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THE CHRISTIANS BETWEEN OTTOMANISM
AND SYRIAN NATIONALISM: THE IDEAS
OF BUTRUS AL-BUSTANI

INTRODUCTION

In the Ottoman system the population of the Empire was organized upon a con-
fessional basis, not upon a territorial or linguistic one. It was composed of reli-
gious communities each of which had its own internal organization and was
controlled by a religious hierarchy. Socially and culturally each community
(*millet*) formed a separate entity, each kept apart from the other. There was no
attempt to create uniformity. Consequently, no intercommunal solidarity or so-
cial integation evolved in Ottoman society.

The Sunni-Muslim was the ruling community. Every other community,
whether non-Muslim or non-Sunni, was politically marginal to it. This system,
inherited from preceding Muslim states, served the Ottomans well for a long
time. But new economic and social realities that evolved approximately be-
tween 1750 and 1850, both within and outside the Empire, forced a change in
the system. No fundamental change took place until about the mid century
when the rise of European influence in the Ottoman lands posed new and dan-
gerous challenges to the government of Istanbul. Subsequently, the Tanzimat
reformers recognized the need to establish the social and political life of the
state on a new basis.

The decisive step toward that end was taken by ʿĀli and Fuad in the reform
edict, Hatt-i Humayūn of 1856.[1] This edict bestowed equal civil and political
rights upon the non-Muslims and opened the way for their integration into the
social and political structure of the state. And in spite of mounting opposition
among a large section of the Muslim population, ʿĀli and Fuad stuck to it and ap-
plied its provisions unfailingly as long as they held power at the Porte. Their
object was to create a new political community that would encompass the
whole population of the Empire, and to found a new nationality based upon
equal Ottoman citizens who regarded the Ottoman Empire as their fatherland.
In this way they hoped to transfer the loyalty of the non-Muslims from the local
community and the Ottoman dynasty to the fatherland and the state. This was
in essence the new political principle which ʿĀli and Fuad introduced and
which was generally known as Ottomanism.

There was possibly no other region in the Empire in which the application of
such a principle was more beneficial than in Syria. Like Ottoman society as a

whole, the structure of Syrian society was fragmentary. Alongside a Sunni-Muslim majority there were about a dozen non-Muslim and non-Sunni minorities.[2] Each community was grouped around its religious hierarchy or its chieftains, and each had a varied degree of consciousness of inner solidarity. These communities were socially and to a large degree culturally separated from each other and from the body of the Sunni-Muslim majority. Moreover, the geographical nature of Syria contributed to keeping them apart, for in earlier centuries non-Sunnis, Maronites, and later Greek Catholics, took haven in mountain valleys where they were able to perform their rituals more freely. Consequently, detachment and a degree of self-sufficiency helped to keep them segregated and time sanctified their traditions and habits and strengthened their sectarian identity. All the communities of Syria had, however, one factor in common: for majority and minority alike, Arabic was the mother tongue.

The rise of Western influence forced a change in this system. Its economic expansion into the east Mediterranean lands was a major factor in transforming the economic system of Syria from subsistence to market economy. This and other factors made the Western powers compete for political influence. It was partly to match these developments that the Ottoman reformers worked for the modernization of the administrative system, and in the course of the generation that followed the restoration of Syria to the Sultan in 1841, mountain valleys and detached districts were opened to the government's direct and centralized rule, and, as we have seen above, a new political principle was introduced which aimed at ending the communal structure of Ottoman society.

Owing to certain reasons – of which the economic expansion of the West was one – there developed during the first half of the nineteenth century a cleavage between Muslims and non-Muslims in Syria. Eventually, religious fanaticism took the place of the tolerance of the preceding centuries. The deposition of Bashir II of Lebanon in 1840 deprived the non-Muslim communities (especially the Maronites and Greek Catholics) of their natural protector. Consequently, they tended to seek the protection of a European country, especially that of France, and found in it a guarantee for their interests. In other words, the division and discord among the inhabitants of Syria made the way of Western penetration easier.

Since the Egyptian occupation under Ibrahim Pasha of 1831–32, and for more than three decades, Syria had been the object of extensive political, economic, and social changes, which were bound to leave their mark on its people. It was under the impact of these events that some Syrians started to develop an image of Syria as one entity and as a fatherland inhabited by one people. A group of litterateurs composed of young men of various communities centered in Beirut were first to voice these sentiments.[3] A leading figure among this group was Butrus al-Bustani. A remarkable educator and thinker, he came to regard sectarianism and religious fanaticism as the worst evils that had come upon Syria. For him, the integration of Syrian society was an absolute and urgent necessity, and it was to his credit that he realized that Ottomanism could provide a framework for the achievement of such an object.

BUSTANI AND THE MISSIONARIES

Butrus al-Bustani (1819–1883) was born to Maronite parents in a village in Mount Lebanon.[4] He attended the Maronite seminary of 'Ayn Waraqa where he spent "ten years learning and teaching."[5] This college was probably the best "modern" educational institution in Syria at the time. Established in 1789 by Bishop Yusuf Istfan, it taught the liberal arts, Arabic, Syriac, Latin, and Italian, in addition to religious knowledge.[6] It was "the mother of national schools in this country," as he was to call it later.[7]

With the best modern education possible at that stage in Syria, Bustani descended the mountain in 1840 to settle in Beirut. His first employment there was as a dragoman with the British force dispatched to help in evicting Ibrahim Pasha from Syria. Later in the year we find him being employed as a teacher by the American missionaries who some years earlier had become established in Beirut. He remained attached to the mission for many years during which he accepted the Protestant faith and produced his early works, including textbooks in Arabic grammar and arithmetic. He also helped Eli Smith of the mission in the translation of the Bible into Arabic. Through the good offices of Smith, who became his friend and patron, Bustani secured in the late 1840s the post of dragoman of the American consulate in the city, which he held until 1862 and afterward passed on to his Salim.[8]

In spite of Bustani's long association with the mission and his conversion to its persuasion, his personality was not submerged. On the contrary, in a study of him and the mission Dr. Tibawi noticed that since about the mid 1850s Bustani was showing a "growing intellectual independence and standing apart from the mission."[9] Finally, continues Tibawi, the death in 1857 of his friend Eli Smith "put an end to Bustani's major connection with the mission".[10] But a relationship with them, "friendly but not intimate" continued for a while.

