

LE DEBUT DE L'IMPRIMERIE ARABE A ISTANBUL ET EN SYRIE: EVOLUTION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT CULTUREL (1706–1787). BIDĀYAT AL-ṬIBĀ'A AL-'ARABIYYA FĪ ISTĀNBŪL WA-BILĀD AL-SHĀM: TAṬAWWUR AL-MUḤĪṬ AL-THAQĀFĪ (1706–1787). By WAHID GDOURA (WAḤĪD GADŪRA). (Publications de l'Institut Supérieur de Documentation, 8; Manshūrāt al-Ma'had al-A'lā li-l-Tawthīq, 8.) Tunis, Institut Supérieur de Documentation, 1985. 312, 7pp.

Studies of Arabic<sup>1</sup> printing history and historical bibliography are still woefully few, compared with what has been written on printing in Europe, and also compared with studies of Arabic manuscript books. The fact that Arabic typography came so late to the Middle East has, perhaps, caused its importance to be underrated; but its effects on the development of Arab and Muslim culture in the last two and a half centuries have been no less marked, *mutatis mutandis*, than in Renaissance Europe. No judicious assessment of those effects, however, will be possible until much more is known about the origins and spread of printing and the modes of production and distribution of printed books. Any new additions to the corpus of such knowledge are therefore welcome, and especially when they are the fruit of extensive research, as is the book under review. The book is in French, with a five-page Arabic summary.

The author has wisely decided to start at the beginning and study the initial period of Arabic typography in the Middle East, following its first introduction in 1706. This was not, of course, the beginning of Arabic printing in the area: as he briefly mentions (p.77), block-printing was practised by Muslims several centuries before it came to Europe. But it does not seem to have been used for book production, which remained firmly in the hands of scribes until the eighteenth century, while Europe in the meantime developed movable metal type and the mass production of books. These included the first Arabic printed books, which remained a European monopoly until 1706.

A substantial part of Gdoura's book—the first 122 pages, in fact, comprising the first two (of four) chapters—is given over to an account of, and an attempt to account for, this seemingly paradoxical state of affairs. He does not, however, attempt to go over in detail the same ground as José Balagna in her 1984 book *L'imprimerie arabe en Occident (XVI<sup>e</sup>, XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, reviewed in this *Bulletin* 12 (1985), pp.232–236; but rather concentrates, in his first chapter, on the role of Arab Christians—more specifically, Maronites and Melkites—both in preparing and publishing Arabic texts in Europe and in importing and distributing them in the Middle East in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most of these books came from Rome or Paris and were part of initiatives aimed at reuniting the oriental churches with Papal Catholicism, although a few were aimed at Muslims. But Protestants also entered the field in the seventeenth century, and Gdoura perhaps underrates their activities: he mentions the Arabic bibles supplied by Dutch Calvinists to the Patriarch of Constantinople in the 1620s, but then mistakenly asserts that 'au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle ... les arabisants hollandais, allemands et anglais, n'ont pas essayé d'envoyer d'autres imprimés arabes au Levant' (p.41). In fact, a number of catechisms, prayer-books, bibles and tracts were printed in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish in England in the 1660s and -70s, and supplied to both Christians and Muslims in Aleppo, Izmir and elsewhere.

The second chapter deals with Muslim attitudes to printing before its introduction in Istanbul in the 1720s. First he clears up any residual doubts as to whether Arabic typography was used among Muslims before then, by dealing thoroughly and convincingly with certain isolated references which have hitherto been taken to suggest that it might; he shows that in fact they refer to printing in other scripts. One such, from Saint-Olon's account of seventeenth-century Morocco, he suggests, refers to otherwise unknown roman-script printing in the Spanish or Portuguese enclaves; but it is surely more likely that it is an echo of the Hebrew press in sixteenth-century Fez, details of whose output are given in J. Müller and E. Róth's *Aussereuropäischen Druckereien im 16. Jahrhundert* (Baden-Baden, 1969), an important source apparently not consulted by Gdoura. Then he surveys Muslim, and especially Ottoman policies and strictures on printing, building on the earlier studies of Demeerseman and others, and drawing on such literary and documentary sources as are available: the most important of these is Müteferrika's own Turkish treatise on the art of printing (which, however, he consulted only in an early French translation). He rightly places most emphasis on the social and political factors which lay behind the long resistance to an innovation which threatened to undermine the established patterns of communication and authority in Muslim society.

