Al-Ahdath in the Levant in the Fatimid Era and Their Convergence with the Al-Zu'ar in the Mamluk Era

Bader Nahar al-Daihani*   Mohammad Habeeb al-Enezi
Ministry of Education, Kuwait
* email: Kwt-b@hotmail.com

Abstract
This study explores those societal organizations that were described in the ugliest and most vile descriptions: Al-Ahdath (Juveniles) in the Fatimid era and the Al-Zu'ar (Thugs) in the Mamluk era. This research tackles their political and societal roles and their disputes with the authority and society. It also sheds light on their clothing, weapons, names, neighborhoods, and other things that pertain to them, concentrating on the convergence between two groups.
Keywords: Al-Ahdath, Al-Zu'r, the Fatimid era, the Mamluk era.

Before delving into Al-Ahdath (Juveniles), it must be noted that these marginal groups existed throughout the ages, and took different names in each era. Each time we find them rebellious and marginalized, hating customs and values. Moreover, the sources mentioned them with contempt and dispraise.

Linguistically, the word Al-Ahdath is the plural of hadath, who is a young person, i.e. youth (Ibn Manzur, 1994, vol. 2, p. 133). Mustafa Shaker mentions that the word Al-Ahdath mentioned for the first time in the history of the Levant by Ibn al-Atheer, as the Caliph Al-Mutadid (d. 289 AH / 901 AD) defeated Khamarawiyeh Ibn Tulun (d. 282 AH / 896 AD) in the incident of the War Mills at Ramla in the year 271 AH / 884 AD. He says: "And its people did not open its door for him, so he went defeated until he reached Tartus... While Khammarwayh himself, fearing defeat, turned back accompanied by a group of Al-Ahdath who have no knowledge of war" (Ibn Al-Atheer, 1997, vol. 6, p. 342; Shakir, 1973, p. 180). In another story, Ibn Al-Atheer narrates about the personality of Jaysh Ibn Khamarawayh (d. 283 AH / 896 AD) who was young. He brought them close to him and listened to their views, so they managed to make him change his intention against his commanders and his companions. He started to slander them and show his determination to replace them and take their endowments and money. Therefore, they plotted to kill him...) (Ibn Al-Atheer, 1997, vol. p. 385). However, there have been other references to Al-Ahdath before this. For instance, Al-Hasan Al-Thaalibi, in his book Beautifying the Ugly and Uglifying the Beautiful, mentioned them with some positivity, calling for their exploitation and benefiting from them. He says: "… honor the mobs and the foolish, for they will suffice you with shame and dishonor. Moreover, Jaafar bin Muhammad, may Allah be pleased with him, said: They put out fires, and rescue the drowned, and block the holes. Saeed bin Salim used to say: The president should make a link between the fools and mob" (Al-Thaalibi, 2002, p. 32). This news clearly shows that Al-Ahdath were used by princes and leaders as followers and bodyguards.

However, these tasks develop later to become the protection of entire cities after their tasks were limited to serving the princes, due to the change in the political, economic and military conditions. This matter becomes evident in the year (294 AH / 906 AD) when the Qarmati Zakarawih attacked Damascus (Ibn Al-Atheer, 1997, part 6, p. 417, in the year (293 AH / 905 AD) when the Qarmatians attacked Bosra and Udhra (Ibn Al-Atheer, 1997, vol. 6, p. 428; Shakir, 1973, p. 180), and in the year (294 AH / 906 AD) when the Romans attacked Korus of Aleppo (Ibn Al-Atheer, 1997), vol. 6, p. 431; Shakir, 1973, p. 181).

When the authority of the Ikhshidids collapsed and the Fatimids came as a force that wanted to control the Levant, Al-Ahdath appeared again, taking advantage of chaos, turmoil and political vacuum. They defended the Levant against the Fatimid danger. In every movement they made, their strength was increasing little by little, and at the same time their tools were developing with the passage of time. This appears in many movements they made, such as Ibn Asuda Movement (358 AH / 975 AD) (Al-Maqrizi, 1967, vol. 1, pp. 118-119), Ibn Al-Maroud Rebellion (363 AH - 364 AH / 974 AD - 975 AD) (Ibn Al-Qalanisi, 1983, p. 17), Qassam Al-Turab Rebellion (368 AH / 978 AD) (Ibn Katheer, 1988, vol. 11, p. 331), and Ibn Abi Talib Al-Jazzar Movement (412 AH / 1021 AD) (Ibn Asaker, 1996, vol. 36, p. 127).

