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From Nuṣayrīs to ‘Alawīs: The Religiography of Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī

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Abstract: A disproportionate emphasis on the work of Western European and North American scholars has been a feature of investigations into the development of the academic study of religion. This article seeks to examine how a non-European intellectual, the Syrian Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī (1876–1953), produced and transmitted knowledge about religions in his encyclopedic historical topography of ‘Greater Syria’—the *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* (1925–1928). Kurd ‘Alī was a leading figure in the *Nahḍa*, an intellectual movement that sought to revivify Arab (and for some, Islamic) culture through a rediscovery of its classical heritage and was a proponent of a reformist tendency within Sunnī Islam known as Salafism—often associated with the thought of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh. Kurd ‘Alī’s religiography in the *Khiṭaṭ*, though grounded in traditional Islamic discourse on the religious other, moves beyond that discourse to privilege the experiences and accounts of insiders. This move from heresiography to religiography is best seen through a close reading of Kurd ‘Alī’s writing on the ‘Alawīs (formerly known as Nuṣayrīs). Kurd ‘Alī’s writing on the ‘Alawīs is also an important witness to a vital phase in the development of that group’s articulation of its own identity in an environment that had been at best indifferent and at worst hostile to its existence.

Keywords: Islam; Arabic; study of religion; Nahḍa; heresiography; heterodoxy; Bāṭinī; Shī‘ī Islam; ‘Alawīs/Nuṣayrīs; Syria; Arabic Print Culture



Citation: Kearney, Jonathan. 2022.

From *Nuṣayrīs* to ‘*Alawīs*: The Religiography of Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī. *Religions* 13: 131. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020131>

Academic Editor: Aje Carlbon

Received: 20 December 2021

Accepted: 24 January 2022

Published: 29 January 2022

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1. Introduction

Much of the discourse on the development of the academic study of religion has tended to focus on the activities of Western European and North American scholars: an imbalance that reflects wider patterns of asymmetric global power relationships and exclusion (Alles 2008). This article seeks to contribute to redressing this imbalance by examining the religiography of the Syrian intellectual Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī (1876–1953) as found in his encyclopaedic magnum opus, a six-volume historical and topographical study of what has come to be known as ‘Greater Syria’, the *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* (1925–1928).¹ An examination of Kurd ‘Alī’s work in this field allows us to see how a non-Western intellectual produced and transmitted knowledge about religions in an environment dominated by colonial European powers. In the introduction to the *Khiṭaṭ*, Kurd ‘Alī gives us some sense of his purpose in writing this work:

Westerners have written masses of books in their languages on the antiquities, civilization, history, economy, and the changing fortunes of this region. But rarely are comprehensive books published by our own people, in our language, and according to our methodology.²

Kurd ‘Alī was a polymathic intellectual: he was one of the leading Arabic-language journalists of his day; an editor of classical texts; a historian; a literary critic; an educationalist; a government minister; and the founder of the Arabic-speaking world’s first language academy (the Arab Academy of Damascus). He was also an exponent of a reformist tendency in Islam that was known as *Salafiyya*.³ As seen in the quotation above, part of

Kurd ‘Alī’s project in writing the *Khīṭaṭ* was to redress the enormous disparity between knowledge about Syria and Syrians produced by Western Orientalists on the one hand, and knowledge produced by Syrians themselves on the other.⁴ So, Kurd ‘Alī’s work offers readers one of the first sustained Arab-Islamic responses to Orientalist scholarship and the imperialist project for which that scholarship provided a moral justification. Within this response, Kurd ‘Alī’s religiography is of particular interest given Orientalist scholarship’s reductive and seemingly obsessive overemphasis on the role played by religion, particularly Islam, in Muslim-majority societies: a phenomenon that Rodinson (2002, pp. 104–5) has referred to as *theologocentrism*.

Kurd ‘Alī published the *Khīṭaṭ* at what was a critical turning point in the history of Syria and the Arabic-speaking world as a whole: after a long period of decline, the Ottoman Empire (of which Syria had been part for four centuries) had finally collapsed following its defeat in World War I. Arab aspirations towards independence, as exemplified by the Arab Revolt of Sharīf Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (1854–1931) of Mecca and the short-lived Arab Kingdom of Syria ruled by his son Fayṣal (1883–1933), had been frustrated and ultimately betrayed by the victorious European powers who went on to colonize the Arabic-speaking territories of the Empire under the Mandate system put in place by the League of Nations in 1920. The Fourth Aliyah of migration of European Jews to Palestine had just begun and the processes that led to the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 were well underway. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire also had a profound significance for Islam as a global religious phenomenon. Since the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Sultan also claimed to be the Caliph: the universal leader of the world’s Muslims—even those who lived outside of the Empire. The Caliphate was abolished by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 1924.⁵

Kurd ‘Alī was a leading figure in the intellectual, cultural and political movement known as the *Nahḍa*. Conventionally translated as ‘awakening’ or ‘renaissance’, the Arabic word *Nahḍa* has typically been used to denote ‘the rebirth of Arabic literature and thought under Western influence since the second half of the 19th century’ (Tomiche 1993, p. 900). Implicit in such an understanding of the *Nahḍa* is a preceding period of decline and decadence from which the Arabic-speaking peoples and their culture emerged following their encounter with the expansionist forces of modern European (mainly French and British) imperialism. The period of decline, so such models posit, began with the Ottoman conquest of the Arabic-speaking lands of the Middle East and ended with the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt.⁶ While Tomiche (p. 900) acknowledges the existence of ‘reformism’—a movement that ‘sought an internal revision of the Islamic phenomenon’—for her, like many historians of the period, the *Nahḍa* is ultimately an exogenous movement ‘born out of East-West contact . . . a liberation and rejection of the shackles of the past, as well as an advance towards modernism as represented by foreign models’ (p. 901). This conception of the *Nahḍa* as an emancipatory break with a stultifying and limiting tradition is informed by an Orientalist discourse that privileges European conceptions of modernity as a set of ‘conceptual and institutional arrangements in which religion has been marginalised from civil society, state, and politics’ and that assumes an ‘oppositional construction of modern versus traditional, secular versus religious, humanist versus antihumanist, and rational versus irrational’ (Haj 2009, pp. 1–2).⁷

Kurd ‘Alī’s life and oeuvre, as will be seen, resist such reductive binary constructions of the *Nahḍa* and Arab intellectual life. In his recent work on the development of Arabic printed-book culture, El Shamsy (2020, p. 5) notes that while there is no unanimously accepted definition of the *Nahḍa*, it is often presented as being characterized by ‘the large-scale translation of European works into Arabic, the adoption of European genres of literature, and engagement with the modern natural and social sciences.’ An interest in the classical Arab-Islamic past is less frequently encountered in such Western accounts of the *Nahḍa*, but it is one that for El Shamsy, is a vital one. The *Nahḍāwī* intellectuals ‘were not, as is often assumed, rejecting the Arabo-Islamic intellectual tradition wholesale in favour of an imported modernity’—rather, their activity sought ‘to reconstruct a classical literature that could serve as the foundation of an indigenous modernity’.⁸

One of the most concrete political manifestations of the *Nahḍa* was the rise of Arab nationalism in the Arabic-speaking territories of the Ottoman Empire. There was no single Arab nationalist position: among the nationalists were those who—like Kurd ʿAlī—sought a greater role for the Arabs within the pre-existing structures of the Ottoman Empire and those who fought for complete independence from Istanbul such as the above-mentioned Husayn b. ʿAlī.⁹

While Kurd ʿAlī is frequently encountered in the footnotes of Orientalist scholarship on the history of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Syria, outside of the Arabic-speaking world, his work has been rather neglected (with some notable exceptions).¹⁰ Tamari (2016, p. 37), for instance, has noted that Kurd ʿAlī is one of ‘least acknowledged pioneers of Arab modernist thought among late nineteenth and early twentieth-century thinkers partly because he is seen, I believe falsely, as a compiler and encyclopedist rather than an original writer’ and characterizes him as ‘one of those rare modern thinkers who can be referred to as a propagator of a synthetic Islamic secular-modernism’.¹¹

This article examines the religiography of Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī through a close reading of the chapter of the *Khiṭaṭ* that he devotes to the religions of Syria. Following this introduction, a brief outline of Kurd ʿAlī’s life that locates him in the intellectual context of the *Nahḍa* will be provided. This is followed by a discussion of the architecture of the *Khiṭaṭ* including its sources, composition, formal structure and aims. The focus then moves to the chapter of the *Khiṭaṭ* that deals with religions. This chapter is to be found in the second of the two parts into which he divides the work: the civilizational history (*taʿrīkh madanī*). In it, Kurd ʿAlī utilizes a number of strategies to produce and transmit knowledge about the religions of Syria. Particular attention will be given to Kurd ʿAlī’s description of the ʿAlawīs—a group that was, at the time of his writing, undergoing a major change in its self-understanding and presentation to outsiders. The nature of the relationship of the religion of the ʿAlawīs to Islam has long been an issue of contention. The religious status of the ʿAlawīs came to be an especially contentious issue following the assumption of power in 1970 of an ʿAlawī general, Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad (1930–2000), as President of Syria. The issue remains contentious during the ongoing Syrian Civil War, which is sometimes presented as a sectarian conflict.¹² A reading of Kurd ʿAlī’s work opens a window into how an Arab intellectual engaged with the religious diversity of Syria and responded to Orientalist discourse and the closely-related colonial occupation and partition of that country.¹³

2. The Life of Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī

Kurd ʿAlī was born in Damascus in March of 1876 during the final months of the reign of the 32nd Ottoman Sultan, ʿAbd ul-ʿAzīz (r. 1861–1876).¹⁴ Syria had been part of the Ottoman Empire since it was conquered by Sultan Salīm I in 1516. By the time of Kurd ʿAlī’s birth, however, the once great empire was in terminal decline. Numerous attempts had been made to reform its institutions, the most recent being the Tanzimat begun by Sultan ʿAbd al-Majīd II in 1839 and which culminated in the granting of the Empire’s first written constitution by Sultan ʿAbd ul-Ḥamīd II on 23 December 1876. However, this first constitutional period was to be short-lived as ʿAbd ul-Ḥamīd suspended it on 14 December 1878, ushering in a long period of territorial loss and increasingly paranoid autocratic rule, described by Antonius (1938, pp. 61–78) as ‘the Hamidian Despotism’. The constitution was restored by the sultan following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, and following a failed counter-coup in 1909, ʿAbd ul-Ḥamīd was deposed by the Young Turks, and replaced by his brother, Mehmed V. By this time, however, the Ottoman Sultan had become a figurehead wielding no real political power.

Kurd ʿAlī is often presented as an Arab nationalist, though such a classification *tout court* is perhaps simplistic.¹⁵ In any case, Kurd ʿAlī certainly considered himself to be an Arab and spent most of his life in the service of the Arabic language and the literary and intellectual heritage of the Arabic-speaking peoples. This act of self-identification as an Arab is indicative of a very open and inclusive conception of Arabness on Kurd ʿAlī’s part: his paternal grandfather Muḥammad was a Kurdish merchant from Sulaymāniyya

who moved to Damascus at the turn of the nineteenth century, while his mother was a Circassian from the Caucasus.¹⁶ Kurd ‘Alī made no attempt to hide or even downplay the Kurdish element of his ancestry: indeed, he proudly displayed it as the central element of the unusual and distinctly non-Arab surname that he chose for himself when he began his career as a journalist.¹⁷ For Kurd ‘Alī, the key to being Arab was the Arabic language: ‘Whatever is said about the large numbers of people who speak French in Beirut, Hebrew in Jerusalem, and Turkish in Aleppo—and however much their degree of attachment to and love for Arabic differ—the land is purely Arabic and its inhabitants are Arabs’ (1.48).

