THE FATHERLAND IN ARAB EMIGRANT POETRY

The subject which most inspired Arab poets in the lands of immigration, that is in North and South America, was their land of birth. On the one hand they gave expression to their nostalgia, complaining about their separation from their homelands, their family, their friends, their neighbours. On the other hand they gave vent to their concern about the hardships their families were suffering under the rulers of the moment. This last kind of poetry will have my attention, beginning in 1902 with Qayṣar Ibrāhīm al-Maʿlūf, one of the first Arab poets in Brazil. The end of the Second World War is the other temporal limit. The most recent poem quoted in this article dates from 6 January 1946.

Qayṣar al-Maʿlūf, appealed in 1902 to the newly appointed governor of Lebanon to practise justice and impartiality, saying a submissive people and a tyrannical ruler were things of the past. The governor, he said, should follow his advice, because:

"Here in our land of migration we see everything a country needs for its people to prosper:
Freedom, justice and equality, which allow a community to gain strength and have its hopes fulfilled.
O new Lord of the mountain, to whose judgement the districts are subjected,
fulfill our hopes with steady justice that splendour may return to the lovely mountain range
rule without prejudice, and listen not to him whose desires are capricious".1

The tone of this poem is still rather friendly. The new ruler is asked to look after the interests of the people and the poet brings arguments in favour of a more lenient rule. After the First World War broke out, however, this sort of friendliness disappeared. The reign of terror of the new

1 Tidhkār al-Muhājir, São Paolo, 1904, 101-103. The translated verses follow here in transliterated Arabic:

wa-kunā bi-mahjarinā raʿaynā kullā mā
yahtājuhū wa-tanun li-yanʿama ʿażluhū
hurstiyatan, ʿadlan, musāwātan bi-hā
ʿazzā ʿl-ikhaʿa wa-huqqiqat ʿamāluhū.

... yā sayyida ʿl-jabati ʿl-jadīda wa man ʿilā
ʿidrākīhi qad sullimāt ʿaʿmāluhū
huqqiq ʿamanīyānā bi-ʿadīn thābitin
fa-yāʿīda li-ʿl-jabili ʿl-jamīlī jalāluhū
wa-ḥkim bi-lā maylin wa-lā tasmaʿ li-ʿman
jamaḥat bihi naḥwa ʿl-hawā ʿamāluhū.
military governor of Lebanon, Ahmad Jamāl Pasha, the public hangings in Damascus and Beirut, in 1915 and 1916, the isolation of the mountain, and a widespread famine provoked the Arab emigrants. The Turks are bitterly attacked as are the Germans, at least in the poems of the North American Arabs. ‘Abd al-Masīh Ḥaddād (1890-1963) should be mentioned here. He was the publisher of the journal al-Sā‘īḥ in New York from 1912 onward and his paper was eventually chosen as a mouthpiece by the most influential group of poets of that moment, al-Rābiṭa al-qalamiyya. ‘Abd al-Masīh Ḥaddād wrote a poem in remembrance of the victims in the Fatherland, attacking the German emperor in the lines translated below. The poem dates from June 1915.

Where are the codes, where are they
who drew up the law by which to go.
They just follow the rule of pleasure
and all of them do as they please.
The law, what is the law to man?
William (Guillaume) in his war set it aside.
He trampled the law and did not observe
the conventions of good neighbourship.

Twenty percent of the population of the Lebanese mountain perished as a result of the famine in 1917 and 1918. In North and South America relief programs were started and the poets wrote their poems to this end. One of the most impressive poems about this onslaught has been written by Mikhā‘il Nu‘ayma, who died in February 1988, almost a hundred years old. He wrote the poem ‘Ākhi (Brother, comrade), which is, I think, the least whispered of his volume Hams al-Jufun (The Whisper of the Eyelids). However, opinions may differ. During the Nu‘ayma festival in Lebanon in 1978 I heard it sung in a soft voice. The message of this poem is without doubt that the Lebanese emigrants are to blame.

Brother, when, after the war, the Westerner speaks loudly of his deeds, blesses the memory of those who died, exalts the courage of the men,