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Medici Ambitions and Fascist Policies. (Re)reading the Relations between Italy and the Levant in the 1930s through the Historiography on Fakhr al-Dīn II

Davide Trentacoste

Abstract: On 13 April 1635, Druze emir Fakhr al-Dīn Ma'n was executed in Constantinople, after years of ambiguous relations with the Ottoman sultan. Exactly three centuries later, a biography of the emir was published in Rome, edited by Maronite father Paolo Carali and financed by the Fascist government. The reason why Fascism was interested in his figure can be traced back to the policy implemented by Italy in the 1930s, which sought to penetrate the territories of Lebanon and Syria. However, these were regions in which Fascist Italy had no real interest or claim, and so it aimed to build a tie between the Levant and Italy by rereading the historiography of the relationship between "Faccardino" and Medici Tuscany at the beginning of the seventeenth century. By comparing the policies of the Medici and Fascism, it will be possible to highlight how, through Carali's work, the latter sought to construct a history that would support its ambitions towards the eastern Mediterranean.

Keywords: Fakhr al-Dīn Ma'n, Lebanon, Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Fascism, Italian-Levantine relations

1. Introduction

There is a rather curious parallelism between the attempts at expansion in the "eastern" ambitions of the grand dukes of Tuscany, Ferdinand I (r. 1587–1609), Cosimo II (r. 1609–1621) and Ferdinand II (r. 1621–1670), and Fascist Italy's policy towards the Levant in the 1930s. This parallelism emerges clearly from the study of the story of a key figure in the history of relations between Italy and the Levant and, more specifically, from analysis of the historiography concerning him: Druze Emir Fakhr al-Dīn Ma'n (c. 1572–1635), known in Italy as "Faccardino".¹ He ruled a broad territory including much of present-day Lebanon

¹ The figure of Fakhr al-Dīn is of primary importance in Lebanese history. He has long been regarded as the founder of modern Lebanon, although this image has been reconsidered in recent years and his role in this respect downgraded. Fakhr al-Dīn is periodically the subject of scholarly analysis and there are many studies on him, so I will only mention the most significant biographies and studies here: Mariti (1787); Carali (1936a, 1938); Chebli (1984); Olsaretti (2005); Olsaretti (2008); El Bibas (2010) and Gorton (2014).

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and the north of today's State of Israel almost as an absolute ruler, while nevertheless under Ottoman authority, which extended throughout the Middle East. However, Fakhr al-Dīn resented the Ottoman yoke and during the first decade of the seventeenth century took the opportunity to rebel together with other local lords, the most important of whom was certainly the pasha of Aleppo, 'Alī Jānbulād (?–1610). The rebellion was quickly crushed by the Ottoman government and despite his involvement, Fakhr al-Dīn was able to obtain a pardon from the sultan thanks to the good relations he had established with the governor of Aleppo, Murad Pasha (1535–1611), who had defeated the rebels. Nevertheless, the Porte did not forget the emir's betrayal. In 1613 the sultan, also prompted by the emir's enemies and the death of Murad Pasha, decided that the time had come to punish his vassal and so he sent a large army to Lebanon, forcing him to flee. The decision as to where to take refuge fell on the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the European state that had helped the pasha of Aleppo at the time of his revolt and had also come into contact with Fakhr al-Dīn at that time. The emir was hosted at the Medici court for about two years, between 1613 and 1615. From there he then travelled to the Italian dominions of the Spanish crown and Malta before returning to Lebanon in 1618 where, having obtained the sultan's pardon, he resumed his position in the government of the province. Once he regained power, he did much to strengthen Lebanon, which, according to many historians, reached the height of its splendour and wealth during his rule. The emir maintained good relations with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, so much so that when Tuscany was struck with famine in the 1630s, he sent ships loaded with wheat from Lebanon. His reign was abruptly interrupted when it was decided in Constantinople that the emir had enjoyed far too much good fortune considering his past treachery, his continuing dealings with Christians and the ambiguous behaviour he had continued to maintain even after his comeback in 1618. Thus, in 1633 his lands were attacked by the Ottomans from both land and sea and after strenuous resistance, he was captured and taken to Constantinople, where he was executed on 13 April 1635.

Leaping forward exactly three centuries, we find ourselves in the midst of the Fascist era, when on 13 April 1935, Maronite father Paolo Carali (Bulus Qar'ali) wrote the introduction to his biography of Fakhr al-Dīn, which was to be published with the financial support of the Reale Accademia d'Italia (Royal Academy of Italy) the following year. The peculiarity of this work, however, lies not so much in the fact that it was completed in 1935, that is, exactly three centuries after Fakhr al-Dīn's death, nor in the fact that it was published under the patronage of the Reale Accademia d'Italia, but rather in its being dedicated to Benito Mussolini (Carali 1936a).

This suggests that for some reason the Fascist government was very interested in the issue of this text, despite its concern with a distant era and geographical area, outside the sphere of influence and the (at least direct) interests of Italy, and a figure, an eastern emir, who had had ties with Italy but not with the Italian state (which came into being much later). It therefore seems clear that if the historical parallels between the Fascist foreign policy and the Medici's policy

towards the Levant three centuries before were probably the result of chance, the Fascist government's direct interest in the story of this emir and the studies concerning him was not accidental. The explanation for this is probably to be found in the contemporary processes of reinterpretation of past historical events linked to what was to be conceived as the same national community/nation, so as to reconstruct or, better, construct a history able to justify national interests and ambitions that would otherwise find no plausible motivation. The "rediscovery" and consequent rereading of the story of Fakhr al-Dīn and his relations with Italy, in particular because of his journey first from the East to the West and then back to the East, served perhaps to link the Levantine region, and especially Lebanon, at least from a historical point of view, to Italy and the latter's alleged beneficial influence on the former. Thus Faccardino, an oriental emir and a traveller in spite of himself, could become an element of fundamental importance in both the Italian nation-building process and the reconstruction of an eastern Mediterranean historically and indissolubly linked to Italy.

