

The Publications of the Būlāq Press under Muḥammad 'Alī of Egypt

It is commonplace knowledge that book printing in Egypt only got a permanent start under Muḥammad 'Alī, when he founded the famous Būlāq Press.¹ The first book published—in 1822—was an Arabic and Italian dictionary, reflecting the fact that Italian was still *the* “lingua franca”, although soon to be replaced by French. But while a case has been made² for the rejuvenating effect which the Būlāq Press had upon the written language of the Arabs, a closer scrutiny of the actual titles published during Muḥammad 'Alī's reign (insofar as we can now reconstruct a list of such titles) seems to indicate that the Arabic literary revival must have come a bit later. While many of the titles are now merely that, the books themselves having been scattered and lost, we are able to form some idea of the Būlāq Press list of offerings from the articles of contemporary orientologists.

The first attempt to note the direction which the newly-founded Būlāq Press was taking was an article by J. T. Reinaud in 1831.³ It includes a list, classified by subject, of 55 items, and is based upon the collection of the French geographer and member of Napoleon's Institut d'Égypte, Edmé François Jomard, sent to Jomard as they were issued by the Būlāq Press. The descriptions are for the most part very brief, with Arabic or Turkish titles supplied for fewer than half the items. Dates of publication are given in both *hijrī* and Christian terms.

Von Hammer-Purgstall was the next European author to print a list of Būlāq's publications. This also consists of 55 items, but they are not all the

the same items; the number is a coincidence. Von Hammer's list is chronological, and titles are transliterated only, with brief descriptions. It is not clear whether von Hammer is describing the actual books themselves, or merely a list of such books sent to the Imperial Palace Library in Vienna by the Austrian consul general in Cairo. Dates of publication are given in both terms, and pagination is noted.⁴

The first really valuable description of Muḥammad 'Alī's publishing efforts, however, is that of T. X. Bianchi, covering what appears to be most of the books issued from inception to the end of 1842. Again, it is a chronologically arranged list, based upon the works of Reinaud and von Hammer, but also including material compiled in Arabic in Cairo at Bianchi's request in 1842, and sent to him by the dragoman of the French consulate-general. 243 items are mentioned, 188 of which are later in date of publication than the books mentioned by the earlier two articles. Bianchi usually gives the title of a work in Arabic script, a brief description, date of publication, format, and price. Because of its contemporary date and relative comprehensiveness, Bianchi's article is still basic for any analysis of the early books printed in Cairo.⁵

The Russian orientalist Dorn published a useful list of Būlāq publications held by the Musée Asiatique in St-Petersburg in 1866. This is smaller in size than Bianchi's list (147 items versus 243), but is more systematic and appears to be more accurate. Full titles and *hijrī* dates of publication are given in Arabic script, as well as pagination and references to the earlier literature. Dorn's list is classified by subject. It does not expand our time horizon by very much, however, as only seven titles listed were printed after 1843 and before the

¹ Date of the foundation of the Press is in doubt. The foundation stone of the old building says 1235/1819, but records in the National Archives now in 'Abdīn Palace indicate that it was 1237/1821. Cf. Jean Deny, *Sommaire des archives turques du Caire* (Cairo: Société Royale de Géographie d'Égypte, 1930), p. 122. The actual date of the first publication seems not in doubt, however.

² J. Heyworth-Dunne, “Printing and translations under Muḥammad 'Alī of Egypt: the foundation of modern Arabic,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (1940), pp. 325–49.

³ J. T. Reinaud, “Notice des ouvrages arabes, persans et turcs imprimés en Égypte,” *Journal Asiatique*, série 2, Vol. VIII (October, 1831), pp. 333–44.

⁴ Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1963), Vol. VIII, pp. 518–23 and Vol. IX, pp. 689–90. The original dates of Vols. VIII and IX were 1832 and 1833 respectively.

