

= Hasan al @-@ Kharrat =

Abu Muhammad Hasan al @-@ Kharrat (Arabic : ??? ????? 1861 ? 25 December 1925) was one of the principal Syrian rebel commanders of the Great Syrian Revolt against the French Mandate . His main area of operations was in Damascus and its Ghouta countryside . He was killed in the struggle and is considered a hero by Syrians .

As the qabaday (local youths boss) of the al @-@ Shaghour quarter of Damascus , al @-@ Kharrat was connected with Nasib al @-@ Bakri , a nationalist from the quarter 's most influential family . At al @-@ Bakri 's invitation , al @-@ Kharrat joined the revolt in August 1925 and formed a group of fighters from al @-@ Shaghour and other neighborhoods in the vicinity . He led the rebel assault against Damascus , briefly capturing the residence of French High @-@ Commissioner Maurice Sarrail before withdrawing amid heavy French bombardment .

After his aborted operation in Damascus , al @-@ Kharrat continued to lead forays against French forces in and around the city . Towards the end of 1925 , relations grew tense between al @-@ Kharrat and other rebel leaders , particularly Sa 'id al- ' As and Ramadan al @-@ Shallash , as they traded accusations of plundering villages or extorting local inhabitants . Al @-@ Kharrat was killed in a French ambush in the Ghouta , and the revolt dissipated by 1927 , but he gained a lasting reputation as a martyr of the Syrian resistance to French rule .

= = Early life and career = =

Al @-@ Kharrat was born to a Sunni Muslim family in Damascus in 1861 , during Ottoman rule in Syria . He served as the night watchman of the city 's al @-@ Shaghour quarter and as a guard for the neighborhood 's orchards . Damascus was captured by Arab rebels in October 1918 . Afterward , the Arab Club , an Arab nationalist organization , emerged in the city to raise support for the rebels . The club assisted the rebels ' leader , Emir Faisal , who formed a rudimentary government . Al @-@ Kharrat became an affiliate of the Arab Club and raised support for Faisal in al @-@ Shaghour . In July 1920 , Faisal 's government collapsed after its motley forces were defeated by the French at the Battle of Maysalun . Afterward , the French ruled Syria under the aegis of their League of Nations mandate .

In the early years of French rule , al @-@ Kharrat was al @-@ Shaghour 's qabaday (pl. qabadayat) , the traditional leader of a neighborhood 's local toughs . The qabaday was informally charged with redressing grievances and defending a neighborhood 's honor against local criminals or the encroachments of qabadayat from other neighborhoods . He was popularly characterized as an honorable man , noted for his personal strength , and protection of minorities and the poor . The qabaday was considered an " upholder of Arab traditions and customs , the guardian of popular culture " , according to historian Philip S. Khoury . Khoury asserts that al @-@ Kharrat was " probably the most respected and esteemed qabaday of his day " . Qabadayat normally shunned formal education , and historian Michael Provence maintains that al @-@ Kharrat was likely illiterate . Qabadayat were normally linked with particular city notables and could secure them political support in their neighborhoods . Al @-@ Kharrat was allied with Nasib al @-@ Bakri , a Damascene politician and landowner . The al @-@ Bakri family was the most influential in al @-@ Shaghour , and al @-@ Kharrat served as the family 's principal connection and enforcer in the quarter .

= = Commander in the Great Syrian Revolt = =

= = Recruitment and early confrontations = = =

A revolt against French rule was launched in the mid @-@ summer of 1925 by the Druze sheikh (chieftain) , Sultan Pasha al @-@ Atrash , in the southern mountains of Jabal al @-@ Druze . As al @-@ Atrash 's men scored decisive victories against the French Army of the Levant , Syrian nationalists were inspired and the revolt spread northward to the countryside of Damascus and

beyond . Al @-@ Bakri was the chief liaison between al @-@ Atrash and the emerging rebel movement in Damascus and the Ghouta . The Ghouta is the fertile plain surrounding Damascus , and its orchard groves and extensive waterways provided cover for the rebels and a base from which they could raid Damascus . In August , al @-@ Bakri convinced al @-@ Kharrat to join the uprising . According to Provence , al @-@ Kharrat was " ideal " for the job , possessing " a local following of young men , notoriety outside the quarter , good connections and a reputation for toughness " . The group of fighters he commanded was known as ? isabat al @-@ Shawaghira (the band of al @-@ Shaghour) . Though named after al @-@ Kharrat 's quarter , the band included twenty qabadayat and their armed retainers from other Damascus neighborhoods and nearby villages . His main areas of operation were in the vicinity of al @-@ Shaghour and the al @-@ Zur forest in the eastern Ghouta . Through his alliance with a Sufi religious leader , al @-@ Kharrat brought an Islamic holy war dimension to the largely secular revolt , something that was not welcomed by some involved .

