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**UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT
ABOUT THE ALBANIAN *HIJRA*
FROM OTTOMAN KOSOVA TO SYRIA AS
A RESULT OF THE BALKAN WARS 1912-1920**

Through the 1908-1912 period, Albanians actively participated in events and revolts of those years, starting with protest meeting held in Ferzovich (Ferizaj) during July of 1908, which ended with signing a telegram by the Albanian leaders in Kosova addressed to Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), demanding the restoration of the constitution of 1876. This telegram from loyal Kosova, as statesman Ismail Qemal Vlora said in his memory, had more effect on the Sultan than the complains of all the Turks or the Great Powers, so he declared on 24 July the restoration of the Constitution¹. Despite the enthusiasm that emerged everywhere in Ottoman *vilayets* upon the restoration of the constitution and parliamentary elections, the situation in Albanian-

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¹ Ismail Qemal Vlora, *Memorie*, përktheu Nermine Vlora Valaschi, Vlorë 1992, p.263.

At that time, Ferit Pasha Vlora (Avloniali Feritpasa), who was the Grand Vizier, explained that the sultan "asked the opinion of all the ministers", but only one clearly stated that "the path had to be cleared and the reform be put into practice". However, at the gathering of Albanians in Ferizaj, in July 1908, which aimed at demanding the return of the constitution", the fact that he [Ferit Pasha Vlora] was Albanian, was enough to cast doubt on him as sympathizer of the Albanian movement". So, on July 21, 1908, when the rally in Ferizaj was at its peak, the Sultan decided to remove Ferit Pasha. Abdul Hamid Kirmizi, Ferit Pasha Vlora, a long-lived state, translated by Rubin Hoxham, Skopje (Logos A) 2018, pp.432-434.

majority *vilayets*, especially in Kosova, did not stabilize, up until the April 1909 movement, wherein, Albanians were present on both sides².

Subsequently, the armed revolt started against the new taxes, particularly in the *vilayet* of Kosova during 1910-1912 period, a time when the state was at war with Italy after its invasion of Tripoli, hence the situation turned into an armed uprising heading for an autonomy (14 points addressed to the government on 9 August). After the Albanian revolt troops took over big cities (Prishtina, Mitrovica, Ferizaj etc.) and *vilayet's* centre (Skopje), the Ottoman government accepted most of demands for autonomy³. But this reconciliation between the Albanians and the central government was not positively viewed by other Balkan states that had supplied Albanians with weapons throughout 1910-1912, and consequently they quickly initiated a proclamation of war against the Ottoman Empire on 18 July 1912 after signing secret conventions for division of Ottoman territories in the Balkans among themselves⁴.

Even though the Balkan War was accompanied by nationalist slogans on the "liberation of brothers", it also contained violent actions against Muslims, specifically in areas that were under the Serbian-Montenegrin foray, and which were manifested in the murder and violent ordeal of Muslim Albanians in Kosova, as documented in diplomatic reports and military correspondents' reports of right and left newspapers⁵. Countless Albanians were forced to move to Istanbul and

² For more, see our work: Mudhakkarat Isma'il Qemal 'an al thawrahal-muḍadah in Istanbul-Aḥdath of 13-17 nīṣān (Memories of Ismail Qemal about 'counterrevolution' in Istanbul-Events of April 13-17), Arabic Journal of Ottoman Studies, 7-8, Tunis 1993, pp.11-28.

³ Noel Malcolm, Kosovo- A Short History, London (Macmillan) 1998, pp.241-250.

⁴ For more about secret conventions and preparations for war see: J.A. Marriott, The Eastern Question: A Historical Study in European Diplomacy, Oxford 1969, pp.437-452; N.Clayton-X.Bougarel, Eupop's Balkan Muslims, translated by A.Kitby, London (Hurst) 2017, pp.51-52.

⁵ Among the others the most important reports are those of the Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky, who was at that time military correspondent of many Russian newspapers,

even further to Sham Sherif (Damascus). In the *Vilayet* of Syria (as named from 1865), as well as in many other *vilayets*, demonstrations took place against the acts of violence towards civilian Muslims in areas occupied by the Balkan armies⁶ and many press articles were published unfolding the massacres against Albanians⁷. In fact, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 was a catastrophe with appalling consequences for Balkan Muslims, who remained a minority in the region after 62% of them were gone by death and forced migration⁸.