Implicitly, we may assume that Bustani became at a certain stage disenchanted with the mission. In the mid 1850s, however, his attitude toward it seems to have been undergoing a change, and the death of Smith gave the occasion for ending his involvement with it. But what made him change his attitude?

If in the early 1840s Bustani experienced a conversion to a religious ideal – Protestantism – in the mid 1850s he was apparently converted to a political one – Ottomanism. When the Porte issued in February 1856 its famous reform edict, the Hatt-i Humayūn, Bustani was apparently quick to realize that it was a real step toward integrating the Empire's communities into the social and political structure of the state and establishing the latter on a new basis. Comparing the missionary with the Ottoman ways, he saw that the interest and the future of his country lay in the second. The Ottoman way offered to end the marginality of the non-Muslims and to open the way to them for integration among themselves and eventually with their Muslim compatriots. The missionaries, on the other hand, with their particularist attitude and their emphasis on Western culture and negligence of Arabic culture, were causing the perpetuation of the social and cultural disjunction of Syrian society. In other words, it was a ques-

tion of destiny in the eyes of Bustani, a choice between becoming an integral part of a larger entity (the Arabo-Syrian and the Ottoman), or being in what amounted to continued conflict with it. Prudently he chose the first alternative, and many Syrian Christians undoubtedly followed his way.

Along with this change of heart came apparently a change in Bustani's attitude toward missionary education. This could be seen from an article on education published in his periodical *al-Jinān* in 1876, and signed by his son Salim. The article showed that Bustani was disillusioned by the missionaries and that his ideal and goal had become different from theirs. ''The purpose of most of the [missionary] schools is religious,'' the article said. ''They were established in order to influence minds religiously, and each [mission] is concerned to teach its own language at its school. . . . Our children were being taught about remote countries, but nothing about their own,'' they were being taught about the markets and monuments of Paris or the history of the English or the Germans, but were ignorant of their own history or of the provinces of the state.[11]

Bustani's goal was different. This kind of education aggravates division and leads to the rise of uprooted generations estranged from their culture and people. The purpose of education, the article continued, should be to strengthen the ties of love and concord among all sections of society, and to ward off the causes of fanaticism and discord. The experience of one's own ancestors should be made the basis of knowledge.[12] In short, ''There should be one system of education for [all] the children of the nation (*'Umma*) to safeguard its [cultural] identity.''[13] Finally, it concluded, ''education should inculcate in the minds . . . the patriotic principle.''[14]

BUSTANI AND THE ARAB CULTURAL REVIVAL

The Ottoman way was the most sensible way Bustani could have chosen, above all for the interests of the Christian communities as he best saw them. He regarded the edict of 1856 as ''granting freedom'' for the non-Muslims, and expressed his gratitude and loyalty to Sultan Abdulmejid for granting it.[15] Indeed, for Bustani the granting of equal civil and political rights was equivalent to the opening of a new era in Syrian history. ''The policy of the past,'' said an editorial in *al-Jinān,* was based on religious solidarity, but now the Porte had abandoned this policy and conformed with ''the spirit of the [modern] age which had substituted religious with patriotic solidarity''.[16] It should also be added that the edict applied to all the subjects of the Sultan ''who are united to each other by the cordial ties of patriotism.''[17]

In other words, Bustani may have realized that the Ottoman reformers were seeking to foster patriotic feelings among the peoples of the Empire. Such a feeling would simultaneously emerge at the provincial level, and in a province like Syria where the differences among the communities were religious and not linguistic or indeed ethnic, the emergence of such a solidarity was relatively less difficult than in other provinces of mixed population. On the other hand Bustani was apparently aware that the emergence of such a solidarity might be hindered or even prevented by the lack of cultural homogeneity among the Syr-

ians. This was true not only between Muslims and non-Muslims between whom
at that time almost two separate cultures prevailed, but also among the Chris-
tian communities themselves, and the missionary activities sharpened this lack
of homogeneity among those communities and within them. Bustani's answer
to that was an Arab literary revival and cultural regeneration through Arabic.
He called publicly for that early in 1859, about two years after he disengaged
himself from missionary work, and he devoted the rest of his life to that cause.
By this he apparently hoped to promote Arab cultural homogeneity among the
Syrians, an important means of generating collective consciousness and hence
patriotic feelings.

   In Beirut in February 1859, Bustani gave a lecture "on the literature of the
Arabs"[18] in which he called for the revival of the Arabic language and culture.
He was probably the first to call publicly for this in modern times. Various na-
tions, he told his audience, were busy spreading their languages among the
Arabs, and Arabs, he added reproachfully, were "showing a great tendency to
learn foreign languages without paying attention to their noble mother
tongue."[19] He emphasized the need for making Arabic a good enough medium
for modern learning, and adapting it to the needs of the modern age.[20] Grammar
also "should be reformed" along with the language in order to make its learning
easier and more desired.[21] Arabic must not become a dead language like Latin,
he added. If this were to happen and the vernacular dialects were to take the
place of the literary language, he warned that there would be "no greater loss to
the Arabs than this."[22]

   A little later he referred to the subject again, answering, it seems, some criti-
cism. Those who were claiming that Arabic was not a good enough vehicle for
modern civilization, he wrote, "are ignorant of its virtues and forget that its
revival is nearer, easier, and more effective than civilizing the Arabs through
various foreign languages."[23]

   Anxious that Arabic should become a language of modern learning, Bustani
spent more than ten years of his life in compiling an Arabic dictionary, *Muhit
al-Muhit*[24] (abridged into *Qutr al-Muhit* for schools).[25] This colossal work, and
his other publications and periodicals, "all contributed to the creation of mod-
ern Arabic expository prose . . . capable of expressing simply, precisely, and
directly the concepts of modern thought."[26]