⁵ T. X. Bianchi, “Catalogue général des livres arabes, persans et turcs, imprimés à Boulaq en Égypte depuis l'introduction de l'imprimerie dans ce pays,” *Journal Asiatique*, série 4, Vol. II (July–August, 1843), pp. 24–61.

death of Muḥammad 'Alī in 1849, and only two printed in the period 1849–66 are mentioned.⁶

Since library catalogues are often more accurate than mere lists of titles compiled anyhow, note should be taken of the catalogue of the Khedivial Library in Cairo. This is classified—rather cumbersomely—by subject, and mixes printed works and the thousands of manuscripts held by the Library indiscriminately, but it has the merit of full description of each item. Unfortunately, since the Library, since renamed Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriya, was founded in 1870, only a handful of the early Būlāq publications found their way into this important collection at the time it was originally catalogued. Only 26 titles, mostly from the latter days of the Muḥammad 'Alī period, rewarded a careful search of Vols. III, IV, and V.⁷

The first serious attempt at analysis of the modern Egyptian book industry was done by J. Heyworth-Dunne. Basing himself solely upon the early efforts of Bianchi and Reinaud, Heyworth-Dunne gives a useful tabular breakdown of the 243 titles involved, regrettably without a key to titles and authors, but—to judge from my own retracing of the same ground—commendably accurate and still valuable for its classification of a large mass of material.⁸

In his recent history of the Būlāq Press, Abū al-Futūḥ Riḍwān has given us another list of early Egyptian printed works, based once more upon Bianchi's pioneering article, plus a half-dozen titles not mentioned there, and possibly on file in the archives of the Press itself. The list is chronological.⁹

The latest, and in some respects the most reliable source, because it is based upon what ap-

pears to be systematic examination of actual copies of the works involved, is al-Shurbajī's catalogue of early printed Arabic books held by Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriya.¹⁰ The merits of this list include the fact that 56 titles are listed which were printed in the latter days of the Muḥammad 'Alī era and hence are not mentioned in Bianchi's article; that some 47 titles stem from the period (1822–42) covered by Bianchi but which are not mentioned by him; and that some 59 titles are mentioned by Bianchi and so provide cross-references useful with regard to accuracy. Presumably, many of the titles listed by al-Shurbajī have been acquired by Dār al-Kutub since the publication of its main catalogue referred to above.

Heyworth-Dunne has made an interesting breakdown into subject categories of the various works listed by Bianchi and Reinaud.¹¹ An overall distinction can also be easily drawn between those publications which fall into the category of traditional Islamic subjects, or subjects classifiable into traditional rubrics in pre-modern Islamic libraries, and those which fall into the category of modern materials. By lumping together Heyworth-Dunne's categories of military and naval, medical, industry, mathematics and mechanics, engineering, geology, botany, geography, European history, ancient Egyptian history, natural history, veterinary, social, travel, history of philosophy, and agriculture, 135 "modern" titles are discernable, leaving a balance of 108 on traditional subjects: Turkish history, calendars (which harmonize the Coptic solar agricultural year with the Muslim lunar year), interpretation of dreams, administration, traditional encyclopedias, language dictionaries, Arabic grammars, poetry, composition, biographies of the Prophet, religion, mysticism, pilgrimage ritual, morals, belles lettres, education, rhetoric, and religious law. Of the 135 modern titles listed by Bianchi (and classifiable as such), 67 are acknowledged on their title-pages to be translations, almost entirely from French

⁶ B. Dorn "Catalogue des ouvrages arabes, persans et turcs, publiés à Constantinople, en Egypte et en Perse; qui se trouve au Musée Asiatique de l'Académie," *Bulletin de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de Saint-Petersbourg*, Vol. X (1866), pp. 182–99.

⁷ *Fihrist al-Kutub al-'Arabīya al-Maḥfūza bi-al-Kutubkhāna al-Khidwīya al-Miṣriya*, 7 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Shaykh 'Uthmān 'Abd al-Rāziq, 1301-08/1883-91).

⁸ Heyworth-Dunne, *op. cit.*

⁹ Abū al-Futūḥ Riḍwān, *Ta'rikh Maṭba'at Būlāq* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Amīriya, 1953), pp. 446–79.