In this framework, numerous Albanian families were terrified by these stormy vicissitudes, followed by vehemence and massacres, and thus were forced to leave their homeland and move to the east during

because he reflected the contrast between the image of the Balkan War outside (as a liberation war) and inside (a war against civil Muslims). G. Weissman - D. Williams (ed.), *The War Correspondence of Leon Trotsky- The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, translated by Brian Pearce, New York (Pathfinder) 1981, pp.158-161.

Relating to diplomatic reports it was published during our work in this paper a good collection reports of British vice-consul in Uskup (Skopje) W. D. Peckham who offered information about aggressive violation of civil Albanians in Macedonia and Kosovo by the Serb military forces. Rober Elsie-Bejtullah Destani (red.), *Kosova – Një histori dokumentare nga luftërat ballkanike deri te Lufta e Dytë Botërore*, Prishtinë (Koha) 2019, pp. 201-210 etc.

⁶ Syrian daily newspaper "al-Muqtabas" reported for such a demonstration against Balkan Alliance's aggression against Ottoman State in Syrian town Dar'ā, where people asked to participate in the war to defend Muslim population there: *Al-Muktabas*, Cairo, 27.10.1912.

⁷ The Arab press in Beirut, Damascus and Cairo conveyed with great interest the massacres against Albanians during the Balkan War. Thus, the well-known *al-Muqtabas* newspaper cites the *Daily Chronicle* newspaper on 01.12.1912 on how Serbian forces killed five thousand Albanians near Prishtina. That same figure is also mentioned in the *Daily Telegraph* reports. Leo Freundlich, *Albania's Golgotha*, translated from German by S. S. Juka, New York 1991, reprinted in Prishtina 2001, p.45.

⁸ There are different calculations about Muslim victims and ethnic cleansing in the Balkan during the wars of 1912-1913. The last documented study mentioned that 812.771 Muslims from the Balkans were survived as refugees (from them 10.904 in *Vilayet* of Aleppo and 3.187 in *Vilayet* of Syria) and 632.408 were dead: Justin A. McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1922*, Princeton (Darwin Press) 1995, pp. 161-164.

1912-1914, respectively to Istanbul and then further on to Damascus. This first wave would then pave the way for the second largest wave throughout the two World Wars as a result of the Yugoslavia's anti-Albanian policy, or as a result of secular politics in Albania, ensuing the example of Kemalist Turkey⁹.

This delicate subject for Kosova, was made scientifically public only after Kosova assumed its new status in the Yugoslav federation later in 1974. Hence, in 1977, it was dispensed with in a master's thesis titled "Presence of Albanians in Syria and their Role in Syrian Life"¹⁰, which was published in a leading Albanian language newspaper (Rilindja) in Kosova, while in 1978 the Kosovar writer Ali Olloni went to Syria for a visit to Albanian colony there, where he met a few older people who were displaced from Kosova during 1912-1914, as a consequence of the Balkan Wars, thereby publishing many articles with their memoirs.

The memoirs of that generation demonstrate that the displacements commenced shortly after the outbreak of the Balkan War, respectively after Serbian forces broke into Kosova's north, at the beginning of "Autumn of 1912." According to Abdulrahman Dobërluka, on the train that left from Vuçitrn (Vushtria) to Thessalonica, there were 400-

⁹ At the time, it seemed that King Zog was under influence of Mustafa Kemal by reforming the country towards the west. In his meeting with Turkish ambassador in Tirana on 15 April 1934 King Zog expressing his admire to Mustafa Kemal said "You are a model for us in working for the westernisation the country". Kopi Kyçyku, Mustafa Kemal Atatürku, Tiranë 1994, p.80.

However, those reforms were viewed differently from the clerics, especially in Shkodra. In an interview with Vehbi Gavoçi (1923-2013), who left Shkodra with his son, Sulejman Gavoçi (died 1958), clearly shows the motive of his departure from Albania: "The main reason at the time was that King Zog carried out certain reforms that were not related to the Islamic religion. He [King Zog] forced women to drop the scarf, brought equality between brother and sister in miras (inheritance), and forced clerks and students to put hats...": Ermal Bega, Interview with *imam* Vehbi Sulejman Gavoçi, Bridge, no.2 (5), Tirana 2010, p.155.

¹⁰ Muhammad Mufaku, the Presence of Albanians in Syria and their Role in the Syrian Life, Master's Thesis, Faculty of Philosophy-University of Pristina 1977.

500 "muhajirs" (refugees). They were not used to sea travel; consequently, they suffered a great deal for seven nights till they arrived to Iskenderun. Upon their arrival to Syria, many youngsters were recruited in the Ottoman army, numerous swent to Anatolia and some could not make it back, and their living conditions in Damascus started to become stable by the end of 1918¹¹.