   It is rightly argued that Bustani's aim was to serve his fatherland "by the
diffusion of knowledge through the medium of Arabic,"[27] but this was not all he
aimed at in working for the revival of Arabic. He was motivated, he once de-
clared, by love of his fatherland and by the desire "to furnish the facilities of
progress for its people and *to revive the desire for [learning] our
noble . . . language.*"[28] In other words he wanted Arabic to be loved and
learned as any other living language. He regarded its revival as "an obligation
(*fard*)" on Arabs.[29] He warned his readers against neglecting their own lan-
guage because Arabic only should prevail in Syria. "Syria must not become a
Babel of languages . . . as it is a Babel of religions and sects."[30] Indeed, lan-
guage for him was not simply a means of learning, it was above all a basis of
national identity.[31]

In his lecture, Bustani dwelled in addition on the contribution of the Arabs to civilization. They were ''the intermediate link that connected ancient sciences with modern learning.''[32] But by then science and culture were ''in a state of complete decline'' among them, and he blamed them for mental laziness.[33] He suggested means for revival such as the printing of books in the arts and sciences, the publication of periodicals, the opening of libraries, and the establishment of schools, and he ended by calling on his compatriots (*abnā' al-Watan*) ''to awake and arise.''[34]

Bustani dedicated the rest of his life to this cause, and what he preached he himself tried to do. In addition to his dictionaries, he established a school[35] famous in its time; he published a periodical and newspapers;[36] and above all he gave his last years to publishing an encyclopaedia in Arabic, seven volumes of which he finished before his death.

On the other hand his call for cultural revival found a favorable response. Only a few months after his lecture a group of fourteen prominent Muslims and Christians in Beirut, including Bustani and some of his friends, formed a cultural association for the publication of Arabic books: *al-'Umda al-Adabiyya li-Ishhār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya*. He was its secretary. Its members were motivated 'by the desire for reviving what time had almost obliterated.''[37] Their plan was ''to print and sell at a reasonable price [Arabic] literary and historical works.''[38] The first of those works was an edition by Bustani of *Diwān al-Mutanabbi* which was printed in Beirut early in 1860.[39] Indeed the choice of this famous poet was in itself indicative of the mood of thought that prevailed among the litterateurs of Beirut at the time, for Mutanabbi's poetry symbolized Arab pride and resentment in an age when Arabs had lost effective political power in the lands of the Caliphate. The group had plans to print several other books, but it is uncertain how far they had gone. The foundation of such an association was a sign, however, that Bustani's feelings and views were shared by many others. Indeed, the interest in classical Arabic literature and cultural regeneration was growing among a new group of litterateurs in Beirut.[40] As an example, short biographies of seven of the fourteen members of the above-mentioned association are known to us. In 1860, five of these were under forty and Bustani was forty-one,[41] a generation, in fact, that had grown up in the same years as Bustani and had passed more or less similar experiences.

Another sign of this interest in Arabic cultural regeneration was the establishment in 1868 of *al-Jam'jyya al-'Ilmiyya al-Sūriyya* (the Syrian Scientific Society) in Beirut. Its purpose was ''to work for all that leads to common benefit . . . in matters of literature and art,'' and its membership was opened to ''those who are zealous for the real benefits of the fatherland.''[42] Among its founders were members of all sects and creeds in Beirut.[43] Others from other Syrian towns joined in as correspondent members. Even some prominent personalities in Istanbul such as Fuad Pasha and others were registered as honorary members,[44] which may suggest that this society was looked upon with favor by the ruling circles at the time.

Due to these efforts of Bustani and others, Beirut was becoming a center of Arabic cultural revival, and since the 1860s and especially in the 1870s, the out-

put of privately owned printing presses both in books and journals was impressive.[45]

To sum up: Bustani's aim by his call for Arabic cultural revival was to lay the basis of Arab cultural homogeneity as a means of fostering collective consciousness among the people of Syria. "We must adopt one nationality," said an editorial in *al-Jinan* in 1870. "It is that which prevailed in our fatherland after all the others and of which we adopted its language and customs – that is the Arab nationality."[46] In this manner, Bustani hoped to pave the way for the integration of the various communities into one Syrian Arab community united together by patriotic solidarity.

BUSTANI AND THE OTTOMAN AUTHORITIES

At the beginning of 1860, Bustani seems to have been settled on his course of work. He edited Mutanabbi's *Diwān* and continued to work on his dictionary. Then in summer came the events of Mount Lebanon, followed by those of Damascus with their fierceness and bloodshed. These events shocked him profoundly, but at the same time they confirmed his belief in the urgent need to establish patriotic – in the place of sectarian – solidarity, and in the prudence of loyalty to the Ottoman state. He regarded Ottoman rule as a check on Muslim or Druse aggressiveness on the one hand, and on foreign interference and domination on the other.

A year before these events, Bustani had called for an Arab cultural revival. Now he called for a second common ideal among the Syrians: that of a fatherland. Following these events he published irregularly a broadsheet which he significantly called *Nafir Suriyya*[47] (A Clarion of Syria). It was written in a simple and sincere style, and each number was signed by "him who loves his country," and addressed to his "fellow countrymen."[48] The undertones of this publication were forgiveness, unity, and love of the fatherland. He opened the first sheet by emphasizing the common marks of patriotism. "O sons of the fatherland, you drink the same water, breathe the same air, and speak the same language. The land upon which you walk, your common interests and your customs are one. . . ."[49] In the fourth sheet he touched again on the same idea: "Syria, known as Barr al-Shām or 'Arabistān is our fatherland . . . and the population of Syria, whatever their creed, community, racial origin (*ajnā*s) or groups are the sons of our fatherland."[50] There should be internal unity and friendship among them. "The backwardness of the Syrians is the outcome of lack of unity and love among them, and of the lack in them of earnest concern for the welfare of their country, and of their surrender to the power of sectarian fanaticism."[51] He quoted in the same sheet a tradition attributed to the Prophet: "Love of fatherland is an article of faith," and he added that those who substitute the love of fatherland with sectarian fanaticism do not deserve to belong to Syria. They were in his view the "enemies of the fatherland."[52] Finally, he recommended justice, equality, and separation between religious and secular realms,[53] a theme that he expounded a decade later in his periodical *al-Jinān*.