It becomes clear that Al-Ahdath organized themselves as revolutionary forces, defending the interests of the poor classes. Al-Douri says: (...I grew up in a society dominated by exploitation and confused by the class differences that led to the clash between its groups. The affairs of Al-Ahdath worsened due to the political turmoil that is accompanied by chaos (Al-Douri, 1968, p. 81). The people of the Levant "rejected the Moroccans (Fatimid) because they differed from them in belief" (Ibn al-Qalanisi, 1983, p. 30), so they were stubbornly defending their city, as mentioned by Al-Maqrizi: (And they worked on as if they were fighting at the gates of

the grave) (Al-Maqrizi, 1991, p. 289).

But the role of these forces ended in failure at the hands of the Fatimid who took control of Damascus. During their rule the local bourgeois forces were able to contain the popular forces and made them subordinate to them and one of their tools (Kahn, 1930, p. 117). However, this containment did not last long, as the masters and notables asked, in Damascus, the leader Jaafar bin Falah to save them from Al-Ahdath. They told him: (Go in, Commander, and we are supporting you. The country is yours. Do what you please.) (Al-Maqrizi, 1991, p. 291). He chose the path of trickery to eliminate them once and for all. (… He made some of the chiefs of Al-Ahdath his chamberlains. He offered the food every day for them and their companions, so every one of them came accompanied his followers and friends. He ordered them when they had finished the food, to come to his room to clean their hands. Then he ordered his companions from the chiefs of Al-Ahdath that if they entered the room to clean their hands, to close the room's door on them, and put the sword in their companions. On the next day they prepared the food, the chiefs got up to the room, and the doors were closed on them, and about three thousand men were killed from their companions...) (Ibn Al-Atheer, 1997, vol. 7, p. 480), and thus they were completely eliminated and we no longer hear about Al-Ahdath in the Fatimid era after this incident.

When we move to the Seljuk era, we find that Al-Ahdath turn into important local groups in the walls and markets of Damascus. These forces were united in opinion and affiliated with some bourgeois families that began to inherit the presidency of Al-Ahdath that in turn united with the title of the presidency of the country, such as the Sufi family and the Al-Qalani family in Damascus. It seems that the Seljuk rule was kept and accepted the bourgeois classes that allied themselves with it, so Al-Ahdath organization in this region became part of the Seljuk forces (Shaker, 1973, p. 175).

This alliance between the bourgeois classes and Al-Ahdath will abolish the role of Al-Ahdathas groups that play defensive roles against the foreign or neighboring powers. Accordingly, they will remain subordinate to the chiefs of the big bourgeois. With the advent of the era of Nur Al-Din Zangi and after him Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyubi, Al-Ahdath disappear because there is no need for them. As a result of the entry of the Franks into the region and the absence of the Fatimid and the Abbasids, the society and Islamic forces developed into new situations and circumstances. Thus, Al-Ahdath organization and the presidency of the country disappeared (Kahn, 1930, pp. 119-120-255), but Ibn Jubayr in his journey partially denies this view and says that he saw in the year 579 AH / 1184AD a group of Al-Ahdath called Al-Nabawiya (People of the Tradition). It appears from his description that they are an organized group with special dress. They have an oath (swear) that they abide by, and they do not accept that any of their members be subjected to aggression. Ibn Jubayr says: (..... a sect known as the People of the Tradition. They are Sunnis who believe in futuwah (chivalry) and all matters of manhood. Anyone who shows a trait of chivalry, they bundle his pants and ask him to join them. They cannot resist seeing any one of them appeal for assistance without giving him a helping hand. They have strange doctrines: If one of them swears by chivalry, he fulfills his oath. They kill the Rafidites (Rejecters of Shia) wherever they find them. They are remarkable in their alliance and self-esteem) (Ibn Jubayr, 2002, p. 227).

