The Druze Mountain has historically been a frontier region, a major contact zone between steppe and agricultural lands. In November, in incidents reminiscent of a century ago, local Bedouins, hard pressed by three years of drought, had led their herds of sheep and goats into the small-scale fruit plantations of the hands of the Bedouins. As always, when conflict arose, in the area, the main road linking al-Suwayda, capital of the province, with Damascus was closed. The province sent a petition to Bashar al-Asad, the young president of Syria, ensuring him of their support and asking for protection. Druze university students demonstrated in Damascus, demanding government support for their people. President Bashar al-Asad personally called shaykh-al-aqil (highest Druze religious office holder), Husain al-Jabar, on the phone.

Discourse on the Druzes

This is the gist of the incident, as reported in a number of news articles and by word of mouth. In previous conflicts between ‘desert and sown’, the stories woven into the incident are of major interest. The first articles, for example, reported that the Druze governor’s office was burnt down (the fact is that it was invaded by French troops). The province, according to the governor, has been skillfully utilized by the Druzes to construct an image of selfless patriotism for the province. The Druze Mountain province, better known as ‘Druze Mountain’, the name confusion already hinting at the complicated identity of its inhabitants. It was, once again, surrounded by army troops. What had happened?

The Druzes

term ‘Hashawan Mountain’ or ‘Arab Mountain’, the name confusion already hinting at the complicated identity of its inhabitants. It was, once again, surrounded by army troops. What had happened?

Identity, Power and Petty

The Druzes in Syria

When in 1991 the Egyptian newspaper al-Ahram al-Masali published a fatwa that de- nied the Druze faith its place within Islam, the confident shaykh al-aqil Jabbar dis- patched a letter to Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, expressing his hope that ‘the mutfi of Egypt did not know what he was doing by issuing this fatwa. For, if he knew what he was doing, it would be a catastro- phe for Islam.’ The president’s and the mutfi’s offices looked into the matter. Egypt’s president wrote back to the Druzes, stating that the mutfi, Dr Tartawi, denied ever having issued such a fatwa. The newspaper printed the explanation that the fatwa in question stemmed from 1936, and that the current mutfi of Egypt had nothing to do with it.

Outlook

Terms with Failed Revolutions: Historiography in

Sultan al-Atrash, leader of the anti-colonial revolt and President Naser in 1960.

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Notes

1. See my Reforming in the Druze Mountain: Ethnicity and Integration of a Rural Community in Syria from the Ottoman Empire to Syrian Independence, Gothic Jauhar Perches, 1996 (Germant), and ‘Coming to Terms: Druze Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire’ in Ottoman Studies, 1999, pp. 17-44.


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The role of Sultan al-Atrash

Sultan al-Atrash, the Syrian Druze leader of the anti-colonial revolt against the French in the 1920s, is often depicted as the Druze leader of the anti-colonial ‘Great Revolt’ against the French in the 1920s, for example, chose his constant companion and signer of international petitions a Chris- tian from his territory – a political strategy to defuse European sectarian suspicion. Governments, starting with the Ottomans, by issuing this fatwa. For, if he knew what he was doing, it would be a catastro- phe for Islam.’ The president’s and the mutfi’s offices looked into the matter. Egypt’s president wrote back to the Druzes, stating that the mutfi, Dr Tartawi, denied ever having issued such a fatwa. The newspaper printed the explanation that the fatwa in question stemmed from 1936, and that the current mutfi of Egypt had nothing to do with it.

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