

# TURKEY-LEBANON FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE: THE TURKISH PRESENCE AND THE OTTOMAN HERITAGE IN LEBANON

T.C. BAŞBAKANLIK YURTDIŞI TÜRKLER VE AKRABA TOPLULUKLAR BAŞKANLIĞI  
PRESIDENCY FOR TURKS ABROAD AND RELATED COMMUNITIES



ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية



# **TURKEY-LEBANON FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE: THE TURKISH PRESENCE AND THE OTTOMAN HERITAGE IN LEBANON**

**ORSAM Report No: 199**

**June 2015**

**ISBN: 978-605-9157-02-5**

**Ankara - TURKEY ORSAM © 2015**

*Content of this report is copyrighted to Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities and ORSAM. Except reasonable and partial quotation and use under the Act No. 5846, Law on Intellectual and Artistic Works, via proper citation, the content may not be used or republished without prior permission by Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities and ORSAM. The views expressed in this report reflect only the opinions of its authors and do not represent the institutional opinion of Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities and ORSAM.*

**Prepared by:**

Oytun Orhan, *ORSAM Researcher*

**Project Team:**

Oytun Orhan, *ORSAM Researcher*

Bilgay Duman, *ORSAM Researcher*

M. Musa Budak, *Middle East Coordinator, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities*

A. Selcan Özdemirci, *Research Assistant, Sakarya University Middle East Research Center*

## *Contents*

Preface.....	5
INTRODUCTION .....	7
I. A SHORT HISTORY OF LEBANESE TURKMEN.....	9
II. THE TURKMEN OF LEBANON: GEOGRAPHY, DEMOGRAPHICS, CULTURE, IDENTITY, ECONOMY .....	11
1. The Akkar Turkmen .....	11
1.1. Qawashra .....	11
1.2. Aydamun .....	12
2. The Baalbek Turkmen .....	13
2.1. Duris .....	13
2.2. Sheymiye .....	14
2.3. Nananiye .....	14
2.4. Addus .....	14
2.5. Hadidiye .....	14
2.6. Mashari Al Qaa .....	15
3. The Dinniyeh Turkmen.....	15
3.1. Hawwara.....	16
3.2. Jairoun .....	16
4. Cretan Turks .....	17
5. The Turkish Citizens Living in Lebanon (The People from Mardin) .....	18
6. Syrian Turkmen.....	19
7. Families from Anatolia and the Ottoman Heritage .....	21
8. Circassians .....	22
III. THE IDENTITY OF THE TURKMEN IN LEBANON.....	23
IV. THE POLITICAL TENDENCIES OF TURKMEN IN LEBANON .....	24
V. LEBANESE SOCIAL GROUPS' VIEW OF TURKMEN .....	25
CONCLUSION: LEBANON'S TURKMEN AND TURKEY .....	26
ANNEX: THE LIST OF PERSONS AND INSTITUTIONS VISITED .....	29
ENDNOTES .....	31



## PREFACE

ORSAM published a report in 2009 titled, “The Forgotten Turks: Turkmen of Lebanon”. The report was significant for two reasons. First, it was the first detailed research about the Turkmen of Lebanon that aimed to map the Turkish presence in Lebanon. The second reason was that the study was based on a field research. During the field trip, ORSAM researchers visited all of the Turkmen villages and met with the prominent persons and common people there. Therefore, ORSAM located the Turkish presence in Lebanon, and developed alternative proposals on enhancing Turkmen’ living conditions, strengthening their ties with Turkey and assisting them to preserve their already-waning identity and language.

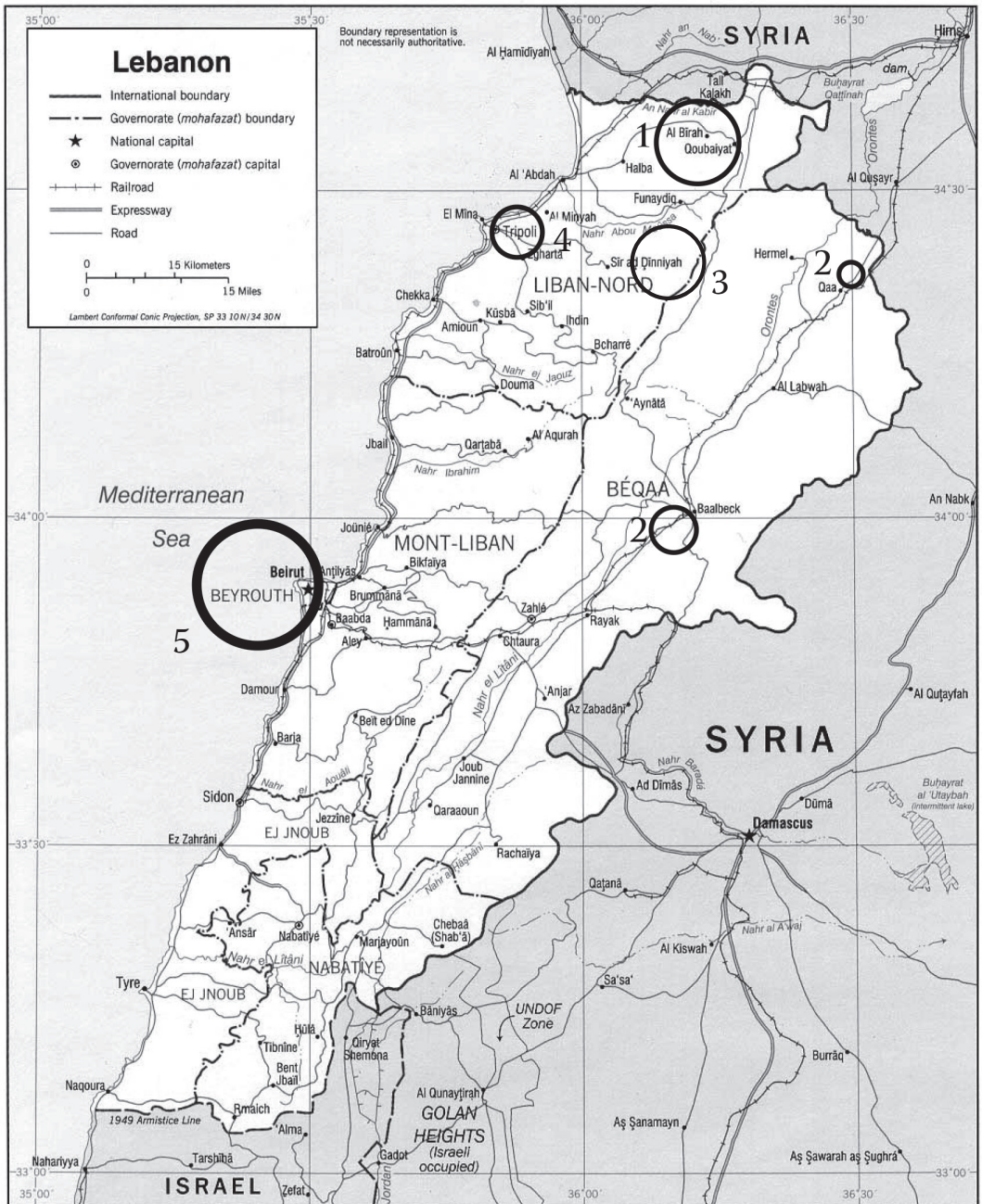
In the following six years, important developments have been observed regarding the state of Turkmen of Lebanon and their relations with Turkey. Turkey has increased assistance provided through Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities, TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) and the Turkish Red Crescent. In 2009, the former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu visited the Turkmen villages in Akkar. One year later, the former Prime Minister and current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held one of the greatest demonstrations in the Lebanese history in the Turkmen village of Qawashra. The Turkmen of Lebanon have sent delegations to Turkey, which were received at higher levels. They have more frequently taken place in the Turkish and Lebanese media with documentaries and news.

Two more important developments have been observed in these six years. First, Turkey has established relations with the Dinniye Turkmen. They were not included in the 2009 report and neither Turkey nor other Turkmen knew about them. Second, the Syrian Civil War and increasing instability since 2011 has caused many Syrians to migrate to the neighboring countries. Lebanon is one of the primary destinations of the Syrian migration. A significant number of Syrian Turkmen are among migrant Syrians as well. Syrian Turkmen headed towards the Turkmen villages in Akkar and Baalbek regions of Lebanon, where they have kinship relations and shared language. The chance for their return is gradually decreasing; therefore, the Turkmen demographics in Lebanon might be permanently altered. For these reasons, we have deemed it necessary to update our 2009 report. We have renewed our report with a field trip supported by the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry, Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities. We have included the communities that have special, historical links with Turkey, apart from Lebanese Turkmen. Within this scope, Cretan Turks, families from Anatolian descent, Circassians and the people from Mardin have been covered in the report.