These were the main views of Bustani in 1860: The need to create internal unity, to forget the differences and emphasize the common aspects, to love Syria and to work for its welfare and progress. In this sense he was probably the first Syrian nationalist. He was a fanatic only in his love for his country, and was led only by patriotic principles, wrote a contemporary biographer.[54]

Bustani put his ideas into practice when in 1863 he opened a school which he called "the National School" (al-Madrasah al-Wataniyya).[55] Apparently he was of the conviction that "as long as most of the schools in the country were in the hands of the Franks, there is no way for the desired reform"[56] – as his son wrote later, meaning by "reform" the strengthening of the fundaments of internal unity. Accordingly, the school "was necessary for the success of the country."[57] As its name implies, it took a nonsectarian line. It accepted pupils from all communities and sects and allowed them freedom of worship, contrary to the missionary schools which made it a condition upon their pupils to attend their churches. It also differed from the missionary schools in its emphasis on the teaching of Arabic, which was taught by the best teachers in the field, Nasif al-Yaziji and Yusuf al-Asir (a Syrian graduate of al-Azhar in Cairo). Turkish was also taught, along with French and English.[58] Probably not less important were Bustani's weekly talks in which he preached his views to the new generation.[59] It was reported that a year after its foundation the school had 150 pupils,[60] which was a large number for those times. It had also a boarding section with pupils from many parts of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt.[61]

Bustani's school appears to have enjoyed the blessing of the Ottoman authorities, just as he enjoyed their favor and respect. Governors, we are told, used to visit it "and exhort [him] to follow the correct patriotic principle that accords the interest of the fatherland with that of the state."[62]

Certainly, the attitude of the authorities toward Bustani seems to have been favorable, following the events of 1860 and the mission of Fuad Pasha to Beirut and Damascus. Bustani on his part did not let an occasion pass without expressing openly his loyalty to the Sultan and his men.[63] The authorities recognized this attitude and amply rewarded him. Thus with the appearance of his second volume of *Muhit al-Muhit* he was granted 25 thousand *qurush* (= £T250) and the Majīdī Order, third class.[64] This reward was granted during the governorship of Mehmed Rāshid Pasha with whom Bustani had, it seems, special relations, as can be recognized in the publication of *al-Jinān*.

After that Bustani finished his dictionary, and when his eldest son Salim was old enough to assist him (he was twenty-two in 1870), he launched the fortnightly *al-Jinān,* the first number of which appeared at the beginning of January 1870. In the same year he also published a newspaper *al-Janna* twice a week edited by his son Salim.[65] Bustani stated in rather vague terms that it was Rāshid Pasha's unstinted support which made the publication of *al-Jinān* possible and, due to him, *Janna* was published too.[66] Accordingly we can assume that some ideas advocated by Bustani in *al-Jinān* while Rāshid was *vali* of Syria (until September 1871) may have been voiced with Rāshid's blessing.[67]

Bustani founded *al-Jinān*[68] because, as he put it, of the need for such a publi-

cation in Syria and the neighboring countries.[69] He assured his readers that it had two basic rules: "the truth and the interest of the country (*bilād*)." Its purpose was to foster knowledge and promote progress. It would not side, he pledged, with this or that group, but only "with our fatherland and with our people (*qawm*). . . ."[70] He was true to his word, and *al-Jinān,* reaching all Arab cities in Asia and in Egypt, met with success,[71] and continued to appear regularly for sixteen years (three years after his death) until the strict censorship of the Hamidian regime made it difficult for it to carry on.

In the first twenty-one months, as long as Rāshid Pasha was governor, Bustani enjoyed freedom to write. In editorials signed by his son Salim, but which obviously contained his own views, he expounded, simply and clearly, the theme of government and subject, the need for internal unity, and the separation of the religious from the civil realms. Time and again he called for loyalty to the Ottoman state as it evolved under the Tanzimat reformers. He was probably one of the few Syrian Christians who regarded any kind of European domination as disadvantageous to the future of Syria. But after the death of 'Āli Pasha and the rise of Mahmud Nedim to the Grand Vezirate (September 1871), Rāshid Pasha was recalled. He was ordered to quit his office within twenty-four hours and to take the first steamer to Istanbul.[72] He stayed there for ten months unemployed, until the fall of Mahmud Nedim.[73] Following Rāshid's recall, Bustani stopped discussing internal politics. His editorials changed: he wrote in general terms and dealt with European politics. After the fall of Mahmud Nedim (July 1872) he explained why. He could not write freely, he said, while the Pasha was in office, and he complained of press censorship.[74] "Silence in such circumstances is better,"[75] he added. Bustani then resumed his commentaries as before but again he was to be interrupted. In 1873 during the governorship of Halet Pasha, a man known to have been close to the Palace,[76] censorship was again imposed on publications in Beirut by order of the Ministry of Education at the Porte.[77] Bustani found it necessary to modify his language. But even after Halet Pasha was transferred and especially in the years 1874 and 1875, Bustani's arguments were of unqualified support for the policies of Istanbul and, as we shall see, he supported on the whole the argument of Sultan Abdulhamid against the constitutionalists.

PATRIOTISM AND OTTOMANISM IN BUSTANI'S THOUGHT

After Bustani dissociated himself from the missionaries, he preached not only cultural revival but also loyalty to the Ottoman state as it evolved under the Tanzimat reformers. In his eyes both ideas were necessary to secure a better future for Syria: Arabic cultural revival, on the one hand, as a means of promoting progress and collective consciousness among the Syrians and of countering Western cultural influences; allegiance to the Ottoman state, on the other, as the best available means of countering this influence on the political level.

But he called also for allegiance because he found Ottomanism, the political principle that 'Āli and Fuad introduced, most appropriate for Syria and indeed

for the Empire as a whole. This was primarily because it included the genesis of patriotism and aimed to establish the identity and the legal status of the subjects upon secular ideals, rather than upon religious belief. Thus Bustani's vision was of Ottomanism as the progenitor of Syrian patriotism, and he apparently saw no contradiction between the two ideals.

His views on the subject appeared as mentioned in editorials in *al-Jinān,* and while some of them appeared in their essence in his first publication, *Nafir Suriyya* (1860–61), in *al-Jinān* he developed and elaborated them. These views can be put under three headings: his call for patriotic solidarity, Ottomanism, and the privileges of the subjects.

