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SPECTERS OF ANCIENT PASTS AND THE ENDS OF HISTORY:

THE ARABIC DISCOURSE OF REVIVAL IN THE TANZIMAT ERA (1839–1876)

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Contents

Abstract

This dissertation is a study of the Arabic discourse of "revival" (*iḥyāʾ*) in Egypt and Greater Syria in the Tanzimat era (1839–1876), with a focus on elite cultural production in Cairo and Beirut. The dissertation has two aims: to argue that this discourse did not simply reproduce the ideologies of European colonialism and imperialism; and to analyze this discourse as the expression of a distinctive structure of historical experience. With regard to the latter aim, the argument is that this discourse formed a fraught and uneasy relationship with the past, and I argue that in doing so it expressed the tensions of the integration of regional economies into the new capitalist world market, and the hopes and anxieties of elites with regard to this process. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the historical context. Chapter 2 analyzes a text produced just before the Tanzimat era, to bring out the distinctiveness of the Tanzimat-era mode of engagement with the past. Chapter 3 argues that the Tanzimat era saw the development of a new concept of history in Arabic in the Tanzimat era that was integral to the structure of historical experience articulated by the discourse of revival. Chapter 4 argues that the discourse of revival was animated by a sense of the past as a field of potentialities that can be harnessed and mobilized; and that the discourse of revival sought to cultivate these potentialities in pursuit of a greater fullness of life that was taken to have existed in the past, and also as a defensive measure against the threat of European colonialism, which sought to exploit these same potentialities in its own interests.

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Introduction

The Arabic Discourse of Revival in the Nineteenth Century

In a short fictional dialogue published in the Cairo weekly *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq* ("Lantern of the East") in September of 1898, Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (1858–1930) conjures a scene in which three "rulers" (*ḥukkām*) discuss the recent conquest of the Sudan by an Anglo-Egyptian force under British leadership. The dialogue begins with a character named Buṭrus lamenting the absence of the great poets of the past to celebrate the military victory:

> BUṬRUS: (*with extreme refinement and dazzling elegance*) Where are the orators of yore, the original rhetoricians, the panegyric poets, the eloquent lyricists? Where are Ibn al-Walīd and Abū Tammām, al-Firdawsī and al-Khayyām, Euripides and Homer, Horace and Virgil, to describe our part in this victory, our share in this glory, to record the great memory in the archive of time?[1]

Buṭrus goes on to compare the situation of the "Sirdar"—the British commanding officer—to that of Julius Caesar, when, as he puts it, "he sent back news of his swift victory from Asia to something like our three-way council in Rome, using three terse words: I came, I saw, I conquered."[2] The quotation of Caesar's proclamation of victory is given in Arabic translation (*waṣaltu*, *raʾaytu*, *intaṣartu*), but another of the rulers, by the name of Maẓlūm, or "Tyrannized," responds: "May I ask, my friend, in God's name—what is this Latin that you're speaking and what's its meaning?" to which Buṭrus rejoins, "it's not Latin, but fine Arabic" (*Arabī faṣīḥ*;

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[1] For the Arabic text, I have used Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī, *What ʿĪsā Ibn Hishām Told Us, or, A Period of Time*, trans. Roger Allen, vol. 1 (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 2; the translation is largely my own. بطرس (متطرفا متخففاً متألقاً متأنقاً) أين الخطباء السابقون، البلغاء الأولون، والشعراء المادحون، والفصحاء الواصفون، وأين ابن الوليد وأبو تمام، والفردوسي والخيام، وأوربيدس وهوميروس، وهوراس وفيرجيليوس، يصفون لنا نصيبا من هذا الانتصار، وحظنا من هذا الافتخار، ويدونون لنا حسن الذكر في سجل الزمان.

[2] al-Muwayliḥī, 1:2.
أرسل خبر انتصاره السريع من آسيا، إلى مثل مجلسنا المثلث في روميا، في ثلاث كلمات بينات موجزات * وصلت * رأيت * انتصرت.

alternatively, "classical Arabic"),[3] and there ensues a discussion about the nature of Egyptian sovereignty under British occupation and who is likely to benefit from the conquest of the Sudan.[4] This text was the first of three pilot instalments of what would become the popular work of serialized fiction, *Fatra min al-Zamān* ("A Period of Time," 1898–1902), which al-Muwayliḥī went on to edit into a single volume as the still more popular *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* (1907).[5]

In this dialogue, Muwayliḥī was satirizing a discourse on the remote, or "ancient," past that was a major component of Arabic cultural production in the nineteenth century. By the term "discourse" here, I mean to designate both an established way of thinking and speaking about the remote past and also, foundational to this, a specific paradigm for the production of knowledge about the remote past. The essential features of the discourse, all apparent in Muwayliḥī's brief satire, were a romantic view of certain societies in the remote past as exemplars of human excellence, in other words as "golden ages" of human achievement; an ambivalent view of the present, on one hand as giving intimations of the glories of these remote pasts, and on the other as ultimately falling short of them; and finally a craving for the full restoration of the exemplary brilliance of these remote pasts, frequently expressed as a call for their "revival" (*iḥyāʾ*). On the strength of this last element, I refer to this way of thinking, speaking, and producing knowledge about the past as the discourse of revival or, simply, as revivalism.

Muwayliḥī's satirical dialogue delivers an acute critique of this discourse, framing it as the instrument of a British imperial and colonial order that had contrived a sham edifice of local Egyptian sovereign power. The primary object of Muwayliḥī's satire is explicitly the Arabic

[3] al-Muwayliḥī, 1:2.

مظلوم (منذهلاً منبهتاً مندهشاً منبهراً) سألتك يا صاحبي بالله – ما هذا اللاتيني الذي تنطق به وما معناه.
بطرس ليس هو بلاتيني ولكنه عربي فصيح.

[4] al-Muwayliḥī, 1:2–9.

[5] For a history of the text's composition and early reception, see al-Muwayliḥī, *What ʻĪsá Ibn Hishām Told Us*, 2015, xviii–xxvii.

discourse. The exchange between Maẓlūm and Buṭrus as to what language the latter is speaking makes this clear. But this exchange also identifies the discourse that Buṭrus is participating in as, in some sense, foreign. Indeed, this is integral to Muwayliḥī's implicit critique of this discourse: the dialogue as a whole positions Buṭrus, with his lofty ideas of ancient glories, as a conduit for British imperial interests. At the same time, the question of whether Buṭrus is speaking Latin or Arabic invites a reading of the text not only as a satire of the Arabic discourse of revival, but also as a commentary on the instrumentalization of antiquity within European imperial and colonial ideology. Buṭrus' comparison of the British commanding officer to Julius Caesar reflects the mobilization of the Roman Empire within late-nineteenth-century British imperial ideology.[6] This will not have been lost on Muwayliḥī's early readers.[7]

It is obvious from Muwayliḥī's satire that the discourse of revival remained a significant force within Arabic cultural production through the end of nineteenth century. In some respects, it was in the late nineteenth century that revivalism was at the height of its influence, insofar as it was in this period—around the turn of the century—that the notion of a contemporary revival was canonized as "the Nahda" (Ar. *nahḍa*; lit. "awakening").[8] The Nahda has been a dominant paradigm of historiography on the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Arab Middle East ever since, albeit subject to substantial critical revision in Anglophone scholarship over the last

[6] Krishan Kumar, "Greece and Rome in the British Empire: Contrasting Role Models," *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 1 (January 2012): 76–101, esp. 91–100.