Based on Ahmet Prishtina's memoirs (1903-1990), it turns out that the "muhajirs"(refugees) stood on the road from Istanbul to Damascus from a few days to several months. In the case of his family, they stopped in Izmir, whereby he worked for a while at a cotton factory, and then went on to Damascus after learning that there were Kosovar Albanians there¹².

The first wave of Albanians displaced as a result of the Balkan War, and that lastly settled in Damascus, thus becoming the nucleus of the Albanian colony in Syria, was distinguished by several features:

1. Those who were part of this wave of displaced people did not go straight to Damascus, even though they sought to arrive at the holy city of Sham Sherif (Damascus), instead they settled temporarily in several cities close to the street (particularly in Kelis) before they assembled back to Damascus.
2. Adherents of this wave of displaced individual undeniably came from the Ottoman *vilayets* (particularly from Kosova), and therefore, were Ottoman citizens, and settled in two *vilayets* (Allepo and Damascus), which remained under the Ottoman rule until October 1918.
3. Followers of this wave, arrived in Damascus on the eve of the World War I, and therefore in a difficult time for the Ottoman state. Subsequently, as we will later see in this paper, the Albanians who came

¹¹ Ali Olloni, Rilindja, Pristine 29.07.1978

¹² Ibid.

to Damascus settled in mosques, until they found work and rented houses to live.

4. The members of this wave included peasant and civic families, respectively families headed by any cleric (ulema), or simple families, whose children later became known in Syrian life. For example, Hafiz Islam Prishtina (who passed away in 1929), was a professor (müderis) in Prishtina, poet and author of a poetry *mevlud* bearing his name "Mevludi i Hafiz Islami"¹³, whereas with regard to the second we have Husein Dobërlluka (1896-1974) whose children turned out to derecognized persons in art and literature: Abdullatif Arnaut (1931), Abdulkader Arnaut (1936-1990) and Aishe Arnaut (1948)¹⁴.
5. Even though amongst the Albanians who arrived to Damascus there were many clerics (ulema) i.e. Hafiz Islam, sheikh Hamdi Buhtari etc., we definitely do not have any script about their reflections on the homeland, the Balkan War, their journey to Damascus and about their life in the new country. This gap is completed by three manuscripts of the second generation, namely the boys born in Albania (Arnautluk) or during the journey.
6. Of those who left memoirs, we have two worth mentioning. The author of the first manuscript is Abdulrahim Shabani (1912-2007) son of Zejnulabedin, who left Kosova in 1914, while the author of the second manuscript is Abdulvehap Xheladini (1928-2004) son of Hafiz Islam, who left Prishtina in 1913.
7. For this particular case, we chose the first manuscript, since it encompasses more information about the circumstances about the abandonment of their birthplace, and the situation of those Albanians who hit the road through Anatolia until finally settling in Da-

¹³ For more on Hafiz Islam and his works see my book: *al-Thaqāfah al-albāniyah fī al-abjadiyah al-'arabiyah*, Kuwait ('Alam al-Ma'rifa) 1983, pp.125-126.

¹⁴ More generally on these persons and their role in Syrian life see: Muhammad Mufaku-Arnaut, *Lidhjetletrareshqiptare-arabe*, Tiranë (ACFOS) 2008, pp.200-202.

masculus, as well as the attitude of the Ottoman state and its inhabitants towards them, until the author grew up and turned into a mosque-imam in a mosque in Damascus.

The 7-page manuscript features the title “Abdulrahim Shabani's biography, born in 1912”. The text shows that he was only two years old when his family left Kosova, without revealing the exact place, hence we have here valuable memories about the first years following the arrival and settling of Albanians in the new country, their woe after the demise of Ottoman rule and the enactment of the French mandate in those lands. These are first-hand records that we cannot find in any other source except in inherited traditions that were not duly preserved. Here we have valuable information about the neighborhoods where Albanians then settled, including the neighborhood they built and later became known by their name (Ḥārat āl-'Arnāut), as well as the physical labour they were carrying out to earn their living etc.

On the other hand, the text then describes the education of the author by different Kosova and Damascus *imams* until a replacement took place in a renowned Damascus mosque (al-Bidra'iya). In other words, the author represents an intermediate level among the Albanian well-formed professorship that arrived in Damascus (Islam Prishtina, Nuh Nexhati, Sulejman Gavoçi) and those who completed their education in Damascus and became fairly recognised in the Islamic world (Nasiruddin al-Albani, Abdulkadir Arnaut and Shuaib Arnaut). However, Sheikh Abdurrahim (as he was acknowledged among the Albanians of Damascus) was distinguished from the others, as the only one who left something in writing about the eviction of Albanians from Albania during the Balkan War. He was also recognized as a good and wise man, keeping in touch with his homeland until September 2000, a time when he completed this text, so before his death in 2007¹⁵.

