only. In the 1860s and 1870s, the missionary schools were the only places for the Nusayri to earn an education and the missionaries were very benevolent towards the community that had suffered from the oppression

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 306.

²⁷¹ Türkyılmaz, "Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empir," 201-202.

²⁷² Andrew J. McFarland, *Eight Decades in Syria*. (Topeka, Kansas: Board of Foreign Mission of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, 1937), 12-13.

of the rulers for centuries. In addition, the missionary schools provided health service to the students that were considered a luxury at that time and food and clothes that students shared with their family members. Therefore, the schools became very important even for the families of the students who were suffering from the rebellions, bad harvest, long winters and plague.²⁷³

However, the Ottoman government worried about the increasing influence and activities of the missionaries among the minorities. Between 1824-1886 the number of the missionary schools reached to four hundred in the empire, but most of them did not have licenses until the mid-1850s. In the 1850s, a sudden increase of the foreign schools in the empire compelled the Ottomans to issue a law of education that obligated the foreign schools to have a license, and regulated their activities according to the demands of the Ministry of Education. In 1869, the Regulation of Public Education was promulgated by the Ottoman Empire. The purpose of this regulation was to integrate the existing schools in the capital and the provinces into one comprehensive law. Therefore, the regulation would break foreign control over the missionary schools.²⁷⁴ The Ottomans did not prefer to use conversion as a weapon to force non-Muslims to accept Islam because it would trigger many rebellions all around the empire due to the great number of non-Muslim in the population. However, they used the Sunni ideology as a tool of oppression against the heretic groups in the empire.²⁷⁵ In the 1870s the Ottomans invented a new tradition and declared *Sunni Hanefi mezheb* as the official belief (*mezheb-i resmiye*), and disseminated of this belief among the heterodox groups that lived in the East Anatolian and Arab

²⁷³ Türkylmaz, "Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire," 207.

²⁷⁴ Selçuk Aksin Somer, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline* (Netherland: Brill Academic, 2001), 86.

²⁷⁵ Deringil, "There is No Compulsion in Religion: On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839-1856," 568.

provinces, particularly in Syria.²⁷⁶ In fact, the increasing influence and activities of the missionaries among the minorities played a significant role on this new policy.

The Ottomans decided to build new schools, issue new laws and close down the missionary schools in the 1870s. In the reports that were sent to the governor of Aleppo in 1870, the local people asked to allow the Nusayris to enter to the mosques with them. It is stated that experiencing the true faith in the mosques would make the Nusayris give up their belief and accept Sunni Islam. If the Nusayris were convinced to accept the Sunni Islam, their children would also give up their Nusayri belief. However, some local Sunni Muslims were not willing to share the mosques with them due to the fact that the community members had been considered infidels for centuries. The Ottomans decided to build schools and mosques in the Nusayri districts, and appoint imams, teachers in order to teach the correct belief to them.²⁷⁷ In 1872, the governor of Syria, Subhi Pasha, sent a letter to the Sultan in order to inform him about the increasing number of missionary schools and proselytizing activities in the region. The governor concluded that the government should send Muslim teachers to the region in order to teach Islam to the Nusayris, and open new state schools in the Nusayri and Druze district in order to decrease the influence of the missionary schools.²⁷⁸ In 1874, the Ottoman government decided to close down twenty-five school missionary schools. Jessup states that “[I]n the Nusairiyeh Mountains east and southeast of Latakia, twenty-five schools of American Reformed Presbyterian Mission which had been in operation for twenty years were forcibly closed by the Turkish officials and that poor pagan population, thirsting for education, are forbidden to allow their children to be

²⁷⁶ Selim Deringil, “The invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35:1 (January 1993), 14.