By making a brief, step-by-step analysis of the history of Fakhr al-Dīn, the Medici and Fascist policies in the Levant, and the work of Paolo Carali, it will finally be possible to reconstruct the Fascist rereading of Faccardino's story and his links with Fascist interests in the Middle East. All of this will be done while bearing in mind that, by comparing the Medici and Fascist policy, I am myself making a rereading of the latter.

2. Fakhr al-Dīn Ma'n

Before analysing the parallelism between Fascist Italy and Medici Tuscany and Fascist era historiography concerning Fakhr al-Dīn, it is essential to first say a few words about him.

A very approximate summary of his history has been given in the introductory part of this text, while I will return to his links with Tuscany in more detail later. Here, however, I think it is important to talk, albeit briefly, about his ethnic and religious affiliation and his relations with the eastern Christians and in particular the Maronites, the largest Lebanese Christian community, to which his biographer Paolo Carali also belonged, as well as the origin of his relations with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

Fakhr al-Dīn's family, the Ma'n clan, settled in northern Syria from the Upper Euphrates region at the time of the Crusades as can be seen from chronicles recording the death of a Ma'n emir in 1147. After defeating the Mamluks of Egypt and finally occupying the Syro-Lebanese region (1516), the sultan recognized the existing power of the Ma'n family and confirmed its rule over the Shūf region (now part of the governorate of Mount Lebanon), to which he also granted a certain autonomy (Abu-Izzeddin 1984, 179).

The recognition by the Ottoman government was not only an acknowledgment of the importance of the Ma'n family and its centuries-old roots in the area, but also an implicit recognition of the Druze community to which the family belonged. The Druzes were, and still are, an ethnic-religious community settled

mainly between Syria and Lebanon, whose origin was for a long time so unclear that some believed them to be the last remnants descendants of ancient Persian rule, Egyptian refugees or even remnants of the Christian presence that survived the Muslim conquest of Acre in 1291 (El Bibas 2010, 60). Relatively more recent studies, however, have pointed out that ethnically the Druzes are a mix of various populations of which the Arab component is definitely the largest part (Firro 1992, 17–20). However, the essential component of the Druze community is not ethnic but religious. The origin of the Druze religion dates back to the beginning of the eleventh century, when there was a small schism from Fatimid Ismailism.² Due to the persecution to which they were subjected, the Druzes fled to Syria, where they laid the foundations of the future Druze community of Syria and Lebanon (El Bibas 2010, 61). Since the Druze religion originated from a schism within Ismailism, it developed independently from Islam. The doctrine is based on the writings that were made public around 1017 by the religion's founder, Ḥamza ibn 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Zūzani, and was handed down by its custodians, the "wise" (*uqqāl*), while the vast majority of the community, the "ignorant" (*juhḥāl*), were not allowed access to most of the rituals and secrets of the religion (El Bibas 2010, 62, in particular note 10). This closure, both towards the outside and to a large extent within the community itself, preserved the "purity" of the religion to a certain extent, but at the same time prevented it from being known externally, creating an aura of mystery about the community which also gave rise to the various legends mentioned above.³ In addition to the esoteric nature of their beliefs, the Druzes were able to survive in the midst of the Sunni majority by means of dissimulation, or *taqiyya* (Firro 1992, 20–3). As the Druzes had strayed far from traditional Islam,⁴ they were at risk of persecution and so they continued to profess the Sunni faith in public, while practising their true faith at home in private. Being considered an integral part of the community of the faithful meant that the Druzes were never subjected to restrictive legislation, as was the case for other religious minorities within the Ottoman Empire, and they always enjoyed extensive privileges and self-government. These characteristics of their religion mean that the Druzes were very tolerant with the ethnic and religious minorities inside their territories and also explain, at least in part, the openness of the Europeans towards Fakhr al-Dīn and vice versa (El Bibas 2010, 62–3).

The fact that Fakhr al-Dīn belonged to a community that stood apart from Islam but at the same time was tolerant of other religions in its territories made

² For an overview on Ismailism, see Daftary (1998).

³ The Druze community was so closed to the outside world that still in the eighteenth-century Tuscan traveller Giovanni Mariti (1736–1806), who journeyed extensively in the Levant and published a biography of Fakhr al-Dīn in 1787, wrote that the religion of the Druzes was a mystery, and all that was said about it was nothing more than fantasy. See Mariti (1787, 15).

⁴ For instance, the so-called five pillars of Islam, namely the testimony of faith (*shahādah*), prayer (*ṣalāt*), legal almsgiving (*zakāt*), fasting (*ṣawm* or *ṣiyam*) in the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) to Mecca, are completely absent in the Druze religion.

him a credible interlocutor in the eyes of European Christianity. Indeed, it seems that, well aware of how little Europeans knew about the Druzes and of the legends about their descent from Christian crusaders, Fakhr al-Dīn himself fed the rumour that he was somehow a descendant of Godfrey of Bouillon (El Bibas 2010, 60). Moreover, according to some biographies written decades later but certainly based on rumours already circulating at the time, Fakhr al-Dīn was raised by an uncle who belonged to the Christian Maronite community and it was he who taught the future emir respect and tolerance towards Christians.⁵

Fakhr al-Dīn was born around 1572, the son of ƘorƘmaz, ruler of the Shūf region. His rule was ended however in 1585, when a caravan carrying tributes from the province of Egypt to Constantinople was raided in a port under his control. Some local rival lords accused ƘorƘmaz of the attack before the sultan, who believed their claims and sent an army to occupy his lands. ƘorƘmaz was killed in 1586 after putting up strenuous resistance. His children were then cared for, and probably hidden, by their maternal uncle who was also able to obtain a pardon from the sultan for his people and regain the territories previously under his family's rule (El Bibas 2010, 65–6).

