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OLGA BIBIKOVA. THE ROLE OF ULAMA¹ IN THE PUBLIC LIFE IN SYRIA (1970–2020) // *The article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: ulama, mufti, Baath party, Alawites, Sunnis.

Olga Bibikova,

PhD(History), Senior Research Associate,
Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS

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Abstract. Religion still plays a significant role in Syria, despite the fact that the civil war divided Syrians into supporters of the government and its opponents. Inside a large group of Muslim sheikhs, there is also no agreement.

During Ottoman rule in Syria (1516–1920), Istanbul did not create a hierarchy of Muslim authorities in the subordinated province. The sultans focused on the waqf administration, whose activities were limited to collection of taxes. At the end of the Ottoman period, as a result of the reforms of Tanzimat (1839–1876), Istanbul sent Sharia judges (kadi-kudat) to Syria. As for ministers of religion in Syria, they were usually the most aware and respected Muslims in fiqh². Traditionally, mufties, imams

were local sheikhs, usually born into families of religious figures. They got their education from childhood, memorizing texts of the Quran, first in the kuttab (school at the mosque), then in the madrasahs, in their youth they visited famous sheikhs or participated in the Zikrs of various Sufi communities, which was by no means prohibited and even encouraged.

Thomas Pierre (Th. Pierret), a Belgian Islamic researcher in Syria, notes that with the advent of secular educational institutions, Ulama children, who had traditionally followed in the footsteps of their fathers and often learned the wisdom of Islam at home, wanted to receive a secular education. The result was the emerging in the religious course of representatives of other classes or foreigners. In the XVIII century they (except Syrians) were Kurds, immigrants from the Caucasus, then natives of North Africa, and in the XX century Albanians. Among the latter was the famous theologian Nasiruddin al-Albani (1914-1999), who was called the "icon of Salafism."³

It is characteristic that the activities of foreign sheikhs in Syria were sometimes accompanied by the emergence of new versions of Islam. For example, Muhammad al-Hashimi (1880-1991), a native of Algeria, popularized the teachings of Shaziliya⁴ among Syrian Muslims. In 1943, Makki al-Kattani (born in 1894, a native of Morocco) headed the Syrian Ulama League, and later became the representative of Syria in the World Islamic League. In support of his homeland - Morocco - he also founded in Syria the organization Jamia al-kaff al-aswad (Black Hand Society), which supported the struggle of North African Arabs against the French colonizers, Palestinians against the British, as well as Libyans against the Italians. He also united the Palestinian youth of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, encouraging them to fight against British colonialism and Zionism, creating the Rabita Shabab Dimashk (Damascus Youth League), together with members of which he engaged in various sports activities (riding and archery), considering these classes a "honourable tradition."

In the 1940s educational institutions for the training of ulama, i.e. professional experts in Islamic sciences, were created in Syria. It is characteristic that when the law on privatization (including educational institutions) was adopted in 1967, these schools were not involved privatization, although the state even then sought to limit the scope of activities of religious institutions⁵.

In 1944, the "Rabita ulama Suriya" (League of Scholars of Syria) was created in Damascus, which included the most prominent Muslim sheikhs. Its first head was Sheikh Abu al-Khair al-Madani, then he was replaced by Sheikh al-Makki al-Kattani. The authority of these sheikhs was very high, thanks to this they won the elections to the National Assembly.

After Syria gained independence (1946), the Syrian Ulama Association was created, one of the founders of which was Ahmed Kuftaru⁶, the future Supreme Mufti of the country.

In 1947, the Baath Party (Arab Socialist Revival Party) was created, the ideology of which was a synthesis of Arab socialism and pan-Arabism. From the very beginning, the founders of the party advocated a decrease in the role of religion in society. Abdullah al-Ahmar (born 1936), one of H. al-Assad's associates, wrote: "The ideology of Baathism does not accept the use of a confessional factor in the interests of both state power and any of the social groups."⁷ In 1949, all mosques (even built at private expense) were declared state property⁸.

In 1963, as a result of the "8th March Revolution," the Baath party came to power. At that time, the ideology of Arab nationalism, professed by the Syrian Baathists, became one of the most significant nationalist ideologies in developing societies. But almost immediately there were disagreements between the Muslim clergy and the Baath party, as a result of which several sheikhs were arrested for criticizing the atheism of the country's leadership.

