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NOTES AND COMMENTS

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A RESPONSE TO PHILIP KHOURY'S REVIEW OF *THE CONSCIENCE OF LEBANON: A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF ETIENNE SAKR (ABU-ARZ)* (*IJMES* 36 [2004]: 306–8)

MORDECHAI NISAN

I intend not to defend my book but to protest its "reviewer," whose first responsibility—as for any reviewer—was to relate what the book is about, even chapter by chapter. But Philip Khoury betrayed the reviewer's task concerning my book *The Conscience of Lebanon*, choosing to use it as a foil to propagate his own Arabist and anti–Israeli political views. His was not a book review but a mean-spirited tirade. He writes, "Etienne Sakr was a minor Lebanese militia leader," though I deal with this point myself; the review is jaundiced by repetitive labeling ("right-wing Lebanese leaders") and vindictively vilifies my study as not a "systematic work of scholarship."

The reader of Khoury's enraged review has hardly an inkling of the content and themes of my biography of Abu-Arz, which deals with the problems and dilemmas of Lebanese nationality and the search for a unified ethos, the breakdown of political order, and the machinations of foreigners—especially Palestinians and Syrians—in undermining the sovereignty of Lebanon.

It would be appropriate for the reviewer perhaps to mention other works or areas of specialization of the author, the literary quality of the book, the special sources made available to the author, and the audiences for whom the work will be of interest. Khoury chose, however, to jump on his political barricades, defaming the author, but really exposing his infantile wrath and personal prejudice.

I can only suggest that readers go out and purchase the book and judge for themselves or that *IJMES* deem it fit to call on another reviewer to review my book.

Abu-Arz is a unique Lebanese figure and a truly great man, and that is why I chose to probe his life and give it a narrative life in book form. Sympathy for the subject of a biography, of which Khoury accuses me, is rather standard, so this is not a flaw in my work at all. Apparently the flaw in Khoury's eyes was the subject himself.

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A REPLY TO MORDECHAI NISAN

PHILIP S. KHOURY

I would have failed in my responsibility as a reviewer had I ignored the fault lines in the pedestal that Mordechai Nisan constructed for his hero, Etienne Sakr. Readers may indeed judge for themselves. Whether they wish to buy the book is another matter.

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