¹⁰ Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shurbajī, *Qā'ima bi-Awā'il al-Maṭbū'at al-'Arabīya al-Maḥfūza bi-Dār al-Kutub Hattā Sanat 1862 M.* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub, 1963/1383).

¹¹ Heyworth-Dunne, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

originals. Even William Robertson's *History of Charles V* was translated into Arabic from the French version done by J.-B. Suard, whose "Charles Quint" becomes *Sharlkān* in the Arabic title. The balance of the modern titles which acknowledge no translation process from European languages are mostly Turkish military works, many published earlier in Istanbul, and presumably translated from European works there, rather than in Egypt.

It is quite striking to see that almost all the military works are in Turkish, with the exception of various manuals at the platoon level for Arabophone sergeants or perhaps junior officers. On the other hand, with the exception of one book on veterinary medicine in both Turkish and Arabic, and two works on engineering in Turkish, all the modern technology published was in Arabic. Apparently, either Muḥammad 'Alī or the Turkish élite around him seemed to feel that the only fit career for a Turk was that of arms, with an interest in politics also considered seemly: Napoleon's memoirs, a history of Italy by Botta, and Castera's history of Catherine II were the only non-military titles translated from Western languages into Turkish and published in Būlāq. In addition to the 39 works on the manly subjects of war by land and sea, the Būlāq Press also printed a considerable quantity of Turkish literature.

With regard to the seventeen *diwāns* of Turkish poetry published at Būlāq during Muḥammad 'Alī's reign, analysis and surmise are greatly aided by the existence of E. J. W. Gibb's *A history of Ottoman poetry*.¹² which identifies and gives considerable biographical and literary detail on all but two of the authors involved. Considering the absence of standard Ottoman polish on Muḥammad 'Alī himself, and the uninhibited employment he made of Greeks, Armenians, and Latin foreigners, the literary taste shown in selecting Turkish poets to publish is quite remarkable. The poets Fuḍūlī, Naf'ī, Nadīm, and Shaykh Ghālib, the four greatest of the period from Sulaymān to Salīm III, are represented, as well as second-rank poets such as Nā'ilī in the seventeenth century and

Rāghib Pasha in the eighteenth. Nor is the emphasis especially heavy upon extreme and antinomian mysticism: the most celebrated ṣūfī among them is Shaykh Ghālib, more explicitly Muḥammad As'ad Ghālib Dede, a Mevlevi of distinction. Most others were court figures and high government officials. Three were official historians to the Ottoman court (*wāqi'-i-nuwīs*): 'Āsim, Sāmī, and Pertev. One was Grand Vezir, 1757-63: Rāghib Pasha. The aforementioned 'Āsim was also Shaykh al-Islām. Fiṭna Khānum (d. 1780) was one of the very few pre-modern Turkish poetesses whose work was acclaimed by the male-oriented Ottoman society in which she lived; her father and her brother attained the rank of Shaykh al-Islām. All lived and wrote in a heavily Persianized literary atmosphere, before the advent of European literary influence, and—with the possible exception of Fuḍūlī, Nadīm, and Rāghib—with a disdain of Turkish diction.

It is fair to raise the question of the possible market for *diwāns* of Turkish poetry in Egypt in the 1830's and '40's. (Twelve of the collections bear dates of publication ranging from 1836 to 1841; the remaining five are undated). It seems highly unlikely to me that there would have been a large market for such sophisticated works among the semi-literate (at best) crowd of Albanians, provincial Turks, and Syrians who appear to have made up the officer class of the forces at Muḥammad 'Alī's disposal when he first seized power in Egypt in 1805.¹³ But as the new army of Egyptian peasants was slowly formed and trained after 1820, Muḥammad 'Alī began to quietly eliminate the Albanians and other turbulent elements with whose help he had clambered to power in Cairo; for officers, he continued to rely for the rest of his career upon Turkish-speakers, whether drawn from the Ottoman capital by the lure of a promising career or from the ranks of the under-age *mamlūks* spared at the time of the 1811 massacre

¹² See 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *'Ajā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa al-Akhbār* (Cairo: [Al-Maṭba'a al-Amīriya], 1297/1880), 4 vols. For a representative view of the Ottoman officers and officials prominent in Egypt at the time, see the necrologies at the end of each year, especially in Vol. IV.