[7] The representation of the British Empire as a new Rome was well established in late-nineteenth-century Arabic literature. The analogy had generally negative implications, by contrast with its legitimating function in British imperial ideology. The analogy in fact functions on two levels: as an inversion of British imperial ideology; and more straightforwardly as a repudiation of the British Empire through comparison with an empire that had come to be coded as a hostile force, probably by virtue of its inscription in British imperial ideology. For other examples of Rome as analogue for contemporary European imperialism, see Salīm al-Bustānī's *Zenūbiā* (1872); Aḥmad Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī's *al-Malik Mitrīdāt* ("King Mithridates," 1884); and Aḥmad Shawqī's *Nahj al-Burdah* ("Way of the Mantle," 1909).

[8] For various examples of this, see *al-Jāmiʿa* 4 (1903), 313; *al-Muḥīṭ* 1 (1903), 569; *al-Muqtaṭaf* 28 (1903), 94; Sulaymān al-Bustānī, *Ilyādhat Hūmīrus* ["The *Iliad* of Homer"] (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1904), 116.

twenty years.[9]

But as well as indicating that revivalism was still a functioning discourse, Muwayliḥī's dialogue demonstrates that, by the end of the nineteenth century, it was being contested and even deconstructed in complex ways. Muwayliḥī's satirical take on the discourse of revival forms part of a trend in experimental transgression of the norms of revivalism that developed in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. It is characteristic of this trend that in a number of respects Muwayliḥī's work is itself unmistakably an expression of the discourse of revival. The above dialogue, like the subsequent instalments of *Fatra min al-Zamān*, is narrated by the figure of ʿĪsā ibn Hishām, famous as the protagonist-narrator of al-Hamadhānī's (d. 395 AH/1007 CE) *Maqāmāt*, an influential Arabic prose work of the Abbasid era (2nd/8th–7th/13th c.). Indeed, as an episodic series of satirical and often ironic prose narratives, *Fatra min al-Zamān* bears a general resemblance to the genre of the *maqāma*.[10] Later episodes of *Fatra min al-Zamān* feature copious excerpts of Arabic poetry—another marker of the *maqāma* genre—with a particular abundance of selections from al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965) and al-Maʿarrī (d. 449/1057), perhaps

[9] There is a longer record of contestation of the Nahda paradigm in Arabic, arguably going back to the period itself; but in terms of revisionist historiography in Arabic, the work of Mahdī ʿĀmil in the 1970s was a landmark achievement: Mahdī ʾĀmil, *Muqaddimāt naẓarīyah li-dirāsat athar al-fikr al-ishtirākī fī ḥarakat al-taḥarrur al-waṭanī*, 2 vols. (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fārābī, 1972–6). The first major account of the Nahda in English was George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1939). The critical turn in Anglophone scholarship began with Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004). A rich and varied body of scholarly literature has followed: Shaden M. Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Univ of California Press, 2013); Tarek El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Elizabeth M. Holt, *Fictitious Capital: Silk, Cotton, and the Rise of the Arabic Novel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Samah Selim, *Popular Fiction, Translation, and the Nahda in Egypt* (New Brunswick, NJ: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For a concise overview and discussion of the Nahda, see Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, "Introduction: Language, Mind, Freedom and Time: The Modern Arab Intellectual Tradition in Four Words," in *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–37.

[10] As noted by Roger Allen in al-Muwayliḥī, *What 'Īsá Ibn Hishām Told Us*, 2015, xxvii. For an extended discussion of the work's formal qualities, see Muḥammad Rashīd Thābit, *Al-Binyah al-Qiṣaṣīyah Wa-Madlūluhā al-Ijtimāʿī Fī Ḥadīth 'Īs'a Ibn Hishām Li-Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī : Dirāsah* (Tunis: al-Dār al-ʿArabīyah lil-Kitāb, 1975), 25–115.

the two most celebrated pre-modern Arabic poets. Muwayliḥī was thus clearly engaged in a project of affirming and, in a sense, re-canonizing "classical" Arabic literature as such—where "classical" roughly denotes literature from before the demise of the Mamluk Sultanate at the beginning of the 10th/16th century, if not from before the fall of Baghdad in the 7th/13th century. This was a major element of the discourse of revival. It is also arguable, though not without significant reservations, that *Fatra min al-Zamān* as a whole gives expression to a worldview that broadly aligns with the aspirations of the discourse of revival as a movement oriented towards realizing the apparent promise of the industrial age.

The emergence of this more experimental, destabilizing form of revivalism marks a substantial rupture in Arabic cultural production, one that maps roughly onto the end of the Tanzimat era (1839–76) in the Ottoman Empire. The discourse that Muwayliḥī was implicitly critiquing in the opening instalment of *Fatra min al-Zamān* had developed in close connection with the Tanzimat project. Grounded in Ottoman reformist traditions, this was, among other things, an attempt by the Ottoman authorities to strengthen the Empire through close economic ties with Europe, and also through rapid and largescale, but not indiscriminate, adoption of the latest technologies and practices of "civilization" as this was understood—that is, by certain Ottoman and Arab-Ottoman elites—to exist in some European countries. Concretely, the Tanzimat project consisted in a program of military restructuring and liberalizing reforms in the legal and economic spheres. It was in this context that the discourse of revival developed, as the combined product of, on one hand, currents within Arabic thought both old and new; and, on the other, a profound reckoning with European historical thought, particularly in the form of European universal history. The Tanzimat era came to an end with financial crises across the Ottoman Empire and the crystallization of European debt imperialism, which cast the preceding

period in a tragic light. European powers asserted control of the Ottoman finances beginning around 1876. In a closely related development, Britain occupied Egypt following a popular uprising there in 1881–2. These events demanded a new appraisal of universal history. As far as the Ottoman Empire was concerned, the demise of the Tanzimat project signaled the end of history, but in the anti-Hegelian, Benjaminian sense that, at this point, on no account could events seem to be moving in an acceptable direction.

The subject of this dissertation is the nineteenth-century Arabic discourse of revival in its formative and dominant phase, from shortly before the inauguration of the Tanzimat reforms to circa 1870. I focus on cultural production in Egypt, especially Cairo, where the discourse of revival initially developed, and Greater Syria (*Bilād al-Shām*), especially around Mount Lebanon and in Beirut, which was intricately connected to Egypt in this period at the level of cultural production, and which was strongly influenced by the discourse of revival as it had developed there. The dissertation has two intersecting aims. The first is to show that, despite Muwayliḥī's framing of revivalism at the end of the century, the Tanzimat-era discourse of revival demonstrates a clear awareness of the ideological implications of the European literature on which it drew; that it consistently repudiated these implications; and that on both of these counts it should not be dismissed simply as an unwitting extension of European imperial and colonial ideology. This is not to impugn Muwayliḥī's cynicism, which, needless to say, was amply warranted by the late nineteenth century, but simply to insist on thoroughly historicizing the discourse of revival in its Tanzimat-era form. The argument that the discourse of revival did not simply reproduce contemporary European ideologies does not imply an altogether new analysis of elite Arabic cultural production in mid-nineteenth-century Egypt and Syria. The resulting account overlaps to some extent with what Peter Hill has termed the "heroic story" of the Nahda,

insofar as it highlights the counterhegemonic, and especially the anti-colonial, dimensions of this discourse. But it also coheres with Hill's own analysis of mid-nineteenth-century elite Arabic cultural production in terms of the particular interests of local elites, as channeled into projects of state building (especially in Egypt) and class formation (especially among the literati of Beirut); that is, against an understanding of elite cultural production in this period in terms of the emergence of a wider "national" consciousness, as in the heroic story of the Nahda.[11]

The second aim of the dissertation is to analyze the mid-nineteenth-century Arabic discourse of revival as the expression of a distinctive structure of historical experience. I mean "historical experience" here not in the sense in which Frank Ankersmit uses this phrase in *Sublime Historical Experience* (2004), whereby "historical experience" denotes a kind of direct experience of a past world, whether via historiography (the past as narrative) or through the material traces of a particular past world (which might be ancient or relatively recent).[12] This is not to say that the kind of "historical experience" described by Ankersmit is necessarily irrelevant to the discourse of revival. But what I specifically mean to indicate by this phrase is the experience of historicality, where "historicality" (*Geschichtlichkeit*; also "historicity") is to be understood with Heidegger as an essential facet of human existence, and this as a function of the fundamental temporal conditions of human existence;[13] and "experience" of historicality is to be understood as being subject to variation in different circumstances (social, political, economic, cultural, etc.). This use of the phrase "historical experience" comes closer to the usage of the philosopher David Carr than that of Ankersmit.[14] Whereas Ankersmit is concerned with a