¹⁵ The manuscript is kept by his son, Abdullah Shabani (1950), who retains the family's home in the Diwaniya neighbourhood near the “Arnaut's Mosque”.

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, and Most Merciful

**Fragment from the biography of Abdurrahim Shaban,
born in 1912**

In 1914, when his father Zejnulabedin left his native homeland: Kosova (قوصوه), as a *muhajir* (refugee), likewise known as an Islamic country, and he came with his family in Sham {Damascus} with a view to settle down there forever. He dwelt in many rooms of the al-Fatih Mosque in the Qaimariyah neighbourhood¹⁶ which was full of refugees. Residents of that neighbourhood deserve to be esteemed for the precious help (food, clothing, etc.) that they offered to those who left their homeland, their property and communities, and that "Allah doesn't waste the reward of good-doers" (Qur'an 11: 115).

A few months later, a decree was issued by the Ottoman State ordering all the refugees in Syria, to be sent to different places in Turkey, such as Adana, Kelis as well as other places, whereby the state would provide each family with a home for dwelling as well as agricultural land. Undeniably, everyone (refugee) profited from this right just as stipulated by the decree. Eventually, the First World War took place, and it brought to most people fear, hunger, and many illnesses, as well as death and anarchy and killing of people for plundering their property. As God has postulated in the Sacred Book. "We will put you through fear, hunger, loss of wealth and life, and fruit, but give glory to those who are patient, and, when stricken by an unpleasant deed pro-

I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Abdullah Shabani, who conveyed me a copy of the manuscript and permitted its publication.

¹⁶ The al-Qaymariya neighbourhood is one of Damascus's oldest neighbourhoods (within the perimeter wall). It became known by this name after Ayyubid prince Nasiruddin al-Qaimari constructed it as a foundation before 650 AH/1252. It functioned as such until the end of the Ottoman rule (1918), and later converted to a mosque. In this neighbourhood we still have Byzantine monuments, Ayyubids, Mamluks and Ottoman monuments.

claim: We belong to Allah and we only return to Him. Their Lord has mercy and blessing on them, and they are the ones guided to the right path" (Qur'an 2: 155-157).

We then settled in Kelis¹⁷. My father sent me to a state-run school, but when the director saw me, he disapproved of my registration by saying in Turkish: *küçük*, (he is a little child).

Then my father sent me to a clerical teacher, named Mula Mehmet Pelshina, (may God bless him), who was our neighbor and was originally from Kosova. He taught me one hour a day, by explaining in our native Albanian language the features of Qur'anic letters, when they should be vocalized, paused and then protracted. Subsequently, through this method, within eight months, I came to the al-Dhariyat verse (Qur'an 51). With God's help, and thanks to the method taught by the late Mula Mehmet, I succeeded to read the words of the Qur'an, when I was eight years old.

Nevertheless, regrettably I did not continue to study with him, since we left the house and went to live in a deserted mosque at the outskirts of the town, at a time when the Ottoman state lost the war, and the British troops, that disembarked in the country, forced us out of our homes and then allotted them to other people who latter came to be known as the Armenian owners. Following these events, my father and other refugees decided to return to Damascus, since he had left his homeland with a view to settle in Holy Damascus and stay until his passing.

My father and the refugees left Kelis for Aleppo, with a two-horse-chariot, and then they continued the journey by embarking on a train

¹⁷ Kelis (Kilis in Turkish) is now a town near the Turkish-Syrian border. During the Ottoman rule it became the centre of a *sancak* in the *vilayet* of Aleppo, until the English forces invaded it in late 1918, and handed it over to France in the early 1920s, since it was conveyed the mandate over Syria. At the 1921 Ankara Agreement, the city of Kelis was left to the Ottoman state, while its surrounding fields remained within Syria until 1926, when the new frontier was included them within the Republic of Turkey.

ride from Aleppo to Damascus at the expenses of the British state. They settled in mosques, just as the first time: some settled in the abandoned Abdullah Pasha Madras¹⁸, some in the al-Madrassa al-Bidrā'iya¹⁹ that had rooms upstairs and downstairs, and some in Suleymaniye²⁰ to the East, where they were helped by people whom the Lord shall not fail to recall.