In 1970, as a result of a coup d'état, power in the country was concentrated in the hands of H. Assad, a member of the

Baath Party leadership, the Alawite community born⁹. Then, in November 1970, the 10th Congress of the Baath Party was held, which launched the beginning of the “correctional movement” and the period of stabilization of the country. The Progressive National Front was created, which, with the leading role of the Baathists, included the Syrian Communist Party, the Arab Socialist Union, the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Organization of Socialist Unionists, etc. As a result of the general referendum of 1973, a constitution was adopted in the country¹⁰, an administrative-command system was created, the model of which was largely borrowed from the socialist countries of that time. Naturally, the ruling circles of Syria took into account the multi-religious composition of Syrian society and did not set out to build a state solely based on Islam, which was typical for most Arab countries that adhered to the socialist orientation at that time.

Nevertheless, H. Assad, the president of Syria, realizing that his membership in the Alawite (Shiite) minority causes discontent among the most religious Sunnis, sought to pursue a pragmatic approach. He communicated with religious figures and regularly appeared in the mosque during significant days for Muslims. Religious programmes were regularly broadcast on radio and television. Retrospectively, we can consider the first decade of H. Assad's reign as relatively stable. Observers noted that the Quran dictates, were perceived by a significant part of the population as part of tradition, and not as a religious belief.

During this period (since 1958), the head of Syrian Muslims was Ahmed Kuftaru, who called for interfaith dialogue. From the very beginning, he showed loyalty to H. Assad, based on the principle of “cooperation with the government for the benefit of the nation¹¹.” He consistently supported the president’s activities in the country and in contacts with religious figures in Muslim countries. However, the period of relative stability was interrupted by the beginning of the “Islamic revolution” in Iran (1979), which had its influence on the Muslims of Arab countries.

On January 8, 1978, the first major anti-government demonstration took place in the city of Qom¹² (Iran). Already on February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini arrived in Tehran from emigration, and on April 1, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic. Events in Iran stirred up the entire Muslim world. The establishment of Islamic power in one of the largest countries in the Middle East revived the hopes of the Sunni clergy to increase the role of Islam in countries where people who came to power focused on socialist ideals. It is characteristic that upheavals began in a number of Arab countries.

In the same 1979, the first anti-government protests under Islamic slogans were noted in northern Syria. The authorities were gradually realizing that it was necessary to respond to attempts to restore the position of Islam in the state by humanitarian institutions. Under the patronage of Mufti Kuftaru, the Abu Nur¹³ Foundation, the Badr Women's Institute and other educational organizations were created. A faculty for the study of sharia was created at Damascus University, where in the second half of the 1990s the number of students was 4 thousand people.

Having faced with an increase in acute craving for Islam, a movement that received support from the masses, the Syrian leadership began to think about measures to prevent the politicization of Islam. However these measures should have been accompanied by relative tolerance to Islamic educational activities.

The Muslim Brotherhood movement was a particular danger to the authorities, which constantly received financial support from the Arabian monarchies. Founded back in 1946, after independence, the Syrian branch of "Brothers" originated in parliamentary democracy. However, the coup d'état (1960) put an end to this phase of democratic experience. Hostile to the Islamists, the new socialist and secular regime forced "Brothers" to go underground. However, in the 1970s "Brothers" took advantage of the growing popularity of the religious reference among young people under the influence of events in Iran, and

began to regain their position. Dissatisfied with the secularism of the Baathists, they began to attack representatives of government agencies. In February 1977, the rector of the University of Damascus, Mohammad Fadel, was killed, in April 1978 Adele Mini, the general prosecutor of Damascus, was killed, and in June 1979 students of the artillery school in Aleppo were shot. In Damascus during this period, detonations of cars rigged with explosives became more frequent. The authorities responded with arrests. In July 1980, Law No. 49 was adopted, according to which membership in the Muslim Brotherhood was punished to death penalty.

In the spring of 1982, after the "Brothers" organized a large-scale uprising in Hama, the relatively peaceful coexistence with power for the "Brothers" ended. The revolt was crushed by an 8,000th army under the command of Rifaat Assad, the president's brother, with the support of the Air Force and tank units¹⁴. With a total of 20 thousand victims, a significant part of the "Brothers" was destroyed, some managed to escape over the border. Several people surrendered to the authorities.

The Muslim clergy of Syria could not stay away from the events, especially as there were many supporters and even members of the Brotherhood among the sheikhs. Some sheikhs were made to leave the country. Among them there were sheikhs belonging to Jamaat Zaid ("Zaid group"), an influential preaching movement which activities were aimed at religious education of students and students of secular educational institutions.