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry, Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities for making this project possible. In addition, we also would like to give our thanks to H.E. Mr. İnan Özyıldız, Turkey’s Ambassador to Beirut; Mr. H. İbrahim Erbir, TİKA Lebanon Coordinator; Mr. Cengiz Eroglu, Director of Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in Beirut; Mr. Hidir Abbas of Qawashra village; Mr. Zaher Sultan, President of the Lebanese Turkish Association; Mr. Ali Görli, a member of the Municipal Council of Duris, and all Lebanese people, who shared their knowledge and opinions with us. We publish our report with our sincere intention that it will contribute to the situation of the Lebanese Turkmen and Turkey-Lebanon relations. Enjoy your reading.

*Assoc. Prof. Şaban Kardaş*  
*President of ORSAM*





Base 802856AI (C00059) 5-02

1. THE AKKAR TURKMEN
2. THE BAALBEK TURKMEN
3. DINNIYEH TURKMEN
4. CRETAN TURKS AND THE FAMILIES FROM ANATOLIA
5. PEOPLE FROM MARDIN

.....  
**Prepared by:** Oytun Orhan, *ORSAM Researcher*  
 .....  
 .....

# TURKEY-LEBANON FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE: THE TURKISH PRESENCE AND THE OTTOMAN HERITAGE IN LEBANON

## INTRODUCTION

The first relations between Turkey and Turkmen of Lebanon were established in 1989. A private named Halit Esad from the village of Qawashra serving in the Lebanese Army was heard speaking Turkish by his commander. The officer took the private to the Turkish Embassy, and thus, the first contact was established. Ibrahim Dicleli, then Turkish Ambassador to Beirut, held a conversation with Esad, who stated that he was a Turkmen from Qawashra. Thereupon, Dicleli invited the prominent figures and elders of the village to the embassy and paid them a visit in return, establishing the first bonds. The Mayor of Qawashra says that villagers escorted the ambassador on his way back to Tripoli since civil war was still ongoing at the time. Since this first contact, every Turkish Ambassador has visited the Turkmen village in the Akkar region during their assignment to Beirut and this has become a custom. For a long time, the Turkmen of Lebanon were thought to live only in the Akkar region. With the guidance of the Kavashra villagers, Turkey contacted the Baalbek Turkmen for the first time in 2007, and the Dinniye Turkmen in 2011.

This report focuses on the Turkmen of Lebanon. However, the Turkish presence in Lebanon has been handled in a broader spectrum. The study encompasses the groups, which have relations and emo-

tional bonds with the Ottomans, Anatolia and Turkey for historical reasons. In the framework of this definition, The Turkish presence in Lebanon can be classified under eight headings:

1. *The Akkar Turkmen:* The Turkmen of the North Governorate live in two villages near Al Qoubaiyat.
2. *The Baalbek Turkmen:* The Turkmen in the Beqaa Governorate live in five small settlements around Baalbek and in a village near Hermel in the border with Syria.
3. *The Dinniye Turkmen:* They live in two villages around Dinniye in the North Governorate.
4. *The Cretan Turks:* These are Turks who were brought to the lands under Ottoman control (Lebanon and Syria) when the island of Crete fell to Greece and attacks on the island's Turks increased. They currently live in Tripoli.
5. *Turkish Citizens Living in Lebanon (The People from Mardin):* These are Turks who migrated from the south-eastern Turkey due to economic reasons and settled in Lebanon, particularly in Beirut, in the 1940s.



6. *Syrian Turkmen*: Syrian Turkmen, who had to flee to the Turkmen villages around Akkar and Baalbek, due to the conflict in Syria.

7. *Families from Anatolia and the Ottoman Heritage*: Notable families in the Ottoman era, which had moved to Tripoli and Akkar in Lebanon in the past and had received favors and benefits in local administration. In a broader perspective, these are the families, who have an emotional bond with the Ottoman Empire and affinity towards Turkey as its heir.

8. *Circassians*: These are Circassians, who had been deported to the Ottoman territory during the Exodus of the Northern Caucasus peoples in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78.

This report has been prepared by using completely data from the field trip in

Lebanon. Within this scope, all the above communities and settlements were visited, and all of their prominent figures and common people were interviewed. In the interviews, questions dealing with the region they live in, their demographics, culture, identity, political tendencies, problems, opinions and expectations from Turkey were posed. We have personally talked to the families with Ottoman and Anatolian origin and visited their associations in Akkar and Tripoli. We have seen Syrian Turkmen in their settlements and talked to their representatives. In addition, we have met with representatives from different sections of Lebanon and sought to understand their perceptions about the Lebanese Turkmen.

This report briefly touches upon the history of Lebanese Turkmen, before going into detail about the specific communities.

## I. A SHORT HISTORY OF LEBANESE TURKMEN

Information about the history of Turkmen in Lebanon is limited to the studies on the history of Lebanon and the stories of the Lebanese Turkmen. There are no academic studies directly related with the Turkmen in Lebanon. Still there is information that can provide some clues regarding the history of Turkmen in the studies on Lebanon. These clues draw a picture that differs from the stories of the Turkmen. The stories and academic research offer us three different scenarios for the history of Turkmen in Lebanon.

The first scenario is based on the comments and stories of the prominent Turkmen villagers. According to the villagers, the Turkmen were brought along with Sultan Selim I's army during his campaign to Egypt and were settled in the conquered lands, beginning with Aleppo. They were rewarded with land and money and were encouraged to work in agriculture and animal husbandry. This strategy is believed to have served three purposes: to provide an information and intelligence link for Istanbul in these lands, to establish an intelligence network for possible counter strikes against the ongoing campaign, and to utilize the Turkmen villages as logistics stations during the return and on the next campaign. The Turkmen think that afterwards they were encouraged by the Ottoman Empire to stay in these lands.

The second scenario is also related to Sultan Selim I and his campaign to Egypt. According to this, Turkmen were settled in these lands before the campaign began in order to meet the logistical needs of the Ottoman soldiers during the campaign. Here the aim is the same as in the first scenario. Only the timing is different.

The most realistic scenario is the third one, which is based on scientific sources and completely different from the first two.<sup>1</sup> Studies of Lebanon and the Mamluks clearly state that the Turkmen presence in Lebanon date much earlier than the 1500s. In his research on Lebanon, Charles Winslow states:

*During the 12th century, the Mamluks who dominated Mount Lebanon divided the area between Kisrawan and Tripoli into regions and settled Turkmen families at strategic locations. However, after the Circassian Lord Berkuk overthrew the Turkish dynasty in 1382, relations between the Turkish families and the Circassian administration ceased. During the 1440s Turkmen lords ruled Kisrawan.*<sup>2</sup>

The Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi's book, *A House of Many Mansions* states that Kisrawan was under Turkmen rule from 1306 to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Winslow's study says that in order to help keep the northern regions of Beirut under control, the Mamluks settled the Turkmen Assaf family in the region in 1306. It has also been claimed that the Turkmen collected taxes through farming contracts. The Turkmen branches mentioned were of Sunni and Turkish origin, just like the Mamluks and the Ottomans. Turkmen strengthened their hand by supporting the Ottomans in the Battle of Marj Dabiq, and thus, they were awarded a wider area of influence and their taxes were lowered in return.<sup>4</sup>

In the light of this information, it can be stated that it is unlikely that the Turkmen presence in modern Lebanon dates back to Sultan Selim I's campaign to Egypt as

claimed. History books clearly indicate that Turkmen tribes were there before the Ottomans conquered these lands. Those tribes were settled during the rule of the Mamluks. They played an important role in Sultan Selim's campaign to Egypt and the Battle of Marj Dabiq and expanded their influence with Ottoman support afterwards. They served as a logistics station during the Battle of Marj Dabiq, but

were not settled by the Ottomans to this end. They also ruled Kisrwan (close to where the Baalbek Turkmen live today) and Tripoli (close to today's Akkar Turks) for a long time. Given the historical data, it is more likely that the Turkmen of Lebanon are the descendants of the Turkmen tribes who settled in the area in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

## II. THE TURKMEN OF LEBANON: GEOGRAPHY, DEMOGRAPHICS, CULTURE, IDENTITY, ECONOMY

### 1. The Akkar Turkmen

Akkar is situated in the North Governorate of Lebanon. Its Turkmen villages are located near Al Qoubaiyat. The altitude of the villages is approximately 800 meters, though they are situated on relatively flat terrain. There are two Turkmen villages in Akkar. In addition, some Turkmen live in other villages due to marriage or other reasons.

#### 1.1 Qawashra

Qawashra is at center stage among these two villages of Akkar, since its villagers have managed to preserve their Turkish identity and language, and it was the first village that established ties with Turkey. Its population of approximately 3,000 consists wholly of Turkmen.