In 1590, Fakhr al-Dīn came of age and took over as governor, his power being recognized by the same government in Constantinople which had ordered his father's execution a few years earlier. It should be noted that the young emir's seizure of power coincided with the peace between the Ottomans and Persians (Treaty of Constantinople) following the Ottoman victory after decades of harsh battle with Safavid Persia.⁶ The peace probably also allowed the Ottomans to reaffirm their presence in Syria and Lebanon where, thanks to the help of Fakhr al-Dīn, the sultan was able to put an end to rebellions by the Shiite populations who, professing the same faith as the Safavid Persians, tried to undermine Ottoman rule in the region in the hope that the Persians would come to their aid. The repression of the Shiite revolts and his friendship with the powerful Ottoman governor of Aleppo, Murad Pasha, helped Fakhr al-Dīn to confirm his power over the region and in 1598 he became governor of the sanjak of Sidon (Kalibi 1988, 126).

A few years later, following the resumption of the war between the Ottomans and Persians, Fakhr al-Dīn allied himself with the pasha of Aleppo, 'Alī Jānbulād, who rebelled against the Ottoman government and sought to establish an independent Syrian state. The pasha also sought allies in the West and in early October 1607 concluded a treaty of alliance with the grand duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand I.⁷ At the same time, the grand duke also came into contact with Fakhr al-Dīn, establishing relations between Lebanon and Tuscany that last-

⁵ In this case, it is interesting to note that this reconstruction was basically taken for granted by Christian scholars Giovanni Mariti and Paolo Carali, while Nejla M. Abu-Izzeddin, author of an important study on the Druzes, and a Druze herself, claims that this story is just a legend. See Abu-Izzeddin (1984, 180).

⁶ On the Ottoman-Safavid war between 1578 and 1590, see Matthee (2014).

⁷ On 'Alī Jānbulād's rebellion, see Griswold (1983), Brege (2020) and Brege (2021, 229–80).

ed until the emir's death in 1635. Some twenty days after the treaty was signed with Tuscany, 'Ali Jānbulād's revolt was crushed by Murad Pasha's troops and the pasha of Aleppo had to flee. On the other hand, Fakhr al-Dīn was able to obtain a pardon for having joined the rebels (Olsaretti 2008, 729) thanks to his friendship with Murad Pasha (and thanks to a large gift of 300,000 piastres).

As already mentioned, Fakhr al-Dīn kept up his contacts with Tuscany, which the emir had identified as an ideal partner, so much so that he asked Grand Duke Ferdinand I for a grand ducal passport to travel to Europe if things became too complicated with the Ottoman court. This actually came to be on 16 September 1613 when, forced to flee Lebanon, Fakhr al-Dīn took his family to safety, leaving the government to his brother, and sailed to Tuscany on a Dutch ship (El Bibas 2010, 84–5).

3. Tuscan ambitions in the Levant and the relations with Fakhr al-Dīn

The Mediterranean policy of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries has aroused the interest of historians in recent years, particularly with regard to Tuscan ambitions in the Levant.⁸ The reason for this is that, with the exception of Venice (which, however, has its own peculiar history), Tuscany was the only pre-unitary Italian state to conduct an ambitious international policy and attempt to expand outside Italy and the Mediterranean (Marrucci 2014, 35). However, it is the Grand Duchy's oriental policy that has attracted the most scholarly attention as for a time Tuscan ambitions in the Levant seemed on the verge of being realized.

It all started at the end of the sixteenth century when grand dukes Francis I (r. 1574–1587) and Ferdinand I failed in their attempt to make peace with the Ottoman Empire and were thus cut off from direct trade with the eastern Mediterranean (Mercan 2020). As a result, Ferdinand I decided to change his strategy towards the Ottoman Empire and adopt a more aggressive stance. In 1599, for instance, his fleet attacked the island of Chios, not just looting it as was customary, but attempting to occupy the main city of the island (Trentacoste 2021b, 57). In 1601, having established stable relations with Shah 'Abbās I of Persia (r. 1587–1629), the Florentine court became more confident and together with the papacy began to plan military actions against Ottoman targets, in particular the occupation of coastal towns or islands in order to use them as bridgeheads and bases for further actions against the Ottomans.⁹ These plans culminated in the attack on the island of Cyprus on 24 June 1607, which failed for various reasons including Venetian counter-intelligence and the Tuscan incapacity to verify information and keep its operations secret (Trentacoste 2021a).

The purpose of this policy was not only to strike a blow against the Ottoman Empire but above all to carve out a position in the East, in (almost) direct com-

⁸ On the Medici's Mediterranean and eastern policy, see Tamborra (1961, 69–82), Brege (2019; 2020; 2021, 211–319) and Trentacoste (2021a, 61–3).

⁹ On Tuscan-Safavid relations, see Trentacoste (2021b).

petition with Venetian interests in the area. A few months after the defeat in Cyprus, Tuscan diplomats established the aforementioned treaty of alliance with the pasha of Aleppo and also started negotiations with Fakhr al-Din. In addition to the various points concerning exclusive access to certain ports and freedom of movement for the Tuscans, if the opportunity arose, it was also proposed to organize a great military enterprise in Palestine with the aim of liberating Jerusalem, which would have made the grand dukes the protectors—the liberators—of the Holy Places just as the glorious knights of the First Crusade had been.

The Grand Duchy of Tuscany sought to disguise its territorial and dynastic ambitions with idealistic and religious motives and tried to push the Catholic states to form a league to wage war against the Great Turk. A number of anti-Ottoman and pro-crusade propaganda booklets were published and a couple of pamphlets praising the crusade (Mossi 1603) and predicting the imminent collapse of Ottoman power in the region (Mossi 1604) were printed in Florence. It is clear that the grand ducal government had a certain interest in having these texts circulate among the various Catholic courts that might have joined its forces against the Ottomans.

Parallel to this anti-Ottoman propaganda, Grand Duke Ferdinand I had strengthened his relations with the Maronite community in Lebanon and these ties were also maintained by his successors Cosimo II and Ferdinand II: for example, in the 1620s, the Maronite bishop of Cyprus, Giorgio Maronio (in office 1614–1634), offered to keep two secretaries at his own expense who would constantly inform the Tuscan court of what was happening in the Levant (Trentacoste 2021b, 111). Moreover, since it was risky to intervene militarily without the support of others (as the expedition against Cyprus also demonstrated), the grand dukes tried to strengthen their presence and influence in the Levant by sending technicians (architects and engineers) and military advisers, while also trying to convince potential Muslim allies that they, and Christians in general, had no territorial ambitions in the Levant and would support their wars of independence from the Ottomans in exchange for mere commercial privileges.¹⁰

The defeat of ‘Ali Jānbulād in 1607 and the death of Ferdinand I in 1609 put a stop to the Grand Duchy’s ambitions in the Levant but did not make them disappear since Fakhr al-Din, as already mentioned, maintained relations with Tuscany and the new grand duke, Cosimo II.