This group was created by Sheikh Usama Abdul-Karim al-Rifai back in the 1950s and named after the mosque Zayd ibn Sabit al-Ansari¹⁵, where he served. Al-Rifai taught fiqh and Hadith classes for young people who studied in secular educational institutions. He had followers among the sheikhs, who also gathered groups of youth. Thus, religious groups beyond the control of the authorities were created, which included young people from various social strata. Naturally, that

events in the country, including the rebellion in Hama, were also discussed in these groups. And although some of the students of the Zaid group were repressed after 1982, its sheikhs "managed to introduce an Islamic vision of political reality into the minds of a significant part of educated youth¹⁶."

For its part, the country's leadership, realizing that the events in Hama were negatively perceived by the conservative part of the country's population, lifted restrictions on some cult customs (celebrating the birthday of the Prophet, wearing a niqab¹⁷ at school)¹⁸.

In addition, in an effort to prevent possible political consequences from Islam strengthening, the country's leadership tried to control all the attempts of Islamists' entry into the realm of politics. After the Islamist uprising of 1979-1982 the authorities at first severely limited religious activities, and also delegated the management of religious affairs to those clergy who showed loyalty. In particular, in 1987, the government decided to close all Islamic schools in Syria, including Abu Nur, but Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro declared the Islamic school the "Al-Assad Institute for Studying the Quran¹⁹" the day before the closure. Due to the patronage of Kuftaru, many Syrian madrasas were preserved as branches of the new institute.

Since the mid-1990s there was a relative liberalization, which made it possible to establish politically more independent figures in public space. The authority of Ahmad Kuftaro was generally recognized. Being first the Mufti of Damascus, and then the Supreme Mufti of Syria, he worked for almost 50 years (from 1949 to 2000) with 9 presidents. The Syrian Sunni community was committed to the traditional schools of Islamic law, maintaining tolerance for Sufism. Some famous sheikhs were simultaneously in Sufi brotherhoods. In particular, the mufti of Syria Ahmad Kuftaro was the sheikh of the Naqshbandian tariqa²⁰.

The necrology, published after the death of the Supreme Mufti, tells about his tireless activities. "Best part of his life, he lectured before every Friday praying. Leaders of Islamic and

other religious organizations were often invited to speak with the sheikh at these weekly Majlis. The late Sheikh Ahmed Yasin, the scandalous Louis Farrahan, Sheikh Nazim Al-Kubrusi and Sheikh Habib Ali Jifri²¹ were among the guests over the years there. Often, famous spiritual leaders of other confessions were also invited to speak. These meetings were held in a crowded mosque, with simultaneous translations in English, French and Russian. It was also broadcast on local television. The core of these lectures was the Sheikh's constant commentary on the Quran... Sheikh also did not detest disputes. In his tireless role as an interfaith advocate, he announced in the 60s that the Abu Nur Institute was celebrating the birth of Christ, and invited leaders of Syrian and Lebanese Christian communities. Naturally, there was a noise that left no doubt about who was the strongest supporter of ecumenic dialogue. A later comment on Jesus may have most briefly summed up the views of Sheikh Ahmed: "if a Muslim does not recognize Sayyidna Isa (Jesus), then his Islam is in vain²²." A. Keftaru expressed his attitude to power in the words: "Islam and political power are twins, none of them flourishes without the other. Islam is the basis, and the power is its guardian. Everything that does not have a foundation collapses, and everything that does not have power is on the watch²³."

Naturally, in conditions of tight control by the sheikh's authorities, supporters of radical Islam lost the opportunity to widely promote their views. Nevertheless, despite the almost complete disappearance of the Salafi wing of the Syrian religious elite, Salafism spread in Syrian society (as in the rest of the Arab world) through various channels, including satellite ones. Initially, Syrian Sufism was the subject of criticism of Salafism. Then, a tolerant attitude towards the Syrian Shiites was criticized. Shiites in Syria are represented by Shiite Imamites (twelvers, i.e., honoring 12 Imams) - 0.5%, Ismaelites - 1%, Alawites - 11.5%. In total, 13% of the population belongs to Shiites²⁴. Naturally,

both Saudi Arabia and Turkey are annoyed that Syria is led by a man belonging to Shia (Alawite) Islam.

As it's known, after the death of Hafez al-Assad (2000), his son Bashar led the country. And if in H. Assad lifetime, the inner circle supported the candidacy of Basil, the eldest son, then after his death, the associates of the late president considered the second son, Bashar Assad, not an equivalent alternative. Some of close associates (Abdel Halim Haddam²⁵) even tried to remove Bashar from office, others went on emigration. Thus, Bashar al-Assad was forced to (without the support of his father's associates) make decisions on a number of issues independently.