Some worked by breaking down stones under the sun to overlay streets, while others worked as payed woodcutters, as cleaners or guardians in schools or government departments. There were also tough jobs like excavating, which they faced despite being physically-feeble due to absence of food and fatigues of life, since they did not want to implore from other people. They spent less on food and clothing, which were indeed essential items to evade the summer heat and the winter cold, in an attempt to save slightly and leave the mosques and settle in homes where it was better and more honorable place for them to stay. After a short while, through His mercy, God alleviated their situation, so that most of them came out of mosques and settled in rented houses in the neighbourhoods of Ḥukural-Saraya, Ḥarat al-

¹⁸ was constructed as a foundation by Abdullah pasha Azmizade in 1193 AH / 1779 on behalf of his father Mehmet pasha Azmizade, then governor of Damascus and Amir al-Hag, a city which was enhanced with a cherished library. As such, it worked until the end of Ottoman rule (1918), and later it was used as a place for hosting and provision of food for Albanians and refugees. In the second half of the 20th century, it became a shopping mall for oriental handicrafts.

¹⁹ Al-Madrassa al-Badra'iya was one of the known Madrasas in Old Damascus (within the surrounding wall). Was built as a foundation by Qadi al-Qudat in Baghdad Abdullah al-Badra'i and opened with an enormous ceremony on 655 AH/1257 in the presence of the Ayyubid governor of Damascus al-Naṣir Yusuf, and it is located in a street called (Ḥārat al-Badra'iya). It bore such a function until the end of Ottoman rule, and later it became a mosque bearing the same name.

²⁰ This is about Imaret al-Sulaymaniya, one of the foundations established by Sultan Suleiman I (1520-1566), and built by architect Mimar Sinan in 1555, including the mosque, madrasa and the imams. It had such functions until the end of the Ottoman rule (1918), while during the 1920-1950 period it served as a shelter to settle and nourish Albanian refugees as well as anti-communist Albanian emigrants. Later on it was converted to a military museum and in 2009 was fully renovated with the assistance of TIKa.

Dhahabiya, Hukur al-Na'na'²¹, and others, and some even built houses in al-Diwaniyah²².

With regard to my late father, when he came in Damascus with the refugees, he slept just one night in al-Bidra'iya, for the reason that he - thanks God - was able to pay rent, and thus he found a house to rent in al-Zainabiyah, in front of the al-Sadat mosque²³, at the end of houses built near the late Şalahuddin al-Khatib's home, God bless him, whom was known as the chief notary of the Palace of Justice²⁴.

After we settled in the above-mentioned house, my father sent me to the private school of Hafız Ahmad al-Dagistani²⁵, in the al-'Aşruniyya neighbourhood near Dar al-Hadith²⁶, who was well known for his knowledge, modesty and good behaviour. With the help of God and the work of the late (al-Dagistāni), within two years I learned to

²¹ Hukur al-Sarāyā, al-Dhahabiya, Hukur al-Na'na' and Diwaniya were neighbourhoods captured in Ottoman times, but were then split during the French mandate after the inauguration of Baghdad Street.

²² Diwaniya included the agricultural fields in the north of the al-'Imārah neighbourhood, and following the opening of the Baghdad Street in the 1920s, it was divided and became a new neighbourhood, as the Albanian refugees established its nucleus in 1936, and later on they built the "Arnaut's Mosque" which still holds this name today.

²³ The al-Sadāt Mosque or al-Sadat al-Zainabiyah (the followers of Zainab, the daughter of Imam 'Alī 'ibn Abī Tālib) was named as abovementioned after seven of the followers of Imam Ali were reburied there. Indeed, the mosque was built outside the outer wall of old Damascus, near the northern port of al-Salam, in 631 AH/1234. During the Mamluk period, Prince Ibn Manjak renewed it, so sometimes it bore his name, and then it was renovated again during the Ottoman period.

²⁴ That house was on the northern outskirts of Damascus, and following the opening of Baghdad Street, it turned into the nucleus of the new neighbourhood of al-Khatib.

²⁵ At this very place the Hai al-Dagistān (Dagistani's Quarter) can be found, which bears the name of the Dagestani refugees who came to Damascus and settled there in the middle of the 19th century, while we could not encounter a scholar by that name. Perhaps the author confused him with al Ahmad al-Dagistani (1892-1967).

²⁶ Dar al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyyah is one of Damascus's oldest madrasas for hadith, (Prophet's tradition), which was founded in 630 AH by the Ayyubid governor of Damascus al-Ashraf, and Salahuddin's grandson, in the al-'Aşrūniyya neighbourhood close to the Damascus Castle, which has been preserved to date.

write, read, and stylish writing, therefore by learning to read the Qur'an better.

