

THE DEVELOPMENT OF OTTOMAN STUDIES IN EGYPT

INTRODUCTION

Ottoman historiography in Egypt became associated with political changes, due to the Empire's religious and political character. On the one hand, it was an Islamic state, but it was also the last Islamic state to rule the Arabian people before their Western colonization. This is why it was ideology that dominated Ottoman era historiography. This fact may become clearer after discussing MuḤammad Farīd's *Ta'rikh al-dawla al-'aliya* [1905], one of the most important historiographical works released by the Ottoman Empire; At that point in time, Egypt was suffering under British occupation, and the hope of independence offered by MuḤammad Farīd (leader of the National Party) promised the return of Egypt to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, this important work fiercely defended the Empire, in spite of being in its weakest state ever and being described as "Europe's ill man."

Religious and political perspectives appear in the earliest of MuḤammad Farīd's writings. He points out how Egyptian and Arab historians entirely neglected the study of Ottoman Empire history, or what he called "the Turkish caliphate branch," in comparison with their close attention to the history of the Arab Islamic state; "the Arab caliphate

branch.” What he meant by that was the attention directed at studying the history of the Arab Islamic state, including the Orthodox caliphs, the Umayyads, and the Abbasid reign, to the detriment of research on the Ottoman reign. Muḥammad Farīd could be right. Muḥammad ‘Ali’s seizing of power and his many problems with the Ottoman state, followed by the establishment of the foundations of “state hereditary possession” for ‘Ali’s family of Muḥammad shows that most historians were discussing “Muḥammad ‘Ali the Great” and his role in establishing the foundations of civilization in the Modern Egypt. History was being manipulated to legitimize the rule Muḥammad ‘Ali’s family. This is why Egyptian history was divided into pre- and post-Muḥammad ‘Ali’s eras. In either case, the influence of Muḥammad Farīd and the National Party would remain, and their Ottoman leaning would affect Egyptian society especially its proletariat and small middle class up until around the end of the World War I, the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, and the shattering of the dream about the end to British colonization at the hands of the Ottoman Empire and Germany, “its ally back then.”

1. THE 1919 REVOLUTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALIST TREND IN HISTORICAL STUDY

The work of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rāfi‘ī, the “nationalist movement historian,” is considered very important for implanting a certain image of the Ottoman state through Egypt’s liberal era. This stage began with Egypt’s independence 1922 and lasted until the 1952 Revolution. al-Rāfi‘ī’s history of the nationalist movement [1929] was written from the perspective of the arrival of the French military expedition and “a development of national awareness” to resist it. He ignores to a great extent the stage that preceded the French invasion, which is the history of the three-century-long Ottoman era, touching upon it in only a few pages and describing as founded in backwardness. He adds that Egypt lost that independence which identified Egypt as a great country before the arrival of the Ottomans, thus unable to avoid the same mistake made by other historians when trying to write the history of the Ottoman era based on generalization. That is to say, al-Rāfi‘ī was describing only the short stage of disturbance that preceded the French invasion in 1798, which he extrapolates over the whole Ottoman era since 1517.

Looking analytically into the substance of al-Rāfi‘ī’s writings and the image he paints of the Ottoman era, we find that the ideological dimension plays a very important role for him, for al-Rāfi‘ī was writing

in 1929, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I and Egypt's separation from it. It was also after the 1919 Revolution and the growth of Egyptian nationalism at the expense of Islam, a tendency detected above in the work of Muḥammad Farīd. al-Rāfi'ī also supported the idea of an "independent Egypt," and searched to historically validate such an idea in the study of pre-Ottoman Egyptian history. Also noteworthy is that al-Rāfi'ī wrote at the time of the Egyptian monarchy of King Fu'ād, rereading the history of "independent" Egypt, illuminating of the king's great grandfather, Muḥammad 'Alī, and of course denouncing the importance of the Ottoman era. The truth here is that al-Rāfi'ī was the son of the liberal era, which Egypt went through after the 1919 Revolution. He is also related to the Egyptian nationalist trend, which became the truly dominant universal ideology at the time. So what was the use of discussing an empire that collapsed during World War I, and whose caliphate ended in 1924, while Egypt had truly entered a nationalist era?