Kurd ‘Alī’s father, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, though left ‘a poor orphan’ following the death of his Kurdish father from Sulaymāniyya, achieved a relatively comfortable position within the mercantile middle class of Damascus having started his career as a humble tentmaker. The family home was in Zuqāq al-Burghul in the al-Shāghūr quarter of the old city of Damascus. ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s success in business eventually allowed him to buy a small farm in the village of Jisrayn in the Ghūṭa—the fertile countryside to the south and east of Damascus. The income from this family farm afforded Kurd ‘Alī a base of financial security, which he could later supplement with his earnings as a journalist and man of letters, thereby saving him from ‘resorting to deceit and self-abasement to make a living’ (6.346).¹⁸ In his study of the politics of Damascus during the final sixty years of Ottoman rule, *Khoury* (1983, p. 73) notes Kurd ‘Alī’s ‘distinctly lower class social origins’ relative to his peers, while *Seikaly* (1981, p. 141) observes that he ‘did not belong to the nobility of birth, wealth or learning’. Perhaps conscious of this, Kurd ‘Alī describes his Kurdish ancestors as Ayyūbids—thereby, connecting himself with Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin, 1139–1193), Sultan of Egypt and Syria and founder of the Ayyūbid dynasty, who reconquered Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187.

As an intellectual, Kurd ‘Alī’s education is central to understanding his life and work. His formation in this regard was a composite one that combined the traditional and the modern; the formal and the informal; and the local and the global. In some ways, this education could be said to have reached its fruition in the publication of the *Khiṭaṭ*—a work which itself combines and synthesizes different types of knowledge. Kurd ‘Alī’s love of books and the life of scholarship had an early genesis: in the first volume of his memoirs, Kurd ‘Alī offers a vivid description of being brought by his mother at the age of six to visit the home of Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṭaṭṭāwī who lived in the Qaymarīya quarter of Damascus. The young visitor was impressed by al-Ṭaṭṭāwī’s book-lined study and told his mother of his determination to become a scholar just like the shaykh.¹⁹ Kurd ‘Alī’s formal education began in 1882 at the Kāfil Sībāy elementary school, where he learned ‘reading, writing, the elements of the Islamic sciences, mathematics and the natural sciences’ (Kurd ‘Alī 6.333). It was here too that Kurd ‘Alī first encountered the man who went on to become the greatest influence on his intellectual development, Shaykh Ṭāhir al-Jazā‘irī, then employed as a government inspector of schools. Even then, the shaykh with the Maghribī accent made a profound impression on the young schoolboy: when told that al-Jazā‘irī was more knowledgeable than his own teacher and had the authority to dismiss the latter, *Kurd ‘Alī* (1948a, p. 11) again determined to become a learned man himself. The shaykh was an embodiment of power and authority that the acquisition of religious knowledge could bestow on an individual—even one like al-Jazā‘irī whose father had moved to Damascus from his native Algeria in 1846.

In 1886, at the age of ten, Kurd ‘Alī went on to study at the military *rüşdiyye* of Damascus. The *rüşdiyyes* were middle schools established by the Ottoman state at the beginning of the Tanzimat period in 1839 and were intended to continue the education completed at elementary schools. The Damascus military *rüşdiyye* opened in 1875 near the Marja district of Damascus.²⁰ Here, Kurd ‘Alī began to learn Ottoman Turkish, the official language of the Empire. Despite his lack of success in mathematics—something he blamed on his poor eyesight (6.334)—Kurd ‘Alī obtained his *rüşdiyye* diploma. Kurd ‘Alī’s father also paid for private tuition in French to supplement the poor instruction in that language provided in the *rüşdiyye*. Kurd ‘Alī furthered his knowledge of French and its

literature by studying for two years with the Lazarist Fathers in their Damascus school.²¹ Thus, Kurd ʿAlī was educated at a traditional Islamic elementary school, a state middle school established as part of Ottoman educational reforms, and a French missionary high school, combining three major intellectual worlds.

An additional, and perhaps the most important, strand to Kurd ʿAlī's education was his personal study with some of the leading reformist ʿulamāʿ of Nahḍa-era Damascus, most notably the aforementioned Shaykh Ṭāhir al-Jazāʿirī.²² His other teachers included Shaykh Salīm al-Bukhārī (1848–1928) and Shaykh Muḥammad al-Mubārak (1847–1912).²³ Though al-Jazāʿirī and al-Bukhārī were reformist ʿulamāʿ, they still followed established and traditional modes of the transmission of religious knowledge through the systematic reading of classic texts with their pupils.²⁴ The *ijāza* system—whereby a teacher certified that a student had read and mastered a particular text with them—allowed scholars to trace their intellectual lineage through previous generations. Kurd ʿAlī lists the main Islamic discourses he studied with his shaykhs: Arabic language, Arabic literature, rhetoric, sociology, history, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Qurʿānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and philosophy.

Kurd ʿAlī (6: 334) also gives credit to his father ʿAbd al-Razzāq for the contribution the latter made to his education: ‘My father, an ordinary man who was practically illiterate, spent a great deal on my education. For years he lavishly bestowed the fees for my professors and he bought me a library of books which was a thing highly regarded at that time in my city.’ Kurd ʿAlī was also an autodidact: His knowledge of French allowed him to read widely in the literature of that language, especially philosophy and sociology from the Enlightenment period onwards. Amongst the French thinkers whose principal works he read he mentions Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Taine, Renan, Lavis, Hanotaux, Boutroux, Le Bon, Brunetière, Petit de Julleville, and Sainte-Beuve. He also read Jeremy Bentham and Herbert Spencer in French translation. His reading in French also took in journals on ‘philosophy, sociology, history, and literature’ (1.335).

Kurd ʿAlī's professional life began in the Ottoman civil service as an employee of the Department of Foreign Affairs in 1892 (al-Ṭabbāʿ 2008, p. 19). He continued his education with his shaykhs and his assiduous reading during this period, but he did not remain in government service for long. Like many Nahḍāwī intellectuals, Kurd ʿAlī was to become a journalist. In 1897, he left the Department of Foreign Affairs and joined the staff of Damascus' first newspaper, the weekly *al-Shām* (‘Syria’). He spent three years with the newspaper, calling it ‘my first school in journalism’ (6.335). At the same time, Kurd ʿAlī also contributed to the Egyptian journal *al-Muqtataf* (‘the select’), and it was through the articles that he published in it on history, sociology and literature that he ‘began to become well-known in the world of Arabic literature’ (6.335).²⁵

In 1901, at the age of 26, Kurd ʿAlī—informed no doubt by his engagement with French literature and scholarship—decided to visit Paris travelling by way of Egypt. However, he did not travel beyond Egypt after his friends Rashīd Riḍā (1869–1935) and Rafīq al-ʿAzm (1865–1925) prevailed upon him to stay in Cairo and edit the twice-weekly newspaper *al-Rāʿid al-Miṣrī* (‘the Egyptian leader’; al-Dahhān 1955, p. 24). During his stay in Egypt, Kurd ʿAlī became acquainted with many of the key personalities of Egyptian intellectual life, including the religious reformer Muḥammad ʿAbduh—who had been appointed Grand Muftī (the senior religious official) of Egypt in 1899. Kurd ʿAlī attended ʿAbduh's lectures in al-Azhār as well as attending his weekly private salon (*majlis*) at his home in ʿAyn Shams. After ten months, Kurd ʿAlī was forced to return to Damascus by the outbreak of a cholera epidemic in Cairo. Back in Damascus, he was to fall foul of the Ottoman censorship laws which became ever more draconian as Sultan ʿAbd ul-Ḥamīd became increasingly paranoid and autocratic. The Ottoman harassment of Arab intellectuals became intolerable for Kurd ʿAlī, so, in 1905, he returned once more to the freer intellectual environment of Egypt, which was outside the Ottoman Empire ruled as it was by the Khedives of the Muḥammad ʿAlī dynasty.

Kurd ʿAlī remained in Cairo until 1908, when the Young Turk Revolution led to the deposition of ʿAbd ul-Ḥamīd and ushered in the Second Constitutional Era of the Empire

which was to last until its dissolution following the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920. As well as continuing the publication of his monthly journal *al-Muqtabas* ('acquired knowledge'), Kurd 'Alī founded Damascus' first daily newspaper, also called *al-Muqtabas*. From relatively humble beginnings, he had managed 'to establish himself as one of Damascus' leading intellectual figures, proprietor and editor of its two leading Arabic publications' (Seikaly 1987, p. 165). The journal *al-Muqtabas* was to become 'the boldest, most coherent, consistent and committed proponent of reform and modernity in Syria prior to World War I' (Seikaly 1981, p. 128).²⁶ Kurd 'Alī gives us a sense of his political stance prior to World War I when he states that *al-Muqtabas* was 'moderate in its tone and nationalist in its policy; it criticized, as best it could, the problematic areas in the Ottoman administration; it never aimed at separation from the Turks—rather it aimed for the attainment of Arab rights within the larger Ottoman community' (6.338).

Despite the moderate tone of *al-Muqtabas*, Kurd 'Alī encountered further difficulties with the Ottoman authorities. In 1909, following publication of an article in the journal that misquoted the supreme religious official of the Empire (the Shaykh al-Islām), he was forced to flee Syria. During this period of exile, he finally realized his long-held ambition to visit Europe. He spent a year mainly in Paris studying French civilization and meeting intellectuals and politicians—including the above-mentioned Émile Boutroux, then a professor of philosophy in the Sorbonne.²⁷ This period was to provide Kurd 'Alī with the material for *Gharā'ib al-Gharb* ('the wonders of the West'), the *rihla* that he published in 1910.²⁸ He returned to Damascus, but his problems with the Ottoman authorities continued when he spoke out against the state's policy of Turkification of subject peoples (6.334).²⁹ In 1912, Kurd 'Alī (1948a, pp. 84–98) again fled to Egypt, where he remained for six months until it was safe for him to return to Damascus. He wrote a vivid account of his fourteen-day journey in disguise from Damascus to Egypt. From Egypt in 1913, he was to travel to Europe again, visiting Italy, Switzerland, France, Hungary and Istanbul. While in Rome, he visited the library of the Italian Orientalist and Duke of Sermoneta, Prince Leone Caetani (1896–1926), whose ten-volume *Annali dell'Islam*, published in 1905, 'attempted a critical survey, year by year and event by event, of all the historical texts available to him for early Islamic history from the Hijra down to the assassination of 'Alī in 40 [AH]/661 [CE]' (Humphreys 1995, pp. 71–72). Kurd 'Alī spent a month in Caetani's extensive library, where he assembled much of the documentation which he was to use in the composition of the *Khiṭaṭ*. The visit to Caetani's library had been suggested to Kurd 'Alī by the German Orientalist Martin Hartmann (1851–1919) as a more affordable alternative when he told the latter of his plan to visit the major libraries of Europe in order to consult the necessary sources for the composition of the *Khiṭaṭ* (Kurd 'Alī 1948a, p. 311).

The outbreak of World War I was to usher in one of the most difficult times in Kurd 'Alī's life. The Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers and came to be dominated by a ruling military triumvirate of Mehmed Tal'at Pasha (1874–1921), Ismā'īl Enver Pasha (1881–1921) and Aḥmed Jemāl Pasha (1872–1922). Jemāl Pasha, commander of the Ottoman Fourth Army, which was based in Damascus, became the military governor of Syria. His administration was a brutal and repressive one that earned him the nickname among the Arabs of al-Saffāḥ ('the blood-shedder'). Those suspected of harboring Arab separatist or nationalist sentiments were arrested and jailed. Many were tried by military tribunals and a number of those were convicted of treason and publicly hanged in Beirut (August 1915) and Damascus (May 1916). Among those executed were friends and colleagues of Kurd 'Alī. Kurd 'Alī was himself suspected of treason by Jemāl Pasha, but documents that were seized from the French consulate in Beirut confirmed that Kurd 'Alī was loyal to the Ottoman Empire.