²⁷⁷ Ali Sinan Bilgili, *Osmanli Arsiv Belgelerinde Nuayriler ve Nusayrilik (1745-1920)*, 70-77

²⁷⁸ Talhamy, “American Protestant Missionary Activity among the Nusayris (Alawis) in Syria in the Nineteenth Century,” 226.

taught.”²⁷⁹ In addition, the Ottoman soldiers broke down the doors of the American school building, insulted the teacher's wife, and arrested all the Christian young men.²⁸⁰ At the same time, the Ottomans sent an order to build schools in Behluliye, Sahyun and Beytu's-Selef which were settled by Nusayris. Due to the poor economic conditions of the empire, the expenses of the schools would be met by the taxes that were collected from the region and by the donations from rich Nusayris.²⁸¹

In 1873 and 1874 two waves of arrest were carried out in Latakia. Some Nusayri converts were arrested by the Ottoman officials, and they were forced to go back their old ways. Türkyılmaz states that the soldiers raided the missionary schools and the houses of the converts, beat the family members, and arrested male converts.²⁸² Ottoman attacks against the missionaries were not common in the area, but with the increasing influence of the RPCNA members among the Nusayris, they were particularly attacked. The native teachers of the schools were conscripted and sent to another region although some teachers were under age, and were categorically exempted from conscription.²⁸³ Three people who were conscripted had paid the exemption fee, but they were considered as defectors and arrested. The arrested Nusayris asked the American missionaries to help. The British and American consuls that were asked for help by the American missionaries met with Halit Pasha, the Governor of Syria, to convince the governor that the three Nusayris were converted to Christianity. Halit responded that if they exempted

²⁷⁹ Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, Vol. 2, 436.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 436.

²⁸¹ B.A. A. MKT. MHM. 475/44. 26 Muharrem 1291 (March 15, 1874).

²⁸² Türkyılmaz, “Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire,” 209.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 209- 212.

every Nusayri convert, in the future all the Nusayris would proclaim that they had converted.²⁸⁴ In the end, the Ottomans were convinced that these three Nusayris were truly Christians, so the Ottomans freed them. According to conscription law, local people who were aged between 20-25 had to participate in conscription ballot (*kur'a*), and those who were only sons of the family that engaged in study could not be conscripted. Therefore, the Ottoman government broke the conscription law in order to disseminate activities of the RPCNA members among the Nusayris. However, the measures that were taken by the Ottomans did not bear fruit because, according to McFarland, attendance in the missionary schools in Latakia and in three other villages increased greatly until a climax in the mid-1870s.²⁸⁵ However, most of these students were not converted because most of them came to the school for the materialistic and educational advantages of the schools, not to correct their belief.

After 1876, especially under the reign of Abdulhamid II, the Ottomans built new schools, reduced influence of the missionaries, and implemented the Sunnification policy among the minorities, particularly the Nusayris. These policies resulted in mass conversion of the Nusayris in the late 19th century. For example, 15,000 Nusayris accepted Sunni-Hanefi sect of Islam in 1890.²⁸⁶ In addition, the construction of 15 schools in Latakia was ordered to educate the local population and reduce the influence of the missionary schools.²⁸⁷ In the same year 40,000 Nusayris in Merkab and 120,000 Nusayris who lived in Mount Lebanon and Kozan Mountains

²⁸⁴ Talhamy, "American Protestant Missionary Activity among the Nusayris (Alawis) in Syria in the Nineteenth Century," 227.

²⁸⁵ McFarland, *Eight Decades in Syria*, 21.

²⁸⁶ B.A. I.DH. 1182/92449. 7 Şevval 1307 (May 27, 1890).

²⁸⁷ B.A. MV. 54/37 14 Şevval 1307 (June 3, 1890).

were converted to the Sunni-Hanefi sect.²⁸⁸ In order to educate these converters, construction of twenty five schools and twenty five masjids in Merkab was required.²⁸⁹ In addition, construction of forty schools in the mount of Lebanon and Kozan Mountains was decided; however, the revenues of the region did not meet the expenses, so the Sultan donated 200,000 qurush for construction of these schools.²⁹⁰ However, most of the converted Nusayris returned their old belief when the Ottoman Empire lost its influence in the region.

A. Conclusion

The American missionaries were arrived the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s with the mission of working among the Christians that were living under ignorance and oppression of the state. In the late 1840s, they discovered the Nusayri society in the mountains. According to a report, the Nusayris were considered non-Muslim, and their traditions and belief system that were claimed to be rooted in Eastern Christianity showed similarities that would help them to get rid of the Ottoman pressure. In the 1860s, the missionaries opened their schools in the mountains. The schools attracted many students among the Nusayris because they not only provided educational opportunities to the students but also provided food, clothes and health services to students and their families.