Ḥusayn Fawzī and his book "the Egyptian Sindbad"

Ḥusayn Fawzī's writing [1997] is considered one of the most important works affecting many Egyptian generations. We can also say that it is more popular and influential in the Egyptian mind than any academic history. One can pose many reasons, the most important of which is the literary and narrative style used to describe his concept of Egyptian history. Fawzī's escape into the narrative style, which he preferred to academic writing, helped make his ideas more popular and easier to spread among more Egyptian groups. Fawzī belongs to many things: first to the descendents of the 1919 Revolution, secondly to the peak of Egyptian nationalism, thirdly to the end of subordination to the Ottoman Empire, and finally to the assertion of a relationship between Egyptian and the European civilization. Therefore, it is not strange to find him beginning his book with "sad Friday," the day when sultan Selim was acknowledged in the Friday sermon after his invasion of Cairo in 1517. So begins the first chapter, entitled "The Darkness." Fawzī, who was also interested in European literature, compared the Ottoman era in Egypt to Dante's *Inferno*. Such a dramatic image would contribute much to implanting a premature image in the collective Egyptian mind about the Ottoman era. Maybe this dramatism is one of the more important reasons why such an image has not changed until the present day. The Egyptian nationalist trend is to distort, or even forget, about that page in country's history.

Luwīs ‘Awaḍ: the last of the liberals

Let us consider Luwīs ‘Awaḍ, the last of the liberal generation, a group passionately stricken with the idea of Egyptian nationalist and Egypt’s association with Western civilization. ‘Awaḍ started his great project to reread the history of Modern Egypt in the 1960s [Luwīs ‘Awaḍ 1969], motivated by the defeat suffered by Egypt at the hands of the Israelis in June 1967, and how it caused a sense of Egyptian defeatism. The war motivated him to look inward in search for the true reason of the defeat. However, ‘Awaḍ true intent was to revive the liberal movement, for it was, in his opinion, liberalism that marked the beginning of modern Egypt and its association with Europe, in the form of the French invasion, which is ‘Awaḍ’s starting point, prior to which was the Ottoman era marking Egypt’s dark age, for applying European historical writing to stages of Egyptian history. To assert such idea, ‘Awaḍ merged the Mamluk and Ottoman eras, calling it “the feudal age.” On the other hand, ‘Awaḍ stressed the importance of the French invasion for bring Egypt out of feudalism and darkness to modernity.

2. ISLAMIC EXPANTION AND THE SEARCH FOR A LOST PARADISE

‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Shinnāwī and the defamed empire

With the 1967 defeat at the hands of Israel and the rise of the Islamic brotherhood, it was natural for research emphasizing liberal nationalism be left behind, and the rereading of history from an Islamic perspective to gain momentum. A lot of work focused on the experience of the Ottoman Empire as “the last of the Islamic caliphates,” which brought in its wake came, in the opinion of many people, a divvying up of the Arab and Islamic world by the countries of Europe. In addition, there was the rise of the chronic and difficult problem in contemporary Arab history called Palestine, as some historian focused on the Ottoman Empire’s role in preventing Palestine from falling into the Jewish hands prior to World War I. The high point of Islamic expansion in the region came with Khomeynī’s Islamic revolution in Iran, an event that shook nationalist systems in the region to their cores.

Within such a climate, the first part of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Shinnāwī’s renown work appeared under the title of *The Ottoman Empire, the defamed state* [1980]. Before analyzing the book’s ideological stand, we

should first draw attention to its scientific importance. In the opinion of this reviewer, there is no work in the Arab body of literature that contains such detailed information about the Ottoman Empire. This is why al-Shinnāwī's 3-part work is considered the "basic reference" to the study of Ottoman era history. However, a disturbing ideological dimension also appears from the start, in the choice of the work's title, where the author declares his position and objective for rereading Ottoman history from its reputation as a "defamed Islamic empire." Here he is accusing "two universal brutal powers in the guise of European colonialism and Zionism" for the defamation of Ottoman history. While there may be a portion of truth to his words, especially concerning the role of Orientalists in distorting the Ottoman image, but by taking this strong ideological stance, he aims at his readers from the beginning exploiting the contemporary air of hostility towards the West.