In particular in the mid-2000s the return of expelled ulama to their homeland was permitted, in addition, Islamic charitable organizations were allowed to work in secondary educational institutions. In response, the Muslim Brotherhood announced the resumption of its activities in Syria. When the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's exiled leadership supported mass anti-government protests in the spring of 2011, Muslim Brotherhood representatives were present a year later in the leadership of opposition forces and military units that fought with the Mujahidins against government forces²⁶.

Since 2008, the authorities have strengthened control over the religious field, while the process of integration of ulama into the bureaucratic apparatus has begun. It is characteristic that the majority of ulama took this process positively, since the concern of ulama is primarily to provide them selves with the space of freedom necessary to carry out their religious activities, and not an access to the political field.

In 2012, there were adopted amendments to the Constitution that were supposed to satisfy Islamists who criticized the authorities for spreading secularism in the country. Article 3 of the Constitution of Syria (Section Basic Principles, Chapter Political Principles) states: "The religion of the President of the Republic is Islam. Islamic jurisprudence (i.e. Sharia) should be the main source of legislation. The State must respect all

religions and ensure the freedom to perform all rituals that do not violate public order. The personal status of religious communities must be protected and respected."²⁷

The deterioration of relations between the Baathist leadership and ulama was partially offset by the consequences of reforms aimed at liberalizing the economy. These reforms began to be implemented by Bashar al-Assad after he came to power in 2000. It is believed that this was mainly in favor of a handful of businessmen close to the president, the most famous of which is his cousin Rami Makhlouf. In fact, the rejection of socialism also contributed (albeit on a more modest scale) to the enrichment of the wider category of average entrepreneurs. Due to the alliance with the latter the Syrian ulama traditionally drew financial resources for their charitable associations. Thus, these resources increased significantly because of the liberalization of the economy and the consequences of the 2003 oil boom.

In fact, the refusal of socialism also contributed (albeit on a more modest scale) to enrichment of a wider category of average entrepreneurs.

During the same period, Islamic banks were created in Syria, which invited ulama to their supervisory committees. Thus, these economic transformations brought the Syrian religious elite closer to the business community and through them to the military-political establishment. Thus, on the eve of the uprising, Syrian ulama took different positions in regard to the authorities. Some of the ulama affected by liberalization of the economy were loyal to the authorities, and another part, mainly provincial, held anti-government positions.

Just before the 2011 uprising, relations between the government and the religious elite aggravated due to Shia missionary activity in the country. The alliance of Baathists with Imamite Shiism began as early as in 1970. At that time, H. Assad, the first "not Sunni" president in the history of Syria, the new head of state, sought to ensure that his Alawite community was recognized as a branch of Shiism and, therefore, a part of the

Muslim Ummah. He received this fatwa from foreign Shiite leaders: the Iraqi theologian and public figure Hassan al-Shirazi (1937–1980)²⁸ and the Iranian-Lebanese imam Musa al-Sadr (1928–1978)²⁹. After 1979, Damascus created a strategic alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Taking advantage of the favorable attitude of the Baathist elite, foreign Shiite theologians turned the Sayyid Zainab mosque (the burial place of the prophet's granddaughter in the suburbs of Damascus) into a Shiite pilgrimage on the model of Iranian shrines. After that, the number of Iranian Shiites visiting Syria increased.

It should be noted that in Syrian-Iranian relations, not everything was smooth. Especially it included Tehran's attempts to introduce a system of Shia education in Syria, which were negatively met by the Syrian Sunnis, particularly as this happened against the background of the playing out Sunni-Shia civil war in Iraq and strong interfaith tensions in Lebanon.

The first mass uprisings in Syria arose amid a drought that began in 2006. In 2010, according to the UN, up to a million Syrians were on the edge of starvation³⁰. By February 2010, due to rising feed prices, almost all livestock number was destroyed³¹. Refugees from rural areas reached the cities. But the authorities were not ready to support the needy population. Overpopulated suburbs were the center of the protest that arose around large cities. Unorganized anti-government protests began. The authorities reacted slowly and irrationally. Calls for an armed uprising appeared in the media, and then the government decided to use the army. The Qatari channel Al Jazeera, calling for the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad fueled the debate.

With the outbreak of hostilities, ulama – the Muslim clergy – became a direct participant in the uprising. Moreover, most of them were on the side of the opposition. That is why in cities such as Dera'a (in the south), Baniyas (on the coast) Deir ez-Zor (near the eastern border), the rebels were able to take purchase of the ulama and even created caches of weapons in mosques. The

center of the 2011 uprising in Dar'a was the Omari mosque in the old city³². The Jabhat al-Nusra group operated in Baniyas. Deir al-Zor was initially interested in jihadists in connection with the oil fields there, for the control of which various rebel groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra, began to fight with each other. We also note the proximity of these cities to neighboring countries, where weapons came from.