The basic elements of Qawashra's cultural identity are Lebanese nationality, Turkmen and Sunni Islam. Almost all village residents speak Turkish. Nevertheless, the younger generation is about to forget its identity and language. Recently, awareness for preserving Turkish language and identity has risen due to Turkey's interest and Turkish education. The predominantly Turkmen character of Qawashra village plays an important role in its preservation of Turkmen identity and language. Another factor is the lower level of education in the village (compared to the other village in Akkar). Since official education is in Arabic and knowledge of Turkish does not give any advantage for the children's future, the desire to learn Turkish is diminishing. Given these circumstances, the lower level of education provides an advantage for the protection of Turkish.

A significant portion of the village supports the Future Movement which represents the Sunnis of Lebanon and lead by Saad Hariri. Turkish flags are seen in many places of the village. There is no political disunity or disagreement in the village. The village has no problems with the neighboring settlements since the majority of Akkar region is of Sunni origin. The village economy is mostly based on agriculture. Major produce includes grain, barley, grapes and olives. Younger people pursue occupations in the military, police and education. Most of them live in Beirut, but maintain their connections to their village. Education is adequate, but education levels remain low. Since basic education is not compulsory, and there are economic problems, not all children receive education. For health services, they have to visit neighboring settlements.

The villagers of Qawashra define themselves as Lebanese Sunni Turkmen, but they feel affinity towards Turkey as well. Since they benefit from the university scholarships that Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities provides, there are many Qawashra Turkmen, who speak fluent Turkish and know Turkey very well. Nevertheless, their knowledge about Turkey is generally limited. Qawashra is the village that received the largest number of Turkey projects. In April 2014, Turkey has built a prefabricated school in Qawashra and donated an electric generator. Turkish Red Crescent has undertaken the construction through the Turkish Embassy in Beirut. Turkish military unit of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has provided the electric generator. Turkish military

has also carried out a project for a computer laboratory with 21 computers. Primary and secondary education is offered in the village. Turkey is building another school in the village. It will be utilized as a high school when it is completed. Water supply network and electricity generator has been linked to the village network for all houses. In Akkar, there are other water supply projects for Turkmen. Although it is not in Qawashra, a health center has also been built for the Akkar Turkmen. The former Foreign Minister and current Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had attended its opening ceremony during his visit to the Turkmen villages. A fully equipped ambulance vehicle was provided for the health center. Turkmen, who were educated in Turkey, carry on their lives in nearby settlements as doctors, engineers and apothecaries. The Turkish Embassy brings teachers from Turkey, and they teach the villagers Turkish for free.

### *1.2 Aydamun*

Aydamun is located near the village of Qawashra. Unlike Qawashra, it is demographically heterogeneous. Its population is 5,000, and Turkmen constitute 70 percent of the population. Thus, there are approximately 3,500 Turkmen living in Aydamun. The rest of the population consists of Christian Arabs. 80 percent of the Christian community is Greek Orthodox and 20 percent is Maronite.

The people of Aydamun are aware of their Turkmen origins, but they are proud to define themselves as Sunni and Lebanese. Turkish has been completely forgotten. No one speaks Turkish, except for one very old person and a few who were educated at Turkish universities. This is because they live together with the Arab community. A high level of education and Arabic as the education language is another reason for their Arabization. Turkmen children learn only Arabic in school and are friends with Arab children. Therefore, Turkish is completely forgotten.

The majority of Aydamun village supports the Future Movement. There is no political disunity or disagreement in the village. They peacefully coexist with the Christian people. The economy is based on agriculture. Olive and almonds are the most common crops. In Aydamun, too, younger people pursue occupations in the military, police and education. Rug making, which used to be the village's successful trademark, ceased ten years ago. In terms of education, the village is in good shape. There are state primary and secondary schools and a high school in the village. There is also one private school offering primary and secondary education. There are many young people with a university diploma.

The villagers have no relations with or relatives in Turkey. Their knowledge about Turkey is very limited, but still positive. They describe Turkey as a great, beautiful and developed country based on what they have heard from those who received education in Turkey or those who have visited Turkey. They would like to visit Turkey. There are young people who were educated in Turkey with the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities scholarships, and they are the only ones who can speak fluent Turkish. Turkey is about to realize a school project in the village. Once the school is finished, it will be handed over to Lebanese authorities. Along with the usual curriculum, Turkish education will be offered as well in this school. Turkish military have donated a computer laboratory to the village school.

In Akkar, there are some settlements beside Qawashra and Aydamun, in which some Turkmen live because of marriage or other reasons. Three hundred and fifty Turkmen live in Masta Hasan near Aydamun, where approximately 5,000 people live. Fifty Turkmen live in Al-Dibbabiya, which has a population of 1,200. The village of al Daws, which has a population of approximately 2,500, houses 40-50 Turkmen.

*Table 1. Population distribution of Akkar Turkmen settlements*

Turkmen Villages in Akkar	Total Population	Percentage of Population	Turkmen Population
Qawashra	3,000	Turkmen: 100%	3,000
Aydamun	5,000	Turkmen: 70% Christians: 30% (Greek Orthodox 80% Greek Catholic 20%)	3,500
<b>Total</b>			<b>7,000</b> (including the Turkmen that live in Arab villages.)

*Source: The numbers are taken from the mayors of related settlements.*

## 2. The Baalbek Turkmen

Turkey became acquainted with the Baalbek Turkmen in 2007 with the help of the Akkar Turkmen who informed the Turkish officials about the Baalbek Turkmen settlements. The lifestyle, culture, socioeconomic level and Turkish of the Baalbek Turkmen are unlike those of the Akkar Turkmen. The Baalbek Turkmen are a more closed society and have a tribal structure. They live in an area which is densely populated by Christians and Shiites. The villages are surrounded by communities that belong to a variety of religion and sects, but the Turkmen communities are homogenous. Except for Duris and Addus, the villages are entirely composed of Sunni Turkmen. The Turkmen of the region are settled in 5 Turkmen villages around Baalbek, all within 10 minutes from one to another, and in one village near Hermel. All these villages are known as Turkmen tribes by the locals. People from different villages are related and have ties with each other.

### 2.1 Duris

Duris is a district close to the city of Baalbek. In comparison to other Turkmen villages, Duris is a relatively large and advanced town. Turkmen are in the minority here. The total population is approximate-

ly 10,000. There is an equal dispersion of Christians and Muslims in the town. 85% out of 5000 Muslims are Shiite and the rest are Sunni. Turkmen form the entire Sunni population. There are approximately 700 Turkmen in Duris. The remaining Sunnis are Arabs that have a population of around 200.

The Turkmen of Duris enjoy good conditions in terms of economy and education. Nevertheless, their Turkish language and identity has been weakened due to their coexistence with Arabs, high level of education and their outward-oriented nature. They identify themselves as Sunni Lebanese as well as Turkmen.

They also support the Future Movement. The Shiites in the vicinity are strong and they support the March 8 Alliance, led by Hezbollah. For this reason, Turkmen have been excluded from politics until recently. Turkmen are gradually joining the local administration of Duris. Occasional sectarian tensions in Lebanon affect Duris negatively, due to its diverse character. However, during daily life, different groups do not have problems among themselves and there are even marriages between them. Kinship relations through marriage increase day by day.



## 2.2 Sheymiye

Sheymiye village is about 20 kilometers from Baalbek. It has a population of 1,200, consisting entirely of Turkmen. Sheymiye resembles a typical Anatolian village. Some families have a similar lifestyle to the Yoruks in Anatolia. Villagers (including the young ones) had some difficulty understanding our questions in Turkish, but we could clearly understand them while they were speaking to each other. They speak the Turkmen language at their homes. As the entire village is of Turkmen origin, they live in a Shiite-majority region and they are identified as a Turkmen tribe, and their education level is low enough, they were able to preserve their Turkish identity and language very well.

Turkmen of Sheymiye predominantly support the Future Movement. Their economy depends on agriculture and animal husbandry. There are relatively wealthy families as well as extremely poor people, who live in tents. The education level of the village is mediocre. Children have to go to a settlement named Bid Neil, since there is no school in the village. They receive health services in a medical center 10 kilometers away.

The Turkish Red Crescent built a school in Mahamiya, since this settlement is close and accessible for the Baalbek Turkmen, but Turkmen do not attend this school.

## 2.3 Nananiye

The population of the Nananiye village is approximately 900, entirely Sunni Turkmen. The village is proudly aware of its Turkmen identity, though they are gradually losing their cultural identity. The elders of the village can speak Turkish fluently, while the children can barely speak Turkish. Many villagers have Turkish names or popular names in Turkey<sup>5</sup>. The village's income level is quite low. Its people became Lebanese citizens in 1994. Like other Sunnis, the people support the Future Movement. They state that they

have no conflicts with neighboring communities.