¹⁰ In 1983 William Griswold (1983, 84–5) wrote that one of Ferdinand I’s objectives was probably the establishment of a puppet state between Syria and Lebanon. More recently, on the basis of documentation of the negotiations between Florence and Aleppo, Brian Brege (2021, 247–51) stated that the grand dukes’ objectives stopped at obtaining extensive trade privileges and the exclusive use of certain trading ports. Brege’s reasoning is likely to be more solid and credible than Griswold’s, since Tuscany alone would never have been able to maintain its control over Syria or Lebanon. However, it is also true that if ‘Ali Jānbulād and/or Fakhr al-Din had been successful in obtaining independence from the Ottoman Empire, they would have been dependent on western allies for trade and especially military supplies and this would have allowed the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, as their main ally, to exert a strong influence on the two Levantine princes.

During his stay at the court of Cosimo II between 1613 and 1615,¹¹ Fakhr al-Dīn came into contact with one of the most sophisticated courts of late Renaissance Italy, but above all with European techniques and technology. Indeed, there is much evidence of his numerous visits to Livorno, a rapidly expanding town whose fortifications were being built according to the most modern military standards. It seems that the emir was also very interested in the commercial traffic for which the port was a fundamental stopover, as well as the ships that visited it (El Bibas 2010, 104–6).

While he was in Tuscany, as well as taking part in great feasts and visiting Tuscan naval and military shipyards, along with Cosimo II, Fakhr al-Dīn continued to negotiate—and plan—possible military actions aimed at restoring his power in Lebanon and bringing the Tuscans directly into the region, although in the end nothing ever came of it. So, after about two years, the emir left Tuscany for Naples where he hoped to obtain the powerful help of the Spanish forces.

Cosimo II died in 1621 and was succeeded by his son, Ferdinand II (r. 1621–1670), still a child at the time. In his early years, the new grand duke was assisted in the government by a regency council that maintained good relations with Fakhr al-Dīn, who in the meantime had returned to Lebanon (1618) and regained power, taking Lebanon to what was for a long time considered its zenith.

The emir's departure from Tuscany in 1615 and his return to Lebanon in 1618 did not put an end to relations between Florence and Beirut. Although there is a gap between 1615 and 1629 in the relevant documentation, some relations continued all the same: there is at least one letter from Khasikiyya bint Zafir, the emir's wife, to the grand duchess of Tuscany, Maria Maddalena of Austria (Carali 1936a, 282–83), that bears witness to this continuity.

Between the end of the 1620s and the early 1630s, relations revived and Fakhr al-Dīn repeatedly requested that architects and engineers be sent from Tuscany to Lebanon—military for the restoration of fortresses and civil for the construction of palaces, bridges and irrigation works—as well as bakers, farmers and stockbreeders (El Bibas 2010, 156–61). In addition, as already mentioned, the emir supplied loads of wheat to Tuscany during the famine years. However, as said, all this came to an end with the sultan's decision to crush Fakhr al-Dīn's power and execute him in 1635.

4. Italian and Fascist interests in the Levant

About three centuries later, Fascist Italy pursued a policy towards the Levant, and in particular towards Syria and Lebanon, comparable to the one adopted by the Medici towards the pasha of Aleppo and Emir Fakhr al-Dīn. As we shall see, albeit in short, like Tuscany, Italy was aware that it could not obtain what it wanted with weapons alone, and was less motivated by immediate concrete interests than political and economic considerations in a long-term perspective.

¹¹ On Fakhr al-Dīn's stay in Tuscany, in addition to the works already mentioned in other footnotes, see Alberti (1997; 2016) and Cuffaro (2010).

In fact, it was the Balkan regions bordering the Adriatic and the regions bordering the Red Sea, in particular Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen, that played a major role in Fascist Italy's Mediterranean policy.¹² The Balkan coastline—a region over which Italy had historically exerted its dominance and cultural influence through Venice—was to be Italy's reward for participating in the First World War alongside the Allies, while hegemony over the Red Sea region and control of its southern access would effectively put Italy in a position to compete with Britain for control of the routes through the Suez Canal (Quartararo 1979). In this context, the Levant was a secondary sector, but the Fascist government was determined not to neglect any area of the Mediterranean region, especially by virtue of the idea that the Mediterranean should essentially be an Italian sea, as the *Mare Nostrum* had been for the Roman Empire.

Interest in the Levant was therefore already well established before the 1930s. In fact, it was precisely one of the regions in which Italy should have obtained territorial compensation for its participation in the First World War alongside the Allies: after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Italian government expected to obtain concessions in Anatolia, Syria and Lebanon.¹³ However, the advent of Kemalist Turkey prevented Italy from taking possession of the Antalya region, while the entrusting of Syria and Lebanon to the French in the form of a League of Nations mandate precluded Italian access to those regions as well. Consequently, first for liberal Italy and then Fascist Italy, abdicating its claims in the eastern Mediterranean region meant once and for all giving up what it considered to be its right.

However, as already stated, the military option was not viable since France, backed by the British, would never have allowed it. France had always been hostile to any attempt at Italian either eastward or westward expansion in the Mediterranean, while Great Britain was more in favour of a policy of balance between powers. The French-Italian rivalry had several causes, such as the proximity of Corsica (still considered part of Italian territory) or the fact that France had occupied regions that the Italians considered part of their sphere of influence, such as Tunisia.¹⁴

¹² The "natural" objectives of Fascist foreign policy were Africa and Asia, and to reach both without problems it was necessary to control the Mediterranean. On Fascist policy towards Asia and Africa, I refer to the classic De Felice (1988), and to the more recent Williams (2006) and Arielli (2010), which deal with the issues of Fascist propaganda in Africa and Asia.