[11] Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 3–11.
[12] F. R. Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 241–368.
[13] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John. Macquarrie, Edward. Robinson, and Taylor Carman (New York: Harper & Row, 2008), 424–55.
[14] As set out in David Carr, *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

particular type of historical experience that, he argues, was key to the development of "modern Western historical consciousness,"[15] Carr approaches historical experience as a general phenomenon, seeking to understand, in general terms, "how history is encountered, how it enters our lives, and in what forms of consciousness and experience it does so."[16] Despite often framing these problems in collective, ostensibly universalizing terms (as in "how it enters our lives"), Carr recognizes that historical experience is socially and culturally constructed.[17]

Unlike Carr, but in line with Heidegger, I recognize no clear boundary between historical experience and the experience of temporality.[18] Indeed, what I mean by the phrase "structure of historical experience" is identical with what Reinhart Koselleck calls "time structures" or "temporal structures" (*Zeitstrukturen*).[19] I prefer to speak of historical experience, on the basis that this foregrounds the dynamic process that performatively shapes the *experience* of temporality, while leaving the analysis of time and temporality themselves to other disciplines. The dynamic process in question here is what Heidegger referred to as "*geschehen*," which literally means "to happen," but which has been translated in certain contexts as "historizing" to reflect the morphological association with "history" (*Geschichte*) that Heidegger was activating in these contexts.[20] This dynamic process is one that goes beyond the practices of historians to encompass the full spectrum of ways in which a given society or formation within a society establishes a particular relation to past, present, and future. Of course, to identify this process

[15] Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 350–63.
[16] Carr, *Experience and History*, 47.
[17] Carr, 173–83.
[18] Carr writes (p. 38) that "historicity in Heidegger's sense, based on his account of temporality, still has no specific connection to history. … All experience is temporal in this sense, including the experience of nature. For the experience that is specific to history, we have to look beyond temporality." Carr goes on to locate the connection between experience and history in the experience of membership in a community (pp. 48–55).
[19] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 93–94; Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik Geschichtler Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 130–1.
[20] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 41 n. 1.

with reference to "history" runs the risk of privileging formal historiography as the normal or proper means of mediating temporality. As far as the mid-nineteenth-century Arabic discourse of revival was concerned, the privileging of history in this sense—as the formal practice by which knowledge of the past is produced—is consistent with the actual dynamics of this discourse: that is, history in this sense, and a particular conception of history in this sense, were of preeminent importance within the discourse of revival. This, at least, is one of the arguments that I make in the dissertation. But as well as making this argument, I argue that the privileging of history within the discourse of revival forms part of a fraught, uneasy, and anxious structure of historical experience. The dissertation does not, therefore, imply any affirmation of history in general or any particular conception of history in normative and/or exclusive terms as the proper medium for negotiating the temporal conditions of human existence.

My analysis of the mid-nineteenth-century Arabic discourse of revival as the expression of a distinctive structure of historical experience produces a new perspective on elite cultural production in mid-nineteenth-century Cairo and Beirut. The element of novelty consists in the just-mentioned argument regarding the qualitative properties of the structure of historical experience that this discourse articulated. While mid-nineteenth-century intellectuals in Egypt and Syria were not especially troubled by anxieties over questions of cultural authenticity,[21] this dissertation contends that they constituted and constructed for themselves an anxious and uneasy structure of historical experience. They did this as part of a process of cultural production that itself formed part of an elite project to integrate regional economies into the increasingly globalized economy on favorable terms, which to a large extent amounted to resisting domination by European colonial powers. The structure of historical experience that was forged

[21] Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 247–9.

by these intellectuals expressed the tensions of this process of integration into the world market—even as it formed an integral part of this process.

There is a certain oblique affinity between the kind of analysis of mid-nineteenth-century Arabic cultural production that this implies and the account given by Tarek El-Ariss in the early chapters of *Trials of Arab Modernity* (2016).[22] This consists in the fact that, like El-Ariss's account, mine reads texts from this period as expressions and productions of a distinctive type of mid-nineteenth-century "experience," and an anxious and uneasy one at that.[23] El-Ariss accomplishes this by shifting attention from "questions of representation and cultural exchange" in literature from this period "to an engagement with a genealogy of symptoms and affects," focusing in particular on "the body as a site of rupture and signification." His aim in this is to "challeng[e] prevalent conceptualizations of modernity, both those that treat it as a Western ideological project imposed by colonialism, and others that understand it as a universal narrative of progress and innovation."[24] It is thus an important part of his argument that the kind of bodily experience that he describes is a characteristically "modern experience" and even definitively "the experience of the modern," at least in the context of "Arab modernity."[25] The argument that I make in this dissertation is that a cognate type of experience can be identified as a property of the structure of historical experience within which "the modern" (or "the new") was articulated as a category. That is to say, the bodily experience of "modernity" as a site of trials and tribulations, of discombulation and anxiety, had a counterpart in the experience of "the modern" as part of a particular structure of historical experience; in other words, of "the modern" as part of a framework for dealing with the temporal conditions of existence. The main theoretical and

[22] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 19–87.
[23] El-Ariss, 50, 83.
[24] El-Ariss, 2.
[25] El-Ariss, 50–52.

methodological framework that I use to analyze the discourse of revival in the way that I have outlined here is that of hauntology. In the remainder of this introduction I set out my reasons for doing so, before giving an overview of the chapters.

Hauntology and the Nineteenth-Century Arabic Discourse of Revival

> Be light of step: I think the surface of the earth
> is made only from these bodies.
> It would be repugnant of us to treat forefathers
> and ancestors with contempt, even if the time was long ago.
> Go gently abroad, if you are able,
> and do not strut over the remains of God's people.[26]

The first installment proper of *Fatra min al-Zamān* begins with the narrator ʿĪsā ibn Hishām describing how, in a dream, he was walking among gravestones in the Imām Shāfiʿī cemetery in Cairo, reflecting on the vanity of mankind. As he was walking, he tells us, he recalled the words of "the wise poet Abū al-ʿAlāʾ"—that is, the aforementioned 5th/11th-century poet al-Maʿarrī—and proceeds to recite the above verses, which form part of a longer poem from al-Maʿarrī's collection *Luzūm Mā Lam Yalzam* ("The Necessity of the Unnecessary"). As ʿĪsā proceeds through the graveyard, he resumes his reflections on death and the passing of time, in the process reciting two more excerpts of al-Maʿarrī on these topics. He then relates that, all of a sudden, he was startled by the rising of a man from one of the graves:

> Among the reflections and considerations, and the ideas and thoughts, I was pondering the marvels of events and marveling at the upheavals of time, immersed in conceiving the oddities of fate, bending my thoughts to the secrets of the Awakening and the Resurrection—suddenly a convulsion behind me that almost killed me! I turned in shock, and behold, one of the tombs had split apart, and a man of lofty bearing emerged from it.[27]

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[26] al-Muwayliḥī, *What ʿĪsá Ibn Hishām Told Us*, 1:35. Allen's translation with a few alterations.

خفف الوطء ما أظن أديم الـ أرض إلا من هذه الأجساد
وقبيح بنا وإن قدم العهـ ـدُ هوان الآباء والأجداد
سر إن استطعت في الهواء رويداً لا احتيالا على رفات العباد

[27] al-Muwayliḥī, 1:38. My translation.