¹³ Six vols. (London: Luzac and Co., 1900-09).

in the Cairo Citadel.¹⁴ Thus, there might have been a market for Turkish poetry of classical quality in Egypt itself from the 1830's on, when the Būlāq Press began to print them. On the other hand, Heyworth-Dunne may be right in his statement that they were" . . . possibly edited for export to Turkey."¹⁵

If the Turkish-speaking élite of Egypt was provided by the Press with a tasteful selection of their heritage, the same could not be said for the Arabic-speaking inhabitants. Grammatical works were printed in large quantities, to judge from the twenty-seven titles on language sciences contained in Bianchi's 1843 list. But of literary works only *Alf Layla wa Layla* and *Kalīla wa Dimna* are mentioned by any researcher. It remained for Shaykh Rifā'a al-Ṭahtāwī, later in his career after the death of Muḥammad 'Alī and his temporary eclipse under 'Abbās, to foster the printing of a number of Arabic works of importance, such as

¹⁴ On Muḥammad 'Alī's unobtrusive easing out of the dangerous Albanian soldiery, see René Cattai, *Le règne de Mohamed Aly d'après les archives russes en Egypte*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Société Royale de Géographie d'Egypte, 1931-36), Vol. I, pp. 425-26; Félix Mengin, *Histoire de l'Egypte sous le gouvernement de Mohammed-Aly, ou récit des événemens . . . jusqu'en 1823*, 2 vols. (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1823), Vol. II, p. 194; and John Bowring, *Report on Egypt and Candia, addressed to the Right Hon. Lord Viscount Palmerston. . . .* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1840), pp. 198-99. On the use by Muḥammad 'Alī of young *mamlūks* as officer material for his New Organization army, see D. A. Cameron, *Egypt in the nineteenth century or Mehemet Ali and his successors. . . .* (London: Smith and Elder, 1898), p. 97, note.

¹⁵ Heyworth-Dunne, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

al-Maqrīzī's *al-Mawā'iz wa-l-I'tibār* (Būlāq: 1270/1853-54); al-Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (Būlāq: 1285/1868-69); al-Hārīrī's *Maqāmāt* (Būlāq: 1266/1850); and Ibn Khaldūn's *Kitāb al-'Ibar* (Būlāq: 1274/1857). During Muḥammad 'Alī's lifetime, such monuments were available only in manuscript.

From the few sources available to us at the present time, including imperfect lists of titles drawn up by Western orientalists during the nineteenth century, more careful catalogues compiled by Egyptians for their national library, and Heyworth-Dunne's analytical article (as well as passing references in his *An introduction to the history of education in modern Egypt*),¹⁶ it seems clear that while the establishment of printing in Egypt on a permanent basis by Muḥammad 'Alī was indispensable for the revival of Arabic as a literary language in very wide modern use, the Pasha's aim in establishing Būlāq Press was severely utilitarian. Remarkably responsive as he was to the vistas which modernization unfolded before his eyes, a printing press was not for him a grand cultural gesture, but rather a coolly practical instrument for improving his army, the agriculture of his territory, and the usefulness to him of his subjects, whether Turkish- or Arabic-speaking. The real credit for the preservation of various monuments of Arabic literature, and for the foundations of a modern educational system in Egypt geared to printed books, must go very largely to Shaykh Rifā'a Rāf'ī al-Ṭahtāwī.

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¹⁶ (London: Luzac and Co., n.d. [1938]).

On defining Dhū ath-Thalāthah and Dhū al-Arba'ah

1. In the terminology of Arabic lexicography, the correct technical meanings of the terms *dhū ath-thalāthah* and *dhū al-arba'ah* have as yet not been given nor has it even been recognized that a problem exists. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that a literal translation of these two

terms makes lexicographical sense, i.e., *dhū ath-thalāthah* 'that which possesses three (radicals)' and *dhū al-arba'ah* 'that which possesses four (radicals).' However, as will be shown below, these translations not only have nothing to do with the technical meaning of the terms in question but