Jemāl Pasha, recognizing Kurd 'Alī's influence, recruited him to co-edit the military newspaper *al-Sharq* ('the East')—along with the Druze amīr Shakīb Arslān (1869–1946)—and to write two *rihlāt*: one recounting the visit of a Syrian delegation to Istanbul and the other recording the visit of Enver Pasha to the Hījāz. Both were published in Beirut in 1916 and were later disowned by Kurd 'Alī (1948a, p. 313) who gives some sense of the

difficulties he faced as a writer at that time: ‘I was displeased with their contents . . . they offer a picture of the politics of the day, when writers and poets wrote to assist the Ottoman state at its most critical time’. Elsewhere, he is harsher in his judgement of these two books, decrying them as ‘ugly propaganda for the hated war’ (6.341). Kurd ‘Alī was also dismissive of the newspaper *al-Sharq*, which he described as a ‘Turco-German newspaper intended purely as propaganda intended to influence the Arab world in particular and the Islamic world in general’ (6.341). He claimed that they were written ‘under duress’ while his friend al-Ziriklī states that Jemāl Pasha obtained Kurd ‘Alī’s cooperation at gunpoint, and that he was haunted by ‘Jemāl’s ghost’ until the end of his days (al-Ziriklī 2002, 6.203).³⁰

Following Jemāl Pasha’s resignation as commander of the Ottoman Fourth Army and departure from Damascus in 1917, Kurd ‘Alī left the city too and went to Istanbul, intending to become a merchant (as his father and grandfather before him had been) and thereby avoid further ‘enslavement’ by the Turks. This commercial interlude was not a success, as his enemies from the ruling Committee of Union and Progress in the capital frustrated his mercantile efforts out of spite (6.341). Kurd ‘Alī returned to Damascus after its fall to the Allies at the end of September 1918. He had intended to return *al-Muqtabas* to publication, but was offered the headship of the Ministry of Education in Fayṣal’s short-lived Arab Kingdom of Syria. During this time, he was involved in the foundation of the National Museum of Damascus and reequipped the *zāhiriyya* Library that had been founded by his mentor al-Jazā’irī. Following an unspecified disagreement with the government, Kurd ‘Alī resolved to resign from public service. However, he was persuaded to stay, on the condition that he be permitted to transform the ministry into the Arabic-speaking world’s first language academy: the Arab Academy of Damascus (al-Majma‘ al-‘ilmī al-‘Arabī bi-Dimashq). The Academy, which was modelled after the Académie française, was established on 8 June 1919, with Kurd ‘Alī as its first president—a position he held until his death in 1953.³¹

The remaining years of Kurd ‘Alī’s life were comparatively quiet, devoted as they were to the work of the Academy. He served two terms as Minister of Education (1920–1922 and 1928–1931) during the period of the French Mandate. His willingness to cooperate with the French has been judged harshly by some (Moubayed 2006, p. 490), and he could be seen as belonging to a class that Yapp (1996, pp. 89–90) has identified as ‘local collaborators’. His friend, al-Ziriklī (2002, 6.203), paints a somewhat more sympathetic portrait of Kurd ‘Alī in this regard: ‘His judgements about people and events were not without confusion . . . His political life effectively ended with the declaration of World War I, after which he gave up taking risks, joined no associations and worked for no opposition parties. He avoided the life of the masses and the pursuit of covert matters.’ Kurd ‘Alī’s terms as Minister of Education under the French Mandate clearly did not count as meaningful political engagement for al-Ziriklī. Kurd ‘Alī was not unmindful of the criticism his work under the French attracted and states that he was ‘almost certain that the French Mandate was an inevitability’ (6.343). Elsewhere in the *Khīṭaṭ* (3.175), he speaks of the futility of resisting the advancing French troops in 1920, believing that, had they wanted, they could have taken all of Syria with an army of one-eyed veterans. Kurd ‘Alī made a third journey to Europe, when, as Minister of Education, he took a group of students to study at French universities. He added an account of this journey to a new edition of *Gharā’ib al-Gharb*, which was published in 1923.

So, at the time of the publication of the *Khīṭaṭ*, Kurd ‘Alī was at the peak of his intellectual powers. He had spent almost thirty years at the service of the Arabic language both in terms of preserving its literary heritage and intellectual inheritance on the one hand, and promoting it as a suitable vehicle for a society inhabiting a new global reality—often through confrontation with an expanding imperialist Europe on the other. In addition to his voluminous journalism, Kurd ‘Alī had established the Arab Academy of Damascus to help preserve and strengthen the language and its culture. As a *Nahḍāwī* intellectual, Kurd ‘Alī was an active participant in what Sheehi (2004) has called the formation and articulation of a modern Arab subjectivity. He was comfortable in at least three major

languages: Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and French. His composite education had given him a thorough knowledge of the traditional Islamic sciences as well as a number of contemporary European discourses (especially history, philosophy and sociology) for which he had a critical and qualified appreciation. He was an experienced editor and textual critic of classical texts. He had also travelled extensively in Europe to build upon the knowledge he had acquired through his broad reading. Kurd ‘Alī had also worked for all three of the political establishments of the Syria of his day: The Ottoman Empire, Fayṣal’s independent Arab Kingdom of Syria, and most recently, the French Mandate. Much has been made of Kurd ‘Alī’s willingness to serve both the Ottoman Empire and the French Mandate as occupiers; however, it is perhaps more interesting to observe that both of these authorities—as well as Fayṣal’s independent one—sought out his approval and service. The *Khiṭaṭ* is then the crowning achievement of a long period of scholarship and public life.

3. The Composition and Structure of the *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām*

The Arabic word *khiṭaṭ* is the plural of *khiṭṭa*, which Lane ([1863–1893] 1980, 2.760) defines as ‘a piece of ground, or land, which a man takes to himself, and upon which he makes a mark, in order to its being known that he has chosen it to build there a house’. The plural form, *khiṭaṭ*, was used to refer to ‘the various quarters of the newly founded early Islamic towns which the Arab-Islamic chiefs laid out . . . for the population groups which they attracted thither’ (Cahen 1986, p. 22). Subsequently, a specialized genre of historical-topographical writing known as *khiṭaṭ* emerged which described these quarters and catalogued their contents. These *khiṭaṭ* works initially sought to provide a limited circle of administrative officials with manuals to facilitate their work. Rosenthal (1968, p. 155) characterizes the *khiṭaṭ* as ‘reference works that present a wealth of topographical, cultural, historical and economic information neatly arranged and classified.’ Kurd ‘Alī himself identifies the tenth-century Egyptian historian and administrator Ibn Zūlāq (917–997) as the first author to write a *khiṭaṭ*—the *Khiṭaṭ Miṣr*. However, the *locus classicus* of the genre is the *khiṭaṭ* of the Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442), which Kurd ‘Alī saw as the finest exemplar of the genre (1.2). Another example of the *khiṭaṭ* genre closer to Kurd ‘Alī’s own time was that by the Egyptian statesman ‘Alī Pasha Mubārak (1823–1893)—a work that was intended as a modern counterpart of the earlier work of al-Maqrīzī.

The second part of the title, the toponym *al-Shām*, is equally challenging to the translator. Common Western renderings include ‘Greater Syria’, ‘Historic Syria’ and the Levant. Etymologically, *al-Shām* is related to the Arabic word *shamāl* (‘left’ or ‘north’) and has been used at least since the Arab-Islamic conquests of the region in the seventh century to denote the land that was—from the perspective of someone facing east in central Arabia—to the left. In this sense, it is the counterpart of Yemen—the region to the right (*yaman*) from that same perspective. On the other hand, the word ‘Syria’—and its cognates in other languages—is Greek in origin, though it probably entered Greek from a Semitic source. Kurd ‘Alī himself delimits the area thus: ‘By *al-Shām* I mean the region that encompasses what the Arabs accept in using this term—namely the land that extends from the waters of the Nile to the waters of the Euphrates, and from the foot of the Taurus mountains to the farthest part of the desert’ (1.2). By the time of the publication of the *Khiṭaṭ*, the word Syria (*Sūriya*) had come to denote an area smaller than *al-Shām* and could be seen as an exonym tied up with the imperialist projects of France and Britain (and to an extent, that of the Ottoman Empire).³² So, for Kurd ‘Alī, the borders of *al-Shām* are not those set by outsiders: they are instead the natural borders of sea, mountain, desert and river. Taking both terms together, by calling his work the *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām*, Kurd ‘Alī is not only asserting the validity of the Arab-Islamic intellectual tradition and demonstrating its continued productivity in the face of an ongoing denigration of it by Orientalists, he is also challenging the imperialist occupation and partition of the region into colonialist statelets. The *Khiṭaṭ* is a work of both cultural and political self-assertion.

Though Rooke (2006, p. 168) asserts that the title *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* is untranslatable, he offers a usefully descriptive placeholder rendering: ‘Geographical-Historical Description

of Syria.³³ Kurd ‘Alī outlines his own understanding of the nature of the genre: ‘by *khīṭaṭ* is meant all that is encompassed by civilization; the study of the division of the land into quarters is the study of its history and civilization’ (1.2). He expands upon this: ‘What really is the *khīṭaṭ* of *al-Shām* but the choicest of its events and personalities; reports of the ascent and descent [of dynasties]; and the marvellous phenomena that appeared in past ages—taking those from what time had spared whether written, printed, etched on stone, brick or papyrus?’ (1.2–3). Central to Kurd ‘Alī’s conception of the *Khīṭaṭ* is how the presence and activity of people have made the land what it is. Two of the words he uses—‘*umrān* and *ḥaḍāra* (both of which can be translated as ‘culture’ or ‘civilization’)—belong to semantic fields that denote human settlement and activity. Kurd ‘Alī is clearly using the term *khīṭaṭ* in a wider sense than simply the quarters into which cities were divided: for him, the people of Syria have marked out (or ‘quartered’) the land as theirs through their presence on it; their cultivation of its fields; their construction of buildings; and their creation of long-lasting institutions that maintain and transmit knowledge and culture. This ‘marking out’ of Syria (and its recording in the *Khīṭaṭ al-Shām*) constitutes a demonstration of the territorial integrity of the land as its inhabitants understand it—a refusal to employ the categories of colonialist occupiers or their Orientalist cohorts.

Kurd ‘Alī does not slavishly seek to reproduce the *khīṭaṭ* genre as found in its classical exemplars: he freely adapts it to suit his particular needs, thereby participating in the dynamic development of Arab-Islamic literary genres whose forms were more flexible to those for whom they were a living tradition than the static artefacts described in the handbooks of Orientalist scholarship (such as Brockelmann’s *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*). Kurd ‘Alī divides the *Khīṭaṭ al-Shām* into two major sections: volumes 1–3 cover what he calls *ta’rīkh siyāsī* (‘political history’), while volumes 4–6 cover what he calls *ta’rīkh madanī* (‘civilizational history’). The political history presents a chronological narrative account of the history of al-Shām from antiquity to the date of the publication of volume 3 (1925).³⁴ The civilizational history, on the other hand, utilizes a thematic arrangement to describe Syria in the author’s present as comprehensively as possible. For instance, there are chapters on agriculture, commerce, industry, roads and waterways, as well as chapters that catalogue the buildings of the cities and towns of al-Shām.³⁵ Kurd ‘Alī’s Syria is presented using these diachronic and synchronic axes. However, the two categories are not entirely watertight. For instance, the first three chapters of the political history are thematic in their arrangement, covering as they do the geography of Syria (1.7–16), the peoples of Syria (1.17–35), and the languages of Syria (1.36–49), the treatment of which Kurd ‘Alī saw as a necessary prolegomenon to the history proper. In the chapter on religions in the civilizational history (6.205–273), the various religious groups are presented in a roughly chronological fashion in terms of their historical emergence and the essays on them also contain narrative material. The political history ends with a chapter on the modern administrative divisions of al-Shām (3.225–232) and another containing the texts of key documents relating to its recent history: from the Sykes–Picot correspondence of 1916 to the Treaty of Ankara of 1921 (3.233–263).

Kurd ‘Alī covers the pre-Islamic history of Syria in a single chapter of the *ta’rīkh siyāsī* (1.50–68). So a period of more than two millennia occupies just 2.4% of the overall historical narrative. By way of contrast, the chapter that follows, on the beginning of the Islamic period in Syria and which covers the thirteen-year period from 626 to 639 CE (1.69–99), occupies some 4% of the historical narrative. There is clearly a major disparity in the amount of coverage given of the pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods of the history of Syria in the *Khīṭaṭ*. At first glance, one might see this as reflecting the norms of classical Arab-Islamic historiography which tended to manifest less interest in the pre-Islamic period of history than in that after the appearance of Islam. However, Kurd ‘Alī’s practice here is more nuanced, as he explains in the introduction to the *Khīṭaṭ*:

I took what I obtained from books by Westerners, but I was more interested in referring to what our ancestors (*al-aslāf*) had written on this subject despite its fragmented nature. I relied on the Arab authors in particular, since every nation

is, for the most part, more knowledgeable about its own history than are others. If Western scholars have investigated the history of this region in the pre-Islamic period, excavated its antiquities and monuments, and analysed its languages and dialects, then surely its history after that period is closer to that for which our scholars are a [more fruitful] source'. (1.3)

So, Kurd 'Alī's desire to produce an authentically native historiography does lead to a foregrounding of the historical event of Islam as an interpretative key to understanding the history of Syria.