The ghost (*shabaḥ*) presently identifies himself as "Aḥmad Bāshā al-Manīklī, the Egyptian Minister of War," a notoriously acerbic military commander from the time of Mehmed Ali (1769–1849), de facto ruler of Egypt from 1805 to 1848.[28] Back from the grave, the Pasha (as he is subsequently identified in the text) goes on to play a central role throughout *Fatra min al-Zamān*, as the dream-frame largely recedes and ʿĪsā ibn Hishām takes him on a tour around late-nineteenth-century Egypt, with a detour to Paris for the Exposition Universelle of 1900.

Muwayliḥī's figure of the revenant Pasha is, among other things, the focal point of an intricate reflection on issues of historical experience, temporality, and relations with the past and its inhabitants.[29] The lines of al-Maʿarrī that ʿĪsā recites—prior to the Pasha's resurrection—conjure a world in which the dead are never altogether dead, and the past, "even if the time was long ago" (*wa-in qaduma al-ʿahd*), is not so far away as the living might suppose. The poet issues a call to "be light of step," and to "go gently," not apparently in order to avoid waking the dead, but just because this is the proper way to proceed in such an ontologically complex environment; it would be "repugnant" (*qabīḥ*) to do otherwise. The ghost of the Pasha vindicates these lines of al-Maʿarrī. This is not because in returning from the grave he proves the porosity of the boundary between life and death, but more straightforwardly because of his principal role within the text: to deliver, by way of Manīklī's famously sharp tongue, a biting commentary on late-nineteenth-century Egyptian society amid the noxious effects of British occupation and the wider crosswinds of global capitalism. The Pasha bears out the wisdom of al-Maʿarrī's warning

وبينما أنا في المواعظ والعبر، والخواطر والفكر، أتأمل في عجائب الحدثان، وأتعجب من تقلب الأزمان ، مستغرقا في تصور بدائع المقدور، منهيا بالفكر إلى أسرار البعث النشور، إذا برجة من خلفي كادت تقضي بحتفي، فالتفت لفتة المذعور فإذا هو قبر قد انشق من بين القبور، وخرج منه رجل طويل القامة.

[28] On al-Manīklī, see Thābit, *Al-Binyah al-Qiṣaṣīyah*, 124–27; Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 245.

[29] The figure of Manīklī Pasha in Muwayliḥī is a central focus of Peter Hill's concluding remarks in *Utopia and Civilisation*, 245–55, where Manīklī is analyzed as representative of "Mehmed Ali's entourage, in their heyday, as the masters of a confident, powerful and autonomous regime" (247). My analysis in the remainder of this paragraph is consistent with this take, but I emphasize the ways in which Muwayliḥī thematizes the Pasha's status as a ghost.

not to "treat forefathers and ancestors with contempt," as he sets about puncturing and deflating the delusions and seductions of modern life. At the same time, the Pasha is in no way a symbol of an idealized past: his short temper quickly lands him in court for assaulting a donkeyman whom he considers to have insulted him;[30] his persistently exasperating behavior eventually elicits an excoriating condemnation from ʿĪsā, who denounces the Pasha's whole (historical) social class as a band of hypocrites that plundered the wealth of ordinary people.[31] Thus, as well as exposing the absurdity of any crassly presentist triumphalism of the modern, the figure of the Pasha stands against the reductive romanticization or idealization of the past. Furthermore, he does this not simply by virtue of his own particular moral failings or by representing those of his class, but in a more fundamental way, in his capacity as a shockingly larger-than-life "ghost" whose all-too-real return from the dead makes a mockery of the kind of yearning for the restoration of the past that goes along with its idealization. In a roundabout way, this too amounts to an affirmation of the delicate ontology to which al-Maʿarrī's verses give expression. While the past is in some sense never entirely past, it is a fallacy to suppose that it can be substantially restored, and a mistake to wish that it could be.

The haunting of the late-nineteenth-century world of Muwayliḥī's *Fatra min al-Zamān* by this unghostly specter—in the company of another time-traveler, from a much earlier period, in the shape of ʿĪsā ibn Hishām—is an emphatic expression of the unraveling of the settlement with the past that had been characteristic of the Tanzimat-era discourse of revival. In this respect, Muwayliḥī's figure of the ghost pulls in the same direction as his satirization of the late-nineteenth-century permutation of this discourse in the pilot installment. But whereas the pilot installment foregrounds the relationship between the discourse of revival and the European

[30] al-Muwayliḥī, *What 'Īsá Ibn Hishām Told Us*, 1:44–51.
[31] al-Muwayliḥī, 1:144–49.

imperial order, the figure of the ghost thematizes the question of relations with the past in a more profound way, unsettling the fundamental temporal dynamics of the discourse of revival.

What the ghost Pasha unsettles, to be precise, is a desire to circumscribe and contain, once and for all, the capacities of the past to operate as an unpredictable, not-altogether-controllable force; a desire to purge what may be termed the spectral dimensions or spectrality of the past; in other words, its powers of haunting the present. This desire was by no means purely negative: the desire to contain these capacities of the past was constitutive of a desire to bring the imagined vitality and prosperity of particular, invariably somewhat remote, pasts back to life in the present. It was the latter that provided the principal affective content for the kind of expressions of yearning for the past that we saw from Muwayliḥī's character of Buṭrus above, as it did more generally for the programmatic calls for and occasional avowals of "revival" that formed part of the same discursive field. But, somewhat paradoxically, given that the language of "revival" explicitly invokes the return of the past, the discourse of revival in Tanzimat-era Cairo and Beirut was characterized by a fraught relationship with the spectral dimensions and haunting capacities of the past. For one thing, the dream of reviving the perceived vitality of particular pasts—the golden ages of early Abbasid-era Iraq and Syria, Egypt under Ramesses II (c. 1303–1213 BCE), Phoenicia as a major trading power (1st millennium BCE), the Hellenistic Mediterranean (c. 3rd–1st cent. BCE)—was intimately related to anxieties about the infringement of other, generally more recent, pasts on the present and the future. For another, the pursuit of "revival" implied, in and of itself, an intense relationship and even something of a struggle with the privileged pasts whose perceived vitality was the object of this pursuit. Muwayliḥī's figure of the ghost Pasha, an excessive presence, exuberantly causing various kinds of havoc in a full-blooded return from the dead, affirms the instability of any settlement with the past that attempts

to impose strict limits on its capacities.

My conception of the spectral here derives from Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1993), in which Derrida analyzes a number of related intellectual projects as being paranoiacally obsessed with ghosts, and fixated on the need to eliminate ghosts from the lifeworld of the present. The main object of Derrida's analysis is Marx's preoccupation with the spectral, in particular his desire to eliminate the futural "specter of communism" by making it a reality, which would also mean the elimination of the spectral forces of capitalism,[32] "in the name of living presence as material actuality."[33] But Derrida is also concerned with showing how, in his desire to "be done with it," Marx's attitude towards the specter is ultimately comparable to that of Max Stirner, whose theory of ghosts he vehemently criticized in *The German Ideology*. "Marx seems to agree essentially with Stirner," Derrida writes: "one must win out over the specter, put an end to it."[34] Stirner's theory was that the ghosts of the past need to be actively called up by individuals in the present and transformed through a process of "egological conversion" into a living form, thus conjuring away the ghostly presence.[35] A further contention of *Specters of Marx* is that the discourse that formed around Francis Fukuyama's proclamation of the end of history in the early 1990s, and rapidly assumed hegemonic status, was haunted by ghosts that it sought to exclude, in particular "specters of Marx" insofar as Marx could not be straightforwardly accommodated within a unified account of "Western" thought.[36]

The object of Derrida's critique is thus an ontology, or ontological persuasion, that excludes (at least some of) the modes of existence and indeed of agency that are characteristic of