The Ottomans were concerned about the increasing interest of the missionaries in the region because in the 1860s, missionaries opened several schools among the mountain. The Ottomans issued laws and promulgated new reforms as well as opened new schools in order to

²⁸⁸ B.A. I. MMS. 113/4821 2 Şevval 1307 (May 22, 1890), B.A. Y. PRK. UM. 19/70 1 Rebiulahir 1308 (November 14, 1890)

²⁸⁹ B.A. DH. MKT. 1741/110 27 Zilkade 1307 (July 11, 1890)

²⁹⁰ B.A. Y. PRK. UM. 19/70 1 Rebiulahir 1308 (November 14, 1890)

both diminish the influence of the foreign schools in the region and to convert the Nusayris to Sunni Islam. However, the policies of the Ottomans did not meet the expectations because their economic conditions did not allow them to open several schools in the region. At the same time, although the numbers of the schools reached its high point at that time, the missionaries were not satisfied with the numbers of the converted people in the 1870s.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I tried to analyze the course of the Ottoman-Nusayri relationship between 1831 and 1876, the treatment of the Ottoman government toward the Nusayris, outcomes of the Egyptian and Ottoman reforms in the region and among the Nusayris, the reaction of the Nusayris to these reform policies, and the activities of the Protestant missionaries among the Nusayri community.

The Ottomans and the Nusayris did not have any significant conflict, except for in the 16th century when thousands of Nusayris were killed by Selim I, as long as the Nusayris paid their taxes and sent recruits to the army during wartime. However, some conflicts occurred in the beginning of the 19th centuries when the Nusayris refused to pay taxes. These conflicts continued until the beginning of the 1830s when the Egyptians controlled the region. Between 1834-1840 when the Nusayris refused disarmament and conscription policies of the Egyptians and revolted against them, the Ottomans were glad the Nusayris for their revolt as well as backed them by arming them against the Egyptians. However, at the beginning of the 1840s when the Ottomans evacuated the Egyptians from Syria with the assistance of the Western powers, the discriminatory behavior of the Ottomans towards the Nusayris continued.

It is difficult to conclude that the Nusayris had a clear status in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. Their status depended on where they lived; for instance, while they were treated as members of the Islamic community in Latakia, they were considered member of a heretic sect in Hama and some other places in the Syrian provinces. In fact, the attitude of the local Sunni Muslim population as well as Christians played a determinative role in the status of the members of the community because the Nusayris were considered peasants, ignorant, robbers, and unbelievers, so the Sunni-Muslims and non-Muslims did not want to have the same status as the Nusayris. Some of the Ottoman policies demonstrate the unclear status of the sect. Türkyılmaz states that in some cases authorities forced the Nusayris to pay *cizye*, the obligatory tax for non-Muslims. She states that in 1819 a petition was sent by the *fellahs* (Nusayris) of Adana, Tarsus and Cilicia to complain that although they were members of Islamic community (Ehl-i Sunnet), they were forced by the Ottoman officials to pay *cizye*.²⁹¹ In addition, the Nusayris were treated as Muslims and their testimonies were accepted in the Latakia court; however, their testimonies were not accepted at the Hama court. Even after the Tanzimat reforms, in some places, such as Alexandretta their testimonies were not accepted neither in Sharia (Islamic) not in the Nizamiye (secular) courts. Therefore, it is clear that the Tanzimat reforms did not clarify the status of the community.

The geographical conditions of the Nusayri settlements, tribal characteristics of the community and continuous pressure by the rulers and local community shaped their socio-economic life in the 19th century. Due to limited agricultural areas in the mountains that were destroyed many times as a result of tribal conflicts or by the Ottoman rulers and heavy taxes that were demanded by the state, the Nusayris sought different ways, such as attacking caravans and

²⁹¹ Türkyılmaz, “Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire,” 177.

neighboring villages to gain their life expenses. The condition of life in the mountains and the oppression by the rulers also made the Nusayris materialist and opportunistic. In the 19th century as the Ottoman Empire experienced continuous conflict in different regions of the empire, the Nusayris used this opportunity and refused to pay taxes, or send recruits to the army, and they revolted against the state under the leadership of Isma'il Khayr Beg, who was a powerful Nusayri leader. The significance of this revolt is that the Nusayri tribes were united under Isma'il Khayr Beg; however, this unification did not last long. The Ottomans implemented the policy of playing Nusayri tribes against each other in order to break their unity, so the policy of the Ottomans worked, and Isma'il Khayr Bey was killed by his maternal uncle who would be appointed as a governor of Safita in place of Isma'il Khayr Beg.