The second half of the book contains detailed studies of the history and output of the eighteenth-century Arabic and Turkish presses in the Middle East. The account of the Christian

presses of Aleppo (1706–11), Shuwayr (from 1734) and Beirut (1751–53) is especially valuable, as it brings together much information previously scattered in various primary and secondary sources, and presents for the first time a coherent overall picture of this incunabular stage of Arabic printing in the Levant. The last chapter, on the Müteferrika press in Istanbul, 1728–87, covers, for the most part, ground well trodden by others, but is still a useful synthesis of previous accounts. One study, however, which Gdoura seems not to have taken into consideration is Osman Ersoy's *Türkiye'ye matbaanın girişi ve ilk basılan eserler* (Ankara, 1959). This contains important descriptive and analytical bibliographical information on Müteferrika's output to 1742, which is lacking in Gdoura's account; it also deals with the printed maps of the period 1719–29 which were the forerunners of the book-printing venture, and which Gdoura seems to have ignored.

An important feature of the book is the 'Catalogue des livres arabes imprimés au Proche-Orient au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle' (pp.248–264), arranged topographically, and chronologically under each place. While this falls short of being a full descriptive bibliography—the so-called 'collations' are just summaries of the textual contents—it does provide useful checklists, and is especially valuable in the case of the Syrian and Lebanese imprints. For Müteferrika, however, it is less satisfactory than Ersoy's bibliography (op.cit., V. bölüm, pp.37–45), and contains a number of inaccuracies, especially in the CE equivalents of the Hijrī dates of the books: the very first Muslim printed book, for instance, Vankulu's *Tercüme-i Şihâh-i Cevherî*, bears the date 1 Rajab 1141 (= 31 January 1729), but is assigned by Gdoura to 1728, and similar inexactitudes occur elsewhere. Rather more serious, however, is the anachronistic misattribution of the famous Ottoman history of America (*Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*), written in the sixteenth century and printed by Müteferrika in 1730, to the Arab historian al-Mas'ūdī. Gdoura is not the first to do this: the fact that parts of the first two chapters, on traditional Islamic cosmology and geography, are drawn, with acknowledgement, by the anonymous Turkish author from two of al-Mas'ūdī's works, evidently caused certain 'bibliographes ottomans' to cite his name as the author—hence the misattribution in Abdulhak Adnan [Adıvar]'s *La science chez les turcs ottomans* (Paris, 1939), which is Gdoura's source (p.215, n.124). The error has also been repeated by Ersoy (op.cit., p.40) and more recently by Alpay Kabacalı (*Türk yayın tarihi*, 1987, p.36), evidently following Ersoy. Self-perpetuating errors of this kind are, alas, not infrequent in Middle Eastern bibliography and, indeed, historiography.

There are also, throughout the book, many typographical errors, too numerous to list here. Some of these border on the grotesque, e.g. *Zeits Chrifft der Deutschen Margenlandischen Gesellschaft* (p.72, n.6) or even the alarming, e.g. the citation of Bernard Lewis's *The emergency of modern Turkey* (p.75, n.21). But for all that, the book is well set out. After the main text and bibliography of eighteenth-century editions follow 14 pages of facsimiles, giving a reasonable idea of the type-faces and layouts used—it is a pity, however, that no indication is given of original sizes. Some are reproduced from copies in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and others from illustrations in secondary sources. Then come an extensive bibliography of works consulted, and finally indexes of persons, places, 'collectivités' (nationalities, religious groups, etc.) and titles of pre-nineteenth-century Arabic printed books.

This book, despite its shortcomings, is essential reading—and, indeed, an essential reference work—for all concerned with Arabic and Turkish historical bibliography, and that should mean everyone interested in the social and intellectual history of the early modern era in the Middle East.

#### Note

1. The terms 'Arabic' in this review, and 'arabe' in the book under review, when used with reference to printing, denote the script, not the language.

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ORIENTAL PRESSES IN THE WORLD. By NAZIR AHMAD. Lahore, Qadiria Book Traders, 1985. 272pp., incl. 39 facsimiles. Pak.Rs. 175.—

The title of this book is somewhat misleading: this is not a directory, but a history, and it deals not with printing in all Asian languages, but in just three: Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Nor does it cover proportionately all the countries of the world where those languages have been printed, but