Concerning the internal organization of Al-Ahdath, we find that they had a special master called the chief, leader, or president (Ibn Al-Qalanisi, 1983, p. 82; Ibn Al-Adim, 1996, p. 201; Al-Maqrizi, 1967, vol. 1, p. 125). This president is usually concerned with one of the city's quarters and imposes his control over it (Ibn Al-Atheer, 1997, vol. 7, p. 281). It seems that all these presidents were from common people. That is they are from the heart of the organization, but later famous personalities with high lineage were appointed, like Sharif Abu Al-Qasim bin Abi Yala Al-Hashemi (Ibn Katheer, 1988, vol. 11, p. 302).

Each organization had flags, customs, slogans, mouthpieces and other symbols that distinguish it from other groups. Al-Maqrizi says: (... and another is called Ibn Bushrat and Ibn Al-Mughniyeh, and each of them has his own party with flags and mouthpieces) (Al-Maqrizi, 1967, vol. 1, p. 212). Their weapons were simple, such as axes, stones, knives, sticks, slingshots and crossbows (Al-Maqrizi, 1991, p. 290). With regard to their financial resources, they were not limited, sometimes they collected taxes themselves. For instance, Ibn Al-Maroud collected taxes from the people in Damascus during the reign of Alptekin (Al-Dawadari, 1961, vol. 6, pp. 170-171). At other times, some rulers offered them aids, endowments and grants in order to support them. This happened during the conflict between the sons of the Mirdasi Family (Ibn Al-Adim, 1996, p. 235) because looting was among the non-permanent resources for them, just as Qassam Al-Turab did with the Fatimid governor in Damascus Suleiman bin Jaafar bin Falah and expelled him from it (Ibn Al-Qalanisi, 1983, p. 41).

With this overview, we have presented the most prominent features of Al-Ahdath in the Levant in the Fatimid era, in terms of their origin, activities, anti-state movements, relations with the forces of society, flags, emblems and financial resources. In order to complete the comparison picture, it is necessary to present the features of Al-Zu'r (Thugs) in the Levant.

From the linguistic point of view, the dictionaries agree that Al-Zu'r means little and sparse hair, a man of bad manners or a man with little money. The plural forms are Al-Zu'rah and Al-Zu'r of the singular form Zaa'r, who is the fraudulent and vagrant thug (Al-Farahidi, 1992, p. 352; Ibn Sayyidah, 2000, p. 518).

By tracing the Mamluk sources, it is noted that the organization of Al-Zu'r was active in the period of the

second Mamluk state (Al-Burjia), specifically in the city of Damascus. This does not mean that they did not appear before that in the first Mamluk state (Bahriya). There are indications that they carried out corruptive acts in Damascus 735 AH / 1335 AD, which prompted the judges to urge the deputy of the Sultanate, Prince Tunkaz (d. 741 AH / 1341 AD) to deter Al-Zu'r and torture them (Al-Maqrizi, 2006, p. 381). Other indications showed that Prince Muntash (d. 795 AH / 1392 AD) used them in his army during his struggle with Yalbugha (791 AH / 1398 AD) (Ibn Iyas, 2005, pp. 357-358).

Based on Ibn Tulun's book Mufkahat Al-Khelan [Kidding with Friends] and Ibn Tawq's book Al-Ta'leeq [Annotated Diaries], we come to know that the emergence of Al-Zu'r on the scene was at the end of the ninth century AH / fifteenth century AD, when the strength of the Mamluk authority declined and they emerged as an effective and influential force in the society. Among the most actions they did were Al-Zu'r are the crimes of murder, and this is due to the lack of security resulting from the decline in the power of the Mamluk state. Al-Zu'r are associated with acts of murder, plundering, theft and looting of shops. There are many references of that: In 899 AH / 1493 AD Al-Zu'r attacked a Frankish person residing in the alley of the Christian Church, and they slaughtered his wife and his Abyssinian slave, and they took a lot of money (Ibn Tawq, 2002, p. 1300).

There are varied references by historians to this. One of these is that in 899 AH / 1493 AD Shaaban Al-Hourani, one of Al-Zu'ran who was imprisoned for the murder of Al-Zain ibn Al-Siraji, died in prison (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 274).