¹³ In fact, according to the Pact of London (1915), Italy should have received various territorial compensations, especially in the Balkan area (articles 5–7), in Anatolia (articles 8–10, 12) and possibly also in the German colonies (article 13). However, the opposition of the United States, as well as France, which did not look favourably on Italy's international expansion, prevented the country from obtaining what had been promised. With the subsequent Treaty of Sèvres (1920), Italy was in fact forced to renounce all its claims in the Levant: the region of Antalya remained with Turkey and Syria and Lebanon came under French control.

¹⁴ Besides the fact that, being so close to Sicily, it was considered a natural part of the Italian sphere of influence, Tunisia had also been the protagonist of strong Italian immigration flows: indeed, there were about 100,000 Italians there. Other areas of conflict were the port of Tangier and Morocco, where some 100,000 Italians were also present and where France had also prevented Italy from strengthening its presence. See Williams (2010, 33–4).

Since at the time it was impossible to establish a position in the West, Italy turned more decisively towards the eastern Mediterranean, which was already part of the Fascist horizon. In this region, unlike in the West, the Italian government knew that it had no real interests on which to base its claims: the only two places were Egypt, where there was a large Italian community, and Palestine, where Italy was making specious claims linked to its alleged role as protector of the Holy Places (Carocci 1969, 204–10; Arielli 2010, 32–3). With regard to Syria and Lebanon, however, it had no basis upon which to lay a claim. Nevertheless, it was in these two places that Italy made considerable efforts to assert its presence. In fact, Egypt seemed too difficult an objective, while Palestine was a region with a complex situation, in addition to being the destination of sizeable Jewish immigration (Nava 1931, 146). Moreover, British control appeared to be fairly firm, in spite of the numerous rebellions that took place between the 1920s and 1930s. On the other hand, the situation in the regions under French control seemed precarious for the latter and, consequently, favourable to Italy.¹⁵

As already mentioned, the Italian strategy in Syria and Lebanon was a long-term one, aimed at preparing the Italian “entry” to the region once the time was ripe. The Italian entry to the Levant had to be prepared, but how? As early as 1928, the former undersecretary for the colonies, Roberto Cantalupo (1891–1975), wrote that it was necessary to strengthen ties between the Levant and Italy by increasing the volume of trade and above all by intervening on the Italian communities present in the *outremer*, encouraging immigration to those regions and implementing policies aimed at preserving their national identity, cohesion and, in essence, culture (Cantalupo 1928, 372–73, 389–90). Cantalupo was also convinced that trade and culture were the easiest way to enter the Muslim-inhabited lands, and thus the Levant (Cantalupo 1928, 393). This, in the East, seemed to be relatively easy: in fact, it was believed that, unlike the Italian emigrants in America, the Italian communities that settled in Egypt, Syria or Lebanon did not integrate with the local population by Arabizing their names (as they had been Anglicized in the USA), but tenaciously maintained their national and cultural identity, almost forcing those who came into contact with them to speak Italian in order to communicate (Nava 1931, 34). Given this attitude, in Italy it was believed that the Levant could be the ideal destination for the emigration of Italians, who were not only farmers and workers but also skilled technicians (Nava 1931, 35).

The project to increase the Italian demographic presence was, however, a long-term one, given that at the beginning of the 1930s the Italian presence in Syria and Lebanon was not particularly great, as it instead was in Egypt: for example, in Beirut there were about 1,000 Italians, while in Aleppo there were about 500 (Nava 1931, 180). In the immediate future, it was necessary to strengthen the Italian cultural presence and national prestige. On the one hand, therefore, the government tried to encourage the teaching of Italian and the establishment of

¹⁵ For a general history of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon, see Khoury (1987).

new Italian schools both in Syria and Lebanon (Parini 1934, 174; Dueck 2010, 123 ff.), while on the other hand, it financed anti-French newspapers, regardless of whether they were Muslim or Christian.

In this way, it was hoped at least to penetrate the Christian communities in the region, particularly the Maronite one. Indeed, historically, the old Italian states had enjoyed excellent relations with the Maronites, who, however, from the middle of the seventeenth century, became closely linked to France, which guaranteed security for them and the other Christian communities living in areas with a large Muslim majority, particularly in Lebanon. However, in Mussolini's view France was a power in decline, both economically and demographically, and this was evident in the difficulties it had in maintaining control over its Levant mandates. Thus, the Fascist government sought to expose French weakness and decline, as opposed to the rise of Italy which, by virtue of its exuberant growth, could present itself as a power capable of replacing France, both in governing the mandates and as protector of the Christians of the East. The link between France and the Levantine Christian communities dated back to the seventeenth century and the strong French presence linked to the issue of protecting eastern Christianity was also the basis of French claims on the Levant (Longrigg 1958, 41–2).¹⁶

Mussolini pursued a twofold policy in the Levant: an “Arab” policy, aimed at fostering the construction of a pan-Arab, anti-British and anti-French identity (throughout the Levant), and a “Christian” policy, presenting Italy as a Christian power capable of protecting Catholic, Orthodox and Maronite communities amidst the Muslim majority (Zamir 1985, 159).

Although the “Christian” policy was directed towards all communities, it was in the Maronite community that the Fascist regime found its main interlocutor. As already mentioned, the Italians financed various newspapers which, however, required a certain level of literacy to be read, something that differed greatly from community to community according to some estimates at the beginning of the 1930s. The rate was highest in the Maronite community (Vacca 1931, 94).

Italy granted large subsidies to the Maronite patriarch, who was in personal conflict with the French high commissioner in the Levant, in the hope of encouraging him to implement a more anti-French attitude and policy. However, the French managed to interfere in the Italian manoeuvres, succeeding in protecting their “special link” with the Maronites. Not only that, they also reasserted their power over Syria and Lebanon, showing themselves capable of dealing with all the various communities in the region by signing treaties with their representatives (Zamir 1997, 183–213).