[32] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 126–30.
[33] Derrida, 130.
[34] Derrida, 165.
[35] Derrida, 163.
[36] Derrida, 61–95.

the past, which is to say of past societies, past events, past individuals. As Ethan Kleinberg has put it, "the past, like a ghost, is by definition absent and thus has no ontological properties per se, or perhaps more accurately, it has a latent ontology."[37] Derrida offered up the ghost as a figuration of the excluded modes of existence and agency that are exercised by the past as a function of this "latent ontology." In doing so, according to Fredric Jameson, Derrida was trying to show how the obsession with purging specters—both in the end-of-history triumphalism of the 1990s and also in the writings of Marx himself—reflected a desire for and pursuit of "the 'unmixed': what is somehow pure and self-sufficient or autonomous, what is able to be disengaged from the general mess of mixed, hybrid phenomena all around it and named with the satisfaction of a single conceptual proper name."[38] Against such a quest for purity, and the ontology of total presence that he discerned in it, Derrida introduced the category of "hauntology," which he specified as "irreducible" and particularly so with regard to "everything it makes possible: ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology."[39] The immediate context for Derrida's introduction of this term was his observation that the attempt to conjure away specters of Marx in the early 1990s was inextricable from the rise of media and communications technologies that were themselves "spectral." The attempted effacement of the specters of Marx was enabled by the rise of communications media whose enormous power resided precisely in their capacity to conjure away their own power—by virtue of its spectral mode of existence, as "neither living nor dead, present nor absent."[40] In other words, the spectral powers of the media threatened to efface themselves in just the way that they threatened to efface

[37] Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 136.
[38] Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter," in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. M. Sprinker (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 44–45.
[39] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 63.
[40] Derrida, 63.

the specters of Marx. The point of hauntology is to provide a framework for identifying and analyzing these effects. In the words of Mark Fisher, rather than conceive of it as an attempt to "revive the supernatural" or as a mere "figure of speech," it is helpful to "think of hauntology as *the agency of the virtual*, with the spectre understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing."[41] The relevance of Derrida's analysis of Marx's own entanglement with specters is that Derrida offers up hauntology in what he (very deliberately) terms the "spirit of Marx."[42]

My analysis of the Tanzimat-era discourse of revival, as previewed above, is hauntological in the fundamental respect that it centers the way in which this discourse engaged the spectral capacities of the past. In centering this, my aim is not ultimately to demonstrate the validity of hauntology as a category of analysis: I am not simply trying to show that the past is irreducibly spectral or that it must be analyzed or, indeed, lived with as such. As I have claimed above, the Arabic discourse of revival in Tanzimat-era Egypt and Syria was animated by acute apprehension of the spectral capacities of the past—of the ways in which the past acts as a virtual force—and by a desire to bring these capacities under control. My ultimate aim is to identify what were the foundations of this particular relationship with the spectral capacities of the past, above all in terms of epistemic and ideological frameworks; and what was at stake in the cultivation of this particular relationship, or mode of engagement, with the past's spectral powers. In pursuing these questions, I am in a sense attempting to "despectralize" the Tanzimat-era Arabic discourse of revival: to figure out how exactly this discourse was haunted and by what specters. This is consistent with the project of hauntology as conceived and modeled by Derrida

[41] Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014), 18. Original italics.
[42] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 66.

himself: in the final chapter of *Specters of Marx*, Derrida applies just this sort of hauntological analysis to Marx himself.[43] To investigate how the past's spectral capacities were operative in a given context is not to imply that the spectral capacities of the past can be neutralized.

Hauntology is thus integral to this dissertation in two major respects. At the most general level, the argument of the dissertation is that in the mid-nineteenth century, in close connection with the Ottoman Empire's Tanzimat reforms, Arab intellectuals in Egypt and Greater Syria developed a mode of engagement with the past that was distinct in important ways from the modes of engagement with the past that preceded and followed the Tanzimat era. This mode of engagement with the past constituted the essence of what I refer to in the title of the dissertation as the discourse of revival. In the account that I give, what distinguished this mode of engagement with the past from earlier and later modes was precisely the particularities of its settlement with the spectral capacities of the past. In other words, hauntology is the means by which I establish the distinctness of the mode of engagement with the past that was characteristic of the Arabic discourse of revival in Tanzimat-era Egypt and Syria, and hence the very coherence of the topic of the dissertation. But hauntology is also fundamental to the more specific argument that I make about this discourse, namely that the Tanzimat-era discourse of revival consistently repudiated European colonial ideology: the ways in which this discourse engaged the spectral capacities of the past are inextricable from its anti-colonial impetus.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, I describe the historical conditions that underpinned the formation of a distinctive discourse of revival in the Tanzimat era. My argument is that the Tanzimat reforms inaugurated a new association between the concept of revival and a vision of dramatic social change for the better. While the concept of revival (*iḥyāʾ*) and the

[43] Derrida, 156–221.

closely-related concept of "renewal" (*tajdīd*) had long been established in Arabo-Islamic thought, including specifically Ottoman political thought, the Tanzimat reforms mobilized these concepts behind a project that was largely not geared towards the return of social, economic, or ethical norms from earlier times, as was generally the case with previous uses of the language of revival, but rather towards the realization of a substantially new regime. I relate this development to internal tensions within the ruling Ottoman elites, and in particular to the struggle between Mehmed Ali as the governor of Egypt and the central Ottoman government. I argue that the attraction of the rhetoric of revival to Arab elites in Egypt and around Mount Lebanon derived above from recent experiences of social conflict and upheaval.

Building on this historical framework, the second chapter of the dissertation examines a text that was produced on the cusp of the Tanzimat era. *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ wa-Hidāyat al-Ḥukamāʾ* ("The Beginning[s] of the Ancients and the Guidance of the Sages") came off the Egyptian state press at Bulaq in the summer of 1838, making it the first printed work of "ancient history" in Arabic. The text combines translation from an eighteenth-century French school text with sections from a fourteenth-century Arabic work of universal history, as well as citations of poetry and passages of original writing. Focusing initially on the insertion of poetry into the translated portion of the text, I argue that *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* expresses a mode of engagement with the past that is distinct in important ways from that which developed in the Tanzimat era. I argue that the poetry thematizes the limits of knowledge about the past, and that in this respect and others it cultivates a kind of laissez-faire relationship of coexistence with the spectral dimensions of the past. I relate this aspect of the text to the particular way in which it seeks to operationalize the past as an ethical resource, namely by way of direct exemplarity, whereby events of the past function as direct exemplary or counter-exemplary models for possible

situations in the present.

In the third chapter I analyze a short text on historiography that featured as an introductory section in the Arabic translation, via French, of the Scottish historian William Robertson's *History of Charles V* (1769). The Arabic translation of this text was published in two volumes between 1842 and 1846, early in the Tanzimat era; the introductory section, which was a translation of part of a longer French work on historiography from 1825, appeared in the first volume. Like *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, this text was printed on the Egyptian state press at Bulaq, and it emerged from the same translation movement. My argument, however, is that this text, in particular the introductory section on historiography, evidences the development of a new conception of history in Arabic—by which I mean the discipline by which knowledge of the past is produced, as opposed to the past itself—and that this conception of history was a key element in the formation of the dominant trend of Tanzimat-era Arabic historical thought. Specifically, I argue that this text articulated the idea that there is an absolutely "true form" of history, rooted in the metaphysical structure of the universe; and that the text identifies this true form of history with the analysis of human society, or "civilization," as a structure that develops in predictable ways over time. I argue that this conception of history was not entirely new in Arabic, as it has much in common with the historical philosophy of Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406); however, I argue that whereas for Ibn Khaldūn this kind of structural analysis was a subsidiary element of historical inquiry, in nineteenth-century Arabic historical thought it became the ultimate aim of history. The significance of this is that it transformed history from a discipline that is geared ultimately towards establishing facts about past events into a discipline that is geared ultimately towards understanding the fundamental structures of human society. This had the paradoxical effect of providing history with a finite object of inquiry in a way that had not previously been

the case. This fostered a new sense of history as a discipline that produced absolutely solid information and, by extension, a sense of the past as a thoroughly knowable realm, if only by way of reconstruction in abstract structural terms. The significance of this conception of history within the wider argument of the dissertation is that it demanded the pursuit of an eminently spectral form, namely the (always-invisible) structure underlying (now-absent) past events, which it established as an object that could, and must, be fully grasped.