In 902 AH / 1496 AD, Ibn Alaa Al-Din Al-Maqri Al-Shahid was killed at Bab Al-Musalla in Wadi Al-Fawqani, and he was thrown into an enclosure, and his companion , a boy, was wounded. It was said that Al-Zu'r of Al-Shaghour who killed him. Also in 903AH / 1497AD, they killed a deputy (Ibn Tawq, 2002, p. 1567). They also killed a person called Ibn Al-Zuhri whom they took his gauze (Mustafa et al., 1989, p. 499). He insulted them, so they hit him with knives and killed him. He was thrown away until late afternoon (Ibn Touq, 2002, p. 1658). In 905 AH / 1499 AD one of Al-Zu'r named Abd Al-Salam bin Al-Hamawi killed a Christian, named Shreim, in the Quarter of Christians (Ibn Touq, 2002, p. 1829). Moreover, in 906 AH / 1500 AD, the Deputy Duwadar hanged one of Al-Zu'r, originally from Erbil (Kurd Ali, 1949, p. 83). He confessed that he killed a Moroccan in Al-Khatounia Quarter, so he was hanged under the castle in Al-Joura (Ibn Touq, 2002, p. 1894).

The question that occurs to mind is that what is the motive for these crimes and this violence? We believe that the revenge between these groups is the main motive. In 910 AH / 1504 AD, Al-Zu'ran avenged the death of one of their followers, known as Ahmad Al-Sawaf, when they attacked the Slave Quarter, who saw among them a hand of the Deputy Qansuh Al-Burji who killed this young man (Ibn Tawq, 2002, p. 120). Also in 914 AH / 1508 AD the Al-Zu'r killed Judge Shihab Al-Din Ahmed bin Eid Al-Hanafi (Al-Ghazi, 1997, p. 78). When he and his wife went to the orchard of the shrine near Al-Shaghour, Al-Zu'r attacked him and killed him and his servant (Al-Homsi, 1999, p. 187). The reasons for the attack and killing of the judge are not clear, but we think that it is linked to a personal enmity between the Al-Zu'r and the judge.

Al-Zu'r were also known for looting, plundering and assaulting to collect money. In some sources there are references to repeated incidents of looting of shops and markets in Damascus in 746 AH / 1345 AD. This increased the turbulence and insecurity in the city (Al-Maqrizi, 2006, p. 518; Al-Hajji, 1984, p. 338). They stole the Jaqmaq market (Ibn Taghri Bardi, 1990, p. 398; Badran, 1985, p. 323) inside Bab Al-Jabiya, where the thugs attacked the shops of Christians and others' shops. Their theft amounted to seven cloth shops. Moreover, they raided another market in 890 AH / 1485 AD (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 68), and in 894 AH / 1488 AD one of them attacked the newly married Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Abi Al-Naga and took most of the cloth from his house at night before south of Turbit Tanim in the Hasa Square (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 105).

In 902 AH / 1496 AD, one of Al-Zu'r called Al-Nahhasi was arrested because he robbed one of the persons of an amount of up to four ashrafi gold coins and more than fifty silver pieces, which he had stolen by putting his hand in the man's pocket and quickly picking it up. It appears that Ibn Al-Nahhas was among a large group of Al-Zu'ran when they entered a mosque at Bab Al-Salama (Badran, 1985, p. 41), where there were a number of tanners and Turkmen, whom they wanted to rob them and strip them... (Ibn Touq, 2002, pg. 1491).

Ibn Tulun blames the ignorant preachers, as he calls them, and charges them with shortcomings, because they do not realize the effect of the legal fatwas (religious opinions) that they give. If someone from Al-Zu'r hears that a drinker of wine or a murderer who killed a hundred souls can be forgiven and go to heaven, he will become more emboldened to sin, and he leaves the sermon pleased and turns whole-heartedly to sin (Ibn Tulun, 1962, pp. 245-278). As a result, Al-Zu'ran rush to more transgression, robbery and killing because they believe that if someone who killed a hundred lives is forgiven, then it is more appropriate to forgive them when they have not killed such a number yet. Thus, they used to take people's money by intimidation, practice adultery and sodomy. Furthermore, they did not wash or clean themselves (Al-Najjar, 1981, p. 55).