Rooke (2006, p. 169) notes how recent history (the Ottoman period onwards) takes up more space in the *ta'rikh siyāsī* of the *Khīṭaṭ* (approximately 40% by his reckoning), a depth of coverage that Rooke characterizes as 'exceptional' at the time of publication. While in-depth coverage of the Ottoman period may have been rare among Kurd 'Alī's contemporary historians, it was certainly not unusual for Arab-Islamic historians to give more space to their own lifetimes. Often, medieval historians would continue the chronicle of an earlier author, presenting their own work as a sequel (*dhayl*) to the earlier work. Another factor in the more detailed presentation of the Ottoman period (the later part in particular) was Kurd 'Alī's direct involvement in it and acquaintance with the individuals and access to contemporary documentary sources.

Kurd 'Alī places the genesis of the *Khīṭaṭ* in a series of nine articles that he wrote on the civilization (*'umrān*) of Damascus for the Egyptian journal *al-Muqtaṭaf* in 1899. The approval with which these articles met encouraged him to broaden his research to cover all of the land of Syria, 'since a portrait of the capital alone is not sufficient to make sense of the state of the land as a whole' (1.1). Elsewhere, Kurd 'Alī tells how his friend Rafiq Bey al-'Aẓm (1865–1925) wrote to him in 1904, urging him not to dissipate his talents 'in scattered journals', but rather to concentrate his efforts in the publication of a single book that would serve his people (Kurd 'Alī 1948a, p. 344). The writing of the *Khīṭaṭ* presented Kurd 'Alī with the perfect vehicle to combine his vast knowledge of the Arabic literary and historiographical traditions with his extensive knowledge of European thought. The work was a monumental production. Kurd 'Alī offers a terse description of the *Khīṭaṭ*: 'a book on the civilisation (*madaniya*) and history of Syria on the composition of which I spent 30 years, and for which I read almost 1200 volumes in three languages: Arabic, Turkish and French' (6.346). The undertaking also required a good deal of travel: Kurd 'Alī (1948a, p. 310) visited libraries 'both public and private in Syria, Egypt, Medina the Enlightened, Istanbul, Rome, Paris, London, Oxford, Cambridge, Leiden, Berlin, Munich, Madrid and the Escorial'. The exhaustive description of the difficulties faced by the author in the completion of the work is a feature of a number of books from the classical period.

In volume 1 of the first edition of the *Khīṭaṭ*, Kurd 'Alī gives a 695-item bibliography of the main sources he employed in the composition of the work (1.11–45). He divides his sources into four sections: (a) Arabic works in manuscript [items 1–186]; (b) Arabic printed books [items 187–559]; (c) Turkish printed books [items 560–594]; and (d) French printed books [items 595–695]. This list is not reproduced in the 1983 Damascus edition of the *Khīṭaṭ*, which instead has a ten-page bibliography containing only the Arabic sources in a manuscript consulted by Kurd 'Alī (6.349–359). The anonymous editor states that this is because Kurd 'Alī did not give precise details of his citations, thereby limiting the usefulness of such a list.

In the introduction to the *Khīṭaṭ*, Kurd 'Alī gives us a sense of his purpose in writing it which is worth quoting at length:

The subject matter of the *Khīṭaṭ* is certainly glorious, and all who wish to know their country to serve and benefit from it must know it . . . Those who do not have some acquaintance with the treasures their homeland or the deeds of their ancestors are unprepared to effect positive change now or in the future. For who, after all, is better placed to consult the records of the ancestors than their descendants? How can a person love a country that they do not know? How can a person aspire to prosperity—both individually and nationally—while being

ignorant of how the past has shaped of their present situation? How is the present understood without the past? And how can a national spirit be born among a people if its history is not truly studied? (1.3)

Subsequently he noted a specifically nationalist purpose to the work: ‘A people seeking their independence should have a [book of] history to which there can be recourse and which will say to other nations: “This is where I am and this is what I aspire to!”’ (Kurd ‘Alī 1948a, p. 311).

The six volumes of the *Khīṭaṭ* were first published in Damascus over the four-year period from 1925 to 1928. The first three volumes were all published in 1925, while the remaining three volumes were published (one each per year) in 1926, 1927 and 1928. The six volumes contain just under 2000 pages with a rough estimate of the total word count being around 686,700 words. Each volume is divided into titled chapters, which are in turn divided into titled subsections.

In a review exhibiting typically Orientalist prejudices, Hitti (1926, p. 321) characterizes the *Khīṭaṭ* as ‘a piecemeal compilation of historical data from varying, and sometimes contradictory, sources’. He singles out the third volume for greater praise than the first two: ‘Here [Kurd ‘Alī] is not only a chronicler, a compiler, but a historian’ (p. 322). In his review of the remaining volumes (Hitti 1931, pp. 178–179), Hitti is even harsher: ‘The work serves a purpose in making accessible to the Arabic reader material hitherto scattered in various sources, but adds very little that is new to our knowledge of the history of Syria and fails to meet the demands of critical scholarship.’ Hitti’s patronizing view ultimately misses the point of Kurd ‘Alī’s book which was endeavoring to work within the established epistemes of the Arab-Islamic intellectual tradition. Kurd ‘Alī was more than familiar with the norms and expectations of Western scholarship: he was personally acquainted with many of the scholars who had produced it, he had visited their libraries, he had read their works, and made use of the critical editions of classical Arabic texts they had produced. Had he wanted to produce a work, such as Hitti’s (1951) own *History of Syria—including Lebanon and Palestine* within this idiom, he could have.³⁶ A more nuanced and appreciative view of the *Khīṭaṭ* is offered by Seikaly (2010, p. 738):

It is perhaps not unfair to say that the publication which inaugurated the treatment of the Ottoman Empire and its republican rebirth as an object of serious historical investigation, was Muhammad Kurd ‘Alī’s *Khīṭaṭ al-Shām*. Notwithstanding the traditional resonance of the title, this six-volume work was a model of modern historical scholarship in terms of both its methodology and overall conception, covering the political, social and cultural history of Syria from early Muslim times right up to the establishment of the French mandate. At least two of its volumes address in detail the Ottoman era as an integral constituent of Syria’s past that decisively impacted every aspect of its political, socio-economic and intellectual life. In a way, the *Khīṭaṭ* charted, or at least anticipated, the course which modern historical writing about Syria’s long Ottoman past was to take.

4. Religions and Denominations

Kurd ‘Alī treats the religions of Syria explicitly in the second major division of the *Khīṭaṭ al-Shām*: the *ta’rīkh madanī*. He devotes a lengthy chapter (6.205–273) entitled ‘*al-Adyān wa’l-Madhāhib*’ (religions and denominations) in its entirety to the topic which occupies 7.6% of the *ta’rīkh madanī*.³⁷ The title of the chapter warrants some attention. The word *adyān* is the plural of *dīn* and is conventionally translated as ‘religion’. However, the word has a long and complex history in Arabic. In the premodern period, it was usually used to refer to Islam as the true religion: the *dīn* par excellence (see, for instance, Qur‘ān 5:3 and 3:19). According to Brodeur (2004, p. 397), it is only in the early twentieth century that the word takes on the plural sense of ‘any religion’ (among which Islam is but one).³⁸ The word *madhāhib* is the plural of *madhhab*; and in the more recent discourse of Sunnī Islam, it is usually used to refer to the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence: the

Ḥanafīs, Mālikīs, Shāfi‘īs, and Ḥanbalīs. However, the term has been used historically with a wider range of meanings (on which, see [Hallaq 2009](#), pp. 60–71). [Brunner \(2004, p. 170\)](#) notes its use in the literature of the *taqrīb* movement, which attempted a rapprochement between Sunnī and Shī‘ī Islam. By describing Shī‘ī Islam as a fifth *madhhab*, the differences between Sunnīs and Shī‘īs were de-emphasized and constructed as being no more than the differences between the four Sunnī *madhāhib*, which, though they differ in some aspects of their *Fiqh*, tend to recognize each other as validly Muslim. Kurd ‘Alī’s use of the term *madhhab* may be in this particular ecumenical sense.³⁹

The chapter consists of fourteen discrete essays and its initially most noteworthy feature is the inclusion of a substantial amount of material written by authors other than Kurd ‘Alī himself.⁴⁰ He invited seven experts to write on the particular religious groups to which they belonged (6.210). Though Kurd ‘Alī very clearly acknowledges the fact that he has asked experts to write about their own religious groups, he does not explain his rationale for this. It is, nonetheless, a very significant choice: by doing so, he is privileging the expertise and experience of insiders over that of outsiders. However, not all of the essays were written by adherents of the groups described: Kurd ‘Alī commissioned a non-Samaritan—the Muslim Palestinian politician, historian and Qur’ānic exegete Muḥammad ‘Izzat Darwaza (1887–1984)—to write the essay on Samaritanism (6.213–219). Kurd ‘Alī does not explain his decision to ask Darwaza, an outsider, to write this essay, but it likely reflects his belief that there were no sufficiently qualified scholars among the admittedly tiny Samaritan community at the time of writing. However, as a native of Nablus (Hebrew: *Shechem*)—the center of the Samaritan community—and a prolific historian, Darwaza obviously satisfied Kurd ‘Alī’s requirements.⁴¹ Kurd ‘Alī also departs from commissioning insider descriptions by himself, a Sunnī Muslim, writing the essays on four religious groups the nature of whose relationship to Sunnī and Ithna‘asharī (Twelver) Shī‘ī Islam is contested: the Ismā‘īlīs, the ‘Alawīs, the Druze, and the Bābīs.

The order of the essays in the chapter is essentially chronological: Kurd ‘Alī begins with one on ‘the religions of the ancients’ (6.205–210). After this, the ‘Religions of the Book’ are presented: Judaism, Samaritanism, Christianity (in four forms: Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Maronite Catholicism, and Protestantism), and Islam (in two forms: Sunnī and Ithna‘asharī or Twelver Shī‘ī). Kurd ‘Alī then presents his essays on the Ismā‘īlī Shī‘a, ‘Alawīs, Druze and Bābīs which he prefaces with one on the designation *Bāṭinī* that he employs to group them together. The lengths of the individual essays seem to have been left to the discretion of the contributors as they are not of uniform length nor do the lengths of the essays correspond to the number of adherents of the groups. For instance, the essay on Judaism is four pages long while that on Samaritanism is seven pages long.

Some of the expert contributors are less well known than others. Dr Sulaymān Tājir, also known as Salomon Tagger, who wrote the essay on Judaism (6.210–213) had been Chief Rabbi (*Ḥākhām Bāshī*) of Beirut from 1921 to 1923 ([Schulze 2001](#), p. 43). Details on Archimandrite Tūmā Dībū al-Ma‘lūf, who wrote the essay on Eastern Orthodox Christianity (6.219–223), have proved to be more elusive.⁴² He is listed as the author of a treatise on logic, *Jadwal fi’l-Manṭiq (al-Ma‘lūf 1911)*, received by, but not reviewed, in Kurd ‘Alī’s journal *al-Muqtabas* ([Kurd ‘Alī 1912](#), p. 155), where his ecclesiastical title is given as *shammās* (a rank lower than archimandrite). However, by 1925, he had contributed an article to the journal of the Arab Academy of Damascus ([Kurd ‘Alī 1925](#), pp. 331–333) and had been elevated to the rank of archimandrite.⁴³ Archimandrite al-Ma‘lūf’s residence is given there as Balamand in Lebanon—a monastery of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East.