Under these conditions, the government was massively criticized, primarily for using army in the uprising suppression. Not only provincial sheikhs were among them. In Damascus and Aleppo, there were also representatives of the religious class who voiced criticism to the government actions. It is characteristic that some of them were able to increase significantly their authority precisely by anti-government speeches. So, the speeches of Sheikh and Sharia judge Osama Abdul-Karim Al-Rifai³³ aroused great interest on the part of the dissatisfied. No less support was received by Muhammad Karim bin Said bin Karim Raje (born 1926), who has the title "Sheikh of readers of Bilad al-Sham"³⁴. During the Syrian protests in May 2011, the sheikh who preached at the al-Hassan mosque in al-Midan district defiantly resigned, thus declaring his disagreement with the government's measures to suppress opposition protests. Although these ulama did not openly call for the overthrow of power, they disputed the version of the country's leadership that the speeches were inspired from the outside.

On August 1, 2011, the first day of the month of Ramadan, about twenty well-known and respected Syrian ulama published a letter accusing the Syrian authorities of the deaths of "victims of violence" in Hama and other cities of the country. "Sharing the desire of all who love this country for stability, security and unification of the nation, we, the ulama of Bilad al-Sham, condemn and reject the use of excessive violence in Hama and other governorates of Syria. This led to bloodshed of hundreds of children of the Syrian people, the strange manner of celebrating the entry into the month of Ramadan, the month of equality,

tolerance and forgiveness. We have nothing to do with these actions and place full responsibility on the Syrian government. We see in these abusive actions an incentive to disorder in the entire space of the Motherland. We reaffirm the need to implement already promulgated decrees, laws and decisions, in particular, urgent release of all detainees³⁵".

Among the sheikhs who signed this communiqué (20 from Damascus and 11 from Aleppo) there is the already mentioned Sheikh Mohammed Karim Raje. Prominent religious figures such as brothers Osama and Saria are Rifai, Hisham Al-Burhani, Adnan Al-Saka, Jaudet Said, Ahmed Moazz Al-Khatib (former Sheikh of the Omeyad Grand Mosque in Damascus), Mohammed Fayez Avad and Muhammad Rashed supported this message.

There was another statement signed by the sheikhs and imams of Aleppo. Moreover, the Damascus statement speaks of the "full responsibility of the regime," while the Aleppo ulama are somewhat more loyal in considering the situation, placing the "greatest share of responsibility³⁶" on the government.

It is characteristic that the document of the Damascus sheikhs was not signed by the Supreme Mufti of Syria Sheikh Ahmed Badreddin Hassun and the Minister for Awqaf Affairs D. Mohammed Abdel-Sattar Al-Sayed.

Declarations of religious leaders in Damascus and Aleppo represented a serious challenge to the government, which continued to justify the suppression of demonstrations with the help of army, considering the incident as a police operation against the "Salafi armed gangs" formed by foreign states against Syria. Indeed, by that time it was known that foreign states – the Arabian monarchies, including Jordan – were intensively supplying the rebels with weapons and instructors.

In February 2012, more than 100 sheikhs from different countries issued a fatwa about the situation in Syria, stating "that the Syrians were not allowed to stay under the regime of Bashar al-Assad and that it was necessary to leave this system. They

called for help to relieve distress of the Free Army of Syria³⁷ – in material and ideological assistance.”³⁸

Said Ramadan al-Buti (1929–2013) was among those who did not sign the fatwa, an irreconcilable opponent of Salafism³⁹, known for his position on the use of violence as a means of achieving political goals. Before the beginning of the marked events, Sheikh Buti repeatedly spoke out against nationalism and socialism, which form the basis of the Baathist ideology. However, after 2011, he began to show support for the ruling regime, on the premise that “tyranny is preferable to the risk of anarchy⁴⁰” In addition, al-Buti believed that the Muslim clergy should establish a dialogue with the authorities, which will make it possible to find mutual understanding and solve controversial problems. On the eve of the signing of the fatwa, al-Buti during Friday’s sermon explained to the audience at the mosque that the West was trying to run up Muslims against each other, stressing that back in the 1990s the US National Security Council developed a plan for a confrontation of Muslim confessions. He was supported by the imam of the Anas ibn Malik mosque, Sheikh Ahmad Sadek Khatyb, who said that Syria’s enemies abroad mobilized all their forces to destroy the country.