al-Shinnāwī engaged not only the West, in general, and the Orientalists, in particular, but he also locked horns with Arab and Egyptian nationalism, which, as we have already seen, took negative stand against the Ottoman state, decrying it as a reason for Arab world backwardness, thus paving the way for the European domination over Egypt and the Arab world. He criticized many nationalist historians for their endearment to the Orientalist views against the Ottoman Empire. And so, al-Shinnāwī's work contributed to the task of rereading the Ottoman era in the light of contemporary developments, characterized by Islamic expansion in Egypt and the Arab regions that took place after the 1967 war. With the rise of political Islamic movements, rereading Ottoman history became an attempt to overcome a sense of defeat by telling tales of "the good old times," and inventing "paradise lost." Nevertheless, no one can deny the importance of al-Shinnāwī's book in terms of its abundance of detailed information not found in any other book written in Arabic to date.

3. THE OTTOMAN ERA IN THE EGYPTIAN ACADEMIA

Academic historians have also been caught in the trap ideology, beginning with a heated debate over the starting point of the modern Egypt history, one popular candidate for which was the arrival of the French military expedition in 1798, which argued to have marked the initial contact between Egypt and the modern European renaissance, thus ending the middle ages in Egypt. However, objecting to starting a modern history with foreign occupation, others chose 1805, the year Muḥammad 'Alī

seized power, based on his cultural programs and on the premise that Muḥammad ‘Alī was the founder of modern “independent Egypt.” This claim was refuted for two reasons: That Muḥammad ‘Alī, in lieu of his cultural programs, was nothing but another Ottoman ruler and that in spite that the Ottoman Empire allowing hereditary possession by ‘Alī’s family, Egypt was not detached from it, and was still, theoretically, a part of the Ottoman state. Such critics thus pointed to 1517 as the starting point of Egyptian modernity, which is close the beginning of the modern European.

The historian Aḥmad ‘Izzat ‘Abd al-Karīm, in the preamble for his Ph.D. thesis about the Ottoman Egypt, points to his student, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, the author of *The 18th century Egyptian countryside* [1974], that most of the university work done on Egypt was, from the beginning, devoted to the study of the 19th century or the eras of Muḥammad ‘Alī and his successors. For this reason, he added a new problematic for the Ottoman studies in Egypt; that is, the charm of Muḥammad ‘Alī’s era and his successors. In addition, there is the Egyptian monarchy’s desire to legitimize its place in history, which gave rise to the legend called “Muḥammad ‘Alī the Great,” as well as disregard by academia of the stage that preceded Muḥammad ‘Alī and the proliferation of a theory that came to dominate historical thinking of “the superman” who can change history, its application to Muḥammad ‘Alī. Also disregarded was the the fact that Muḥammad ‘Alī was and remained another Ottoman ruler. While admitting the severe neglect to study the Ottoman era at Egyptian universities, ‘Abd al-Karīm also noted the trend on the part of foreign historians to give precedence to this era, mentioning the work of André Raymond and Stanford J. Shaw [1956], which would motivate ‘Abd al-Karīm to urge his students to study the Ottoman era. This is why the first Ph.D. thesis pertaining to Ottoman Egypt was not submitted to an Egyptian universities until 1974.

4. THE ORIGINS OF THE STUDY OF THE OTTOMAN ERA IN EGYPT

During the late 1960s, many elements came to together in helping establish a new school of Ottoman studies in Egypt. It goes without saying that reflection that occurred there after the defeat in the 1967 war contributed to the divergence that came about in academic freedom. Consequently, the opportunity to discuss theretofore untouched historical topics and eras was finally provided. At the same time, there was the

process of re-evaluating the Egyptian archives, which helped in the discovery of many of new source materials. The most important of these for the study of the Ottoman era is the collection documenting the Sharia (Sharī'a) courts, which helped to shatter the above-mentioned grand delusion. Since most of the Ottoman era documents are written in Turkish and Egyptian researchers do not read Turkish, the Sharia court documents, having been written in Arabic, were able to open wide the door for those researchers to study the sources of that era. On the other hand, Egyptian academic circles began to recognize the work done in foreign countries discussing the history of Egypt during the Ottoman era. Zuhayr al-Shāyḅ set out to translate the work of André Raymond [1973, 1985, 1993, 1998], which is still an ongoing project in the Arab world. al-Shāyḅ also began translating many parts of *Description de l'Égypte*, which helped many of his colleagues to comprehend what the scientists attached to the French military expedition had to say about Egypt at the end of the 18th century.

