RECONSTRUCTING THE MEDICI PORTRAIT OF FAKHR AL-DIN AL-MA'ANI

Before the nineteenth century, portraits of rulers in the Islamic Middle East were a rarity. Of all the princes of Mount Lebanon, only two are known to have been portrayed, Fakhr al-Din ibn Qurqaz al-Ma‘ani (1572–1635),1 amir of the Shuf and governor of Mount Lebanon (r. 1590–1633), then under Ottoman control, and Bashir II al-Shihabi (r. 1787–1840), a descendant of the Ma‘anids through several marriage alliances between the two houses. Several engravings purporting to depict Fakhr al-Din have surfaced, all of them by Western artists.

The earliest record of a portrait of Fakhr al-Din is documented in a letter written on July 20, 1659, by Sheikh Abu Nawfal al-Khazen, a Maronite overlord who had lived in Tuscany from 1635 to 1637. He wrote, on behalf of Fakhr al-Din’s grandnephews amirs Qurqaz and Ahmad, to Ferdinando II de’Medici, grand duke of Tuscany, asking to borrow the portrait of Fakhr al-Din in the Grand Duke’s possession. In it he reports the death of Fakhr al-Din’s nephew Amir Milhim Ibn Yunis al-Ma‘ani, and asks in the name of his two sons and successors that “Your Highness kindly allow the Jesuit Fathers, delegated by their Superior, to bring to the amirs the painted portrait of their uncle Amir Fakhr al-Din in the palace of Your Highness, or allow them to copy it, and send it here [to Beirut] from Livorno in the first vessel to sail to Saïda or Beirut.” There is no evidence that Ferdinando II acted upon his request, however, and the whereabouts of the portrait today is unknown.

Relations between the Medici and Fakhr al-Din went back to the time of Ferdinando I de’Medici (r. 1587–1609). England, Spain, France, Tuscany, the city states of Venice and Genoa, and the cities of the Low Lands all competed for trade in the eastern Mediterranean, and vessels from all of them brought goods to Fakhr al-Din’s ports of Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre. In 1608 Ferdinando I negotiated an agreement with Fakhr al-Din2 that included a safe conduct to Tuscany for the Ma‘anid prince.3 The Codice Mediceo del Regio Archivio di Firenze (Fondo Mediceo), and the Archivio Vaticano, Fondo Borghese II, contain several letters concerning Fakhr al-Din for the period 1608–13.4 Ferdinando I died on February 7, 1609, but his son Cosimo II de’Medici (r. 1609–21) continued his father’s relations with Fakhr al-Din. Their secret alliance was discovered by Ahmad Hafiz, the Ottoman governor of Damascus, and resulted in 1613 in a retaliatory raid on the amir’s domains. Fakhr al-Din decided to exile himself; he left Saïda with his younger wife and a retinue of around seventy-five people, and fled to Italy, leaving his mother, Sitt Nassab, of the Tan-nukh princely house, and his younger brother Yunis behind to govern his lands. Fakhr al-Din arrived at Livorno on November 3, 1613, the Grand Duke wrote to welcome him and sent a delegation to greet him headed by his first secretary Lorenzo Usimbardi.6

The amir’s arrival at Florence is described in a chronicle of his reign attributed to Ahmad al-Khalidi al-Safadi (d. 1624).7 After visiting Pisa and spending the night at the Villa Ambrogiana, Fakhr al-Din was greeted by the Grand Duke’s uncle Don Giovanni de’Medici8 in whose carosse the amir rode to the Palazzo Pitti. There Cosimo de’Medici, his wife, and his court received the prince from Mount Lebanon in the grand salon.9 While in Florence, the amir and his family resided at the Palazzo Vecchio10 in the apartment of Pope Leo X.11 His main residence until May 1614 was in Livorno. In June 1614, he moved to the Palazzo Medici Riccardi12 where he resided until the end of July 1615.13 He soon became well known in Europe.14