Other supporters of the legitimate Syrian government include Muhammad Hassan al-Kurdi, rector of Damascus University, Sheikh Hisamuddin Farfour, rector of Al-Fatah Islamic University. Both sheikhs, accompanied by Muhammad Tawfik Ramazan Buti, who after the death of his father was elected head of the Sham Ulama Union and Adviser to the President of Syria on religious issues, visited Russia in February 2017 at the Public Chamber invitation. A strong supporter of the legitimate government is Ahmad Badreddin Hassoun⁴¹, who took office as the supreme mufti of Syria after the death of Ahmed Kuftaru in 2004. His declarations against the opposition and those who support it caused great irritation in Islamist circles. His son Saria (22 years old) was killed in the autumn of 2011⁴². In his interview with Russia Today, Hassun (13.22.2015) called

terrorism “a new ideological course that has nothing to do with Islam⁴³.”

The religious opposition in exile also opposed the legitimate government. Opposition sheikhs created several organizations, such as the Islamic Committee of Sham⁴⁴, the Fund of Ulama and Preachers of the Syrian Revolution, the League of Preachers of Sham and the Committee of Free Ulama, etc., patronized by Saudi Prince Bandar ibn Sultan al-Saud (born 1949)⁴⁵.

Adnan Mohammed al-Arur (born 1948), a native of Hama, who regularly appears on Saudi television, also gained notoriety among opposition sheikhs. He traditionally calls for assistance and arming of the Syrian Mujahidins, as well as Kurdish nationalists in favour of self-determination⁴⁶.

Using the opportunities of the new media to appeal to the Syrian people, these outsiders were especially active in the territories occupied by the Mujahidins, where a completely different, including religious, order was established. Having left Syria on the eve or at the beginning of the uprising, the ulama created the opposition “League of Ulama Shama” (Rabit Ulama al-Sham) in Doha (Qatar), the founder of which is Sheikh Muaz al-Khatib⁴⁷. Since its founding, this organization was headed by exiled scholars from Aleppo and Hamaa, close to the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Sheikh Muhammad Ali al-Sabouni⁴⁸ and member of the Syrian National Council Bashir Haddad.

Within the opposition during this period, there were various committees and organizations, which, were almost all, clerical in nature. Among them there is the Islamic Committee of Sham, the Fund of Ulama and Preachers of the Syrian Revolution, the League of Preachers of Sham and the Committee of Free Ulama, in addition to local or ethnic structures such as the Ulama Front of Aleppo, the Jebel Al-Zawiya Ulama Association and the Kurdish Ulama Association. Their importance and representativeness are extremely different, but it is obvious that they were behind more significant players who were able to finance these organizations.

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Assessing the role of ulama in modern Syrian society, Thomas Pierre (Th. Pierret) notes that once the Syrian Sunni ulama benefited from both the rejection of the Baathist ideology of the Syrian government and the reduction of the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country. However, under the current conditions, "there are few figures among the Syrian Sunni ulema who have a true national reputation... The absence of leading ulama was the result of Baathist policy and repressions."⁴⁹ In the current situation, it is very important for the country's leadership to have associates among religious leaders.

References

1. Ulama- a generic term of Muslim religious figures -mufties, imams, sheikhs.
2. Fiqh - a set of rules of behaviour and morality in Islam.
3. Syrian theologian Ramadan al-Buti and his contribution to the development of Islamic thought in the second half of the 20th - early 21st centuries. Muslim world. № 4 2017. // <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/siriyskiy-bogoslov-ramadan-al-buti-i-ego-vklad-v-razvitie-islamskoy-mysli-vo-vtoroy-polovine-xx-nachale-xxi-vv> (22.09.2020)
4. Shaziliya is a Sufi tariqat founded by Sheikh Abul-Hassan al-Shazali in the 13th century.
5. Pierret Th., Baas et Islam en Syrie. La dynastie Assad face aux oulémas, Paris, PUF, 2011. p.67
6. Ahmed Kuftaru, born in 1915, a Kurd, Mufti of Damascus, and then the Supreme Mufti of Syria from 1958 to 2004.
7. Religious problems through the ideology of the Arab Socialist Revival Party. Al-Ahmar Abdullah. // Religion and Society in the East, Issue I (2017), P. 221-256. // <https://religion.ivran.ru/number?artid=10165> // (13.09.2020).
8. Pierre-Jean Louisard in his book "Between Social Reforms and the National Movement..." notes that the term "nationalization" in Arabic literally means "Reformist Revolution". Visit. Pierre-Jean Luizard, Entre réforme sociale et mouvement national, dans «Al-Azhar, institution sunnite réformé», Le Caire, 1995, P. 523.
9. The exact number of Alawites in the world cannot be defined. In Syria in the census (2003), religious affiliation was practically not taken into account (it was indicated: "Christian" or "Muslim"). It is believed that with the total