However, this setback did not stop Italian attempts, particularly towards Lebanon and the Maronite community. And so, between 1935 and 1937, the Fascist government decided that, in addition to more or less direct actions in the field (es-

¹⁶ Although they were already present, it is interesting to note that the role of the French in Lebanon increased considerably after the death of Fakhr al-Dīn and the loss of Tuscan influence.

entially funding and subsidies to schools, newspapers and local community representatives), it was necessary to show the historical links between these territories and Italy and how much these places owed to the latter. At this juncture, the story of Maronite father Paolo Carali and his biography of Fakhr al-Dīn come into play.

5. Rereading the history of Faccardino

At the meeting of the Reale Accademia d'Italia Moral and Historical Sciences class on 12 May 1933, it was decided to publish the monograph “sull'emiro Fahr Eddin, che nel secolo XVII favorì alla sua corte artisti e commercianti toscani” in the academy's series of *Studi e documenti* (Reale Accademia d'Italia 1934, 318).¹⁷ The publication of Carali's book was recommended, among others, by prominent Arabist Carlo Alfonso Nallino, director of the Rome-based Istituto per l'Oriente. The quoted sentence is probably the reason why Carali's book was strongly encouraged, and financed, by the Italian government through the Reale Accademia d'Italia. In accordance with the tradition, adopted by the academy, Tuscany, that is, “Italy”, had had a great influence on the development of Lebanon and, according to the Fascist government, this fact needed to be highlighted. It is no coincidence that Carali's work bears this dedication: “Al fondatore dell'impero italiano Benito Mussolini con viva gratitudine e alta ammirazione dedico quest'opera sul fondatore dello stato libanese Fakhr ad-Din II” (Carali 1936a, I).¹⁸ It is clear that the juxtaposition of founders is not accidental and must be read in the light of the political events in the Levant in the 1930s, when Italy sought to foster the emergence of a Lebanese identity that would stand in opposition to the French mandate (Benigni 2014, 109–10). It was the same in a sense as what had happened at the time of Fakhr al-Dīn when his “Lebanon” sought to carve out independence from Ottoman rule with Tuscan help.

The whole story of the relationship between Fakhr al-Dīn and the Medici, his journey to Italy and his subsequent rule as a Renaissance prince in Lebanon, was reinterpreted by Paolo Carali through the prism of the political context of his time. The very structure of the work invites us to reflect on how important it was to link Lebanon and Tuscany. In the section on method, Carali explains that the work is divided into two volumes, the first of which contains the European documents and the Italian translation of the eastern documents, while the second includes the Arabic translation of the western documents (Carali 1936a, 17). This may not seem particularly noteworthy, but it means that the work was also intended to be read and circulated in Levantine cultural circles.

In this introduction, Carali repeatedly emphasizes the direct involvement of the Italian government, which strongly encouraged the drafting of the work

¹⁷ “on the emir, Fahr Eddin, who in the seventeenth century favoured Tuscan artists and merchants at his court”.

¹⁸ “To the founder of the Italian empire, Benito Mussolini, I dedicate this work on the founder of the Lebanese state, Fakhr ad-Din II, with great gratitude and admiration.”

and did its utmost to facilitate Carali's work by having the folders containing the most important documents brought to Rome, where he resided, from the Florence archives (Carali 1936a, 17–8).

The first chapter is devoted to providing a rich review of the most important aspects of Fakhr al-Din's rule, such as administration, finance, commerce, justice and the army. Although Carali makes a great effort to show how trade between Europe, Italy, Tuscany and Lebanon was mutually beneficial, a certain bias in favour of the former is evident, while the Druze emir's Lebanon owed its prosperity in the 1620s and 1630s to the positive influence of contacts with Tuscany. I will mention but a few examples: the improvement of the Lebanese cattle breeds thanks to the introduction of Tuscan ones (Carali 1936a, 53), the magnificence of the emir's palace in Beirut as a result of the work of Tuscan artists (Carali 1936a, 52), the introduction of flax cultivation in Lebanon (Carali 1936a, 51) and the continuous requests that Fakhr al-Din sent to the Tuscan court regarding the sending of technicians (mostly artillerymen) and military architects to Lebanon (Carali 1936a, 75–6) or workers, gardeners and peasant families to teach the Lebanese how to work "*all'italiana*" ("in the Italian way") (Carali 1936a, 53–4, 125). It should be noted that most of these requests date back to the second period of his rule, that is, after his stay in Tuscany, where he had the opportunity to observe the military and naval shipyards in Livorno, Tuscan farming and breeding techniques and the magnificence of the Medici court (Carali 1936a, 126).

The second chapter, devoted entirely to both domestic and foreign policy, several times stresses the close ties that Lebanon had with Tuscany and how jealous France and Spain, the major Mediterranean powers of the time, were of this special relationship between the emir and the grand dukes (Carali 1936a, 110–2). Interestingly, however, Carali begins this chapter by emphasizing the fact that since Lebanon had been unified by Fakhr al-Din, the latter was to his state what King Vittorio Emanuele II had been to Italy (Carali 1936a, 84). This parallel can also be associated with Mussolini as founder of the empire, as if to suggest that Fascism and the foundation of the empire were in continuity with the Risorgimento and the unification of the Italian state.

Faccardino's biography ends on page 131, when the most conspicuous part of the work (pages 131–460) begins, that is, the series of documents collected, transcribed and published by Carali himself. Carali states the criteria used to choose which documents to publish and which not in the introduction:

[...] i nostri documenti autentici e contemporanei [...] scelti fra i molti in ragione della loro importanza storica, piuttosto che per scopo apologetico, proveranno che mai il Libano fu sì potente e prospero come durante i quarantacinque anni di regno di Fakhr ad-Din II [...] (Carali 1936a, 24).¹⁹

¹⁹ “[...] our authentic and contemporary documents [...] chosen from among many because of their historical importance, rather than for apologetic purposes, will prove that Lebanon was never so powerful and prosperous as during the 45 years of the reign of Fakhr ad-Din II [...]”