Al @-@ Kharrat commenced guerrilla operations in September , targeting French forces posted in the eastern and southern Ghouta . His prominence rose as he led nighttime raids against the French in Damascus , during which he disarmed army patrols and took soldiers hostage . In al @-@ Shaghour , Souk Saruja and Jazmatiyya , al @-@ Kharrat and his band burnt down all French @-@ held buildings . In the first week of October , sixty French gendarmes were dispatched to the Ghouta to apprehend al @-@ Kharrat and his fighters . The gendarmes were quartered in the home of al @-@ Malihah 's mukhtar (village headman) . In the evening , the rebels attacked the residence , killing one gendarme and capturing the rest ; the prisoners were eventually all returned unharmed .

On 12 October , French troops backed by tanks , artillery and aerial support launched an operation to surround and eliminate al @-@ Kharrat 's rebels in the al @-@ Zur forest . Al @-@ Kharrat 's men were forewarned of the French deployment by the peasants of al @-@ Malihah . Positioned among the trees , the rebels used sniper fire against the French troops . The latter were unable to lure the rebels out and retreated .

As the French withdrew toward al @-@ Malihah , they looted the village and set it on fire . French intelligence officials justified the collective punishment of al @-@ Malihah as retaliation for the rebels ' capture and humiliation of the gendarmes during the previous week ; the French claimed a young boy from al @-@ Malihah had notified al @-@ Kharrat 's men of the French presence in the village . Though they were unable to engage al @-@ Kharrat and his forces directly , French troops executed around 100 civilians from Ghouta villages . Their corpses were brought to Damascus , and the bodies of sixteen men described by the French as " brigands " were put on display .

= = = Battle of Damascus and operations in Ghouta = = =

Spurred by French army actions in the Ghouta , al @-@ Bakri planned to capture the Citadel of Damascus , where French forces were concentrated , and the Azm Palace , where General Maurice Sarrail , the French high commissioner of Syria , would be residing on 17 ? 18 October (Sarrail was typically headquartered in Beirut) . The high commissioner functioned as the overall administrator of Syria on behalf of France and exercised practically absolute power . The rebel units active in Damascus at the time were al @-@ Kharrat 's ? isabat and a mixed force of Druze fighters and rebels from the al @-@ Midan quarter and the Ghouta . To compensate for the lack of rebel strength , al @-@ Bakri sent a letter to Sultan al @-@ Atrash requesting reinforcements . Al @-@ Atrash replied that he was currently occupied with operations in the Hauran , but would dispatch his entire force to back the Damascus rebels as soon as affairs there were settled . Before he received al @-@ Atrash 's reply , al @-@ Bakri decided to move ahead with the operation .

On 18 October , al @-@ Kharrat led forty rebels into al @-@ Shaghour from the old cemeteries adjacent to the southern gate of Damascus , announcing that the Druze had arrived to relieve the city from French occupation . Crowds of residents enthusiastically welcomed the rebels and many took up arms alongside them . Al @-@ Kharrat 's men captured the quarter 's police station , disarming its garrison . They were joined by Ramadan al @-@ Shallash , a rebel commander from Deir ez @-@ Zor , and twenty of his Bedouin fighters . The joint forces proceeded to the Hamidiyya

Market and captured the Azm Palace , but Sarrail was not present , having already left to attend a meeting in the Hauran town of Daraa . The rebels plundered the palace and set it on fire . Provence asserts that capturing the palace without Sarrail " held no tactical importance " but was a highly symbolic achievement for the rebels because of the Azm Palace 's " importance as the historical seat of economic and political power in Damascus , now usurped by the French and totally undefended " .

While al @-@ Kharrat captured the Azm Palace , al @-@ Bakri and 200 rebels under his command rode through the city and were joined by civilians in increasing numbers . After sealing the Old City to prevent the entry of enemy reinforcements , al @-@ Kharrat issued an order to kill anyone linked to the French army . About 180 French soldiers were killed . Sarrail ordered the shelling and aerial bombardment of the city . About 1 @, @ 500 people were killed in the bombardment , which lasted two days . General chaos and scattered fighting ensued as whole neighborhoods , mosques and churches were leveled , French forces moved in , and hundreds of leading figures in the Syrian national movement were arrested , including al @-@ Kharrat 's son Fakhri . The latter was captured on 22 October during a botched nighttime raid by the rebels against the French , who by then were in control of Damascus . Al @-@ Kharrat was offered the release of his son in exchange for his own surrender , but refused .