The Case for Patriotic Solidarity

In 1870 as in 1860 Bustani saw much evil in the fragmentary structure of Syrian society formed as it had been of separate religious communities. In an editorial entitled "Ruh al-'Asr"[78] (The Spirit of the [Modern] Age), Bustani wrote that the nineteenth century had three main characteristics: equality, absolute liberty that does not harm others, and progress. Calling upon his readers to follow these ideals, he stated that religion when mixed with politics was against the spirit of the age. Religion in itself however "does not prevent [its believers] from following the spirit of the age in secular matters." What he meant was not religious belief but the establishment of social and political life on religious solidarity (*'usba diniyya*). Such a solidarity, he believed, hindered equality and progress, and he reminded his readers that in their age, religious solidarity had been replaced by patriotic solidarity (*'usba wataniyya*).[79]

Such views had apparently aroused the resentment of some people,[80] and when Bustani returned to the subject again a little later, he stated that he could not resist returning to it. He added, "I do not fear the attacks of the armies of oppression and tyranny."[81]

Religious solidarity, he forcefully wrote, drove us to disaster and distress, planting weakness and discord among us, because instead of one sect there were twelve, each one trying to promote its own interests and trample on the interests of the others. The result was retardation and ruin.[82] But this was the heritage of the past, the outcome of the policy of the past, based as it had been on religious solidarity. "The world today is constituted on national (*jinsiyya*) and patriotic (*wataniyya*) solidarity."[83] Religious solidarity should be abandoned if the Syrians desired progress. "There is no way of success . . . except by adhering to patriotic solidarity and uniting in Arab solidarity (*'usba 'arabiyya*)."[84]

To have one Arab identity was imperative: "We should overlook our past racial origin and accept one national identity which was the last to prevail in our country and whose language and customs we have adopted – that is the Arab nationality (*jinsiyya*) to which originally many of us belonged."[85]

Bustani defined a nation (*'umma*) as a people united together in one nationality (*jinsiyya*) like the French or the German who, according to him, had fulfilled the conditions of being a nation, that is, "to live in one country and to speak

one language.''[86] Following this definition, he regarded the Syrians as a nation on their own. They speak the same language and inhabit the same country. Bustani had no doubt, too, that they were Arabs. The Arab nation (*'umma*), he assured his readers, had not vanished. It had only lost its vigor, but it could be restored ''in union, by means of national solidarity that corresponds to patriotic solidarity.''[87]

To abandon religious solidarity and establish Syrian society on a new basis of national and patriotic solidarity was Bustani's message for the Syrians. It was in his view the best guarantee for progress and for the future of Syria. But would the ruling (the Ottoman) State agree to that?

Bustani was moderately optimistic. He was aware that the aim of the Tanzimat statesmen was to create an Ottoman nationality. Thus he had reason to believe that the sovereign state would not dispute what he was calling for, because it had foreseen that ''this [course] is inevitable, and history leads it to this recognition, so it will join us and will associate us with itself in one solidarity, like the association of the various European nations when settled in America.''[88] Certainly it was inevitable, and the Turks themselves, at the time he was writing, were becoming more conscious of their past history and culture,[89] just as were the Syrians. This Bustani thought, would not contradict the ideal of Ottomanism which the Porte was trying to implement, hence his illustration using the following American example.

The Americans were a nation (*'umma*). The fact that they shared common interests and one country led them to accept ''by their free will'' one nationality (*jinsiyya*) irrespective of their previous nationalities.[90] The American nation was progressing well because America was ''one fatherland (*watan*) composed of many fatherlands.''[91] All the states (*wilāya*) together formed one common fatherland for the whole people of the republic. But each state had its own laws because the interests of each differed from the other. These were private laws; there were, however, general laws that defined the relations between those states, and there was a central government that looked after the interest of the common fatherland.[92]

Obviously, the example of the United States did not correspond exactly to the state or the structure of the Ottoman Empire, but it was close. This idea casts a light on Bustani's thinking and leads us to believe that at that stage he might have had in mind a federal system for the Empire based on union among autonomous units. This opinion and his attack on religious solidarity probably explains why Mahmud Nedim Pasha frowned at *al-Jinān* when he rose to the Grand Vezirate a year later. Bustani, however, was not alone in his notions of a federal system, and two years later we find Halil Şerif, at times ambassador to Vienna and a foreign minister, of a similar opinion.[93] Midhat Pasha, too, might have had a similar idea in the early eighteen-seventies.[94]

The Ottomanism of Bustani

After the removal of Rāshid Pasha, Bustani did not return to the subject of autonomy, but he nevertheless never failed to advocate allegiance to the state,

which, as we shall see, showed political prudence and foresight on his part, and a degree of understanding of international politics. He believed that the interests of the Ottoman peoples and the interests of the state were identical on the question of preserving the unity of the Empire. The politics of the Ottomans should be based on "power through union." All that might weaken this union would undermine the power of the state.[95]

He said that the people of the east belonged to many racial groups (*ajnās*), but that each one of them was small in number, and therefore "they should be united in one policy"[96] in order to occupy a respected position in the family of mankind. "If the Armenians, the Greeks, the Syriacs, etc., were to become separated from the Ottoman Empire, they would be states without a center [of established rights] and they would be unable to achieve any political gain or to stand firm in the face of danger."[97] Recently, Bustani added, an event had occurred which proved that. A difficulty had arisen between Tunis and a certain foreign state. Tunis prudently leaned upon the Porte and was thus protected from the intentions of that state. Istanbul, as a center of a big country of acknowledged and respected rights, was much less vulnerable than a small state. Bustani asserted that this was sufficient proof for the Ottomans of the advantage of union with Istanbul in political matters, irrespective of their nationalities (*jinsiyyāt*).[98] "The present situation" he assured his readers, "is the most suitable for the people of the east. It has strong guarantees and a proper centre."[99] He solemnly concluded: "Therefore, it is the duty of each easterner to say that I like to preserve the present [political] situation and avoid all causes of split (*inshiqāq*) in order to remain [a member] of a great nation called the Ottoman nation ('*umma*), which even though composed of many racial groups (*ajnās*) is one in [common] interests."[100]

Still, Bustani was aware that the oppression of the ruler or his functionaries might undermine the union of the Ottoman peoples. But he believed that it was better to suffer oppression and remain in union within the framework of the Empire than otherwise. "We do not hear," he added, "that wise men who know the real state of affairs, prefer another state to their Ottoman state even though they suffer injustice at the hands of a governor or a [local] council."[101]