With this statement, Carali almost seems to assert that the only documentation with real historical value was that which confirmed his predetermined assumption of a prosperous Lebanon under Fakhr al-Dīn, thus almost denying the importance of any documentation that did not support this idea. Indeed, in all likelihood, this is what was discarded. Then, in the same sentence, Carali states that the selected documentation served to show how prosperous Lebanon was under Fakhr al-Dīn. As Paolo Carali repeats in an essay published in the *Annali dell'Istituto Superiore Orientale* of Naples in the same year in which the first volume of Faccardino's biography came to light, this situation was substantially due to the beneficial influence that the Druze traveller had been subject to during his trip to Tuscany, that is Italy. I quote Carali's words below:

Fu, quindi, questo suo soggiorno una sorgente di bene, che dall'Italia riversò nel Libano e nel resto del Prossimo Oriente; sicché possiamo dire, a giusto titolo, che l'Oriente deva la sua rinascita attuale all'Italia, culla delle belle arti e focolare del pensiero umano (Carali 1936b, 25).²⁰

This is the conclusion reached by Paolo Carali regarding the story of Fakhr al-Dīn and his journey to Tuscany which, it should be stressed, lasted no more than a year and a half (November 1613 to July 1615), and to which perhaps too much importance is given. Bernard Heyberger has observed that the evidence of the emir's journey to Tuscany is the documentation most studied both by European and eastern historians, so much so that one almost has the impression that Fakhr al-Dīn only visited Tuscany during his western journey.²¹ It is evident that Maronite-Catholic priest Paolo Carali was keen to please the Fascist regime which hosted him in Italy and financed his research. Not only that, he was also the director of the *Rivista Patriarcale*, which received funding from the Italian government with the approval of Galeazzo Ciano from 1937 onwards.

The reinterpretation of the story of Fakhr al-Dīn as the founding father of the Lebanese nation and the importance of contacts with Tuscany for the prosperity of his dominions was constructed through the works of European travellers such as Giovanni Mariti and especially Lebanese scholars such as M. Jouplain (Bulus Nujaym).²² Nevertheless, it was the work of Paolo Carali that established the story once and for all. However, as Bernard Heyberger well points out, Tuscany's influence over Lebanon is but a myth and even the narrative of Faccardino as the

²⁰ "His stay was, therefore, a source of good, which he poured from Italy into Lebanon and the rest of the Near East; so that we can rightly say that the East owes its current rebirth to Italy, the cradle of the fine arts and the heart of human thought." This consideration concludes the introductory pages to a broader essay on the emir's stay in Italy.

²¹ Bernard Heyberger cites in particular Adel Ismail (1955) and Richard Van Leeuwen (1992). See Heyberger (2009, 431), in particular footnote 13.

²² In Paris in 1908, M. Jouplain, the French pseudonym of Bulus Nujaym, published his doctoral dissertation entitled *La Question du Liban, étude d'histoire diplomatique et de droit international* (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1908) which identified the Maronite community as the heart of Lebanese democracy. On the issue of Lebanese national identity, see Firro (2004, 15).

founding father of modern Lebanon can no longer be deemed valid (Heyberger 2009, 430–32).²³ Consequently, the idea that modern Lebanon owes something to Italy ceases to have any value—if it ever had any beyond propaganda speeches.

6. Conclusions

As I said in the introduction, I am aware that I have analysed a rereading of historical events by making a rereading of the past myself. However, this very rereading made it possible to clearly show that Paolo Carali's work had ulterior motives in conducting a historical study of Fakhr al-Dīn since his story lent itself so well to a historical rereading, especially through an ideological prism.

Fakhr al-Dīn was not exactly a traveller, at least not in the classical sense of the term. The emir travelled westwards to escape his enemies in the East and this made him more of a fugitive or exile than a traveller. Nevertheless, the experience of the journey was certainly important, although perhaps more so for historians than for him, which is why its importance should not be exaggerated. In fact, the overstatement of its importance, and especially the part of the journey concerning Tuscany, has certainly been part of all historiographical reinterpretations of the life of the Druze emir. The reason for this is easy to understand: many words of support were spoken for the emir in Rome, Naples and Sicily without anything ever materializing, however. Tuscany, instead, was the only state visited by Fakhr al-Dīn and which implemented, at least partially, a real policy of support for him.

The fact that the Grand Duchy was home to one of the richest and most sophisticated courts of the late Italian Renaissance certainly played an important role in creating the later myth of Tuscan influence on the lands of Fakhr al-Dīn: indeed, all the “modernization” works of his state (construction of bridges, irrigation works, increase in trade and restoration of fortresses) were possible thanks to the beneficial Italian influence, to quote Carali (1936b, 25) once again.

Although it was the ties with Tuscany and his journey there that gave rise to this myth, it must be stressed that the Tuscan grand dukes did not pursue a different policy towards Fakhr al-Dīn than they did towards other Muslim states with which they established relations. For instance, with regard to Fakhr al-Dīn, that Tuscan technicians were sent to Lebanon has always been mentioned as something unusual and particular. In reality, the grand dukes of Tuscany, in particular Ferdinand I, always sent their technicians to the allied courts: thus, Ferdinand I sent some to 'Alī Jānbulād and both he and Cosimo II planned to send some to Persia, to mention but two examples (Trentacoste 2021b, 118–20).

Therefore, it appears that we need to play down the importance of Fakhr al-Dīn's travel to Tuscany and the Tuscan presence in Lebanon, and to reread all this in the context of relations between Tuscany and the Levant (but not only), without giving it more importance than it deserves. However, it is true that his travels gave me the excuse to deal with him and his story, in the light of which

²³ On this issue, in addition to Heyberger, see also Hazran (2009).

the analysis and parallel between the Medici and Fascist policies towards the same region, even if three centuries apart, are much more interesting.

In the introduction I wrote that the fact that Fascist policy in the 1930s followed the Medici policy of three centuries before was certainly a coincidence, but is this really the case? Rereading the story of Fakhr al-Din may help to clarify the perhaps somewhat confused course of relations between Italy and the Levant, which has nevertheless retained, I do not want to say a linearity, but perhaps a certain coherence.