- population of Syria of 17.56 million people, Alawites make up from 10 to 12%, i.e. 2-2.5 million people. Alawites in Syria are represented by 4 tribes: Hayatya, Kalyabiya, Haddadiya and Mutavira.
10. The Constitution of the Syrian Republic provides for freedom of religion. The first Constitution of the country was adopted in 1973 by a majority vote in the People's Assembly at the end of January 1973. 13.03.1973 it entered into force. The new version of the Constitution was adopted in 2012 after a referendum, which was rejected by the opposition, which considered that the vote was fabricated. Thus, the Islamist opposition tried to put pressure on the state, demanding the repeal of all laws that contradict Islam as the official religion in Syria. In addition, they demanded to harmonize the laws with the sharia.
 11. Al-Sira Al-Zatiya li Ahmad Kuftaru (Biography of Ahmed Kuftaru). Official website of A. Kuftaru // <http://www.kuftaro.org>.
 12. Qom is the main religious center of Iran.
 13. Now the Ahmed Kuftaru Islamic Foundation
 14. Le Monde diplomatique. P., 03.05.2006.
 15. The mosque is named after the secretary of the Prophet Muhammad Zed ibn Sabit al-Askari (612-665), who recorded the Prophet reveals.
 16. Pierret Th. Religion and state in Syria. The Sunni ulama from coup to revolution. Cambridge. 2013. XIII. P. 98.
 17. Niqab is a type of hijab, a female veil that leaves only the eyes open.
 18. In 2008, it was prohibited to wear a hijab to women teachers at school. In 2010, the ban on the hijab was expanded. This time it was addressed both teachers and schoolgirls and students.
 19. Ahmad Kuftaru // https://ru.qwe.wiki/wiki/Ahmed_Kuftaro (12.09.2020)
 20. Amin Kuftaru, Ahmed Kuftaru's father, received an Ijaz of the spiritual guidance Irshad of Sufi adherents in the Niqshbandi order - Mudzhaddidi-Halidi from the spiritual mentor of the famous sheikh Iza al-Curdi. Later the sheikh Amin Kuftaru became the head of this tariqa.
 21. Sheikh Ahmed Yasin - (1937-2004) was one of the founders of the Hamas movement. Louis Farrahan (born 1933), an American citizen, head of the radical organization Nation of Islam. Sheikh Nazim Al-Kubrusi (1922-1914) hereditary Sufi, head of the Niqshbandian Order, Sheikh Habib Ali Jifri (born 1971) a supporter of modernized Sufism.
 22. HOMEPAST ISSUES Issue #13 Sheikh Ahmed Kuftaru
<https://web.archive.org/web/20060323085345/http://www.islamicamagazine.com/content/view/87/61/> (12.09.2020)
 23. HOMEPAST ISSUES Issue #13 Sheikh Ahmed Kuftaru
<https://web.archive.org/web/20060323085345/http://www.islamicamagazine.com/content/view/87/61/> (12.09.2020)