Bustani did not lose hope for better things to come, and he tried to calm his readers, many of whom had by the time of his writing (1874) become largely disenchanted with Ottoman rule and had lost hope in the reforms. He told them that he was quite content with gradual improvement and he would never lose patience in waiting for necessary reform because "the reform of nations could not be achieved in one stroke."[102]

He referred to the subject again a year later, conducting, it seems, an argument with some people. "Power is in union," he retorted. "In split and separation, nations are trampled by the greedy, their rights are lost by the aggression of the powerful, and their people are humiliated by the behavior of the foreigners."[103] He raised the same issue again at the height of the events in Istanbul surrounding the deposition of Sultan Abdulaziz and the rise of Abdulhamid. The European powers, he wrote, having a passion for expansion and greed for wealth, would not spare any country divided upon itself from occupation and humiliation and economic exploitation.[104]

The Ruler and the Ruled

Even though Bustani strongly supported Ottoman legitimacy as the least evil for the people of the east, he repeatedly demanded reform and just and better-qualified state functionaries. Under the title of *al-Ḥuqūq* (The Rights), he wrote that "nowadays each individual has rights" and the duty of the state was to protect those rights and should never try to deprive the nation ('*umma*) of them, because people had now awakened and were conscious of their rights. He warned the government that what had moved the French people to revolt was their belief that their rights had been violated. "This revolution," Bustani concluded, "was the beginning of the age of rights." It aroused the nations of Europe to demand their rights and protect them. "This spirit has penetrated the east and we have felt it."[105]

The people, he used to say at times, would not allow despotic and arbitrary rule. "Who is afraid now to challenge the highest functionary and tell him that he had no right to oppress him? Many people prefer to talk . . . in defense of their rights, even if they were put in prison, than accept oppression silently."[106] For some reason, he changed this attitude completely a year later, and advocated quietism and silent forbearance of injustice in the hope of better times.[107]

Basically, however, Bustani was against despotism. "Despotic government which cares first of all to consolidate its rule irrespective of the interest of the nation ('*umma*) leads the people (*sha'b*) to weakness and failure."[108] It was the nation which established the state (*dawla*) in order to have its interests well served. Thus proper politics (*siyāsa saḥīḥa*) were those that combined the interests of the nation with those of the state.[109]

Sovereignty lies in the people: "It is the nation that defines the prerogatives of the state."[110] But in spite of that, it should not be understood that Bustani was in favor at that stage of a democratic regime or a constitutional government. Rather, more in the tradition of the east, he wanted a government *for* the people but not of the people. He did not think that in his time the Ottomans were adequately prepared for such a system. "We aspire that we shall have the qualification to exercise constitutional government (*ḥukūma muqayyada*)," but, he added, the Ottomans were still not sufficiently united or sufficiently enlightened for such a task.[111] He remained with this conviction until the end, more so under Sultan Abdulhamid who put forward a similar argument against the constitutionalists. True to his conviction, Bustani was noncommittal toward the constitution and the parliament of 1876–1878.[112] Again, in 1881, when 'Urabi and his associates in Egypt demanded that the Khedive should establish a parliament, Bustani wrote that "the country should first be prepared for that. . . . It was preferable to enact laws for the spread of education and the reform of the judicial system than to establish a council of representatives."[113] Only when the people (*ahāli*) have reached an adequate degree of knowledge, he wrote just weeks before his death, would they be able to participate in running their affairs by the medium of an elected chamber. "If they were not prepared for that, the harm is greater than the benefit."[114]

For the time being, however, a way should be found to prevent the violation of the rights of the people ('*ibād*),[115] and this could best be achieved through a

just and fair administration, and by appointing to government posts educated and qualified people of good reputation and not people of powerful families – only because they were so.[116] In addition, he consistently attacked corruption and corrupt officials.[117]

In any case, Bustani believed that a constitutional regime was inevitable and should be the aim of the Ottomans, because man's actions and the politics of his society would inevitably conform to the spirit of the age.[118] In the West, republicanism and constitutional monarchy were the prevailing systems. Both forms of government conformed to the spirit of the century. Bustani may have been in favor of constitutional monarchy, if instituted gradually.[119] Indeed, it would depend on the growth and spread of knowledge among the people, the more they achieved that, the more they would be liable to it.

CONCLUSION

What motivated Bustani in the last quarter century of his life was the destiny of his country. He was afraid that the challenges facing Syria would perpetuate or even increase its internal division and backwardness. With an insight that few possibly have equaled, he saw the advantages of the reform edict of 1856 in opening the way for social integration and the rise of patriotic feeling in Syria, and he devoted his time and energy largely to that cause. His life desire was to see Syria strengthened and internally united into a coherent society that could resist the dangers, as he saw them, of religious fanaticism and of European expansion. The granting of civil and political rights to the non-Muslims convinced Bustani, moreover, of the sincerity of the Ottoman reformers, and he did not fail to see where the interests of Syria lay.

Bustani called for Arab cultural revival as a means to face the cultural expansion of the West and to introduce cultural homogeneity in Syria. Accordingly, this revival should be understood (in part at least) as a reaction to the expansion of European influence. It was not, as is sometimes maintained,[120] introduced directly by it. It was enhanced, however, by the help of certain techniques borrowed from Europe such as printing, journalism, and other media of communication. These techniques which were part of the modernization process were employed to mobilize society to face its new challenges.

The attempt of Bustani to think out the future of Syria as a fatherland inhabited by one Arab nation was new and in a sense revolutionary. In the last analysis, however, he was concerned about the Christian communities and their destiny within the context of Syrian society and nation. In short, in the second half of the nineteenth century in Syria, Bustani led the way culturally to Arabism, politically to Ottomanism, and inevitably to Syrian nationalism. When he died (May 1, 1883), he was regarded ''the most learned . . . as well as the most influential man of modern Syria.''[121] There is no doubt much truth in this statement.

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NOTES

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article was originally part of a D. phil. dissertation written under the supervision of Professor Albert H. Hourani of St. Antony's College, Oxford, to whom my thanks are due.

[1] English translation in J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East* (Princeton, 1956), I, 149–153.