In the 1850s, the Protestant missionaries discovered the heterodox groups that lived in the mountains. The Nusayris who were one of the groups that lived in the mountains suffered from the oppression of the state and local community for years, and they did not have any schools or any other public services. The missionaries entered among the society and showed their benevolence to the community. The missionaries that were sent to Syria had been advised as follows: “The first duty of a missionary is to prove to the people that he loves them. If you cannot do that you will not reach their hearths.”²⁹² Rev. Jessup, who lived in Syria more than 50 years also advised that “[I]f you show an interest in their welfare, identify yourself with them as a people, show a fondness for their language and their customs, many of which are beautiful and commendable –if you convince them that you are come to live and die among them, and to live only for their good and glory of Christ, you will win their confidence, and they will listen with

²⁹² *Exercises at the Ordination of James S. Dennis under the Appointment of the American Board as Missionary to Syria: Held in the First Presbyterian Church, Newark, N. J., Wednesday, September 23d, 1868.* (Newark: 1868), 42.

interest as you tell the story of the Cross.”²⁹³ The Protestants opened several schools in the mountains and several Nusayris sent their children to join these schools that were the only educational opportunity for them. The Ottomans took some measures to prevent the Nusayris from participating in the missionary schools and accepting Christianity. Although they issued some rules and promulgated new reforms, they did not dissuade the Protestants from opening new schools and carrying out their activities. The Ottomans decided to open new state schools in the region, but the number of the schools did not increase due to weak economic conditions.

In short, at first, the Nusayris welcomed the Egyptian reforms that provided equal rights to all subjects in Syria without consideration of their religion. However, the cruel policies of disarmament and conscription dissatisfied the Nusayris and triggered the Nusayri revolt in 1834. Between 1841 and 1876, the region experienced the Tanzimat reforms. However, these reforms did not bring any significant change to the status of the Nusayris. During the reform period, in many cases, the Nusayris were treated as members of a heretic group, and the local population, both Christian and Sunni-Muslim, did not want to have equal rights with them. In addition, the Nusayris showed their reaction to the new conscription policy of the Ottoman Empire, and refused to pay tax. The Ottomans sent troops over the Nusayris in order to both punish and force them to participate in the army and pay taxes. When their demands were refused, they attacked and demolished Nusayri villages, burnt agricultural lands, and killed many of them.

The Nusayris who suffered from the continuous pressure of the state looked for a Western power to protect them. The Protestant missionaries that chose the Nusayris as a target for conversion increased their activities among the community. The Nusayris welcomed them because the missionary schools were both the only place to obtain education in the region and

²⁹³ Ibid., 42.

provided material support to the students and their families. Moreover, the Nusayris hoped to have the support of missionaries against the Ottoman government. In the books that were written by travelers and the reports that were sent to the Board, the Nusayris were considered an easy target by them. Contrary to the arguments in these books and reports, the Nusayris were not an easy target for them because the community approached them to use the benefits that were offered to them. Therefore, the numbers of converted Nusayris in the 1870s was not satisfactory to the missionaries.

The Ottomans made some attempts to decrease the influence of the Protestant missionaries. They issued new laws and closed down the missionary schools and constructed new schools in the region, but they were not successful in their policy until 1876. After 1876, especially under the reign of Abdulhamid II, the Ottomans built new schools, reduced the influence of the missionaries, and implemented a Sunnification policy among the minorities, particularly among the Nusayris. However, most of converted Nusayris returned to their former belief when they found the opportunity, as they had done in the 1860s and 1870s, because they changed their belief in order to use the benefits that the Christians and Sunni Muslims enjoyed at that time.

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