According to the chronicle, Fakhr al-Din left Florence in 1615 for Messina, at the invitation of the duke of Ossuna, viceroy of Spain in Sicily (Spain was then at war with the Ottomans). The duke welcomed the amir and gave him a residence overlooking the harbor. At the amir’s request he equipped him for a reconnaissance trip to Mt. Lebanon, while keeping his family and retinue in Messina. On the way back to Sicily, the amir stopped off at Malta,15 where he was welcomed with great pomp. In the meanwhile the viceroy had moved to Palermo, and Fakhr al-Din followed him there and then on to Naples where he is said to have resided until 1618,16 when he was finally able to return to Mount Lebanon after the assassination of Grand Vizier Nassuh Pasha and
The earliest known portrait of him (fig. 1) was published by Eugène Roger, a French Franciscan in Nazareth, who was one of Fakhr al-Din’s physicians in the last year of his reign (1632–33). Roger describes Fakhr al-Din as follows: “Lorsque l’Emir Fechreddin fut défaînt il estoit aagé environ de soixante & dix ans. Ce Prince estoit de moyenne stature, la face vermeille, l’œil brillant, d’un courage invincible, docte en l’astrologie et phisiomnie.” The illustration shows a tall, old, bearded man; dressed in moderately luxurious garments — Eugène Roger describes his retinue as “les princes et ceux qui tiennent rang de noblesse sont passablement bien vestus.” The amir’s face is shown in profile, the same profile that is seen in an illustration in the same book entitled simply “Marchand maronite.” The similarities of the two heads indicate that the illustrator did not make these illustrations from life, but merely depicted his own idea of what a Middle Eastern figure would look like, based on accurate information about costumes.

In 1677, an engraving representing an episode of Fakhr al-Din’s life was published in Amsterdam by Offert Dapper. The illustration (fig. 2) shows a dramatic capture scene in Baroque Rubenesque style. In the foreground, Fakhr al-Din is shown pointing his commanding hand toward two soldiers with swords at their sides, holding a man down on the ground. The scene is set in front of a round tent with elaborate textiles and a crowd of soldiers with lances and standards. The episode represents the capture of Mustafa, pasha of Damascus, at the Battle of ‘Anjar in the Bīqa’ Valley, on November 1623. Several dignitaries surround the prince, probably his son ‘Ali and his closest allies, Amirs Muhammad and ‘Ali Shihab who fought in the battle of ‘Anjar. This illustration is too theatrical to be regarded as a portrait of the amir, though the costumes are roughly representative of the period. The artist may have been inspired by Eugene Roger’s illustration (fig. 1).

In his book on Fakhr al-Din, Adel Ismail reproduces an engraving by Henric Bonnart (ca. 1642–1711), which Bonnart identifies with the caption, “Emir Fechreddin prince des Druses” (fig. 3). This portrait was found at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in a manuscript on the Druses. The print is probably the same as item 127, “Emir Fechreddin prince des Drus,” on Charles Le Blanc’s list of Henri Bonnart’s engravings. Henri Bonnart must have based his design on Roger’s illustration because there are several similarities between the portrait in Roger and Bonnart’s portrait of Fakhr al-Din. Both faces are old and bearded; the turbans are similar; the cloaks are striped and held in the same manner.

the ruin of Hafez. The new grand vizier, Muhammad Pasha, was an ally of Fakhr al-Din. During the remainder of his reign he kept up his ties with Pope Urban VIII, the Medicis, and Spain. From that time on, Amir Fakhr al-Din ibn Qurqmaz al-Ma‘ani was frequently mentioned by travelers to the Holy Land, historians, and geographers. One may assume that such a well-known character could also have been portrayed by artists, but only a few portraits have surfaced, all engravings, ranging in date from the seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century.

Fig. 1. Portrait of Amir Fakhr al-Din. From Eugène Roger, La Terre Sainte . . . (1646). (Photo: by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University)