[2] The non-Muslims were mainly Greek, Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Maronites, and Jews, and a number of other smaller communities. The non-Sunnis were Alawis, Ismailis, Druses, and Matawilah.

[3] See for instance *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār*, June 5, 1858; Aug.7, 1858; Jan. 1, 1859; Oct. 2, 1859; Nov. 17, 1859; Dec. 29, 1859.

[4] On Butrus al-Bustani see: Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1789–1939* (London, 1962), pp. 99–102, 276 f.; A. L. Tibawi, "The American Missionaries in Beirut and Butrus al-Bustani," *St. Antony's Papers No. 16,* ed. Albert Hourani (London, 1963); Butrus al-Bustani, ed. *Dairāt al-Ma'ārif,* Vol. VII, ed. by his son Salim (Beirut, 1883), pp. 589–593, 599–608; *al-Muqṭaṭaf* (Beirut) VIII (1884), 1–7; Jurji Zaidan, *Mashāhir al-Sharq* II (Cairo, 1911), 25–33, where the author drew heavily on the article of *al-Muqṭaṭaf;* Mikhha'il Ṣawāyā, *al-Mu'allim Butrus al-Bustani* (Beirut, 1963); Kamal S. Ṣalibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (London, 1965), pp. 144 f; George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (London, 1938), pp. 47–51. For additional references see Khayr al-Din Zirikli, *A'lām,* (Cairo, 1959), I, 31.

[5] Butrus al-Bustani, *Khutba fī Ādāb al-'Arab* (Beirut, 1859), p. 37.

[6] On 'Ayn Waraqa see Iliya Harik, *Politics and Change in a Traditional Society: Lebanon, 1711–1845* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 162 ff.; Yusuf al-Dibs, *al-Jami' al-Mufassal fi Tārīkh al-Mawarinah al-Mu'assal* (Beirut, 1905), pp. 516 f., 572 f.

[7] Bustani, *Khutba fī Ādāb al-'Arab,* p. 37.

[8] On Bustani and the mission see Tibawi, "The American Missionaries in Beirut."

[9] Ibid., p. 166.

[10] Ibid., pp. 167–168.

[11] *al-Jinān,* 7 (1876), 594.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 638.

[14] Ibid. Presumably because of his relations with some missionaries he could not voice those views soon after he left the mission, and allowed some time to pass before doing so.

[15] Bustani, *Khutba fī Ādāb al-'Arab,* p. 40.

[16] *al-Jinān,* 1 (1870), 386; see also 645, 706.

[17] J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East,* I, 149.

[18] Bustani, *Khutba fī Ādāb al-'Arab.*

[19] Ibid., p. 19; see also Nasif al-Yaziji, *Majma' al-Baḥrain* (Beirut, 1856), pp. 311–314, where he complains of the negligence of Arabic by the Arabs.

[20] Bustani, *Khutba fī Ādāb al-'Arab,* pp. 20 f.

[21] Ibid., pp. 22 f.

[22] Ibid., pp. 24.

[23] *Nafīr Sūriyya,* Feb. 22, 1861.

[24] (Beirut, 1867–1870), 2 vols.

[25] (Beirut, 1867–1869), 2 vols.

[26] Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age,* p. 100; see also Bustani, *Khutba fī Ādāb al-'Arab,* p. 23.

[27] Tibawi, "The American Missionaries in Beirut," p. 179.

[28] In an address to the public signed by Bustani, published in *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār,* Dec. 22, 1862. The emphasis is mine.

[29] In the Foreword for *Quṭr al-Muḥīt* he added, "to render its learning easier is the desire of those who are distinguished by patriotic enthusiasm and Arabic zeal."

[30] *Nafīr Sūriyya,* Feb. 22, 1861.

[31] Cf. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age,* p. 100.

[32] Bustani, *Khutba fī Ādāb al-'Arab*, p. 17.

[33] Ibid., pp. 31 f.

[34] Ibid., pp. 34 ff.

[35] See below, p. 294.

[36] Ibid.

[37] *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār*, Feb. 23, 1860.

[38] Ibid.; see also Tibawi, "The American Missionaries in Beirut," p. 168.

[39] Printed "at the expense of the '*Umda*". This edition saw four impressions in Beirut between 1860 and 1887. See Yusuf Sarkis, *Mu'jam al-Matbuāt* (Cairo, 1928), p. 1616.

[40] Nasif Yaziji was the most famous. Among others of less fame, for instance, were Yuhanna Abkarius who published in the 1850s two books on Arabic literature: *Nihayat al-'Arab fī Akhbār al-'Arab* (Marseilles, 1852), and *Rawdāt al-'Adab fī Ṭabaqāt Shu'arā' al-'Arab* (Beirut, 1858).

[41] The names of the members in *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār*, Feb. 23, 1860. Of these, Khalil Khuri was in his middle twenties, Husain Baihum in his late twenties, Ibrahim al-Ahdab and Niqola Naqqash in their mid-thirties, and Michael Mudawwar in his late thirties.

[42] *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār*, Jan. 7 and Jan. 28, 1868.

[43] The names of the founders in *al-Jawāib*, Feb. 11, 1868.

[44] Phillippe de Tarazi, *Tārīkh al-Ṣaḥāfa al-'Arabiyya* (Beirut, 1913–1929), I, 75–77. See also Tibawi, *A Modern History of Syria* (London, 1969) p. 160.

[45] It may not be irrelevant to add that Cairo under Ismail started to develop from the end of the 1860s to become as well a major center of Arabic "secular" culture. Many Syrians, the disciples of Bustani and others, contributed considerably to the movement there. See Abu al-Futouh Radwan, *Tārīkh Matba'at Bulāq* (Cairo, 1953), pp. 194 and 204; also *al-Jawāib*, Mar. 22, 1870.

[46] *al-Jinān*, 1 (1870), 674.

[47] According to Tarazi, *Tārīkh al-Ṣaḥāfa*, I, 94, thirteen issues were published, but only the first eleven are available (appeared between Sept. 1860 and April 1861).

[48] Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 101.

[49] *Nafīr Suriyya*, Sept. 29, 1860.

[50] Ibid., Oct. 25, 1860.