Fr Luwīs Shaykhū SJ (better known in Western sources as Louis Cheikho; 1859–1927), who wrote the essay on Catholicism (6.223–230), was a Jesuit priest originally from Mardin in Upper Mesopotamia (now in Turkey, approximately 35 kilometres north of the Syrian border). Shaykhū was ordained in the Chaldean Rite of the Catholic Church and spent most of his life in Beirut, where he was based in the Université Saint-Joseph from 1894. Shaykhū founded and edited the journal *al-Mashriq* (‘the Levant’) in 1898 and produced an

enormous body of work during a lifetime of scholarship.⁴⁴ Escovitz (1983, p. 100) notes that Kurd ʿAlī viewed Shaykhū (along with his Belgian Jesuit colleague, the Beirut-based Henri Lammens, (1862–1937) as representing the worst excesses of Orientalism and ‘crediting the greatest accomplishments of Arabic literature to Christian Arabs, while ignoring the contribution of Muslim Arabs.’ Yet despite his profound disagreement with this aspect of Shaykhū’s scholarship, Kurd ʿAlī still commissioned the piece on Catholicism from him, clearly recognizing the merit of some aspects of the Jesuit’s scholarship as well as his Arabic literary style—always a consideration for Kurd ʿAlī.⁴⁵ The essay on Maronite Catholicism (6.230–232) was written by Fr Buṭrus Ghālib (1878–1931), a priest (*khūrī*) of the Maronite Catholic Church from Beirut who had published in Shaykhū’s journal *al-Mashriq* and the newspaper *al-Bashīr* (also edited by Shaykhū). The Rev. Asʿad Maṣṣūr (1862–1941), who wrote the essay on Protestant Christianity (6.232–239), was the author of a history of the city of Nazareth (1924) and Pastor (*qass*) of the Evangelical Community of Nazareth (al-ʿAwdat 1966).

Two essays on the numerically largest forms of Islam then follow. Shaykh Salīm al-Bukhārī (1851–1928), who wrote on Sunnī Islam (6.239–245), was one of the three key teachers (along with Ṭāhir al-Jazāʿirī and Muḥammad al-Mubārak) whom Kurd ʿAlī singles out by name in his autobiographical appendix to the *Khīṭaṭ* (6.334).⁴⁶ Shaykh Aḥmad Riḍā (1872–1953), who wrote on Shīʿī Islam (6.245–250), was from al-Nabaṭiyya in the Jabal ʿĀmil in southern Lebanon and was a key figure in the intellectual and cultural revival of the Shīʿa of that region. He was also a member of the Arab Academy of Damascus.⁴⁷

Though Kurd ʿAlī offers a broad selection of groups in this chapter, the omissions are also noteworthy. For instance, Kurd ʿAlī did not commission an essay on the (non-Chalcedonian) Syrian Orthodox Church. Given the uniquely Syrian origins of this historic church, such an omission is unusual.⁴⁸ Kurd ʿAlī also omits the Yazīdīs, whom he refers to as ‘worshippers of Satan’—a designation and imputation rejected vehemently by the Yazīdīs themselves. He explains this omission by stating that there are only two Yazīdī villages on the outskirts of Aleppo and that the bulk of the community lives in Jabal Sinjār near Mosul and thereby outside Syria and the scope of the *Khīṭaṭ* (6.273). These omissions are in marked contrast to al-Ghazzī [1923] (1991) who, in the chapter he devotes to religions in his *Nahr al-Dhahab*, covers both the Syrian Orthodox Church (1.199) and the Yazīdīs (1.205–208).⁴⁹

5. The Bāṭiniyya

Before examining Kurd ʿAlī’s piece on the ʿAlawīs, it is necessary to look at his use of the term *Bāṭinī*—the umbrella term he uses to describe them along with the Ismāʿīlīs, Druze and Bābīs. The use of the term *Bāṭinī* as a heuristic category is indicative of an unstated subject position as a Sunnī Muslim of a textualist bent. The term *Bāṭinī* is derived from the word *bāṭin* (‘interior’) and is used to refer to the hidden, inner or esoteric meaning of a sacred text (whether Qurʾān or Ḥadīth) or ritual. This is opposed to the *ẓāhir* (‘exterior’) or the outer, exoteric meaning or form of a sacred text or ritual. While the *ẓāhir* is accessible to the majority of Muslims, the *bāṭin* is accessible only to a select minority of initiates to whom it is transmitted hierarchically. To describe a group as *Bāṭinī* is also to imply that it in some way privileges the esoteric over the exoteric meaning—a privileging that may involve an abrogation of the exoteric (such as maintaining that the *Sharīʿa* is no longer binding or necessary). However, *Bāṭinī* is ultimately a term used by outsiders to describe groups to whom they are often hostile. Like many such exonyms, it is predicated on defining a group on the basis of a phenomenon which it may not view as defining—if indeed they even acknowledge it as a feature of their group at all. So, though a number of groups may acknowledge the existence of a *bāṭin* and its importance, they do not define themselves as *Bāṭinī*. The word has most frequently been used pejoratively to describe the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿa by hostile non-Ismāʿīlīs, and Kurd ʿAlī’s use of it in his introductory essay on the Bāṭiniyya is largely consistent with this usage.

Just as Kurd ʿAlī does not explain why he asked Darwaza (an outsider) to write on the piece on the Samaritans, he does not explain why he himself chose to write on the four groups he describes as *Bāṭinī* and to which he clearly does not belong. Whereas the paucity of qualified Samaritan experts most likely explains the former, this is an unlikely explanation for the latter groups which were and remain far larger numerically. This choice is more likely due to Kurd ʿAlī’s understanding of the nature of the four groups and his belief that secrecy is one of their signal features (6.251). Religious knowledge among the ʿAlawīs and Druze is not usually shared with outsiders or even non-initiates within the groups; and while the Ismāʿīlīs were once a proselytizing group, such efforts had largely ceased by the fall of the Fāṭimid Caliphate in the twelfth century. The Bābīs (and the Bahāʿīs that were later to emerge from them) on the other hand were very open in their sharing of religious knowledge and seeking converts.

Kurd ʿAlī begins this introductory essay with quotations from two of the most well-known Sunnī Muslim works on religious others: *al-Milal wa-l-Nihāl* (‘the religions and the sects’) of al-Shahrastānī (1076–1153) and *al-Farq Bayna al-Firaq* (‘the difference between the sects’) of al-Baghdādī (d. 1037).⁵⁰ These quotations introduce some of the major motifs in pre-modern Muslim writings on such groups: firstly, they practice esoteric interpretation of sacred texts; secondly, though they may claim to be Muslim, they are not, and are in fact hostile to Islam and covertly oppose it; thirdly, they maintain secrecy about their beliefs which are ultimately based upon those of their pre-Muslim forefathers (often identified as Magians); and that the invented category ‘Bāṭinism’ allowed them to disguise and retain these ancestral un-Islamic beliefs inwardly while outwardly seeming to profess Islam. Kurd ʿAlī continues the essay with some historical references from al-Baghdādī to the Qarāmiṭa—a revolutionary Ismāʿīlī movement that flourished in southern Iraq and eastern Arabia. He then reproduces what Daftary (2007, p. 101) describes as the ‘most derogatory and lasting aspect’ of anti-Ismāʿīlī sources: namely, that the true founder of the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿa, and thus the ancestor of the Fāṭimid dynasty, was ʿAbd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh (whom Kurd ʿAlī, quoting al-Baghdādī, refers to as Maymūn b. Dayṣān, 6.251) a member of the Bardesanians: a Gnostic Christian group founded by Bar Dayṣān (154–222) of Edessa. Ḥamdān Qarṣaṭ—after whom the Qarāmiṭa are named—is mentioned as the successor of Maymūn and as having belonged to the Sabians (Ṣābiʿa) of Harran prior to his conversion to Ismāʿīlism. Kurd ʿAlī continues with another quotation from al-Baghdādī in which the latter alleges that the Bāṭiniyya are ultimately atheists who believe in the uncreated and infinite nature of the world and reject belief in prophets and the *Sharīʿa*, deeming lawful whatever their natures incline them towards. Kurd ʿAlī ends this paragraph with a strange comparison between the Bāṭiniyya and Freemasonry, alleging that both concern themselves primarily with ‘matters of earthly rule and power’ (6.251).⁵¹

The essay continues with Kurd ʿAlī’s own words and places the origins of the Bāṭiniyya in the caliphate of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (656–661)—so consequently among the Shīʿa. However, Kurd ʿAlī describes them as extremists (*Ghulāt*)—a term used pejoratively by both Sunnī and Shīʿī writers to refer to those Shīʿa whose veneration of ʿAlī and the Imāms they felt exceeded the proper bounds.⁵² He continues by describing the gradual adoption of Islam in Syria during the first three centuries of the Islamic era, making reference to Willibald (fl. 720s)—bishop of Eichstätt in Bavaria—who passed through Homs on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land and observed that only half of its population was Muslim. He characterizes Syria during the Islamic period as tending at times towards the Shīʿa, and other times not, describing its varying fortunes under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the Saljūqs. Kurd ʿAlī’s focus then shifts to Aleppo where the rule of the Shīʿī Ḥamdānids in the ninth century he judges to be a cause of the ‘deep-rootedness of Shīʿism’ in northern Syria (6.252). He then quotes an anecdote from the history of Aleppo by Ibn al-ʿAdīm (1192–1262) which describes the revolt in Aleppo and Ḥarrān in 758 of a Shīʿī group called the Rāwandiyya, who declared themselves to be the equals of the angels, and climbed a hill in Aleppo, donned silk clothing and in attempting to fly from the hill, fell to their deaths.

Kurd ʿAlī’s focus then shifts to Palestine in the tenth century, quoting the work of Jerusalemite geographer al-Muqaddasī (d. c. 990), who reports that half the population of the region were Shīʿī and also notes the presence of the Sunnī *madhhabs* during the period of Fāṭimid expansion following the conquest of Egypt and establishment of the Ismāʿīlī caliphate there. Al-Muqaddasī’s observations are followed by those of the Andalusian traveller Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217), whose *Riḥla* Kurd ʿAlī quotes at length here. Ibn Jubayr travelled through Syria in 1184 and in his account of Damascus, he notes that the Shīʿa in the region outnumber the Sunnīs and are found in diverse forms including Imāmīs (Ithnaʿasharīs), Zaydīs, Ismāʿīlīs and Nuṣayrīs—to the latter of which Ibn Jubayr attributes belief in the divinity of ʿAlī. The introductory essay on the Bāṭiniyya concludes with a lengthy quotation from one of the famous (or, to some, infamous) *fatāwā* on the Nuṣayrīs by the Ḥanbalī jurist and theologian Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) of Damascus written during the period of Mongol incursions into Mamlūk Syria. Kurd ʿAlī (1950, pp. 360–69) held a high opinion of his fellow Damascene to whom he refers in his introduction of the quotation with the honorific title *Shaykh al-Islām* (6.253), and whose life and work he describes very positively in his *Kunūz al-Ajdād*.⁵³ In the portions of the *fatwā* quoted by Kurd ʿAlī, Ibn Taymiyya describes the Nuṣayrīs as a threat to Islam due to their habitual aid to its enemies and condemns them as apostates. However, it appears that Ibn Taymiyya may not have been particularly well informed on the ʿAlawīs in that he conflates them with the Ismāʿīlīs and ‘other kinds of Qarāmiṭa’.⁵⁴

The tone of this introductory essay is overwhelming negative, employing as it does not only the problematic outsider category *Bāṭinī*, but also outsider sources, some of which, like the *fatwā* of Ibn Taymiyya, are extremely hostile. The essay does not offer a systematic and thorough narrative account of the development of ‘Bāṭinism’, rather it presents readers with a view of how the phenomenon has been viewed by a number of pre-modern writers: a historian, a geographer, a traveller, a jurist and two ‘heresiographers’ writing between the eighth and fourteenth centuries. Kurd ʿAlī has already given a chronological narrative of Syrian history in the *taʿrīkh siyāsī*, so he can reasonably expect some level of familiarity with this history in broad outline from his readers. The quotations from the classical authors essentially flesh out the bones of the narrative of the *taʿrīkh siyāsī*. Kurd ʿAlī’s authorial presence in the essay is minimal: he offers no explicit evaluation of his sources, preferring to allow the reader to make their own judgements and draw their own conclusions.