What about their internal organization? It was customary for the Al-Zu'r to have a master or chief. In 904 AH / 1499 AD - 907 AH - 1501 AD their chief was Sayyid Quraish, and from 907 AH / 1501 AD - 910 AH / 1504 AD was Ibn Tulun (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 83), whose successor was known in 910 AH / 1504 AD) as Abu

Taqiah (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 122). In Salhiya, Al-Jamous was known as one of the elders of the neighborhood (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 106), and in Al-Hassa Square, Ibn Al-Ustad was known in 907 AH / 1501 AD - 913 AH / 1507 AD) (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 111). Their nicknames such as Quraysh or Ibn Al-Ustath indicate a high or noble rank and also denote generosity and nobility. On doing so, they aimed at giving their organization the color of respect, thinking that these names would erase the bad qualities that characterized Al-Zu'r's organization. Moreover, they used other nicknames to denote prestigiousness and to fear enemies, so some of them are called (Abu Taqiya) or (Al-Jamous) to denote the enormity of the body. Among their dignitaries are also Ibn Al-Dhahabi (Ibn Tawq, 2002, p. 1515), Barakat and Ibn Fakik (Ibn Touq, 2002, p. 1625), Ibn Al-Tayyib (Ibn Touq, 2002, p. 1708), Qaziya (Ibn Touq, 2002, p. 1710), Al-Sayyid Arish (Ibn Touq, 2002, p. 1731) and Ibn Al-Ajami, whom Ibn Touq considered the chief of Al-Tahoun Quarter (Ibn Touq, 2002, p. 1824).

As for their clothes, they would throw a robe or something similar as a distinctive emblem for them, and they would cut the hair of their heads, and as a result they were known as (Qar'ani, Lit. Bald Heads) (Ibn Tulun, 1984, p. 174). They carried daggers, which were their main weapon, but they used swords in some cases (Ibn Tulun, 1962, 1984, p. 190). Furthermore, they stipulated that those who join them must use swords, daggers, and other weapons they own (Ibn Tulun, 1962, pp. 238-239).

Concerning the relationship of Al-Zu'r with the Mamluk authority, the relationship was characterized by ambiguity and complexity. In many cases the authority punished them with various deterrent penalties, such as tawsit (bisection) (to cut someone in half at the waist with a sword) (Ibn Touq, 2002, p. 1499), hanging (Ibn Tuq, 2002, p. 1281), skinning at times (Ibn Tulun, 1984, p. 168), as well as collective punishment at other times (Ibn Tulun, 1984, p. 168). The Mamluk state was harsh in this way, perhaps aiming at the supremacy of security and law.

Al-Zu'r formed the main force in Damascus. Their power was often equal to, if not superior to, the power of the deputy. Therefore, the deputies were keen not to confront them, and just to keep a certain amount of disagreement between the Al-Zu'r themselves. If Al-Zu'r were able to permanently unite, they would have another matter with the rulers (Al-Olabi, 1982, p. 102). Some of the ruling class had the ability to direct the energy of Al-Zu'r to benefit from them in achieving their personal goals (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 89). Sometimes the state paid them money in return for going out in its campaigns (Ibn Tulun, 1984, p. 180; Al-Ghazi, 1982, p. 767), and some of the Mamluks used them to arrest fugitives from Mamluk authority (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 168).

There are two reasons that mostly strained the relationship between the two parties (Al-Zu'r and Mamluk authority): Al-Rami (Lit. tossing) and taxes. Al-Rami means to impose on an entire quarter or neighborhood blood money for a dead person found in it whose killer was not known, according to the Hanafi doctrine (Al-Basrawi, 1988, p. 198; Doumit, 2001, p. 416). At the same time taxes united Al-Zu'r against the Mamluks. In order divide Al-Zu'r, the deputies worked to stir up discord and sow the seeds of division among their ranks in the hope of weakening their power (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 38). When the Mamluk state weakened and was about to fall in 922 AH / 1516 AD, and the rumors and news abounded in the Levant about the arrival of the Ottomans, some of Al-Zu'r in Damascus killed some of the Circassian Mamluks and their associates and supported the Ottomans in the Citadel of Damascus (Ibn Tulun, 1962, p. 42).

Conclusion

At the end of the study, we can say that Al-Ahdath and Al-Zu'r were similar organizations in two different eras. Through this research, it was found that what the two groups have in common are many, starting with names, titles, weapons, clothing, relationship with society, relationship with the ruling authority, and taking advantage of their services by some princes. Other commonalities include the opportunities they seize now and then; in addition to the oppression and punishment they were subjected to sometimes when they did not agree with the authority or when they became weak.

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