[51] Ibid., Jan. 14, 1861.

[52] Ibid., Oct. 25, 1860.

[53] Ibid., Nov. 10, 1860; Feb. 22, 1861.

[54] *al-Muqtaṭaf*, VIII, 6.

[55] On it see *al-Jinān*, 4 (1873), 626–629; al-Dibs, *Tārīkh Suriyya* (Beirut, 1893–1905), VIII, 779; and Shakir al-Khuri, *Majma' al-Masarrāt* (Beirut, 1908), pp. 114 f.

[56] *al-Jinān*, 7 (1876), 595.

[57] Ibid., 4 (1873), 627; see also 1 (1870), 70.

[58] Ibid., 4 (1873), 627; *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār*, June 16, 1864.

[59] *al-Muqtataf*, VIII, 3; Zaidan, *Mashāhīr al-Sharq*, II, 27.

[60] *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār*, June 16, 1864; see also Tibawi, "The American Missionaries in Beirut," p. 171.

[61] Zaidan, *Mashāhīr al-Sharq*, II, 27.

[62] *al-Muqtataf*, VIII, 3.

[63] See, for instance, the comment by Tibawi on the Foreword to Bustani's *Miftāḥ al-Miṣbāh* (Beirut, 1862) in Tibawi, "The American Missionaries in Beirut," p. 170. Bustani also dedicated *Muḥīt al-Muḥīt* to Sultan Abdulaziz.

[64] *Al-Jinān*, 1 (1870), 335; Zaidan, *Mashāhīr al-Sharq*, II, 27.

[65] Tarazi, *Tārīkh al-Ṣaḥāfa*, II, 10.

[66] See *al-Jinān*, 4 (1873), 363: "His beneficial hand leveled the way for 'al-Jinan' . . . and it was he who planted the trees of 'al-Jannah'; cf. also 1 (1870), 1.

[67] Rāshid Pasha was foreign minister in the government that deposed Sultan Abdulaziz in 1876. Two weeks after the coup he was killed along with Hüseyn Avni Pasha by Hasan the Circassian. On Rāshid's life see *al-Jinān*, 7 (1876), 473–475; *al-Jawāib*, Sept. 6, 1876; *Sicill-i Osmani*, II, 356–357.

[68] On *al-Jinān*, see also Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, pp. 263 and 274.

[69] *al-Jinān,* 1 (1870), 515–516.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 3 (1872), 433; 4 (1873), 363.

[72] *al-Jawāib,* Oct. 11 and Dec. 12, 1871.

[73] *al-Jinān,* 7 (1876), 474; *al-Jawāib,* Sept. 6, 1876.

[74] *al-Jinān,* 3 (1872), 541–542.

[75] Ibid., p. 579.

[76] *al-Jawāib,* Oct. 29, 1873.

[77] Ibid., July 2, 1873.

[78] *al-Jinān,* 1 (1870), 385–387.

[79] Ibid., p. 386.

[80] See, for instance, the article by Sheikh Tahir al-Jazairi of Damascus which attacks Bustani on this question, in *al-Jawāib,* Sept. 17, 1872.

[81] *al-Jinān,* 1 (1870), 641.

[82] Ibid., pp. 645, 706.

[83] Ibid., p. 643.

[84] Ibid., pp. 674, 675.

[85] Ibid., p. 673.

[86] Ibid., p. 642; see also Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age,* p. 99.

[87] *al-Jinān,* 1 (1870), 675.

[88] Ibid.

[89] See E. Kuran, "Ottoman Historiography in the Tanzimat Period," in Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, eds., *Historians of the Middle East* (London, 1962), pp. 427–428; see also Roderic Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton, 1963), pp. 177 f.

[90] *al-Jinān,* 1 (1870), 646.

[91] Ibid., p. 644.

[92] Ibid. In this view Bustani had perhaps been inspired or at least encouraged by Rāshid Pasha the Vali. We have no direct evidence for that, however, and the views of Rāshid Pasha on the subject are obscure. But the fact that those ideas were expressed in the time of Rāshid's governor-ship only, and that he assisted in the appearance of *al-Jinān,* moves us to imply his acquiescence to them.

[93] Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire,* pp. 290–291. See also Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought* (Princeton, 1962), p. 66.

[94] Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire,* pp. 290–291. See also Sir Henry Elliot, *Some Revolutions and Other Experiences* (London, 1922), p. 228, where he recorded that Midhat Pasha spoke of "decentralization."

[95] *al-Jinān,* 5 (1874), 110.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., p. 111.

[99] Ibid.; cf. 4 (1873), 794–795.

[100] Ibid., 5 (1874), 111.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 6 (1875), 577.

[104] Ibid., 7 (1876), 650.

[105] *al-Jinān,* 2 (1871), 573–574; cf. L. Zolondek, "Socio-Political Views of Salim al-Bustani (1848–1884)," *Middle Eastern Studies,* 2, 2 (Jan. 1966), 150.

[106] *al-Jinān,* 4 (1873), 362.

[107] Ibid., 5 (1874), 111.

[108] Ibid., 2 (1871), 141.

[109] Ibid., p. 789.

[110] Ibid., 3 (1882), 758; cf. Zolondek, "Socio-Political Views of Salim al-Bustani," p. 147.

[111] *al-Jinān,* 2 (1871), 142; 6 (1875), 195.

[112] Ibid., 7 (1876), 434.

[113] Ibid., 12 (1881), 578.

[114] Ibid., 14 (1883), 130–131, 193–194.

[115] Ibid., 2 (1871), 574.

[116] Ibid., 1 (1870), 614.

[117] Ibid., 2 (1871), 180; 5 (1874), 35.

[118] Ibid., 1 (1870), 388; cf. Zolondek, ``Socio-Political Views of Salim al-Bustani,`` p. 149.

[119] *al-Jinān,* 11 (1880), 321; 14 (1883), 130–131; see also Zolondek, ``Socio-Political Views of Salim al-Bustani,`` p. 150.

[120] See for instance Antonius, *The Arab Awakening,* pp. 41 ff.

[121] Henry H. Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria* (New York, 1910), II, 483; cf. Asad Rustum, *Lubnān fi `Ahd al-Mutaṣarrifiyya* (Beirut, 1973) p. 273.