The village economy relies on agriculture. Major produce includes grain, barley, potatoes and tomatoes. Like other Turkmen villagers, many people work in the military and the police. Its education level is medium. Sixty percent of the children receive education. Since there is no school in the village, they have to go to primary and secondary schools in Baalbek, which is twelve kilometers away. Concerning infrastructure, the village does not have any problems with water supply. Water from wells is provided to households through a pipe network. Occasional electricity problems are overcome thanks to electricity generators. The villagers watch Turkish television channels and Turkish TV series are very popular, as it is common in Lebanon.

They do not have affinity or interest towards Turkey, since they did not have any contacts until the last ten years. Only a few villagers have been to Turkey for a job. The relations were established when the Turkish Embassy in Beirut and Turkish unit in the UNIFIL found out about the Baalbek Turkmen. In recent years, as relations drew closer, visits and aid programs increased as well.

## 2.4 Addus

Addus is very close to Nananiye; it is almost 5 minutes away. Actually, it is hard to discuss those two villages separately. Therefore, all information about this village is identical to Nananiye. It has a population of 1,000 and the 85 percent of it is Sunni Turkmen, while the remaining 15 percent is Shiite Arabs. Approximately 800 Turkmen live in Addus.

## 2.5 Hadidiye

Hadidiye village is five kilometers away from Addus. It is a very small village, even a hamlet. It consists of approximately

thirty houses and tents. Its population is around 600, all of which are Turkmen.

## 2.6 Mashari Al Qaa

The village of Mashari Al Qaa is geographically distant from other Turkmen villages in Baalbek. Though it lies within the borders of Beqaa Governorate, it is closer to the city of Hermel. Mashari Al

Qaa is located on the Lebanese-Syrian border. Some of the villagers are Lebanese, and others are Syrian citizens. It consists entirely of Turkmen. The total population is about 500. Of the population, 300 villagers are in the Syrian side and 200 villagers are in the Lebanese side of the border. Because of the Syrian civil war, the whole village population has passed to the Lebanese side. It is situated on plentiful soil and the villagers work in agriculture.

Table 2. Population distribution of Baalbek Turkmen settlements

Turkmen Villages in Baalbek	Total Population	Percentage of Population	Turkmen Population
Sheymiye	1,200	Turkmen: 100%	1,200
Duris	10,000	Muslims: 50% (Shiites: 85% Sunnis 15%) Christians: 50% (Maronites, Greek Catholics)	700
Nananiye	900	Turkmen: 100%	900
Addus	1,000	Turkmen: 85% Shiite Arabs: 15%	800
Hadidiye	600	Turkmen: 100%	600
Al Qaa	500	Turkmen: 100%	200 (300 Turkmen are in the Syrian border)
<b>Total</b>			<b>3,800</b>

Source: The numbers are taken from Ali Gorli, member of the Duris municipality.

## 3. The Dinniye Turkmen

Dinniye is a region in the Miniye-Daniyeh district of the North Governorate. Its population, which comprises generally of Sunni Arabs and Christians, is approximately 25,000. Ninety five percent of the population is Sunni Muslims, while the remaining are Christians. There are 15 settlements in the Dinniye region. Two of them are Turkmen settlements; and one another houses Turkmen among others as well. Turkmen villages in Dinniye are under the administrative authority of Bey Al-Hawiq village. They are not legally related to any municipal authority. Nevertheless,

Kaffar Benin and Safire Municipal authorities take care of Turkmen villages as well.

Turkey has established relations with the Turkmen of Dinniye in 2011 after the Turkmen of Baalbek. Until then, neither Turkey nor other Turkmen knew about the Dinniye Turkmen. The Turkmen of Dinniye has become aware of other Turkmen after 2010, when Turkey became more active in Lebanon and launched official, high level visits to the Turkmen villages. Their first contacts with Turkey have taken place in 2011, when the officials in Turkish Embassy paid a visit. They deem the visit by the former Prime Minister and current

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the Turkmen villages in Akkar as “the abolishment of a hundred year rift”. There is little information regarding their history. They state that nearby villages know them as “Turkmen” or “Turks”. They do not have kinship relations with other Turkmen villages in Lebanon. The Turkmen identity has been weakened and Turkish language is almost completely forgotten in the villages. Although they do not understand Turkish language, they stated that they feel affinity towards Turkish TV series and music. They watch Northern Cyprus radio and television channels.

Turkmen of Dinniye spend the winter working in Tripoli or studying as students in Mijlaya and Kubbe neighborhoods. They return to their villages during summer. They make their living with agriculture. They also serve as soldiers or teachers. Although it is relatively small, some Turkmen subsist on livestock as well. The most important problem of the villages is water supply.

### 3.1. *Hawwara*

Hawwara is the largest Turkmen village in Dinniye. Its population of 600 consists entirely of Turkmen. Three large Turkmen families live in the village. They are called Halil, Turkmani and Zaile. Its population falls to 300 during winter, but raises to 600 during summers. There is an elementary school in the village, where 70 students receive education.

### 3.2. *Jairoun*

The total population of the village in Dibeil is 2,500. Approximately 250 of them are Turkmen and they belong to the Halil tribe. The rest of the village is Sunni Arab. In the village, there is one elementary and one secondary school, in which 240 students receive education.

In addition, there is Gurhayye village, populated by Sunni Arabs, in which 100 Turk-

men live. Its population is 1,000. While this is not a Turkmen village, the Turkmen settled there as a result of marriage ties.

The residents of Dinniye do not have any problems among themselves, since most of them are Sunni Muslims, and conflicts mainly arise from sectarian reasons. Turkmen share a common culture with Arabs. They have been integrated with their surroundings through marriage. The Arab villages know them as Turkmen. Villagers have close interest towards Turkish TVs and music. Like the majority of Sunnis, they largely support the Future Movement.

The most important problem of the villages is that they are not under a municipal authority. In addition, there are problems related to water supply, health, language education, education facilities, ambulance and fire department. The villages lack proper healthcare. The nearest hospital is one and a half hours of travel away, and since it is a mountainous area, travel is hard. In order to address this problem, clinics have been established nearby in order to provide emergency medical attention, during health issues such as child birth. Clinics are in need of a large amount of medical materials. The Dinniye Turkmen’ foremost request is the opening of an education center that will include Turkish language programs. They state that not only Turkmen, but also the rest of the local folk are also interested in learning Turkish language. Considering the fact that they have forgotten Turkish, the issue of Turkish education is very important and meaningful.

The Turkmen living in Dinniye have acted as a bridge between Turkey and Dinniye, therefore, contributing the establishing of relations. As a result, the Union of Municipalities in Dinniye and the Union of Municipalities of Marmara signed a co-operation protocol. Turkey has increased its aid to Dinniye through TİKA Lebanon Coordination Office.

#### 4. Cretan Turks

The Cretan Turks that live in Tripoli (the northern province of Lebanon) have a different story than those of Baalbek and Akkar Turkmen. Their history in Lebanon began when the Ottoman Empire lost its dominion over the island of Crete. In 1821, when Greece gained independence, the Greeks in Crete rebelled against the Ottoman Empire, too. Until 1897 many uprisings were put down by the Ottoman Empire. In 1897, just before the Ottoman-Greek war, the island rose up again. Although the Ottoman Empire won the war, a new administration under the protection of Czarist Russia, England, France and Italy was established on the island with the intervention of regional powers. Gregorios, the son of the Greek King was commissioned as commissar to the island.<sup>6</sup> After 1897, when the Ottoman Empire lost control of the island and the Ottoman soldiers left, the Muslim population of Crete was left to fend for itself. Then, attacks on the Muslim population of the island (45% of the population) began. In 1898, a counter-revolt was initiated under the leadership of Ali Bekraki, but as the attacks continued, the Ottoman Empire sent ships to evacuate the island's Muslim population. Most of the Cretan Turks were settled in Izmir and Mersin, but some of them were sent to Tripoli and Damascus. Sultan Abdulhamid II established the village of Hamidiye for those who arrived from Crete and gave them land. They were also compensated for their losses in Crete. After WWI, the Ottoman Empire lost Lebanon and Syria and the borders were redrawn. Some of the Cretan Turks remained in Syria and others in Tripoli where their relatives lived. Today, the Cretan Turks of Lebanon consist of those who were settled in Tripoli and those who were settled in Hamidiye, but migrated to Lebanon due to economic reasons. The detailed story of Cretan Turks can be found in Professor Abdullatif Bekraki's book "Girit Adası ve Göçmenler Tarihi" (The Island of Crete and the History of the Migrants).<sup>7</sup> Accord-

ing to Bekraki, 10,000 Cretans were taken to Tripoli, but they dispersed later.

