PART ONE

ENCOMIA: RAFEQ THE HISTORIAN
ABDUL-KARIM RAFEQ, FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE

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I am delighted to have this opportunity to say a few words about my dear friend and respected colleague Dr. Abdul-Karim Rafeq.

As students at the American University of Beirut, my friends and I would often visit the office of our revered teacher, the late Dr. Nicola Ziadeh, to ask his advice and to check on the new publications which he received from all over the Arab world. One day he told me that a professor from the University of Damascus named Abdul-Karim Rafeq had visited him, and that he had written an excellent book about Damascus during the eighteenth century, published in English by Khayyats in Beirut. Professor Ziadeh asked me to read the book and summarise part of it as a requirement for one of my graduate courses. The book was based on Rafeq’s doctoral dissertation, written in 1963 under the supervision of Professor Peter Holt, Professor of Arab History at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, a noted scholar and a man of great modesty and integrity.

From that time onward, I wanted to get to know Abdul-Karim Rafeq. I learned that he was born in Idlib in 1931; that he completed his primary and secondary studies there and then attended the American College in Aleppo, where he learned English and French while continuing to master Arabic. He then became a student at the History Department at the Faculty of Arts at the Syrian University (it became the University of Damascus in 1958). In those days many great scholars from Bilad al-Sham were on the faculty of the university, including George Haddad, Nur al-Din Hatum, ‘Umar Farrukh from Beirut, Sa’id al-Afghani, Shukri Faysal, the Damascus poet Shafiq Jabiri, and the geography professor ‘Umar al-Hakim. Later they would be joined by ‘Abd al-Karim Gharayba as well as Nabih ‘Aql when he returned to Damascus. During this important stage in Middle Eastern history, the university was known for having students from all over Syria and the rest of Bilad al-Sham: Jordan, Lebanon, and especially Palestine, after the nakba of 1948 had obliged many Palestinians to come to Damascus. The university also attracted students from North Africa and the rest of the Arab world, as it invited great thinkers to participate in