The Publications of the Bûlāq Press under Muḥammad ‘Ali of Egypt

It is commonplace knowledge that book printing in Egypt only got a permanent start under Muḥammad ‘Ali, when he founded the famous Bûlāq 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 Bûlāq Press had upon the written language of the Arabs, a closer scrutiny of the actual titles published during Muḥammad ‘Ali’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 Bûlāq Press list of offerings from the articles of contemporary orientalists.

The first attempt to note the direction which the newly-founded Bûlāq Press was taking was an article by J. T. Reinnaud 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’Egypte, Edmé François Jomard, sent to Jomard as they were issued by the Bûlāq 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 Bûlāq’s publications. This also consists of 55 items, but they are not all 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 ‘Ali’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 Reinnaud 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 Bûlāq 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 in ‘Abdin Palace indicate that it was 1237/1821. Cf. Jean Deny, Sommaire des archives turques du Caire (Cairo: Société Royale de Géographie d’Egypte, 1930), p. 122. The actual date of the first publication seems not in doubt, however.
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.
death of Muḥammad ʿAlī 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-Miṣrīya, 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 Muhammad ʿAlī 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—from 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 appears to be systematic examination of actual copies of the works involved, is al-Shurbaji’s catalogue of early printed Arabic books held by Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīya.10 The merits of this list include the fact that 56 titles are listed which were printed in the latter days of the Muḥammad ʿAlī 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-Shurbaji 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 discernible, 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, pilgrimages, 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

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8 Heyworth-Dunne, op. cit.
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 *Sharīkān* 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 'Ali 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 Castéra's history of Catherine II were the only non-military titles translated from Western languages into Turkish and published in Bülāq. In addition to the 39 works on the manly subjects of war by land and sea, the Bülāq Press also printed a considerable quantity of Turkish literature.

With regard to the seventeen *divāns* of Turkish poetry published at Bülāq during Muḥammad 'Ali's reign, analysis and surmise are greatly aided by the existence of E. J. W. Gibb's *A history of Ottoman poetry*, 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 'Ali 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, Na‘īr, Nadim, and Shaykh Ghālib, the four greatest of the period from Sulaymān to Salīm III, are represented, as well as second-rank poets such as Na‘īlī 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 (*wāqī‘ī-i-nwīs*): 'Āṣim, Sāmī, and Perti. One was Grand Vezir, 1757–63: Rāghib Pasha. The aforementioned 'Āṣim 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, Nadim, and Rāghib—with a disdain of Turkish diction.

It is fair to raise the question of the possible market for *divāns* 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 'Ali's disposal when he first seized power in Egypt in 1805. But as the new army of Egyptian peasants was slowly formed and trained after 1820, Muḥammad 'Ali 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 mamluks spared at the time of the 1811 massacre.

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in the Cairo Citadel.\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{15}

If the Turkish-speaking elite 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 Alfl Layla wa Layla and Kalila wa Dimna are mentioned by any researcher. It remained for Shaykh Rifʿā’ 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


\textsuperscript{15} Heyworth-Dunne, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 335.

\textit{On defining Dhū ath-Thalāthah and Dhū al-Arba‘ah}

1. In the terminology of Arabic lexicography, the correct technical meanings of the terms \textit{dhū ath-thalāthah} and \textit{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., \textit{dhū ath-thalāthah} ‘that which possesses three (radicals)’ and \textit{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