This conception of history combined in its effect with what I argue in the fourth chapter was the central node of the discourse of revival, namely the figuration of particular times in the remote past as symbols of potentiality. I argue that this way of figuring remote pasts had a variety of influences: the rhetoric of the Tanzimat reforms; the resonances of "revival" and "renewal" within the Arabic literary tradition; and also a trope of European colonial and Orientalist literature, whereby Europeans figured the objects of their colonial desires, including the lands of the Ottoman empire, as "ancient" lands as a way of affirming these lands' potential for European colonization. Regarding the last of these, I argue that intellectuals in Cairo and Beirut transformed this trope, so that the ancient pasts of the region became symbols of potentiality for development at the hands of local, and not colonial, forces. At the same time, I argue that the association between the category of the ancient and the threat of colonization played a formative role in this discourse, and specifically that it was reflected in the pursuit of comprehensive coverage of the region's ancient pasts within the discourse of revival. I argue that this reflected an anxious effort to "own the past," as it were, against the threat of colonial intrusion.

CHAPTER 1

The Discourse of Revival in Egypt and Syria and the Tanzimat Reforms

1.1 Abdulmejid I, the Gülhane Decree, and the concept of "revival"

Situating the mid-nineteenth-century Arabic discourse of revival in relation to the Tanzimat reforms is, on the face of it, a simple matter. The inaugural document of the Tanzimat was the Gülhane Decree of November 1839, promulgated by the newly-invested Sultan Abdulmejid I (1823–1861; r. 1839–1861), who had succeeded his father, Sultan Mahmud II (1785–1839; r. 1808–1839) in July of the same year. This was not a legal instrument so much as an official declaration of legislative intent. As per the summary of one historian, the decree "called for reforms in taxation, military recruitment and judicial procedure; and it extended guarantees for life, honour and property to all subjects, Muslim and non-Muslim. It promised new laws to implement these reforms – a promise from which a flood of new laws flowed."[1] Originally written in Turkish, the decree was "printed and despatched (and translated where necessary) to all the provinces of the empire, including Egypt and Syria."[2] The decree presents its aims as an effort at "revival" (Turk. *ihya*; Ar. *iḥyāʾ*). It opens with a section averring that the Empire has been in decline for 150 years, owing to its deviation from "the noble religious law and the sublime ordinances" (*al-sharʿ al-sharīf wa'l-qawānīn al-munīfa*).[3] Following the main body of

[1] Carter Vaughn Findley, "The Tanzimat," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Vol. 4: Turkey in the Modern World*, ed. Reşat Kasaba (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18.
[2] Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," *Die Welt Des Islams* 34, no. 2 (1994): 199.
[3] Muḥammad Farīd, *Tārīkh al-Dawlah al-ʿAlīyah al-ʿUthmānīyah*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Taqaddum, 1912), 254. N.B. The text of the decree provided by Farīd is his own translation of the Turkish, and not the text of the original Arabic translations of the decree. I have not been able to locate the original Arabic translation, though presumably there are extant copies of it. Still, given that the key terms in the Turkish, including "revival" (Turk. "*ihya*") are derived from Arabic, we can safely conclude that the corresponding Arabic term appeared in the original Arabic translation.

the text, the decree concludes with an affirmation of the sultan's commitment to its provisions, and this includes explicit mention of "revival," as follows: "since these religiously-legitimate [*sharʿī*] laws will be enacted for the revival [*iḥyāʾ*] of religion, state [*al-dawla*; alternatively 'Empire'], property [*al-mulk*], and [religious] community [*al-milla*], the necessary covenant and pact will be taken on our royal part not to impose any initiative that is contrary to these [i.e. religion, etc.]."[4]

That there was a direct link between this founding document of the Tanzimat and the Arabic discourse of revival—at least as it developed among intellectuals from Mount Lebanon—seems clear from the association between revival and the figure of Abdulmejid I that appears in a number of texts around the middle of the century. One of these is a lecture delivered by Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī (1800–1871) at a meeting of the Syrian Society for the Acquisition of the Sciences and Arts (*Al-Jamʿiyya al-Sūriyya li'ktisāb al-ʿUlūm wa'l-Funūn*) in Beirut. The individual and the setting are both significant. One of eight "pillars of the *nahḍa* ['awakening'] of learning" by the reckoning of Jurjī Zaydān (1861–1914),[5] Yāzijī was born in the village of Kfarshima in the foothills of the mountains between Beirut and Sayda. He spent his early adulthood working as a scribe to the ruler of Mount Lebanon, Emir Bashīr Shihāb II (1767–1850; r. 1789–1840), before moving to Beirut in 1840.[6] There he devoted himself to writing—poetry and various forms of prose—and in 1847 he was among the founding members of the Syrian Society. Active through 1851, this was a forum for fortnightly meetings at which the society's members would give lectures on topics encompassing science, astronomy, literature, geography, and history. At one of

[4] Farīd, 255.
وبما أن هذه القوانين الشرعية ستوضع لاحياء الدين والدولة والملك والملة فسيؤخذ العهد والميثاق اللازم من قبلنا الملوكى بعدم وقوع أى حركة مخالفة لها.

[5] Jurjī Zaydan, *Tarājim Mashāhīr Al-Sharq Fi al-Qarn al-Tāsi' 'ashar*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1911), 350.

[6] Zaydan, 2:9–12.

these sessions, Yāzijī gave a brief talk "On the Sciences of the Arabs," in which he enumerated the different fields of knowledge cultivated across the history of Arabic-speaking peoples. In his closing remarks, he claimed that the Arab sciences continued to flourish,

> until the rulers' desire for knowledge fell away [*saqaṭat*]. Then, the factors underpinning the quest [for knowledge] were cut off and the pursuit of its attainment was obstructed. Its works fell into oblivion and time annihilated its adherents, until many of these fields of knowledge were lost without sight or trace. The rest of them would have gone the same way, had God not set them aright with this happy Mejidi dynasty that has revived [*aḥyat*] what had died of the culture of the ancients [*ādāb al-awwalīn*], thanks be to God, Lord of the Worlds.[7]

The term for "revived" here is a verbal form of the word for "revival" that figures in the Gülhane Decree. "Mejidi" is a reference to Abdulmejid I.

The explicit association of Abdulmejid with "revival" is made around the same time by the less well-known figure of Ibrāhīm ibn Khalīl al-Najjār (1822–1862). Born in Dayr al-Qamar, capital of the Emirate of Mount Lebanon, Najjār studied medicine in Egypt for four years from 1838, and then in Istanbul for another four years, before being appointed chief doctor of the imperial troops in Beirut.[8] As well as a work of Ottoman history-cum-personal memoir that I discuss in chapter 4, he authored a primer on physics, chemistry and biology, by the name of *Hadīyat al-Aḥbāb wa-Hidāyat al-Ṭullāb* ("A Gift for Friends and a Guide for Students," 1850). In the preface to this work, he praises Abdulmejid for having "founded schools for the sciences of the world and [those] of religion, and thereby revived [*aḥyā*] the sciences of the ancients [*al-*

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[7] Yūsuf Q. Khūrī, ed., *Al-Jamʿīyah al-Sūrīyah Li'l-ʿūlūm Wa'l-Funūn, 1847–1852* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥamrā', 1990), 56.
حتى سقطت رغبة الملوك في العلم فانقطعت أسباب الطلب وتعطّل السعي في تحصيله ودثرت مصنفاته وأفنى الدهر أهله حتى فقد كثيرٌ من هذه العلوم فلم يُعرَف لها عين ولا أثر وجرت بقيتها على آثاره لولا أن يتداركها الله بهذه الدولة المجيدية السعيدة التي أحيت ما مات من آداب الأولين والحمد لله رب العالمين.

