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Science and Arabism in Ottoman Syria and Lebanon: the case of Mansur Hanna Jurdak (1881- 1964)

Angela Kahil

Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK)-INALCO

Abstract

Mansur Hanna Jurdak was a prominent Arab-Protestant scientist at the American University of Beirut who starts his journey within the American Protestant network in Lebanon since the establishment of the missionary station in the village of Shwayr in Mount Lebanon. Very integrated in the American institutions, Jurdak becomes an internationally known scientist, mathematician and astronomer, since he discovered a star he named 'Al-Kulliyah' (the faculty). Besides his scientific career, Jurdak is an intellectual, within the Nahda Arab movement, advocating for a cultural Arabism and for the use of the Arab language. In his numerous articles published in *Al-Irfan*, he criticized the French mandate. His major work was the Dictionary of astronomy he wrote in both languages, English and Arabic.

My research about Mansur Hanna Jurdak sheds the light on individual stories that complete our knowledge about the late Ottoman period, the French mandate and post-independent Lebanon, but also about the Nahda, adding one new figure to the list of Arab intellectuals of the movement. I adopt a personal approach of History which consists in illuminating the past with individual stories. The proposed topic is a way to take Mansur Jurdak out of oblivion as well as his contribution - as a scientist - to the development of the Nahda and the promotion of science. The paper questions the opportunities and strategies that Arab intellectuals used to diffuse their ideas (belonging to a network, religious conversion, scientific research).

Keywords: Nahda, AUB, science, Arabism, Protestant