Also, in 1968, the Syrian historian, 'Abd al-Karīm Rāfiq, published his famous Arabic book, *The Levant: Egypt and the Ottoman conquest* [1968], which contributed greatly to establishing a clear political background for Egyptian researchers of the new generation. Thus, the way has now been paved for a new fields of Ottoman studies in Egypt, which at the beginning of the 1970s witnessed a new generation of young researchers finishing their Ph.D. thesis, like 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Abd al-Raḥīm's dissertation about the 18th century Egyptian submitted to Ain Shams University. At the same time, Layla 'Abd al-Latif finished her thesis entitled *Administration in Egypt during the Ottoman era* [1978], and Salwa Milād, wrote her dissertation on the Sharia courts records for the Cairo University Archives Dept. Most of the university theses were published in order to be accessed more freely and to encourage new generations of the researchers to challenge the the Ottoman era.

Then competition began among Egyptian universities over the promotion of Ottoman studies, which originated at Ain Shams University by Aḥmad 'Izzat 'Abd al-Karīm, spread to al-Azhar University, which is deeply rooted in Islamic history, producing the above-mentioned controversial work by al-Shinnāwī. Consequently, the historical rivalry was revived between Cairo University, al-Azhar University, and the University of Alexandria 'Umar 'Abd al-'Azīz, as the 1970s and 80s witnessed intense competition between the three universities institutions in the process of Ottoman studies becoming the rage among between Egyptian researchers. Cairo University fell behind at first for several reasons, one of which being its status the country's mother university and

shrouded in “conservatism” harboring old traditions, including emphasis on the Egyptian Arab nationalism under the influence of Muḥammad Anīs. That is why most of the theses being submitted to Cairo University revolved around the “nationalist movement” in Egypt and the Arab world, frequently focusing on the history of political parties and the Palestinian issue. It was only during the second half of the 1980s that Cairo University saw a new generation of graduate students interested in the Ottoman Empire. In order to compensate for its belatedness Cairo organized a Ottomans studies seminar hoping to draw the attention of undergraduates from all over Egypt and Arabia.

On another level, the journal *History of Egypt*, published by the Ministry of Culture, helped to publicize the most of university dissertations concerned with Egypt during the Ottoman era [Muḥammad Afīfī 1991, 1992; ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Sulaymān 1995; ‘Abd al-Rāziq ‘Īsā 1998; Ḥusām ‘Abd al-Mu‘ṭī 1999; Samīra Fahmī 2001].

5. THE PRESENT SITUATION

The field of Ottoman studies in Egypt has today reached a distinctive stage in its development, for it is now brimming with accumulated research, after 20 years since the end of the academic “famine.” Much of the work has been concerned with the detailed study of the social and economic history of Ottoman Egypt, but most of its tends to be fascinated with the documentation, tending to quote directly from the Sharia court archives rather than focus on historical methodology and hypotheses. What is needed now from the field is a move from the stage of quantity to one of quality. One key is the translations of the work foreign scholars discussing the period, which has encouraged young Egyptian readers to think more deeply about new methods of research; another is the scientific exchange which has occurred between the Egyptian and foreign researchers during a series of scientific symposiums held in Cairo. This reviewer is of the opinion that in less than 20 more years, Ottoman studies will witness more positive development than in the past 20, consisting of a more scientifically sophisticated generation of scholars and writing. This second stage will also witness the emergence of new academics who have obtained professorate degrees and specialize in the field of the Ottoman studies from Egyptian universities.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works in Arabic Language