[8] Khayr al-Dīn Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām, qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-al-nisā' min al-ʿArab wa-al-mustaʿrabīn wa-al-mustashriqīn*, 15th ed., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm Li'l-Malāyīn, 2002), 38; Ibrāhīm ibn Khalīl Najjār, *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-sārī wa-nuzhat al-qārī* (Beirut: I. b. Kh. al-Najjār, 1856), 12, 44, 46.

awwalīn]."[9] In another instance, a decade later, in the first edition of Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq's (1804–1870) *al-Jawāʾib* ("Circulations"), published weekly in Istanbul from 1861, a dedicatory poem frames Abdulmejid as having "revived the state of the Caliphate [*dawlat al-khilāfa*], long after its bones had turned to dust."[10] A few years earlier, as part of the introduction to the first edition of *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār* ("Garden of News," Jan. 1, 1858), which was the first Arabic newspaper published in Beirut, the young editor Khalīl al-Khūrī (1836–1907) published a poem in praise of Abdulmejid featuring the line: "His thoughts have renewed the most glorious feats, that is * he revived the sciences, over which the darkness has now cleared."[11] The explicit association of Abdulmejid with "revival" in these three passages indicates the salience of official Tanzimat ideology, as expressed in Abdulmejid's Gülhane Decree, to the formation of a discourse of revival among intellectuals in this period.

But the relationship between the Tanzimat and the Arabic discourse of revival is not as straightforward as these passages might suggest. For one thing, in both Egypt and Mount Lebanon, in different ways, the idea of "revival" keyed into a set of local concerns and aspirations that did not, of course, correspond exactly to those of the central Ottoman authorities. This is not to say that implicit affirmations of official Tanzimat ideology of revival, such as the above, were disingenuous—though a degree of obeisance to Abdulmejid is to be presumed—but simply that the Tanzimat project was inevitably subject to local interpretation and negotiation and that expressions of enthusiasm for it were contingent on such processes. I will come back to

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[9] Ibrāhīm ibn Khalīl Najjār, *Kitāb hadīyat al-aḥbāb wa-hidāyat al-ṭullāb* (Marsīlīyā: Maṭbaʿat Bārās wa-Sāvūrnīn, 1850), 10.

انشأ المدارس لعلوم الدنيا والدين فاحيا بها علوم الاولين.

[10] As quoted (and translated) in Youssef George El-Khoury Salem, "Aḥmad Fāris Al-Shidyāq in the Public Sphere: Al-Jawā'ib Newspaper (1861–1884)" (Unpublished MA Thesis, Beirut, American University of Beirut, 2020), 26.

[11] The poem was reprinted in al-Khūrī's collection *Al-ʿAṣr al-Jadīd* ["The New Age"] (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Sūrīyyah, 1863), 6–8. On al-Khūrī see Fruma Zachs, "Building a Cultural Identity: The Case of Khalil al-Khuri," in *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2004), 27–39.

this point in detail later in subsequent sections. There is another layer of complexity that needs to be addressed first.

This is that the ideology of revival that was given expression in the Gülhane Decree was not spontaneously produced for the purposes of this document. Rather, it was a novel iteration of a trend in Ottoman (Turkish) political discourse that goes back to the reform agenda of Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807) in the late eighteenth century. Crucially, Mehmed Ali's state-building project in Egypt, which is central to the argument of my next chapter, was in many ways an offshoot of this earlier agenda. This is important for understanding the Arabic discourse of revival as it emerged in Egypt, as we shall see, but Mehmed Ali's successful adoption of this agenda was also an important ingredient of revivalist discourse in Greater Syria—which Mehmed Ali held under occupation from 1832 to 1841. In a further twist, the success of Mehmed Ali's state-building project, or rather the threat that it posed to the Sublime Porte, provided much of the underlying impetus for the whole Tanzimat program. To understand these complexities and their significance for the Arabic discourse of revival, it is necessary to review the formation of this discourse of revival in Ottoman political discourse prior to the Tanzimat.

1.2 The Ottoman discourse of "revival"

The concept of revival became a focus of Ottoman political discourse in relation to the reform agenda of Sultan Selim III. In 1792 Selim called on his advisers to submit proposals for reforms.[12] The immediate impetus for his doing so was defeat in the Russo-Turkish War of 1787–1791, in which the Ottomans were attempting to regain sovereignty over territory lost in the previous Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774), notably the Crimea.[13] In reflection of this context,

[12] Alp Eren Topal, "From Decline to Progress: Ottoman Concepts of Reform 1600-1876" (PhD Thesis, Ankara, Bilkent University, 2017), 77.
[13] Virginia Aksan, "War and Peace," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 102–3.

the majority of the responses submitted by Selim's bureaucrats concerned the organization of Ottoman military power, and the major initiative to emerge from the process was the establishment of the "New Order" (*Nizâm-ı Cedîd*) army.[14] The main element of this was the formation of new centrally-financed and highly-drilled infantry units, on the model of contemporary European standing armies, but the program also sought to introduce new standards of discipline and training into existing units of the army.[15] To meet the costs of the New Order army, the government established a special fund, the "New Revenue" (*İrad-ı Cedîd*), which it financed through the redirection of existing government funds, as well as the imposition of new taxes. Given the pressure that this inevitably exerted on state finances as a whole, the government sought to maximize its overall revenues by establishing direct control over income-generating activities across the Empire, cutting provincial notables out of the equation. The creation of the New Order army thus went hand-in-hand with an attempt to centralize control of the economy.[16] These measures were articulated as an attempt to bring about the "revival" of Empire.

It should be noted that, insofar as the notion of "revival" implied that the Empire was in decline, this was in fact nothing new in Ottoman political discourse. Since the late sixteenth century, Ottoman statesmen had expressed concerns about perceived decline in the Empire and composed treatises theorizing the problem and proposing solutions.[17] But while, from the

[14] Fikret Adanir, "Semi-Autonomous Provincial Forces in the Balkans and Anatolia," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 179.
[15] Kadir Ustun, "The New Order and Its Enemies: Opposition to Military Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1789-1807" (PhD Thesis, New York, Columbia University, 2013), 108–12.
[16] Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*, Rev. pbk. ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 58–61; Ustun, "The New Order and Its Enemies," 112–123; Aysel Yildiz, *Crisis and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire: The Downfall of a Sultan in the Age of Revolution* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 74–9.
[17] Halil İnalcık, *Essays in Ottoman History* (Beyoğlu, İstanbul: Eren, 1998), 16; Douglas A. Howard, "Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of" Decline" of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of Asian History* 22, no. 1 (1988): 52–77; Marinos Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 145–87.

beginning, this literature looked back to the era of Suleiman I (r. 1520–1566) as the Empire's golden age and the model of order and good administration,[18] through the mid-eighteenth century these authors presented their proposals under the banner of "reform" (Turk. "*ıslâh*").[19] It was only in the late eighteenth century that the concept of "revival" became central to this discourse.[20] In the Turkish context, this concept was most often expressed by the term "*tecdîd*" (literally, "renewal") but the closely related term "*ihya*" (literally, "bringing to life") was also used.[21]