Let us begin with the geopolitical situation in the Syro-Lebanese region. Both in the first 30 years of the seventeenth century and in the 1930s, the situation seemed to favour the intervention of a foreign power. The dominant power seemed to be in a predicament: just as the Ottoman Empire looked as if it were in crisis against the pasha of Aleppo and the emir of Lebanon at the beginning of the seventeenth century, so France appeared to be struggling to maintain its control over these territories. The temporary difficulty in controlling the region was seen in the West as a clear sign of the Ottomans' inexorable decline, and in the same way as between 1601 and 1604 propaganda texts were published in Florence explaining how the Ottoman Empire was on the brink of collapse, three centuries later anti-French propaganda was published in Italy, claiming that France was a power in decline (Piras 2011, viii, 114).

A declining power but still a great power: in 1607, the Ottoman forces were able to crush the rebellions of the local princes and again in the 1930s France managed to crush the revolts in the region. This show of force demonstrated that the adversary still had the capacity to react and was still too strong to be openly challenged by a "second-class" power, as Tuscany certainly was in relation to the Ottomans and as Italy was also in relation to France.

This situation left the Italian players of both periods unperturbed. Renouncing direct intervention, momentarily at least, and preferring to support revolts and strengthen ties with the Levant, the long-term plan did not aim for territorial occupation, but nevertheless strove for indirect control of the region. However, the Tuscans/Italians did all this while trying to present themselves not only as ideal partners of these eastern polities in the struggle for independence but also as the potential liberators of Jerusalem and protectors of the eastern Christians.

The latter, and in particular the Maronites, were identified as the main interlocutor by both the Tuscans and the Fascist Italians, especially in Lebanon. Moreover, they were a possible "bridgehead" to increase Tuscan/Italian influence in the region. Giorgio Maronio, who proposed himself as Cosimo II's informer, was a Maronite religious man like Paolo Carali, on whom Fascism relied to create a narrative that bound the Levant to Tuscany and Italy. The sending of technicians, peasants, soldiers and gifts was also intended, again in the long term, to increase Tuscan/Italian cultural and economic influence, as well as the prestige of the Tuscan/Italian state in the eyes of the Levantines.

This last aspect has perhaps fostered the most speculation regarding relations between the Levant and Tuscany/Italy. In fact, there is no doubt that some, perhaps more than a few, Tuscans went to the Levant, and in this case to Lebanon, but it is not possible to quantify the real influence that their presence had. Ar-

chitecture is one of the fields in which this alleged influence has been most debated: Giovanni Mariti, a Tuscan traveller who visited Lebanon at the end of the eighteenth century, claimed that the palace of Fakhr al-Dīn in Beirut was built according to oriental taste and only partially restored by Tuscan workers who did not have time to decorate it according to Italian Renaissance influences (Mariti 1787, 234). On the other hand, Paolo Carali, who unlike Mariti had a clear political objective, wrote that this lack of visual evidence of Tuscan influence on Lebanese architecture was nothing more than proof that the Tuscan craftsmen had worked to please the emir's oriental taste (Carali 1936a, 126).²⁴

In short, I could go on and on listing the similarities and parallels between the Medici and Fascist policies: parallels that at this point were no longer accidental but dictated by a geopolitical situation in the eastern Mediterranean and the Levant that did not allow for any other course of action, either during the Renaissance or during the 1930s. However, once the impossibility of occupying the Levant was realized, one perhaps fundamental difference came to light. The effort made by the Medici was a “classical” one, that of an early modern state that wanted to expand its commercial outlets and bind lands to itself not culturally but economically and, why not, also dynastically, linking the name of its ruling house to the crown of Jerusalem and Cyprus. I do not want to say that there were ideal motivations behind it, far from it, but there was something more than just economic reasons or conquest. On the other hand, having lost the opportunity to occupy the Levant in the short term, Fascism tried to carry out a different operation, of a cultural nature, with which it sought to bind to Italy, and thus to itself, the history of a region that in reality owed no more to Italy than it did to other countries. And this is where the experience of Fakhr al-Dīn's journey to Tuscany and his ties with the Medici fit in perfectly. If we consider the fact that for decades Lebanese historians themselves have attributed a much greater importance to this journey and these relations than they actually had, it can be said that their rereading in a strongly ideological way has enjoyed a certain success.

I would like to comment on this last aspect, namely on how hard it is for this myth to die, even today. The idea that Fakhr al-Dīn owed a great deal to Tuscany (and therefore to Italy) can still be found in narratives of his story on some Italian nationalist and even extreme right-wing websites. Here, the story of the Lebanese emir merges into a wider, equally “mythical” discourse on the special relationship between Mussolini and Muslims who, according to a fairly common narrative, saw him as a model to follow.²⁵

²⁴ On this aspect, see Hadad (2007) and Scham (2015).

²⁵ Here are just a couple of examples. The first is an article on the website “L'intellettuale dissidente” (Mariani 2016), a tendentially right-wing but not extreme website which slavishly repeats the classic narrative about the close friendship between Tuscany (Italy) and Lebanon and how much the latter owes to its relations with the Medici. The second is instead an article that appeared on the openly right-wing nationalist site “Il primato nazionale” (Rossiello 2017), which revives the rhetoric of Islamic admiration for Mussolini and Italy although there are no references to Fakhr al-Dīn.

Finally, I would like to conclude with the last parallelism between these two stories. When Lebanon was invaded in 1633 by forces loyal to the Ottoman sultan, Fakhr al-Dīn asked for the grand duke to send him the Tuscan fleet to support his resistance from the sea while he fought on land. However, the fleet did not show up in Levantine waters: aware that he could not do much and pressured by the Tuscan commercial circles to resume good relations with the Ottomans, Ferdinand II abandoned his ally Faccardino to his fate. Similarly, when France reacted more harshly to anti-French unrest, Fascism limited its involvement in support of the Lebanese and Syrians in the Levant, thus showing that realpolitik was ultimately more important than the alleged friendship with Islam.

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