- 24 Religion in Syria // https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Религия_в_Сирии#Шииты. Sometimes Druse are also referred to Shiites, but the Druse community tries to distance itself from Shiites. (12.09.2020)
- 25 Abdel Halim Haddam - (1932-2020), Sunnit, Vice President of Syria (1984-2005). Having left Syria in 2006, he announced the creation of a "government in exile" in Paris.
- 26 The Washington Post 13.05.2012.
- 27 The Constitution of Syria. 2012 // <https://constitutions.ru/?p=7027> (21.09.2020)
- 28 Hassan al-Shirazi - 1937-1980) - Shiite theologian, spoke in favour of national liberation and revolutionary movements in Muslim countries.
- 29 Musa al-Sadr - (1928-1978) - Iranian and Lebanese Shiite political and religious figure, theologian and philosopher. Founder of the Lebanese Amal movement. In 1973, he promulgated a fatwa, according to which he declared all Alawites who believe in a single god, i.e. Muslims (before that, Alawites were considered heretics). The Sunnis of Syria and Lebanon called him "the architect of Muslim unity."
- 30 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic. 15.09.2011.
- 31 Fountain H. Researchers Link Syrian Conflict to a Drought Made Worse by Climate Change // The New York Times, 2.03.2015.
- 32 Only in July 2018, control of the city was returned by means of negotiations.
- 33 Osama Abdul-Karim al- Rifai, hereditary imam of the al-Rifai mosque in the Kafr Suza region of Damascus. In 2013, he was attacked, after that he moved to Istanbul and settled in the Fatih region, where many emigrants from Syria live. In the autumn of 2014, on Facebook page, he announced that on Fridays he would give lessons at the Mihrimah-sultan mosque. This is the first time that the Turkish Department of Religious Affairs has allowed an Arab sheikh to teach.
- 34 I.e. the head of all hafiz (knowing the Quran by heart) in Syria.
- 35 Des oulémas en vue imputent la responsabilité de l'effusion de sang au régime syrien. 05.08.2011, Le Monde. P., // <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/syrie/2011/08/05/des-oulemas-en-vue-imputent-la-responsabilite-de-leffusion-de-sang-au-regime-syrien/> (09/09/2020).
- 36 Des oulémas en vue imputent la responsabilité de l'effusion de sang au régime syrien. 05.08.2011, Le Monde. P., // <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/syrie/2011/08/05/des-oulemas-en-vue-imputent-la-responsabilite-de-leffusion-de-sang-au-regime-syrien/> (09/09/2020)
- 37 Free Syrian Army - created in July 2011 by a group of deserter officers led by Colonel Riyad al-Asaad. Fights against government forces.
- 38 United Fatwa of Scientists in Syria // <http://www.ansar.ru/rightway/obedinennaya-fetva-uchenyh-po-sirii> (15.09.2020).
- 39 Al-Buti was killed in a suicide bombing at the Al-Iman mosque.

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- 40 Pierret Th. Le Baas syrien face à la mouvance islamique sunnite // 28/03/2012 // <https://www.lescledumoyenorient.com/Le-Baas-syrien-face-a-la-mouvance-islamique-sunnite> (04/09/2020).
 - 41 Ahmad Badreddin Hassun - 1949, doctor of Shafiite fiqh.
 - 42 The Supreme Mufti of Syria Ahmad Hassun during the funeral of his son publicly stated that he forgives the killers, but asks them only for one thing to lay down their arms, stop killing people...
 - 43 RT International. 13.11.2015.
 - 44 The Islamic Committee of Sham (Hayat al-Sham al-Islamiyah) is a Salafist NGO that raises funds for refugees and the affected population. Its founders, Syrians based in Jordan and the Gulf countries, are young religious entrepreneurs who, basing on humanitarian success, are trying to build religious and political power. One of their many fatwas contains a warning that giving up the goal of establishing sharia is a "red line" // Th. Pierret. En Syrie: L'autorite des oulemas mis en cose par revolution // <https://orientxxi.info/lu-vu-entendu/en-syrie-l-autorite-des-oulemas-mise-en-cause-par-la-revolution,0456> (13.09.2020).
 - 45 Bandar ibn Sultan al-Saud - In 2005, he was appointed Secretary General of the National Security Council of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. From 2012 to 2014 - Head of the General Intelligence Service. Until 2014, he supervised work on Syria. Then he was replaced by Muhammad ibn Naif. It was Prince Bandar who was to conduct an operation to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. This was reported by the newspaper Wall Street Journal 25.08.2013.
 - 46 Sheikh Arur rejects the division of Syria. 2012-08-21 Kurdistan.Ru // https://kurdistan.ru/2012/08/21/news-16632_SHeyh_Arur_otvergaet.html (13.09.2020).
 - 47 Muaz al-Khatib - born in 1960, imam of the Omeyyad mosque, a native of the al-Hasaniy family - direct descendants of Hassan, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. In November 2012, he was elected president of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. At the end of January 2013, he issued a suggestion to start a dialogue with the legitimate government "in the name of ending the bloodshed and saving hundreds of thousands of lives." He took a moderate approach in resolving the political crisis in the country. In March of that year, he resigned, explaining his decision by the increasing interference of foreign powers (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) in the activities of the Syrian opposition.
 - 48 Sheikh Muhammad Ali al-Sabouni, born in 1930, Aleppo, a hereditary hafiz (expert on the Quran), a graduate of Al-Azhar, taught at the Department of Sharia at Umm al-Qurra University, also at the Department of Islamic Education at King Abdul Aziz University in Saudi Arabia for 28 years.
 - 49 Pierret Th., Baas et Islam en Syrie. La dynastie Assad face aux oulémas, Paris, PUF, 2011. P. 124.