I left school when my father went out of al-Khatib neighbourhood and settled in al-'Imārah neighbourhood²⁷ on al-Dhabiyah Street²⁸. Close to the house was a skilful, shoemaker master, named Lutfi al-Ṣabbāg, who had a workshop on Mithat Pasha Street²⁹. My father sent me there to acquire the craft and after a while he found me a bride. For four years I learned the craftsmanship fairly well, so my father then found me a shop near his grocery shop.

After I left the master and became free in my work, I again looked for knowledge at a clerical teacher named Nuhal-Sa'atī³⁰, at his home on Hukur al-Saraya street. He was well known for his knowledge, devotion and modesty in the al-'Uqaiba neighbourhood. He, that may God bless him, did not admit any payment for his teaching, nor for any religious and remembrance ceremonies. He was contented with his work as a watchmaker and the money he earned through it.

Yet, I had to leave these lessons as a result of my job, since I worked unaided in the shop and without any support. Yet, the late visited me at the store over and over again. He was keen to walk out in

²⁷ Al-'Imārah is one of the oldest quarters of Damascus, divided into two parts: the oldest part (al-Juwwāniya) is situated within the surrounding city wall while the newest part belongs to the ayubide-ottoman period (al-Barrāniya), and in between them is Bab al-Faradis one of Damascus's oldest gates.

²⁸ One of the streets of the al-'Imārah neighbourhood, north of the Daḥḍaḥ cemetery, which had been inhabited by Albanian refugees in the 1920's.

²⁹ The old Via Reckta in Roman Damascus, it's called by this name because The Governor of Damascus Province Mithat pasha ordered the renovation of the whole street in 1878.

³⁰ It is about sheikh Nuh Nexhati (d.1953), the father of Naṣiruddīn al-Albanī (1914-1999), who was member of the famous clerics of Shkodra, in the last years of the Ottoman rule. However, he disagreed with Ahmet Zogu's initial reforms, so he re-settled with his family to Damascus in 1922. In Damascus he taught at home while working during daytime as a watchmaker. Among his Albanian students were his son Naṣiruddīn Arnāut (later: al-Albānī), Abdulkadir Arnāut (1928-2007) and Shuaib Arnāut (1928-2016).

nature, where there was no crowd, and thus I attended him wherever he pleased to go. From time to time we went to Duma by tram³¹.

In 1943, by a decree of the Damascus's Foundations' Directorate, I was appointed *muezzin* at the al-Badra'iya mosque, which was located in the al-Imara neighbourhood. The Imam of this mosque was the honest clerical teacher Hussein al-Shattī³², then director of the Islamic Madrasa on al-Naqīb Street in al-'Imarah al-Juwwāniya neighbourhood. I often substituted him during the shifts of Qur'anic *tajweed* ceremonies at the late Fa'iz al-Dair'atānī³³.

After a while, the well-known late Sheikh readers Abdulhamid Karīm³⁴, owner of the (al-Nahdah al-'Imiyah) madrasa in al-'Uqaibah neighbourhood³⁵, advised me by saying: now you are well versed with *tajweed*, nonetheless you still have an accent while reading (Qur'an), so it would be virtuous of you to learn from hafiz Sheikh readers Fa'iz al-Dair'atānī, since he has been appointed by the Foundations' Directorate to assist Imams in the Madrasa al-Kāmiliyah in the al-Buzūriyah

³¹ At that time, Duma was a village in the eastern suburbs of Damascus that served as a recreational place for the residents of the capital in the weekends, and could be reached by tram, which indeed was a means of transport in Damascus from 1907 until 1962.

³² He was member of Damascus's clerics (1880-1962) and was a kadi in several places as well as the first director of the Shariah Faculty which was founded in 1942. He was elected first secretary of the Association of Clerics of Syria, which was founded in 1937.

³³ Of the famous clerics of Damascus in Quran's readings (1894-1965), he was for a long time the imam of the al-Tawba Mosque in the abovementioned neighbourhood of al-'Imārah.

³⁴ 'Abdulḥamīd Karīm (-1976) was from the famous clerics of that neighbourhood and was a professor in the al-Kāmiliyah madrasa and an Imam at the al-Shāmiyah Mosque. He founded in that same neighbourhood the al-Nahḍah al-'Imiyah madrasa.