The number of Cretan Turks in Lebanon is not known precisely, but their number is estimated to be around 10,000. Those people do not call themselves Turks, but they are aware that they are of Cretan origin, so they call themselves "muhacirler" (immigrants). When they were first settled in Tripoli, the Cretans remained distant from the Arab population and tended to preserve their identity. This tendency seems to change for the new generation. The first generations used to speak Turkish and Greek, but the new ones have forgotten both of them. Within the last 110 years, they have largely been assimilated. Only some Turkish customs and traditions are still practiced. The locals in Tripoli call the Cretans "muhacirler" instead of Turks because when the Ottomans first sent the Cretans to Tripoli they advised the authorities by saying that they are sending new immigrants from Crete. Today, the Cretan Turks can be distinguished by their family names since their surnames always end with "aki" or "eki" which means son in Greek. When we separate the Greek ending, we find the Turkish root. For example "Bekraki" is consisted of "Bekir" and "aki" and it means "son of Bekir" (Bekir is a common Turkish name).

Cretan Turks feel affinity towards Turkey, the successor of the Ottomans, because others call them "Ottomans" in Lebanon. There are various reasons behind Cretan Turks' identity loss. First of all they live side by side with Arabs. They were easily accepted by local people since they are all Sunnis. They have experienced no discrimination or oppression. They were unable to form a self enclosed community, since they lived in a large city. Turkey was unaware of their presence and in the beginning of the 1990s; it did not have interest in them, therefore accelerating their Arabization. Until 1985, Turkey has remained unaware of the Cretan Turks in Lebanon and in that year, some Cretan Turks went to the Turkish Embassy in Bei-

rut to establish the relations. They are an urbanized community with high levels of education, and this fact led Turkish to fade into oblivion.

As communication was hard to establish in the earlier times, the Cretans in Syria and Lebanon lost contact with their relatives in Anatolia. The last link between the Cretans of Lebanon-Syria and Anatolia was lost too when the surname act was adopted in Turkey. They believe that they have many relatives in Izmir and Ayvalik but they cannot be certain of it. The only difference between the Cretans in Turkey and Lebanon is the region they were settled in fell out of Turkish control and they remained among the Arab community.

The Cretan Turks of Lebanon are still in relation with their relatives in Syria. They hold mutual visits with the villagers of Hamidiye from time to time. Even not as much as the Cretans of Lebanon, the Cretan Turks of Syria are assimilated as well. For example, Cretans in Lebanon have forgotten their languages completely, but those in Hamidiye can still speak Greek. The fact that they speak Greek should not create any confusion about their identity. As we know, the Greeks who were living in Turkey and were sent to Greece after the population exchange could speak better Turkish than Greek. This is because of the language spoken in the lands they lived. The locals of Hamidiye do not describe themselves as Cretan Turks, but as Cretan Muslims or Ottomans. Some of the better educated locals in Tripoli have researched their roots and define themselves as Cretan Turks. The majority of the Cretan Turks of Tripoli establishes relations or sympathizes with Turkey.

Parallel to Turkey's rising interest to Lebanon in the 2000s, its relations with the Cretan Turks increased as well. The most important development regarding this issue has been the conference titled "Crete and Cretan Muslims during the Ottoman Rule", which was organized with the support of the Presidency for Turks Abroad

and Related Communities. Held on the centenary of the forced migration, the conference has brought together Cretan Turks from Lebanon and the surrounding regions. In the conference, there was also an exhibition covering 40 documents from the Ottoman State Archives regarding the Cretans.

## 5. The Turkish Citizens Living in Lebanon (The People of Mardin)

There is a large community of Turkish citizens in Lebanon, who also have Lebanese citizenship. Some Turkish citizens in Beirut have been organized within associations. The figures of these associations indicate that 50,000 Turks live in Beirut. Most of them emigrated in the 1940s for economic reasons from southeastern Turkey. They are mostly from the Söğüt, Ömerli, Çavuşlu, Şenköy, Midyat and Gelinkaya districts near Mardin. Some of these emigrants went to Syria, and some came to Beirut. The Turks who live in Beirut today are the second and third generation. The middle aged and older Turks speak Turkish fluently, but the younger generation is about to forget their language. Most of them have still family ties in Turkey. They have relatives and property in Turkey, and they visit very often for business.

This community used to belong to the lower socioeconomic level, but their conditions have recently been improving. Most of them want to return to Turkey. Many of them were not registered as Lebanese citizens until 1994, and their conditions have improved since then. Some of them have both Turkish and Lebanese citizenships. They can get the Turkish citizenship when they furnish legal proof of their Turkish origins, but some of them fail to submit the paperwork and obtain Turkish citizenship. Turkish citizenship is their greatest wish. They also want Turkish education.

Since 2005, some Turkish citizens started returning to Turkey. Of all 50,000 Turkish citizens, only 23,000 to 25,000 people have the right to vote. Among those, the people that define themselves with Mardin origin form a positive bond with Turkey. About 30,000 people define themselves as people of Mardin.

## 6. Syrian Turkmen

As of 2015, over 4 million Syrians had to migrate out of Syria due to economic and security reasons, which is one of the most important consequences of the security problem posed by the Syrian civil war. Syrian Turkmen are among those who had to flee as well. Although the number of Turkmen living in Syria is not known, there are a lot of settlements in Aleppo, Latakia and Homs. Since they are weak in terms of political and military organization and they live in strategically important locations, Syrian Turkmen have become a part of mass migration in Syria.

The main cause of the migration of Syrians is instability. Geographical proximity is the most important factor determining the destination of migration. While Turkey and Iraq received migration from the north and east of Syria, migrants from the west and south headed to Lebanon and Jordan. Besides, destination country and immigrants' ethnic-religious identity are closely related. Syrians preferred the regions where their relatives or communities with similar identities live. The migration of Syrian Turkmen is a clear example. The Syrian Turkmen living in Aleppo and Latakia immigrated to Turkey, the closest destination that they had kinship relations. Similarly, the Turkmen living in Homs and Tartous headed to the Turkmen settlements in Akkar and Baalbek.

It is possible to classify the Syrian Turkmen's migration to Lebanon under two headings:

a. Zara and its surroundings, Hama and Tartous Turkmen' migration to the Turkmen settlements in Akkar

The Turkmen settlements in Akkar received migration mostly from Homs and a small amount from Hama and Tartous. Turkmen settlements in these provinces are close to the Turkmen villages in Lebanon. There are also kinship relations between Humus Turkmen and Akkar Turkmen. Zara village is the most important Turkmen settlement in Homs. It was an opposition stronghold from the onset of the uprising and armed opposition forces that Turkmen joined controlled the city until 2014. It had a strategic location enabling opposition militants to enter Syria from Lebanon and connection between the center of Homs and the Mediterranean coast. The regime forces carries out assaults against Zara, in order to cut the supply lines of the opposition from Lebanon and control the Damascus-Aleppo highway. Zara was captured by the regime in March 2014, after the intense fighting that started in February 2014. The regime attacked the civilians in Zara and caused many casualties. After Zara had fallen to the regime forces backed by Hezbollah, Homs Turkmen stated mass migration to Akkar. The most severe problem for Homs Turkmen is that they will have to live in the Turkmen settlements in Lebanon for a long time, maybe permanently, since their villages had been completely wiped out.

As of April 2015, around 1,600 Turkmen families migrated to the province of Akkar. It means that almost 6,000 Syrian Turkmen moved to Akkar. Some of these immigrants have dispersed to big cities such as Beirut and Tripoli for jobs. Even before the Syrian uprising, Qawashra and Zara Turkmen had marriage relations. Therefore, a great deal of Zara Turkmen settled in Qawashra. Nevertheless, some families moved to Wadi Halid and Halbe, since Qawashra is not that big. Besides, there are small groups that settled in Aydamun, El Bire, Halba, Shahduf, Bazbina, Al Dewsiye, Tilayl, Wadi Halid and Mashda



Hamud. The majority of Syrian Turkmen in Akkar have migrated from Telkelah, Nizariye, Tensin, Qusayr, Akrap, Sem Alil, Husn, Hamis, Hırbit, İcbab, Baruha in Homs countryside, Babi Amr in Homs center, Tillif, Kuzhik, Üveir, Hürmül, Beyt Natir, Hasarciye in Hama, and Mitraz, Beyt Aslan, Bisitin, Ayn Dibish, Dahrub and Bdada in Tartous.

b. The migration of Syrian Turkmen from Qusayr and its surroundings to the Turkmen settlements in Baalbek

A significant number of Turkmen live around Qusayr in the Syrian-Lebanese border and its surroundings. It has a strategic importance for controlling the border. For this reason, the regime has been attacking the city since the beginning of 2013. The Lebanese Hezbollah joined the siege of Qusayr in May 2013, thus directly taking sides in the Syrian civil war. Supported by Hezbollah militants, Syrian army units captured the town. As a result, local Turkmen had to flee to Lebanon. Most of them settled in the Turkmen region in Baalbek.