6. The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs

Kurd ʿAlī’s essay on the ʿAlawīs presents a remarkable shift in tone from the introductory piece on the Bāṭiniyya.⁵⁵ In the title, as well as giving the name by which the group were commonly known to outsiders (*Nuṣayrīs*), he gives the name which members of the group had begun to use to refer to themselves (ʿ*Alawīs*) in the early 1920s.⁵⁶ Standard narratives by non-ʿAlawīs often claim that the group changed their name from Nuṣayrīs in the 1920s in an attempt to emphasize their links with Shīʿī Islam and distance themselves from accusations of heresy.⁵⁷ Winter notes (Winter 2016, p. 4) that the designation Nuṣayrī was never used by the ʿAlawīs themselves in their own writings; its origins lying instead in the heresiographical literature. One of the first Arabic sources to use the term ʿAlawī is the *Taʿrīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn* (‘history of the ʿAlawīs’) of Muḥammad Amīn Ghālib al-Ṭawīl (d. 1932)—published in Latakia in 1924, and of which Kurd ʿAlī makes extensive use as will be seen below. Kurd ʿAlī is one of the first non-ʿAlawī Arabic intellectuals to adopt the preferred self-designation of the ʿAlawīs so soon after it had begun to be used by the community itself.⁵⁸

Even though Kurd ʿAlī did not commission an ʿAlawī scholar to write the essay on the group, he does make extensive use of al-Ṭawīl’s above-mentioned *Taʿrīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn*. Al-Ṭawīl had been an Ottoman functionary, serving as Director of Police in the *vilayet* of Adana, and was subsequently appointed to the district court of Latakia. The author allegedly wrote the *Taʿrīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn* in Turkish and later translated it into Arabic, though the Turkish original is not extant (Winter 2016, p. 241).⁵⁹ Though al-Ṭawīl’s work tends

to be characterized as historically unreliable (Friedman 2010, p. 273; Massignon 1934, p. 966), it is a landmark publication: ‘The [*Taʿrīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn*] despite its many flaws, nonetheless constitutes a pioneering attempt to construct an ʿAlawi identity as such and should probably be seen as the historically most important work of all ʿAlawi literature’ (Winter 2016, p. 241). Kurd ʿAlī also makes use of the personal testimony of an ʿAlawī *ʿālim* whom he identifies as Shaykh Sulaymān Aḥmad (6.262), and whom he also refers to with the honorific title *ustādh* (‘professor’). Shaykh Aḥmad was also an honorary member of the Arab Academy of Damascus.

Despite the use of ʿAlawī sources, Kurd ʿAlī begins his essay on the group with a quotation from the Mamlūk administrator and encyclopedist al-Qalqashandī (1355–1418) whom he does not name.⁶⁰ Al-Qalqashandī’s description of the ʿAlawīs is a relatively neutral one—though he is clearly not an ʿAlawī himself, he describes some of the beliefs and practices of the group (such as he had heard or read) without judgement or condemnation—in what could be characterized as an ethnographic manner. He mentions the doctrine of ʿAlī as a divine incarnation; the relation of Salmān al-Fārisī to this incarnation; the initiatory nature of group; the practice of *taḥīyya*; and the glorification of wine. Kurd ʿAlī moves directly from al-Qalqashandī to al-Ṭawīl’s history which he introduces thus: ‘Their own traditionists said, according to what the author of the *Taʿrīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn* recorded, . . . ’ (6.260). The quotation from al-Ṭawīl deals with the word ʿAlawī, which he maintains is their original self-designation which they had been forbidden to use for the four-century period from the Ottoman conquest of Syria to the Ottoman defeat in World War I. So according to al-Ṭawīl, rather than being a creation of the French, ʿAlawī is an endonym. He also notes that the derivation of the name *Nuṣayrī* has been related by some to the mountains in which the community lived, and by others to the above-mentioned Ibn Nuṣayr. Most importantly, though, from an ʿAlawī perspective, the term *Nuṣayrī* is for them ‘the ugliest of contemptuous words’ (6.261).

Kurd ʿAlī continues his use of al-Ṭawīl’s history by quoting an example of ʿAlawī *bāṭinī* interpretation of the text from Qurʾān 5:3. According to al-Ṭawīl, though the reference to the completion of the revelation of Islam is understood to refer to the appointment of ʿAlī, certain revelations and teachings remained concealed to protect them. The ʿAlawīs believe, according to al-Ṭawīl, that these secret teachings are what the community transmit from one generation to the next through their process of initiation. Kurd ʿAlī next gives a long list of the names of the numerous clans into which the ʿAlawīs are divided which he has also extracted from al-Ṭawīl (6.261–262), noting that diversity among the ʿAlawīs is clan-based rather than doctrinal.⁶¹

Kurd ʿAlī’s final quotation from al-Ṭawīl (6.262) contains a definitive statement on contemporary ʿAlawī religious identity: ‘The ʿAlawīs do not have a special religion or *madhhab* as some think; rather they are Shīʿī Muslims of the Jaʿfarī *madhhab* and there is no difference between them and the rest of the Jaʿfarīs.’ Kurd ʿAlī summarizes al-Ṭawīl’s assertions by describing how the latter believes that the ʿAlawīs, the Ithnāʿasharī (Twelver) Shīʿa and the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿa form a unity, differing only in their views on the imamate following Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765). Kurd ʿAlī continues the essay by reporting the views of the above-mentioned ʿAlawī Shaykh Sulaymān Aḥmad which he gathered personally from him as part of his research on the group. The shaykh asserts that the ʿAlawīs are a Shīʿī Muslim community that has endured persecution and disaster for five centuries. These unfortunate circumstances led to a general decline in the community and a failure of leadership by its men of religion. The shaykh characterizes what he sees as the minor difference between the ʿAlawīs and the other Shīʿī Muslims as being environmental and tribal—not arising from them being different religions—and concludes by saying that most historical accounts of the group are prejudiced.

Kurd ʿAlī follows the Shaykh’s words with some ethnographic data on the distribution and numbers of the ʿAlawīs in Syria at the time of writing: ‘The Nuṣayrīs or ʿAlawīs live today in the mountains of Lādhaqiyya, Tripoli and Hama. Small groups of them also live in the Ṣālihiyya quarter of Damascus, and in the villages of ʿAyn Fīṭ, Zaʿūrā and Ghajar [in the

Golan region] . . . the number of ‘Alawīs today exceeds 200,000’ (6.262–263). Then, while admitting that the group has endured persecution over the centuries, Kurd ‘Alī reproduces the well-known anecdote from the *Rihla* of the fourteenth-century Moroccan traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa that accuses the ‘Alawīs of using the mosques built for them by Sunnī rulers as pens and stables for their livestock. Kurd ‘Alī notes that subsequent attempts by Sunnī rulers to impose the use of mosques on the ‘Alawīs were frustrated by the group who let them fall into ruin. He then makes an observation that typifies the *Salafī* modernist position: ‘The case of the ‘Alawīs is like that of the other small Islamic groups: whenever they increase in knowledge and education, they return to sound sources [of religion]’ and concludes with a very positive observation: ‘They are generous, proud, brave and noble of character’ (6.263).

Winter (2016, pp. 238–244) describes al-Ṭawīl and Shaykh Aḥmad—Kurd ‘Alī’s two main sources in the essay—as key figures in a phenomenon known as the ‘Alawī Awakening (*al-Yaqza al-‘Alawiyya*). The ‘Alawī Awakening, like the wider *Nahḍa* of which it was a part, was an enterprise that sought to revive a community through the promotion of enquiry and knowledge. The ‘Alawīs were also seeking to articulate a religious identity of their own, moving beyond heresiographical constructions of them by outsiders. In incorporating the work of an ‘Alawī historian and an ‘Alawī religious leader into his own literary monument to Syria, Kurd ‘Alī embraces and promotes the goals of the ‘Alawī Awakening and the right of a marginalized religious community to present itself on its own terms. The marked contrast between the tone of the introductory essay on the *Bāṭiniyya* and that on the ‘Alawīs shows an important development in Islamic writing about religious others: namely, a move from heresiography to religiography.

7. Conclusions

Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī is a key figure in the development of modern Arabic thought. As the leading figure of the *Nahḍa* in Syria, Kurd ‘Alī was uniquely placed to participate in the articulation of a new Arab subjectivity. The *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* is the product of thirty years of scholarship and specifically aimed to support Syrian aspirations to unity and independence in the face of colonial occupation. Kurd ‘Alī also wrote as a Muslim of the *Salafī* tendency, and in this regard, his work also sought to contribute to a revivification of Islam through a rediscovery of a spirit of enquiry and embrace of science and reason that the *Salafīyya* felt it had lost. The *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* aimed to represent the reality of Syria as Syrians experienced through the use of native epistemes in the face of the Orientalist scholarship that abetted the colonial project of France and Britain.

For Kurd ‘Alī, religion (*dīn*) formed an essential component of civilization (*madaniyya*). In the *Khiṭaṭ*, he gave expression to the diverse manifestations of religiosity in Syria. This religious diversity was not an obstacle to the unity of the Syrian people:

We in Syria are a single nation, however much those who try may endeavor to sow divisions among us. Religious groups were not and never will be the criterion by which this unity is to be judged. The Maronite, the Catholic, the Orthodox, the Protestant, the ‘Alawī, the Ismā‘īlī, the Hebrew (and all the others) are bound to us by the most binding of all ties: that of a common welfare, a shared homeland, the kinship of race and the bonds of language.’ (6.48)

Kurd ‘Alī utilized a number of strategies to represent Syrian religiosity: (a) he specially commissioned essays on particular religious groups from adherents of those groups; (b) he commissioned one essay from a historian who was not an adherent of the group on which he wrote; and (c) he wrote a number of the essays himself: one on ‘ancient religions’ and four on groups that he refers to as *bāṭinī* (‘esotericist’) as well as an introductory piece on that particular classification. His willingness to allow adherents of different religions represent those religions is pioneering in its privileging of the experiences and accounts of insiders. The exception to this is his own writing on the so-called *Bāṭinī* groups. Yet even within this, his essay on the ‘Alawīs is remarkable in that he employs ‘Alawī sources—one of which had been published only four years before he published the final volume of the *Khiṭaṭ* in which the essay is found. He is also pioneering in using the group’s preferred self-

designation ‘Alawī. Kurd ‘Alī’s writing on the ‘Alawīs is particularly important given the on-going controversies about that group’s identity and their role in Syria. His religiography is one that seeks not only to respond to Orientalist scholarship and colonialist disruption, it also seeks move beyond the limitations of the discourse of heresiography to develop a new way of negotiating religious plurality and inner-Islamic difference.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Barbara Broaders and Bradford A. Anderson for their feedback on this research.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interests.

Notes

- ¹ The term religiography is drawn from the work of Dressler (2013) who developed it in his study of the the Turkish historian Mehmed Fuad Köprülü (1890–1966) and the development of knowledge on Turkish Alevism. The toponym that Kurd ‘Alī used in the title, *al-Shām*, encompassed the contemporary states of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, the Turkish province of Hatay (formerly known as the Sanjak of Alexandretta) and the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt. It has been translated into English as ‘Greater Syria’, ‘Historic Syria’ or ‘the Levant’ to give but three examples. In this article, *al-Shām* has been rendered simply as ‘Syria’ and references to Syria are to be understood thus, unless otherwise indicated. See also Section 3 below.
- ² Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī ([1925–1928] 1983), *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Nūrī), 1.3. References to the *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* (hereafter, the *Khiṭaṭ*) are given in the form volume number, full stop, and page number. All translations from Arabic in this article are mine, unless otherwise indicated.
- ³ In a discussion of the *Salafiyya* of Damascus, Weismann (2001, p. 206) notes that their ‘purpose was to dissociate contemporary Islam from its latter-day tradition, both scholarly and mystic, presenting it as the cause of the decline of Muslim civilization and as an impediment to the adoption of useful Western innovations.’ The word *Salafī* is an adjective formed from the noun *salaf* (‘ancestors’), a word usually understood to refer to the first three generations of Muslims, whose pristine Islam was to be recovered and emulated. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–1897) and his pupil and later collaborator, Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905), are frequently cited as the founders of the *Salafiyya* movement. The term *Salafī* has also come to be used to refer to a very different tendency in contemporary Islam influenced especially by the thought of Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) and Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792). The literature on the genealogy of the term *Salafī* is extensive and ever expanding. For an excellent overview of its development, see Weismann (2017) and the key works that he analyzes therein. Of particular interest in terms of the use of the term *Salafī* in the context of Damascus is Coppens (2021). On the contested nature of the relationship between the two forms of Salafism, see Haykel (2009). Kurd ‘Alī does not himself use the term *Salafī* to describe himself or his work. His biographer al-Ālūsī (1966, p. 12) sees *Salafī* thought as a vital component of Kurd ‘Alī’s identity, describing him as ‘Iraqī Kurdish of ancestry; Arab by upbringing; Syrian (*Shāmī*) of homeland, birth and death; Islamic in thought and belief; and *Salafī* in position.’
- ⁴ By way of example, Kurd ‘Alī (1.3) points out that in the ninety-eight years from 1805 to 1903, Orientalists had written 95 books on the monuments of Petra alone ‘whereas there were very few Syrians themselves who had visited these important ruins, indeed there are some who have not even heard the name [Petra].’
- ⁵ The Ottomans claimed that the title of caliph had been bestowed upon Sultan Selīm I by al-Mutawakkil III, the last of the ‘Abbāsīd shadow caliphs at the Mamlūk court in Cairo in 1517 but only began to use the title in the nineteenth century. The Ottoman Sultanate was abolished by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 1922 and when the last sultan, Meḥmed VI, went into exile, his cousin, ‘Abd al-Majīd II, succeeded him as caliph alone until that office too was abolished in 1924.
- ⁶ In his foundational study of the development of Arab nationalism, *The Arab Awakening*, Antonius (1938, p. 13) describes the period of Ottoman rule as one of ‘torpid passivity’ for the Arabic-speaking provinces of the empire. Brockelmann (1902, p. v), representative of an older European Orientalist historiography of Arabic literature, dates the ‘decline’ of Arab-Islamic literature even further in the past to the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258, entitling the third book of his monumental *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* ‘The Decline [Niedergang] of Islamic Literature’.
- ⁷ Much of the historiography of the *Nahḍa* emphasizes the role played by Arab Christians in the movement and presents it as a secular movement. However, for many *Nahḍawī* intellectuals, the *Nahḍa* was an Islamic phenomenon (see al-Ālūsī 1966, p. 11).
- ⁸ El Shamsy’s work highlights the transformative role played by Arab intellectuals in the production and wide distribution of new critical editions of classical Arab-Islamic texts—an enterprise that established ‘the literature that we today consider the