³⁵ It is a neighbourhood built on a hill north of the wall of old Damascus, and has many Ayyubid and Mamluk monuments, i.e. the al-Tawbah Mosque, but it grew larger during the Ottoman rule, with palaces, inns, and other mosques and it was referred to as "Little Istanbul".

neigh bourhood³⁶, from 7:30 to 9 o'clock. I duly thanked him, and without hesitation attended the classroom at the madrasa, and, with the help of God, I managed to learn once more Qur'an's chanting, at hafiz sheikh readers Fa'iz al-Dair'atānī, who was well known for his great knowledge in the Qur'an's scrolls, and had taught them from the late sheikh (Salīm) al-Halwānī³⁷, the imam of the mosque at al-Tawbah in the al-'Uqaibah neighbourhood.

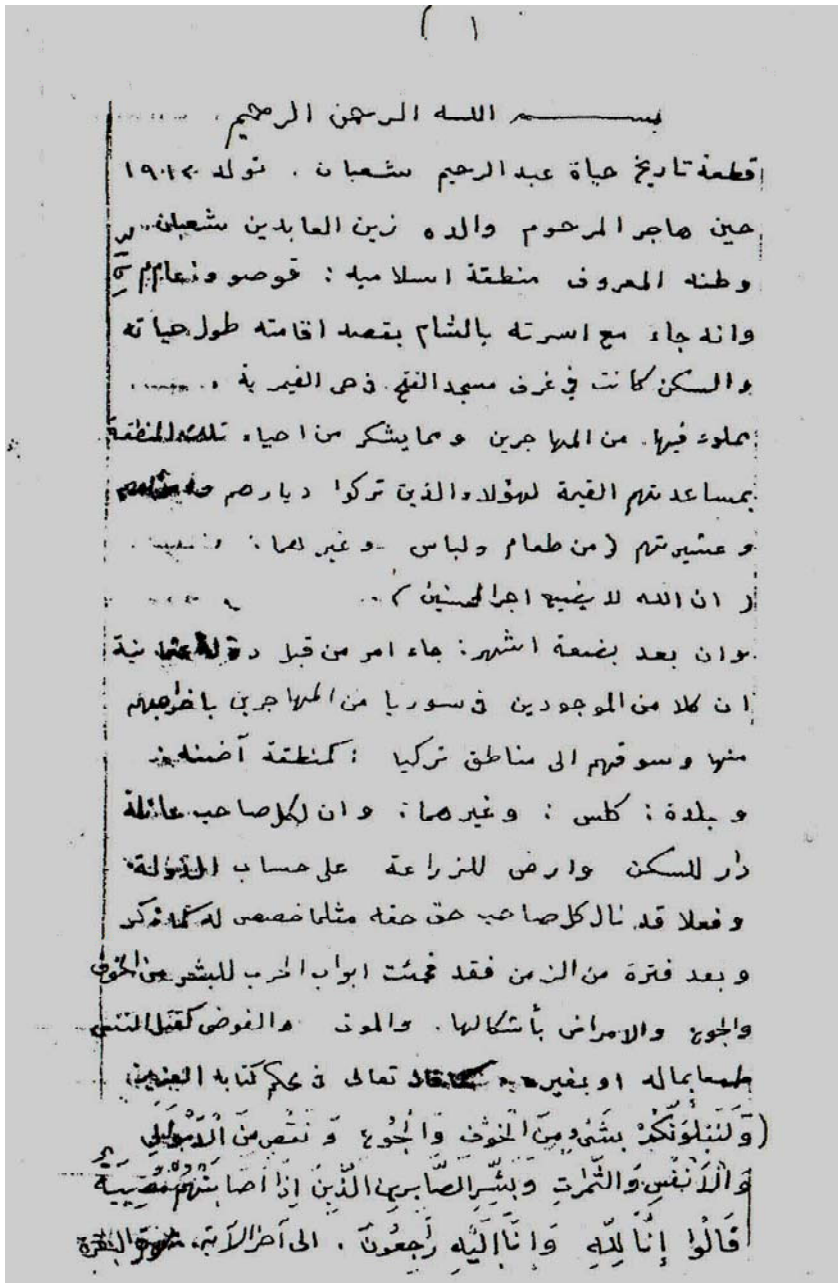
O Lord, I beg You, through your mercy open to us and Muslims who have passed through the gates of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection, when the young get old, and peace is upon Prophet Muhammad and his family.

The author is scholar Abdurrahim, son of the late Zejnulabedin Shaban, with xhumadah al-ahra on the hijri calendar as 1421, as of 18 September 2000.