As of April 2015, about 1,500 Syrian Turkmen live in Baalbek. The number of families distributed to villages is as follows: 16 families in Duris, 65 families in Hadidiye, 115 families in Addus, 45 families in Naniye and 15 families in Sheymiye. These are the settlements that Syrian Turkmen left behind: Qusayr, Zara, Lisi, Nazariye and villages in Lebanese border. There are close kinship relations between the Turkmen that migrated to Baalbek and the resident Lebanese Turkmen. Before the forced migration, there were close relations involving trade, marriage, mutual visits, etc. They have similar surnames and speak the same language. In fact, they are of the same family, which was separated by borders. Their language includes some pure uncommon Turkish words, which are also used in some parts of Anatolia, but they also use a lot of Arabic words. The chance for the return of the Turkmen that migrated to Baalbek is very low, since the Syrian

regime destroyed the settlements around Qusayr. There are extremely miserable living conditions in the settlements that were not destroyed, i.e. insecurity, lack of basic services such as education, healthcare, electricity, and economic vulnerability, which will prevent the return of refugees at least in the medium term.

The Syrian Turkmen in Baalbek try to survive under severe conditions; as such most of them live in tents. Many families in animal husbandry business migrated with their animals. In addition they seek to make a living through the aid provided by the United Nations that are recently decreasing. Other than that only TİKA Lebanon Coordination Office provides aid for them.

Besides these two large migration waves, a small number of Golan Turkmen living in Damascus and some Turkmen in Hatit Turkmen village near Damascus had also migrated to Lebanon. These families mostly settled around Beirut. About 30 Syrian Turkmen families settled in Saida in southern Lebanon. In addition, it is estimated that 100 families and around 500 Syrian Turkmen live in Tripoli and its villages.

Syrian Turkmen think that there are several reasons for the Syrian regime's harsh treatment of them. First is the strategic importance of settlements like Zara for the regime. Second is Turkmen people's support for the opposition. As the third reason, Turkmen believe that the regime destroyed their villages, because it thinks Turkmen are on the side of Turkey. The people of Zara remark that they have hoisted two flags in their village in the beginning of the revolution; one is the Free Syrian Army flag, the other is the Turkish flag. They state that they have been bombed for three days after they had raised the Turkish flag. They also said that streets go empty when Turkish officials give speeches on TV and everyone supports Turkish national football team in its important matches.

Syrian Turkmen think that the Lebanese government has negative views on Syrians and particularly Turkmen migrants and hampers their affairs. They are disadvantaged just because they are Turkmen; as such Lebanese officials and international organizations allegedly think that Turkey can take care of Turkmen. The biggest desire of the Syrian Turkmen in Lebanon is coming to Turkey one day.

Although Syrian Turkmen's chances for return are very limited, the Lebanese government's policy is focused on ensuring their return. It has various reasons for this policy. The country already has scarce resources, and a refugee count of 1.5 million entered Lebanon that has a population of mere 4 million. They already have an unpleasant experience with the Palestinian refugees and worry that the country's volatile demographic structure is about to change. It is unacceptable for Lebanon that Syrians remain permanently in the country, while they also cannot send them back by force. Lebanon's policy towards migration seeks to prevent further migration, while promoting the return of refugees. For example, Lebanon asks the international community to send aids and undertake projects inside Syria. Thereby, Lebanon wants to ensure Syrians remain in their country and promote refugees to return to Syria.

## 7. Families from Anatolia and the Ottoman Heritage

Large families that have an emotional bond with the Ottomans and its heir Turkey for historical reasons are another element of Turkish presence in Lebanon. They can be handled in two categories. The first category is the families, who left Anatolia and settled in Tripoli and Akkar during the Ottoman era for business and other reasons. It is estimated that some of these families had settled in the Mamluk era. The second category is local notable families, which received authority and responsibility from the Ottomans for local

administration. These families, which are still prominent in Tripoli and Akkar, feel affinity towards the Ottomans and Turkey as its heir, and define themselves as Ottomans. Some of these families' names are "Turkmani", while others' family names are related to Turkish and Anatolia.

It is estimated that these families had migrated from Anatolia to Tripoli and Akkar: Turkmani, Turkmaniyye, Marasli, Istanbuli, Afyoni, Tahsildar, Sabuncu, Matrasi, Corbaci, Tutuncu, Sabuncu, Defterdar, Sancaktar, Cebahanci, Sancaktar, Bezirbesi and Taha. They are prominent Turkman families in Tripoli and Akkar. In addition, there are a lot of families with Turkish names of Anatolian cities and professions, and Turkish suffixes such as "-i, -ci, -ci". They are all viewed as Ottoman families. Some of them define themselves as Turks and feel affinity towards Turkey. In Tripoli, there are 200 families that have the surname "Turkmani". They have formed "Lebanon Turkmani Association", which continues its activities. In addition, efforts are going on for forming an association that will encompass all Ottoman families.

The families in the second category had been serving the Ottomans in local administration. Some of them are, Rufai, Kadiri, Kilanis, Zubi, Recep, Mirabi, Hatib, Zekeriya, Sayfa, Simin, Tenbuse Salih, Mahmut, Shehhel. Tripoli and Akkar notables. There are Ottoman decrees, declaring these families exempt from military service. The families still keep these decrees. The House of Sayfa family, which received the authority to govern Akkar from the Ottomans 500 years ago, is still a prominent family. Similarly, the House of Zubi was assigned with the governing of Mesha. Until two generations ago, they are reported to have spoken Turkish. Several members of these families are known to have served as advisors to Sultan Abdülhamid.

In addition to the notable families, the Ottoman heritage is quite visible in the

provinces of Akkar and Tripoli. Hamidiya Madrasa and Library, which was a gift of Sultan Abdülhamid to Akkar” stands as a clear example. Mesha Madrasa in Tripoli is another example. Consequently, these families and even a large part of the community in Tripoli and Akkar develop an emotional bond with the Ottomans and feel affinity towards Turkey as its successor. Local people and community leaders state that the Ottomans attached the greatest importance to Tripoli and Akkar, among other cities in the vicinity.

### 8. Circassians

The Circassians were transferred from the Balkans to the Middle East after the

Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78. They remained in Syria, Israel and Jordan after the Ottoman Empire lost these territories. Some of them moved to Lebanon for work. Currently, Circassians are dispersed in Lebanon, mostly in the North Governorate. The greater part of Circassians lives in Akkar, Tripoli, Beirut, and Minye. The total number of Circassian clans in Lebanon is twelve, but there is no clear number of Circassians people living dispersed in Lebanon.

The Circassians of Lebanon feel grateful to the Ottoman Empire for saving them during their exodus, and see Turkey as their second homeland. They maintain relations with their relatives in Turkey.

### III. THE IDENTITY OF THE TURKMEN IN LEBANON

As a result of Lebanon's social and political structure, religious and sectarian elements have become the building blocks of people's identity. In this respect, Turkmen are no exception. The dominant element of their identity is Sunni Islam. As such, their conservative nature is an important factor. Therefore, their sectarian identity is sometimes more important to them than their ethnic identity. Although they are aware of their Turkmen identity, until the 2000s they tended not to protect it, and their ethnic identity and language were eroded with each new generation. However, in recent years the idea of preserving Turkmen identity has come into prominence for certain reasons. These are the efforts of Turkish Embassy, Turkey's increasing interest in Lebanon, Turkish troops coming to Southern Lebanon within the framework of UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) and Turkishness being a source of pride<sup>8</sup> for Turkmen in Lebanon.

When we compared the Akkar and Baalbek Turkmen's cultural identity the following results were obtained. The majority of the Turkmen live in villages where only Sunni Turkmen are present. On the other hand, there are also some villages, such as Aydamun and Duris, where Turkmen live with Christians and Shiite Arabs. Since the villages in Akkar are mainly found in Sunni regions, they have no problems with their neighbors. They are known as Sunni villages, rather than as Turkmen villages. They are not under political oppression. Turkmen are members of the Sunni-majority community. This gives the Akkar Turkmen a role in national poli-

tics and helps them socialize with their neighbors. An incentive to protect their Turkmen identity does not emerge in an atmosphere where the difference does not seem to matter. The same conditions apply for the Cretan Turks. It seems that this situation accelerated the Arabization of the Akkar and Cretan Turks.