essential canon of Islamic texts' (p. 5). He argues persuasively that 'the technology of print was not a cause of the [sociocultural] transformation as much as it was a *site* and *means* of it' (p. 5). Kurd 'Alī was himself a careful editor of classical Arabic texts.

9 On the history of Arab nationalism see [Choueri \(2000\)](#). For an accessible introduction to this history of the late Ottoman Empire, see [Hanioglu \(2008\)](#). On the first three centuries of Ottoman rule over the Arabic-speaking lands, see [Hathaway \(2008\)](#). [Masters \(2013\)](#), pp. 192–224 gives a succinct account of what he calls the 'end of the relationship' between the Ottoman Empire and its Arabic-speaking subjects. On the rise of Arab nationalism in Syria specifically, see [Reilly \(2019\)](#), pp. 75–89.

10 See, for instance, the monographs by [al-Dahhān \(1955\)](#), [al-Ālūsī \(1966\)](#), [Hermann \(1990\)](#) and [al-Ṭabbā' \(2008\)](#). There are also a number of articles and book chapters on specific aspects of Kurd 'Alī's life and career by [Seikaly \(1981, 1987\)](#), [Escovitz \(1983\)](#), [Havemann \(1987\)](#), [Futūh \(1993\)](#), [al-Bayyūmī \(1995, 2.67–87\)](#), [Ezzerelli \(2004, 2012, 2018\)](#), [Tamari \(2013–2014, 2016\)](#) and [Rooke \(2000, 2006\)](#). There are also shorter general pieces in the standard reference works by [Brockelmann \(1942\)](#), [Pellat \(1986\)](#), and [al-Ziriklī \(2002\)](#).

11 For an example of such a dismissive view of Kurd 'Alī's scholarship, see [Hitti \(1926, 1931\)](#). Another potential factor in the neglect of the intellectual legacy of Kurd 'Alī may be his political career which included two terms as Minister of Education during the French Mandate. He was, by the standards of post-independence Syria, a political liberal rather than a revolutionary. [Moubayed \(2006\)](#), p. 490 observes that 'in a career that lasted over fifty years, he played no role in the nationalist movement, either under the Ottomans or the French'. This is clearly based on an understanding of nationalism by Moubayed as characterized by physical-force resistance to colonial power. However, despite his negative (and valid) appraisal of Kurd 'Alī as a politician Moubayed acknowledges him as 'an excellent historian and scholar'.

12 The 'Alawīs, as will be seen below, have also been known as the Nuṣayrīs. The group rejects the latter designation and it tends now to be encountered in overtly hostile sources.

13 For the history of Syria as part of the wider Ottoman Empire, see the now classic [Holt \(1966\)](#), [Yapp \(1987, 1996\)](#) and [Hathaway \(2008\)](#). For the history of Syria from the Ottoman conquest to the present, see [Reilly \(2019\)](#).

14 The most important source for Kurd 'Alī's life in its relationship to the writing of the *Khiṭaṭ* is the autobiographical essay appended to the final volume of the work and which covers his life up to the time of publication of volume 6 of the first edition in 1928 ([Kurd 'Alī \[1925–1928\] 1983](#), 6. 333–47). Published twenty years later, the two opening essays in the first volume of Kurd 'Alī's memoirs (*al-Mudhakkirāt*) on the author's surname and childhood ([Kurd 'Alī 1948a](#), pp. 5–20) are also useful.) have also been consulted. [Reynolds \(2001\)](#), p. 251 note that Kurd 'Alī followed the model of 'Alī Pasha Mubārak (1824–1893) in including an autobiography as part of a *khiṭaṭ*. Elsewhere, they note that the *tarjama* genre (Kurd 'Alī uses the term *tarjama* in the subtitle of the autobiography: '*Ḥayāt Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī: tarjamatuḥu bi-naḥsihi*') 'represents a carefully categorized frame for de-picting the most crucial information about a person in an intellectual context that focused on a person's value as a transmitter and contributor to knowledge and to a shared academic and spiritual heritage' (p. 43).

15 Kurd 'Alī's pre-World War I position is better described by what [Khalidi \(1991\)](#), p. 51 calls Arabism: 'implying protonationalism rather than full-fledged nationalism with the concomitant desire for separation of the Arabs from the Ottoman Empire.' See, for instance, [Dawn \(1991\)](#), who describes Kurd 'Alī as part of a group of 'Islamic modernists who had become Arab nationalists' (p. 9). Kurd 'Alī was also a supporter of the Ottoman Empire. [Seikaly \(1987\)](#) has noted Kurd 'Alī's seemingly paradoxical position as both an Ottoman loyalist and a supporter of Arab rights. However, it was possible to hold Arab nationalist views while remaining loyal to the Empire. Initially, many of the early Arab nationalists simply wanted greater rights for Arab subjects of the Sultan.

16 Sulaymāniyya (known in Kurdish as Silēmanî) is a city in Southern Kurdistan (Başûrê Kurdistanê) and which corresponds to the Kurdistan Region of the contemporary Republic of Iraq. [Kurd 'Alī \(1948a\)](#), p. 5, tongue no doubt firmly in cheek, and in mockery of the pseudoscientific discourse of race still prevalent in Orientalist writings about non-Europeans in the mid twentieth century, notes how his Kurdish grandfather and Circassian mother make him an 'Aryan'. Describing himself elsewhere, Kurd 'Alī states: 'I am Kurdish in ancestry; Arab in thought, feeling and language; Muslim in belief . . . No philologist absorbed in the Arabic language and no historian rooted in the study of the cultural history of this nation can be anything but an Arab in feeling, thought and passion, whatever their ancestry and whatever their belief' (Kurd 'Alī quoted in [al-Mubārak 2015](#), p. 113).

17 [Dakhli \(2009\)](#), p. 263) observes that Kurd 'Alī begins his memoirs with a long exposition on the origins of his surname (a veritable epic) and sees his name as part of a presentation of himself as a 'new man, the first of the name, the one who claimed it and bore it'.

18 [Kurd 'Alī \(1948a\)](#), pp. 11–14) paints an idyllic picture of childhood visits to the farm at Jisrayn in his memoirs, describing how it took him two hours atop a donkey to travel the 8 kilometres from there back to the city. Kurd 'Alī's claim of incorruptibility is especially important in view of the accusation by Jemāl Pasha that he had bought Kurd 'Alī's cooperation ([Djemal 1922](#), p. 199).

19 [Kurd 'Alī \(1948a\)](#), pp. 10–20). Muḥammad al-Ṭanṭāwī (1825–1889) had been a teacher of two of Kurd 'Alī's teachers: Ṭāhir al-Jazā'irī (1851–1920) and Salīm al-Bukhārī (1851–1928). See [El Shamsy \(2020\)](#), p. 164).

20 [Province \(2011\)](#) notes that the historiography of the late Ottoman Empire has tended to neglect the importance of the military schools, focusing more on the schools established by foreign missionaries or the state civil schools—especially in terms of the impact of education on the development of the *Nahḍa*. He notes that the military schools were better funded by the state, and did

not charge tuition fees (p. 122), thus making them more accessible to those outside the traditional elite classes of the Ottoman Empire, such as Kurd ‘Alī’s family.

- 21 Lazarists is one of the names by which the Congregation of the Mission—a Roman Catholic society of apostolic life founded by French priest Vincent de Paul (1581–1660)—is known. The Lazarists opened their first mission school in Damascus in 1755 (Commins 1990, p. 15). Kurd ‘Alī also translated a number of books from French to Arabic. His usually fulsome biographer al-Dahhān (1955, p. 44) notes that these works of translation are to be regarded as juvenilia which allowed the translator to improve his knowledge of French. Kurd ‘Alī (1948a, p. 309) admits that the translations of two French novels that were published in Cairo in 1907 were careless and undertaken for profit alone, noting wryly that ‘money is one thing, literature another.’
- 22 Ṭāhir al-Jazā‘irī was the single most important and influential Islamic reformist cleric in Damascus of his time. Kurd ‘Alī compared his importance to that of Muḥammad ‘Abduh in Egypt. He had been appointed inspector of schools as part of the educational reforms instituted by Miḍḥat Pasha, during his brief governorship of Syria (1878–1881). See Escovitz (1986) on al-Jazā‘irī and his influence. The longest chapter in Kurd ‘Alī’s (1950, pp. 5–54) *Kunūz al-Ajdād* (‘treasures of the ancestors’) is devoted to his teacher. The recent work of El Shamsy (2020, pp. 158–71) sheds new light on the major contribution of al-Jazā‘irī to the development of modern Arabic book culture. On al-Jazā‘irī, see also al-Ālūsī (1966, pp. 29–43)
- 23 On al-Bukhārī and al-Mubārak, see al-Ṭabbā‘ (2008, pp. 48–50).
- 24 El Shamsy (2020, pp. 161–62), quoting Kurd ‘Alī’s *Kunūz al-Ajdād*, notes how al-Jazā‘irī also trained his students in textual criticism and philology—often without their knowing that this was what he was doing.
- 25 On Kurd ‘Alī’s journalistic career, see Ayalon (1995, pp. 231–33).
- 26 Seikaly (1981, p. 130) notes that in 1906 when he founded the journal *al-Muqtabas*, Kurd ‘Alī ‘was already regarded as an able stylist and a knowledgeable thinker, learned in classical Islamic sciences, as well as modern secular subjects.’
- 27 In typically autodidactic fashion, Kurd ‘Alī (6.338) asked Boutroux to provide him with a list of what the philosopher thought were the most important works in French on history, sociology, literature and economics—and presumably philosophy.
- 28 The *riḥla* (‘journey’) was a long established literary form in Arabic. Travellers would write accounts of the journeys they made (initially to Mecca on the *Ḥajj*) containing detailed descriptions of the places they visited and the people they met—often for the benefit of future travellers on the same journey.
- 29 The ruling party was the Committee of Union and Progress. For more on Kurd ‘Alī’s attitude towards the Ottoman Empire, see Seikaly (1987).
- 30 Jemāl Pasha claimed in his memoirs that Kurd ‘Alī and a number of his contemporaries were ‘so-called revolutionaries’ who, upon receipt of cash sums, ‘became his most humble servants’ (Djermal 1922, p. 199), a claim echoed by Khoury (1983, p. 75). The difficulties of Kurd ‘Alī’s wartime years are explored by Tamari (2013–2014, 2016). Kurd ‘Alī’s own account of the final days of the Empire in Syria (3.115–160) is also illuminating.
- 31 The Academy was forced to close in Spring of 1920 as Fayṣal’s beleaguered government did not have the funds to support it. Fayṣal’s Arab Kingdom was defeated by the French Armée du Levant at the Battle of Maysalūn on 24 July 1920. The French occupied Damascus later that day with the Armée du Levant’s General Henri Gouraud becoming the first French High Commissioner of the Levant. Kurd ‘Alī persuaded the French Mandate authorities to allow him to reopen the Academy, which he did in September of 1920. On the Academy, see Newman (2013, pp. 486–87).
- 32 One of the problems with the term ‘Greater Syria’ (or any translation of *al-Shām* that uses an adjectival modifier) is that the composite nature of the toponym suggests something contrived, while the single word *al-Shām* suggests an unarguable topographical reality. In this article, unless otherwise indicated, the toponym *al-Shām* has been rendered quite simply as ‘Syria’.
- 33 Other attempts at translating the title *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* have been made by Masters (2001, p. 2) ‘A Map of Syria’; Tamari (2013–2014, p. 12) ‘Syrian Mapping’; Schayegh (2017, p. 146) ‘the districts of al-Shām’. On the nomenclature of Syria, see Shehadeh (2011) and Bosworth (1997). The word *al-Shām* is also used synecdochally to denote the city of Damascus, and though as a native of that city, one might say that Kurd ‘Alī’s perspective is inevitably Damascene, his usage of *al-Shām* is certainly in the wider regional sense. Batatu (1999, p. 395) translates the title *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* as ‘the Compendium or Affairs of Damascus’, which seems to (wrongly) take *al-Shām* in the limited sense. For the purposes of this article, the title will be left in its Arabic form: *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām*.
- 34 In his memoirs Kurd ‘Alī (1948a, p. 311) recalls how he was initially unsure to write the political history annalistically or dynastically. He ultimately opted for a dynastic arrangement which allowed him to present wider patterns than the more atomized annalistic arrangement would allow.
- 35 A total of 611 numbered structures are described in three chapters in volume 6: from [1] the al-Khayḍarīya *madrasa* (6.69) to [611] the Syphilis Hospital of Aleppo (6.161).
- 36 On an Egyptian scholar with a motivation comparable to that of Kurd ‘Alī, see El Shamsy (2020, pp. 200–8) where he discusses Maḥmūd Shākīr’s criticism of the work of the Orientalist David Margoliouth (1858–1940) on pre-Islamic poetry and that of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889–1973), believing the latter had plagiarized the work of former.
- 37 As will be seen, religion and religious diversity were central to Kurd ‘Alī’s construction of Syria. On the complex interplay of relationships between non-Muslim groups and Arab nationalism, see Masters (2001). More broadly, Sharkey (2017, pp. 243–300)