³⁶ One of the old markets in that part of Damascus within the city walls. At the beginning was used to trade grain, but in Ottoman times it became a marketplace for different seeds and spices. There are Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman monuments (hammams, inns, palaces etc.), including the palace of the governor of Damascus Esad Pasha Azmizade (1742-1757), which was thereafter transformed into an Ethnographic Museum.

³⁷ Salīm al-Ḥalwānī (1868-1944) was the son of the sheikh Quran readers of Damascus Aḥmad al-Ḥalwānī, and thus he progressed in this field and received the title after the death of his father in 1889 AH. He was a professor at the al-Kamiliyah madrasa al-Tawbah mosque that were in the neighbourhood of al-'Uqaibah.

Photo 1: The first page of the manuscript



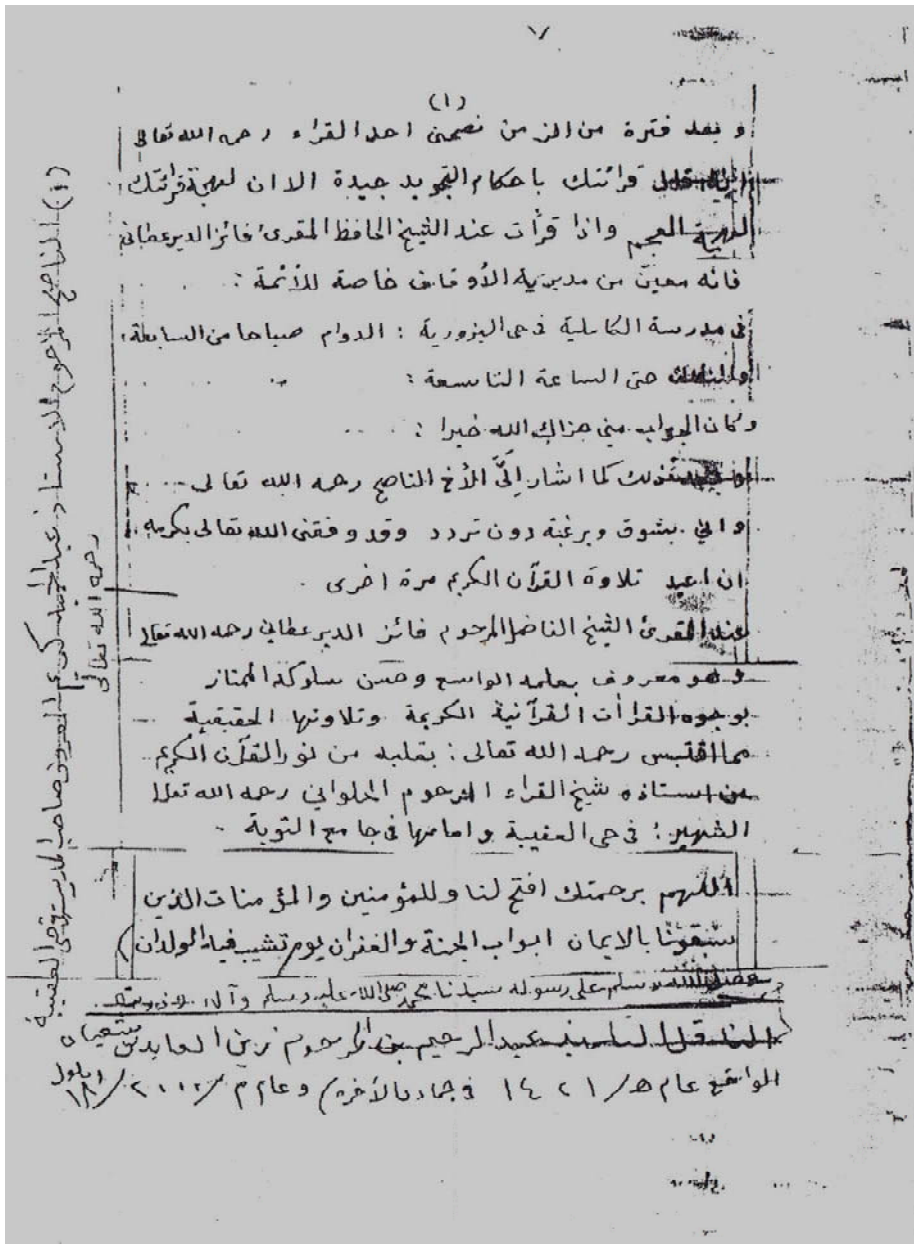


Photo 3: Epitaph of Abdulrahim Shabani in Ḍahḥah Cemeteries in Damascus