The majority of Baalbek Turkmen also live in villages with mainly Turkmen populations. However, the neighboring villages and towns are predominantly Shiite and Christian; therefore they are in minority position. They are also politically weak. Many of the Turkmen we interviewed emphasized that they are not welcome in the neighborhood and are pressured not to participate in political activities. This atmosphere isolated the Baalbek Turkmen. They are referred to as the "Turkmen Horde" by Shiites. Being different and a minority decelerated their "Arabization."

We observed that the education levels in the villages are directly proportional to Turkmen identity and the protection of Turkish language. We saw that Turkmen, who were friends with Arab children and received education in Arabic, forgot Turkish. In Aydamun, which has the highest education level among all the villages, Turkish was forgotten. Yet in Baalbek, where the education level is low, Turkish was better preserved. In Qawashra, however, the education level is lower than Aydamun's and higher than Baalbek's. Therefore, they are better than Aydamun, but lag behind Baalbek Turks in maintaining competence in Turkish and their Turkmen identities.

#### IV. THE POLITICAL TENDENCIES OF TURKMEN IN LEBANON

Religion is one of the main points of reference in social relations and in the political views of Turkmen in Lebanon that majorly have conservative tendencies. It can be said that they are conservative and devout, but they do not have radical tendencies. Turkmen, who describe themselves as a community that avoids extremes of all kinds, also avoid radical tendencies in politics. In addition, they feel devotion to their country and the Lebanese identity, similar to the Turkmen in Iraq and Syria.

Turkmen are not exposed to any oppression or threat for being Turkmen, but they have some problems because of their Sunni identity. For example, as a result of increasing tension between the Sunnis and Shias in Lebanon, Turkmen as a part of Sunni community conflict with the Shias locally. Since they are Sunnis, they largely support Saad Hariri and his party, the Future Movement.

Among the Turkmen of Lebanon, there is no one, who has reached a senior position. There are no politicians, opinion leaders,

artists or scientists. In Lebanon Assembly, the sects are represented with quotas, which were allocated for them. The 1989 Taif Accord stipulates that Christian and Muslim deputies be equally represented in the Assembly with 64 deputies each. Muslims are divided into 4 sects: Sunnis, Shiites, Druzes and Alawis. These sects have deputy quotas of 27, 27, 8 and 2 representatives, respectively. Turkmen have yet to have one of their own voted into the national assembly, but have an opportunity to see their deputies in the Assembly if they take advantage of the 27-person Sunni quota.

Looking at the whole picture, while Shiites and the March 8 Alliance support non-Arab Sunnis' entry into the parliament, Sunni Arabs have objections.<sup>9</sup> Some Christian parties give support, while others do not. Sunni Arabs do not want to give one of their quota to Turkmen. In contrast, Shiites support it, since it will weaken Sunni Arabs and present new alliance opportunities, especially with Sunni Kurdish groups.

## V. LEBANESE SOCIAL GROUPS' VIEW OF TURKMEN

Until the 2000s, neighboring communities used to identify the Lebanese Turkmen with “peasantry and poverty”. Their view of Turkmen have improved as a result of Turkey’s rising interest, investments towards Turkmen areas and changing perspectives toward Turkey in Lebanon after 2000.

Different Lebanese social groups’ view of Turkey is the most important factor that determines their view of Turkmen. Turkmen feel relief as long as Turkey has a positive image in Lebanon, while otherwise social and political oppression towards Turkmen increases. Therefore, there is a direct correlation with the Lebanese society’s view of Turkmen and Turkey’s image in Lebanon.

The turning point in Lebanese society’s view of Turkmen is the demonstration that was organized in Qawashra during the visit by former Prime Minister and current President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in November 2010. This demonstration has been useful for introducing the Lebanese Turkmen to the Lebanese society, which were previously unaware of their existence. People from all groups in Northern Lebanon attended the demonstration that Erdogan and Saad Hariri, leader of the Future Movement were present. It has been broadcast live on all Leba-

nese TV channels, and according to many commentators it was the most crowded demonstration in Lebanon’s history. In addition, the demonstration took place in the written media as well. It was emphasized that Erdoğan made his speech in the Turkmen village of Qawashra. Therefore, Turkmen have been known in the entire Lebanese society. Their image and position were enhanced, when Turkey gave the impression that it backs Turkmen.

Other communities, above all, know Turkmen with their Turkmen identity. Their representatives, during the interviews, defined Turkmen as their “brothers”. In the regions that they live in, Turkmen have blended in with Arabs. They state that Turkmen belong to Lebanon, though they speak a different language. Other communities express that they know the Turkmen but define them as “Sunnis”.

Although Lebanese society learned about the Turkmen on the occasion of Erdoğan’s demonstration, they do not have close information about them. In contrast, they know a great deal about the Armenians. The neighborhood of Burj Hamud is known as the Armenians’ neighborhood by everyone. It is not the case for the Turkmen. The main reason for that is that the Turkmen do not have political representatives or strong civil society organizations.



## CONCLUSION: LEBANON'S TURKMEN AND TURKEY

From the 1980s to the end of the 2000s, Lebanese Turkmen's relations with Turkey were limited to the Turkish Embassy. Turkey has ratified a Turkish military detachment to join the United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon after the Israeli-Lebanese War in 2006. In this context, the Turkish military unit that served in Sur during the years 2006 and 2013 has further strengthened ties between Turkey and the Lebanese Turkmen. With the joint efforts of the Embassy and the military unit, Turkey has forged close relations with Turkmen villages and realized many projects. Visits are regularly organized in religious and national bayrams.

There is a fast paced development in Turkey's relations with Lebanese Turkmen after 2009. The turning point in this issue was the former Foreign Minister and current Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's visit to Lebanon in July 2009. During his official visit, Davutoğlu visited the Turkmen settlements in Akkar, establishing high-level contacts with the Lebanese Embassy and Lebanese Turkmen. In his Qawashra speech, Davutoğlu gave the message that Turkey's support will continue with these words: "You are the bridge of friendship between Lebanon and Turkey. We will always stand by you as we also do for our Palestinian brothers in Gaza. When you are in peace and in prosperity, we are also at peace. Your problem is our problem." During the visit, the villagers of Qawashra greeted the minister with Turkish flags and chanted, "Long live Turkey." Davutoğlu also promised that Turkey's aids to the Turkmen villages would continue. The second turning point in the relations was the former Prime Minister and current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Qawashra and Aydamun during his visit to Lebanon in November 2010. The

public demonstration in Qawashra during his visit was one of the most crowded demonstrations in the history of Lebanon. Erdoğan addressed the Turkmen with these words: "My Turkmen brothers living in this region provide a friendship bridge for us and Lebanon. I believe that my Turkmen brothers will continue supporting the peace in Lebanon." Both visits have indicated that Turkey's interest and approach towards Lebanese Turkmen involve a new highest level, Ankara-centered understanding. This political approach has deepened the limited level of relations and Turkey's aids increased. Turkey's rising interest to Lebanon in a general level has supported this process. As a natural outcome of this process, Beirut Yunus Emre Turkish Culture Center was opened in March 2013 and TİKA Lebanon Coordination Office started its activities in 2014. Both institutions operate in the whole of Lebanon; in addition to this they play an important role in Turkey's increasing aid to Turkmen.

Since 2009, Turkey's total assistance to Turkmen can be presented as follows. During Davutoglu's visit in 2009, a health clinic, which had been built by TİKA, was opened. A public fountain carrying the name of Davutoğlu was built in memory of his visit. During Erdogan's visit in 2010, an opening ceremony was held for the school that TİKA had built in Aydamun. The Turkish Red Crescent built a prefabricated school building in Akkar in 2009 to be utilized as a high school. In 2012, former Minister of Education Ömer Dinçer attended the ceremony for laying the foundations of a school, built by the AFAD. For providing Turkish lessons in schools, Lebanese government has to enact a decree enabling it. It has given permission for many languages. Recently,

they have even allowed Persian language. Permission for Turkish has not been yet obtained despite Turkey's requests. For this reason, Turkish teachers teach after formal education hours in the schools built by Turkey.