- ‘Abd al-Ḥamid Ḥamid Sulaymān. 1995. *Ta’riḫ al-māwānī al-Miṣriya fi al-‘aṣr al-‘Uthmānī* (History of Egyptian sea ports in Ottoman era). Ta’riḫ al-Miṣriyīn (History of Egypt) 89. Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb (General Egyptian Book Organization).
- ‘Abd al-Rāziq Ibrāhīm ‘Isā. 1998. *Ta’riḫ al-quḍā’ fi Miṣr al-‘Uthmāniya: 1517–1798* (History of judges in Egypt during Ottoman era: 1517–1798). Ta’riḫ al-Miṣriyīn 117. Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb.
- ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rāfi‘i. 1929. *Ta’riḫ al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniya wa taṭawwur niẓām al-ḥukm fi Miṣr* (The history of the nationalist movement and the development of the governmental system in Egypt). 3 vols. Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Nahḍa.
- ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Abd al-Raḥīm. 1974. *al-Rīf al-Miṣrī fi al-qarn al-thāmin ‘ashar* (The Egyptian countryside in the 18th century). Cairo: Maṭba‘at Jāmi‘at ‘Ayn Shams (Ain Shams University Press).
- . 1990. *Fuṣūl min ta’riḫ Miṣr al-iqtisādī wa al-ijtimā‘ī fi al-‘aṣr al-‘Uthmānī* (Parts of economic and social history of Egypt in Ottoman era). Ta’riḫ al-Miṣriyīn 38. Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb.
- ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Muḥammad al-Shinnāwī. 1980. *al-Dawla al-‘Uthmāniya: Dawla islāmīya muftarā ‘alay-hā* (The Ottoman states: A slandered Islamic state). vol. 1. Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop.
- ‘Abd al-Karīm Rāfiq. 1968. *Bilād al-Shām wa Miṣr min al-fath al-‘Uthmāniya ilā ḥamlat Nābilyūn Bunābirt (1516–1798)* (Syria and Egypt from Ottoman conquest to Napoleon Bonapart’s expedition (1516–1798)). Damascus: s.n.
- Ḥusayn Fawzī. 1997. *Sindbād Miṣrī* (The Egyptian Sindbad). Cairo: Maktabat al-Usra.
- Ḥusām ‘Abd al-Mu’tī. 1999. *al-‘Ilāqāt al-Miṣriya al-Hijāziya fi al-qarn al-thāmin ‘ashar* (The relationships between Egypt and Hijaz in the 18th century). Ta’riḫ al-Miṣriyīn 149. Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb.
- Luwīs ‘Awād. 1969. *Ta’riḫ al-fikr al-Miṣrī al-hadīth: al-Khalfiya al-ta’riḫīya* (History of the modern Egyptian thought: Historical background). vol. 1. Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl.
- Layla ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Aḥmad. 1978. *al-Idāra fi Miṣr fi al-‘aṣr al-‘Uthmānī* (Administration in Egypt during the Ottoman era). Cairo: Maṭba‘at Jāmi‘at ‘Ayn Shams.
- Muḥammad ‘Afīfī. 1991. *al-Awqāf wa al-ḥayya al-iqtisādiya fi Miṣr fi al-‘aṣr al-‘Uthmānī* (Endowments of Waqf and economic life in Egypt during the Ottoman era). Ta’riḫ al-Miṣriyīn 44. Cairo: al-Hay’at al-Miṣriya al-

‘Āmma lil-Kitāb.

- . 1992. *al-Aqbāt fi Miṣr fi al-‘aṣr al-‘Uthmānī* (The Copts in Egypt during the Ottoman era). Ta’riḫ al-Miṣriyīn 54. Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb.
- Muḥammad Farīd. 1905. *Ta’riḫ al-dawla al-‘alīya al-‘Uthmānīya* (History of the Ottoman state). Cairo: n.s.
- Samīra Fahmī ‘Alī ‘Umar. 2001. *Imārat al-Ḥajj fi Miṣr al-‘Uthmānīya* (Leader of *al-Ḥajj* pilgrimage in Ottoman Egypt). Ta’riḫ al-Miṣriyīn 201. Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb.

Works in Western Languages

- Raymond, A. 1973. *Artisans et commerçants au Caire aux XVIIIe siècle*. Damascus: Institut français de Damas.
- . 1985. *Grandes vieilles arabes à l’époque Ottomane*. Paris: Sindbad.
- . 1993. *Le Caire*. Paris: Fayard.
- . 1998. *Égyptiens et français au Caire 1798–1801*. Bibliothèque générale 18. Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire.
- Shaw, S. J. 1956. *The Financial and administrative organization and development of Ottoman Egypt*. Princeton Oriental studies 19. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press.