The rebels withdrew from Damascus as a meeting was held between French army commander Maurice Gamelin and a delegation of Damascene notables . As a result of the meeting , the French agreed to end their bombardment in return for a payment of 100 @, @ 000 Turkish gold liras by 24 October . The fine was not paid by the French deadline , but the bombardment was not renewed , likely as a result of orders from the French government in Paris . International condemnation of Sarrail 's bombardment of Damascus and growing criticism in France of his mishandling of the revolt led to his dismissal on 30 October . He was replaced by politician Henry de Jouvenel , who arrived in Syria in December . On 22 November , al @-@ Kharrat commanded 700 rebels in a battle with about 500 French soldiers outside of Damascus . Al @-@ Kharrat 's men inflicted " trifling " losses on the French , but experienced heavy casualties themselves , with thirty dead and forty wounded according to Reuters . On 5 December , al @-@ Kharrat was one of the commanders of a 2 @, @ 000 @-@ strong force uniting rebels from disparate backgrounds , which assaulted the French Army barracks in al @-@ Qadam , south of Damascus . The French claimed to have inflicted significant casualties , but rebel activity continued .

= = = Tensions with rebel leaders = = =

Centralized order and oversight among the revolt 's armed participants was difficult to establish because of the diversity and independence of the rebel factions . A meeting of rebel leaders was held in the Ghouta village of Saqba on 26 November . Sa 'id al- ' As accused al @-@ Kharrat and others of plundering in the Ghouta , while al @-@ Kharrat alleged that al @-@ Shallash extorted the residents of al @-@ Midan and the Ghouta town of Douma . The meeting concluded with an agreement to elect a government to replace the French authorities , increase recruitment of the Ghouta 's inhabitants , coordinate military operations under a central command , and establish a revolutionary court to execute spies . The meeting also designated the area between the village of Zabdin and north of the Douma @-@ Damascus road as being part of al @-@ Kharrat 's zone of operations . Despite his leading role in the rebels ' military efforts , al @-@ Kharrat was not included in the newly formed rebel leadership council , nor were any of al @-@ Bakri 's allies . Instead , al- ' As served as the rebels ' overall head .

Sharp divisions among rebel factions became apparent during a second meeting in Saqba on 5 December . According to Syrian journalist Munir al @-@ Rayyes , hostility between al @-@ Kharrat and al @-@ Shallash was well @-@ known among the rebels . Because al @-@ Shallash had levied war taxes on the major landlords and city elites of the Ghouta , al @-@ Kharrat 's benefactor al @-@ Bakri viewed him as a threat to the traditional landowning class to which al @-@ Bakri belonged . Al @-@ Rayyis claimed the meeting was called for by al @-@ Kharrat , who ordered his fighters to capture and bring al @-@ Shallash to Saqba . However , according to al- ' As , the

summit was called by al @-@ Shallash , and once the latter arrived in the village , al @-@ Kharrat personally detained him and confiscated his horse , weapons and money .

After his detention , al @-@ Shallash was given a brief trial during which al @-@ Kharrat accused him of making " impositions and ransoms and financial collections in the name of the revolt " , while al @-@ Bakri condemned him specifically for extorting the residents of Douma for 1 @,@ 000 giney (Ottoman pounds) , and imposing large fines on the inhabitants of Harran al @-@ Awamid , al @-@ Qisa and Maydaa for his own personal enrichment . Al @-@ Kharrat and al @-@ Bakri decided al @-@ Shallash 's verdict , and dismissed him from the revolt . While many rebels with officer backgrounds similar to al @-@ Shallash disapproved of the judgement , they did not intervene . In his account of the meeting , al @-@ Rayyis condemned the rebel commanders for complacency in the " ridiculous trial " and accused al @-@ Kharrat of being motivated solely by personal animosity . Al @-@ Shallash was able to escape ? or was released by al- ' As ? when French planes bombed the meeting . Al @-@ Shallash would later surrender to Jouvenel and collaborate with French authorities .

= = Death and legacy = =

Al @-@ Kharrat was killed in an ambush by French troops in the Ghouta on 25 December 1925 . He was succeeded as qabaday of al @-@ Shaghour and commander of the ? isabat al @-@ Shawaghirah by Mahmud Khaddam al @-@ Sreja . Al @-@ Kharrat 's men continued to fight the French until the revolt ended in 1927 , although historian Thomas Philipp states that al @-@ Kharrat 's group dissipated after his death . In January 1926 , al @-@ Kharrat 's son Fakhri was sentenced to death and publicly executed , along with two other rebels , in Marjeh Square , Damascus . The French had previously implored Fakhri to persuade his father to surrender in return for his release , but Fakhri had refused .

Abd al @-@ Rahman Shahbandar , a prominent Syrian nationalist leader , described al @-@ Kharrat as having played " the preeminent role " in the battle against the French in the Ghouta and Damascus . Historian Daniel Neep wrote that al @-@ Kharrat was the " best @-@ known " of all of the Damascus @-@ based rebel leaders , although other leaders of the rebel movement attributed the publicity and praise of al @-@ Kharrat to the efforts of the Cairo @-@ based Syrian @-@ Palestinian Committee , with which al @-@ Bakri was closely affiliated . Al @-@ Kharrat and his son Fakhri are today considered " martyred heroes " by Syrians for their nationalist efforts and their deaths in the Syrian struggle for independence from France .