examines the interactions of Muslims, Jews and Christians in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. On the specific relationships of the ‘Alawīs to Arab nationalism and the French Mandate, see Winter (2016, pp. 218–68).

- 38 On the genealogy of the Arabic word *dīn*, see Gardet (1965), Brodeur (2008), Nongbri (2013, pp. 39–45) and Waardenburg (1999).
- 39 The Twelver Shī‘a are sometimes referred to as the Ja‘farī *madhhab*. The word *Ja‘farī* is derived from the name of the Shī‘ī Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d 765). The famous ‘Shaltūt Fatwā’, issued in 1959 by Maḥmūd Shaltūt (1893–1963)—the Shaykh of al-Azhar in Cairo—recognized *Ithna‘asharī* (Twelver) Shī‘ī Islam as a fifth *madhhab*. The *fatwā* is significant in that it constitutes official recognition of the validity of Shī‘ī Islam by one of the world’s highest-ranking Sunnī ‘*ulamā*’. On this, see Brunner (2004, pp. 284–305). A more recent example of a text that uses the term *madhhab* as an ecumenical device to construct an Islam of denominations that recognize each other’s validity is the *Amman Message* which refers to eight *madhāhib*: Ḥanafīs, Mālīkīs, Shāfi‘īs, Ḥanbalīs, Ja‘farīs, Zaydīs and Ibādīs, on which, see Kearney (2018). For a good overview of the terminology of religious groups in Arab-Islamic literature, see Sedgwick (2000).
- 40 Rooke (2006, p. 173) presents the *Khiṭaṭ* as ‘a collective creation’ and basing himself on the first edition (1925–1928) estimates that some 10% of the work (excluding documents and bibliography) is the work of others, most of which appears in the *ta‘rīkh madanī* (vols 3–6). Choueri (1989, p. 49) describes the *Khiṭaṭ* a ‘team effort on the part of leading Syrian personalities and scholars headed by Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī.’ However, with 90% of the work coming from Kurd ‘Alī’s own pen, to characterize the *Khiṭaṭ* as being a group endeavor seems to be an exaggeration.
- 41 Darwaza notes (6.213) that he wished in his piece to convey the Samaritans’ account of themselves—something that differs markedly from what is said about them in Jewish and Christian scriptures. He also states that he made use of a manuscript written by a Samaritan priest (who is unnamed) in writing his piece. It is significant that Samaritanism is treated as a religion in its own right and not as a deviant form of Judaism.
- 42 He is not listed in either of the standard reference works by al-Zirikī (2002) or Kaḥḥāla (1993).
- 43 al-Ma‘lūf, ‘Ta‘thīr al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Arabī fī Ūrubba‘ [the influence of the Arabic Language Academy in Europe], *Majallat al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Arabī* 5 (al-Ma‘lūf 1925), pp. 331–33.
- 44 On Shaykhū, see Pouzet (1997), Kaḥḥāla (1993, 2.679), and al-Zirikī (2002, 5.246–247).
- 45 Another indication that Kurd ‘Alī respected Shaykhū as a scholar is the fact that he lists him among the ‘contemporary scholars and littérateurs’ section (6.68) of the first chapter of the *ta‘rīkh madanī*—‘Science and Literature’ (6.3–89).
- 46 On al-Bukhārī, see al-Ālūsī (1966, p. 44), Kaḥḥāla (1993, 1.777) and al-Zirikī (2002, 2.116). al-Bukhārī is also the first scholar listed in the ‘contemporary ‘ulamā’ and littérateurs’ section (3.66) of the ‘Learning and Humanities’ section. In this section, pre-eminence is given to scholars of religion.
- 47 On Riḍā, see al-Zirikī (2002, 1.125–126), Kaḥḥāla (1993, 1.87–88), and Chalabi (2006, 36 et passim). Kurd ‘Alī also lists Riḍā among the ‘contemporary scholars and littérateurs’ section of the ‘Science and Learning’ chapter of *Khiṭaṭ* (3.68).
- 48 The Syrian Orthodox Church has been officially known as the Syriac Orthodox Church since 2000. It is mentioned very briefly by al-Ma‘lūf (6.220) as one of the ‘heresies’ condemned by the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE in his essay on Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The Archimandrite echoes the Council’s imputation of monophysitism (one rejected by the church that holds a miaphysite christology) and uses the term Jacobite (after Jacob Baradaeus, d. 578) and notes that there are *Sūryānī* (Syriac), Armenian and Egyptian ‘Jacobites’. Shaykhū (6.229) also mentions the ‘Jacobites’ in his piece on Catholicism, where they are listed as a ‘heresy’ along with Arianism, Nestorianism and Monothelism.
- 49 In contrast to both Kurd ‘Alī and al-Ghazzī, their contemporary fellow Syrian historian al-Tabbākh ([1923] 1988, 1.79) has only one sentence in which he explicitly discusses religion in his *A‘lām al-Nubalā*: ‘The most common religion in the land of Syria [*Sūriyya*] is Islam, then Christianity (in all its denominations), then Judaism; there is also a small number of Ismā‘īlīs, Twelver Shī‘a, Druze and others.’
- 50 While often narrowly described as ‘heresiography’ in Orientalist scholarship, Brodeur (2008, pp. 79–80) prefers the term ‘literature on religious others’. He notes that although such works were usually written from ‘the centre to the periphery, where the centre is the author’s particular interpretation of Islam’, their authors wrote with ‘different degrees of openness to understanding religious others on their own terms’ (p. 80). Brodeur observes that pre-modern Muslim writings on religious others do not belong to a single genre and offers a broad classification of this literature into four principal types: refutations, descriptions, general literature on religious others; and miscellaneous, such as histories and encyclopaedias (p. 80).
- 51 Kurd ‘Alī (1948b, pp. 408–9) held a very negative view of Freemasonry. In his memoirs, he recounts how he refused an invitation to join the organization in Egypt after the benefits of membership were outlined to him, stating that a Muslim had no place in an organization founded by Jews to counter Catholic oppression. Kurd ‘Alī also disliked Freemasonry in that he believed many of his enemies in the CUP were members of the Lodge. In this regard, Kurd ‘Alī differed from al-Afghānī and ‘Abduh, both of whom were enthusiastic Freemasons.
- 52 *Ghulāt*, like *Bāṭinī*, is an outsider term. Momen (2016, p. 59) cautions against using the term not only because it was the one used by their enemies, but also because the doctrines viewed retrospectively as extreme were part of mainstream Shī‘ī discourse prior to the development of a ‘fully-evolved orthodox position’.
- 53 Ibn Taymiyya’s thought has become a source for a number of different Islamic movements. In addition to his influence on ‘Modernist’ *Salafī* thinkers like Kurd ‘Alī, he is a major inspiration to both Wahhābī and ‘Radical Salafīs. Hoover (2019, p. 33)

points out that Ibn Taymiyya's 'anti-Nusayri fatwas echo down to the present in extremist Sunni polemic against the 'Alawis and the Druze in Syria.'

- 54 For a translation of Ibn Taymiyya's *fatwā*, see Friedman (2010, pp. 299–309). See also his study of this and two other related *fatāwā* (Friedman 2005).
- 55 The religion of the 'Alawīs is an incredibly complex system—a complexity exacerbated by the nature of the available sources. The most thorough study of the 'Alawī religion is that of Friedman (2010), while Winter (2016) has written the definitive history of the community.
- 56 The word *Nuṣayrī* links the group to Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-Numayrī (d. 883) a disciple of 'Alī al-Hādī (d. 868) and Ḥasan al-'Askarī (d. 874), the tenth and eleventh Imāms of the Ithna'asharī Shī'a, respectively. Ibn Nuṣayr is believed by the 'Alawīs to have been entrusted with a special revelation by Ḥasan al-'Askarī—a revelation that forms the basis of the religious beliefs of 'Alawīs (see Winter 2016, pp. 12–13).
- 57 The word 'Alawī is an Arabic adjective formed from the name 'Alī (the first Imām of the Shī'a) and could be translated as 'Alid'.
- 58 A major feature of anti-'Alawī polemical literature is the insistence on describing the group as Nuṣayrīs (despite their rejection of the name) and alleging that the name 'Alawī was given to the group by the French as part of their policy to court religious minorities and inhibit Syrian unity. This trope is sometimes even encountered in scholarly literature. Picken (2008), for instance, refers to the 'Alawīs as 'a pseudo-Islamic sect . . . [who] are also known as 'Alawis, a name of which they are proud of and which was given to them by the French colonialist powers upon granting them a state at the beginning of the twentieth century in Syria.' The various statelets into which the French divided their Mandate territory changed names and borders several times between 1923 and 1946. To describe the French as 'granting' the 'Alawīs a state is an oversimplification and reproduction of anti-'Alawī clichés. On the French Mandate in Syria, see Yapp (1996, pp. 85–115).
- 59 The *Tā'rikh al-'Alawīyīn* was first published in Latakia in 1924 by Maṭb'at al-Taraqqī. References to the book in this article are to the 2000 reprint (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus) with introduction by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khayyir.
- 60 The work is al-Qalqashandī multi-volume *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Ṣinā'at al-Inshā'* ('the dawn of the night-blind in the composition of chancery documents').
- 61 Kurd 'Alī notes that the clans are named either for famous ancestors or villages and towns in their lands. Among these clans he lists: Kalbiyya, Nawāshira, Jahiniyya, Qarāhila, Jalqiyya, Rashāwina, Shalāhima, and Rasālina. The list given by al-Ṭawīl ([1924] 2000, pp. 408–11) is longer and gives more detail. To take two examples, al-Ṭawīl notes how Kalbiyya is one of the largest 'Alawī clans who live mainly 'in the heart of the 'Alawī Mountains' (p. 408); or how Ḥaddādiyya 'are named for their ancestor, the teacher Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād the son of the Amīr Mamdūd al-Sinjārī, the nephew of the Amīr Hasan al-Makzūn' (p. 409).

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