Besides these, after the TİKA President's visit to the region, water supply network and a reservoir were constructed, mosques and churches were repaired and sports fields were built. Following these developments, Lebanese Turkmen visited Turkey and were accepted by the former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and Erşat Hürmüzlü, chief advisor of the former President Abdullah Gül. The name of Turkey's former Ambassador in Lebanon, Serdar Kılıç, who had worked hard for establishing Turkey's relations with Lebanese Turkmen, were given to the municipal buildings and gardens in Qawashra and Aydamun. In addition, TİKA Lebanon Coordination Office has carried out aid programs towards the Syrian Turkmen in Akkar and Baalbek. Akkar received more attention, whereas aid programs for Baalbek remained limited. In addition to food and clothing aids, TİKA has also provided an ambulance to be utilized in Baalbek area

With the deepening relations between, the Turkish public has acquired a degree of awareness about Lebanese Turkmen, albeit insufficient. They have more frequently taken place in the agenda after the end of the 2000s. Various TV channels visited the Turkmen villages and prepared documentaries. Academic studies have been published about Lebanese Turkmen. There were news articles and columns in the papers, and journals have prepared exclusive files about Lebanese Turkmen. In addition to the Turkish media, Lebanese Turkmen have also appeared in the Lebanese and Middle East media. There have been debates about them in conferences about Turkmen in Turkey. Turkmen politicians and opinion leaders in other Middle Eastern countries established relations with Lebanese Turkmen. Turkmen

regions and some Turkish municipalities started the practice of "sister towns". The Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center and TİKA Lebanon Coordination Office in Beirut, while also having benefits for the whole of Lebanon, operate particularly for improving the living conditions and protecting the identity of Turkmen.

The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, which was founded in 2010 under the Prime Minister's Office, has been also playing an important role in the development of relations between Turkey and the Turkish and Ottoman presence in Lebanon in particular and the relations with Lebanon in general. Turkey's education scholarships to Lebanon, which had had a yearly average of 1 to 4 students, has risen to a yearly average of 30 Lebanese students since the founding of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. In addition, among the activities of the Directorate for Turks Abroad and Related Communities are programs for increasing the capacity of the civil society organizations in Lebanon. Within this scope, the Assistance Programs of the Directorate support the projects that aim to contribute to the relations between the two countries, enhance our kins' positions in the society and increase the capacities of the associations.

Within this process, significant progress has been achieved in terms of the awareness of Turkish and Lebanese societies about Lebanese Turkmen. Nevertheless, the most important drawback is about the Turkish education of Turkmen. That is because there is no progress in gaining permits for Turkish education in Lebanese schools. In the schools that Turkey had built for Turkmen, even two hours of Turkish education in a week is not possible. Therefore, they learn Turkish in courses after class. It does not amount to a significant progress, since Turkish education does not take place in the formal curriculum. Turkish education can be made legal through obtaining a formal decree from the Lebanese government, which is

only possible through high level contacts by Turkey. The Lebanese government, which already allows many foreign languages, has recently adopted a decree permitting Persian education. Therefore, it is possible, but only through the bilateral political relations between the two countries.

Another important issue regarding the Turkish presence in Lebanon is the role of the civil society organizations. There is a large number of associations working for Lebanese Turkmen and Turkey-Lebanon friendship. These are, Lebanese Turkmen Association (Qawashra), Lebanon Turkish Fraternity Association (Qawashra), Lebanon Turkish Culture Association (Aydamun), Duris Social Solidarity Association (Duris), Lebanese Turkish Association (Tripoli), Uli Al Nuha (Tripoli), Lebanese Turkish Friendship Association (Tripoli), Lebanon Turkmani Association (Tripoli), Association for Developing Lebanon-Turkey Relations (Tripoli), Jil Mustakbel (Beirut), Lebanon Turkish Forum (Beirut), Lebanon Turkish Youth Association (Beirut), Saida Lebanese Turkish

Friendship Association (Saida). All these associations work for improving the conditions of Lebanese Turkmen, preserving Turkmen culture and language, developing Turkey-Lebanon relations, increasing social interaction between Turkey and Lebanon, and enhancing Turkey's image in Lebanon. Even though, this report handled many groups within the umbrella of Turkish presence, the relations among themselves are little further than emotional affinity. It is impossible to bring them under one roof for various reasons such as their geographical disparity, different past experience and differing social, cultural and economic structures. Nonetheless, each association's work benefits its own contingency. In this perspective, supporting each individual organization in its own region might be better than gathering all of them under one organization. It will not prevent these associations to cooperate and work together with Turkey on issues of common concern, such as relations with Turkey.

## ANNEX: THE LIST OF PERSONS AND INSTITUTIONS VISITED

*(The names are listed in chronological order)*

M. Musa Budak, Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, Middle East Coordinator

H. Ibrahim Erbir, TIKA Lebanon Coordinator

Cengiz Eroglu, Director of Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in Beirut

Zaher Sultan, Founder of the Lebanese Turkish Association

Moustafa Khodor, Major of Qawashra

Khodor Abbas, Deputy Head of Lebanese Turkish Association

Khodor Mohamed Khodor, Mukhtar of Qawashra

Halid Ismael, Director of Qawashra High School

Muhammed Huseyin, Chairman of the Turkmen in Lebanon Association

Halid Asad, Qawashra Turkmen, Retired Officer

Syrian Turkmen who migrated to Qawashra

Rami Adil Heddad, Major of Aydamun

Mustapha Ibrahim, Deputy Major of Aydamun

Kemal Maksut, Chairman of Turkish Culture Association

Ali Gorli, Chairman of Duris Social Solidarity Association

A Syria Turkmen who migrated to Baalbek

Khalid Al Sulh, Mufti of Baalbek

Mohammed Sadiyeh, President of Dinniye Union of Municipalities

Mustapha M. Turkmani, Member of Dinniye Development Committee

Zeyd Bakkar Zakaria, Mufti of Akkar

Muhendis Zekeriya Zubi, Major of Mesha

Halit Daher, Representative of Akkar, Lebanon Parliament

Muin Merebi, Representative of Akkar, Lebanon Parliament

Abdulkader Zubi, President of Akkar Zakat Foundation

Ali Bekraki, President of Ulinuha Association

Ahmet Türkmani, President of Lebanon Turkmen Association

Omar Tadmuri, Prof. Dr., Lebanon University

Halid Tadmuri, Prof. Dr., Lebanon University, President of Lebanese Turkish Association

Abdullah Bouhabib, President of Issam Fares Center

Hala Al-Helou, Ministry of Planning and Social Affairs, Lebanon

Gülshen Saglam, Member of New Generation Association

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Associate Professor Veysel Ayhan, who released a book about the history of Lebanon, says that Turkmen settled in Lebanon during the reign of the Mamluks. Again, he was the one who informed me that Turkmen came to the region before Sultan Selim I. In this respect, I would like to thank him for his contributions. For detailed information, see Veysel Ayhan, Özlem Tür; *Lübnan: Savaş, Barış, Direniş ve Türkiye ile İlişkiler*, Bursa: Dora Yayınları, 2009.
- 2 Charles Winslow, *Lebanon: War and Politics in a Fragmented Society*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 15, cited by Veysel Ayhan, Özlem Tür; *Lübnan Sorunu ve Türkiye: Savaş, Barış ve Direniş*, Bursa: Dora Yayınları, 2009.
- 3 Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 103.
- 4 Charles Winslow, *Lebanon: War and Politics in a Fragmented Society*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p.15. Abdul-Rahim Abu-Husayn's book titled *The View from Istanbul* deals briefly with the history of the Sanjaq (state) of Tripoli and states: "From the time of the Ottoman Conquest in 1516 until 1579, the affairs of the sancak/province were under the control of the Turkoman 'As-saf emirs of Ghazir in Kisrawan. When the province of Tripoli was reconstituted in 1579, a new Turkoman family was put in charge- the Sayfas.", Abdul-Rahim Abu-Husayn, *The View from Istanbul: Ottoman Lebanon and the Druze Emirate*, London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003, p. 92.
- 5 Sibel, Songül, Aslan, Fatih Mehmet, Tülay, Gürcan, Nurcan, Gülay and Aydan can be given as examples of those names.
- 6 The Island of Crete officially became part of Greece after the declaration of the second constitutionalist monarchy in 1908. With the signing of the London and Bucharest Treaties after the Balkan War, Ottoman Empire officially accepted the annexation of Crete by Greece and thus the issue of Crete was concluded. For detailed information about the process, see Ayşe Nükhet Adıyeke, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Girit Bunalımı (1896-1908)*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2000.
- 7 Haşim Söylemez, "Lübnan'daki Giritli Türkler", *Aksiyon*, Issue 722, 6 October 2008, [http://www.aksiyon.com.tr/dosyalar/lubnandaki-giritli-turkler\\_522802](http://www.aksiyon.com.tr/dosyalar/lubnandaki-giritli-turkler_522802).
- 8 Some of the Turkmen I interviewed are stating that the security treaty with Israel that was signed in the 1990s was a matter of dishonor for them and they hesitated to reveal their Turkmen identity at these times.
- 9 This conclusion is based upon the interviews with the Issam Fares Center and the representatives of the different political groups in Lebanon.





Süleyman Nazif Sokak No: 12-B Çankaya / Ankara  
Tel: 0 (312) 430 26 09 Fax: 0 (312) 430 39 48  
[www.orsam.org.tr](http://www.orsam.org.tr), [orsam@orsam.org.tr](mailto:orsam@orsam.org.tr)