Why did the concept of revival become a focus of Ottoman political discourse in the late eighteenth century? Part of the answer is that the changes that were believed to be necessary to preserve the integrity of the Empire were disruptive of the social order in a way that demanded a high level of positive legitimation. The New Order measures posed a genuine threat to powerful interests in the Empire, notably to the Janissaries, the long-standing elite infantry force of the imperial household, and to provincial elites.[22] The measures could be, and were, challenged as "innovation" (*bidʿa*), which implied illegitimacy of a religious description.[23] Both *tecdîd* and *ihya* (Ar. *tajdīd* and *iḥyāʾ*) were well-established concepts of Arabo-Islamic thought. *Tecdîd*, in particular, denoted the idea of a periodic renewal of Islam, in connection with a hadith (a saying of the Prophet) according to which every hundred years an individual would be sent to the Community to "renew for it the matter of its religion."[24] Framing the measures in terms of *tecdîd* and *ihya* was thus a powerful way of legitimizing them. The specific issue of the introduction of

[18] Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century*, 188–232.
[19] Topal, "From Decline to Progress," 34–42.
[20] Topal, 81–2.
[21] Topal, 84.
[22] Yildiz, *Crisis and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire*, 73–101.
[23] Topal, "From Decline to Progress," 82–3.
[24] The text is given in Ella Landau-Tasseron, "The" Cyclical Reform": A Study of the Mujaddid Tradition," *Studia Islamica*, no. 70 (1989): 79. This is my own translation of the key phrase. The text (*matn*) of the hadith is as follows: إنّ الله يبعث لهذه الأمة على رأس كلّ مئة سنة من يجدّد لها أمر دينها.

European techniques of military training and discipline—the aspect of the measures most vulnerable to the charge of innovation—was justified within this framework as an application of the principle of *mukābele bi'l-misl* ("responding through imitation").[25]

But the reference to "revival" was not a cynical ploy to dress up "Westernizing" changes as a return to the past. Selim's bureaucrats were steeped in a cyclical conception of history derived from Ibn Khaldun.[26] Their aspiration to reestablish the "old rule" (*kanun-ı kadim*),[27] which they shared with earlier exponents of Ottoman reform discourse,[28] should be understood in this context. While centralization of the economy meant a loss of status for provincial elites, and the establishment of new military units posed a threat to the Janissaries, the bureaucrats of the New Order did not propose and implement these changes in pursuit of a world that they imagined would be significantly different from any that had gone before, let alone any kind of utopia. *Tecdîd* and *ihya* were concepts of moral reinvigoration. It is clear from the bureaucrats' memoranda that moral laxity was indeed at the heart of their diagnoses of the Empire's weakness; what they meant by this was the decline of religious observance and of obedience to the state.[29] For the bureaucrats of the New Order, as for earlier exponents of Ottoman reform discourse, the alternative to this state of decay was the imagined orderliness of the Empire's glory days, and the New Order measures were an attempt to restore this orderliness: not to establish a new kind of orderliness that embodied the "spirit" of the Empire's golden age, but to usher in the return of an earlier orderliness in a more concrete sense, according to the cyclical pattern of history.

[25] Topal, "From Decline to Progress," 81–4.
[26] Topal, 90–7.
[27] Ustun, "The New Order and Its Enemies," 91; Topal, "From Decline to Progress," 81.
[28] Topal, "From Decline to Progress," 34–42.
[29] Topal, 88–90.

1.3 Mehmed Ali and the transformation of the Ottoman discourse of revival

This discourse of revival is genealogically linked to the Arabic discourse of revival of the Tanzimat era but by way of a significant transformation. Somewhat paradoxically, the occasion for this transformation was in large part the threat posed by the dramatic success of Mehmed Ali's state-building project in Egypt and particularly by its extension, through invasion, to Syria in the 1830s. The paradox here is that Mehmed Ali's state-building project was largely modelled on the New Order agenda. Once he had secured his personal position with the massacre of the Mamluks in 1811, Mehmed Ali set about establishing an army by conscription and centralizing control over the economy. These measures were modelled on Selim's reforms,[30] to which Mehmed Ali added an ambitious program of industrialization.[31] Of course, insofar as he was making these changes in order to fortify his own position, he was bringing about precisely the opposite of what Selim had been trying to achieve with the New Order reforms, namely the centralization of power in Istanbul. Moreover, Mehmed Ali was accomplishing this at a time when the Ottoman center was riven by intra-elite rivalry. Despite efforts to integrate potential antagonists into the new initiatives,[32] Selim's own efforts had ultimately succumbed to internal opposition. He was ousted by the Janissaries in 1807 in favor of his cousin, Mustafa IV (r. 1807–8), who was himself ousted the following year in favor of Selim's brother. Mahmud II (1808–1839) set about gradually reconstituting Selim's reform agenda, notably succeeding with the dissolution of the Janissaries in 1826.[33]

But the combination of internal discord in Istanbul and Mehmed Ali's skill in growing

[30] Patrick Scharfe, "Muslim Scholars and the Public Sphere in Mehmed Ali Pasha's Egypt, 1801-1841" (PhD Thesis, Columbus, OH, Ohio State University, 2015), 171–2.
[31] Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*, 69–72.
[32] Ustun, "The New Order and Its Enemies," 110–2.
[33] Yildiz, *Crisis and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire*, 3.

and financing his army had produced a situation in which Mehmed Ali had the strongest military force in the Empire. Since Mahmud was trying, again, to centralize power in Istanbul, there was an obvious conflict of interests between his administration and Mehmed Ali's position of power in Egypt. This was the occasion for Mehmed Ali's invasion of Syria and deep into Anatolia in 1831–1833. The purpose was not simply to annex Syria for its own sake, but to secure his own and his descendants' position in Egypt against the likelihood that Mahmud would attempt to remove them in the course of his centralization efforts.[34] With the Egyptian troops just a week's march from Istanbul, Mahmud turned to Russia for support early in 1833, and the threat of this was sufficient for Mehmed Ali to call a halt to the advance of Ibrahim's troops.[35] A few months later a deal between Mehmed Ali and the Sublime Porte was struck, the Convention of Kütahya, whereby Mehmed Ali was to withdraw his troops from Anatolia, but would hold the governorship of Syria for life.[36] Despite this, Mahmud remained eager to regain Syria. After being dissuaded by European powers from attempting this on two earlier occasions, he sent a force towards Aleppo in the summer of 1839. On June 24, at Nizib in southern Anatolia, the Ottoman army was again comprehensively defeated by troops under the command of Mehmed Ali's son, Ibrahim.[37]

This defeat came a week before the (unrelated) death of Mahmud and the investiture of his son, Abdulmejid: the promulgation of the Gülhane Decree followed a few months later. Among its probable aims, as Butrus Abu-Manneh has argued, was "to capture a moral lead over

[34] Butrus Abu-Manneh, "Mehmed Ali Paşa and Sultan Mahmud II: The Genesis of a Conflict," *Turkish Historical Review* 1, no. 1 (May 2010): 13–17; Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 47–55.
[35] Abu-Manneh, "Mehmed Ali Paşa and Sultan Mahmud II," 20–1.
[36] Bruce Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516-1918: A Social and Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 149.
[37] Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume 2, Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 49–51.

Muhammad [= Mehmed] Ali and to counter those who, out of despair, had come to hold the view that only Muhammad Ali could regenerate community and state."[38] This was a view that Mehmed Ali had actively sought to cultivate. The initial invasion of Syria was accompanied by a political initiative to win the support of provincial governors in Anatolia and the *ulema* in Istanbul and beyond for the deposition of the sultan. The detail of Mehmed Ali's plan is unclear, but he and Ibrahim cultivated support in the name of breaches of the Sharīʿa, and they framed their plan as a whole as "renewal of the sultanate" (*tecdid-i saltanat*).[39] It can be no coincidence that, about this time, the idea of Mehmed Ali as an agent of revival appears in Arabic. As we will see in the next chapter, in his account of his travels in Paris, published in 1834, Ṭahṭāwī praises Mehmed Ali as having "set his mind" to "restoring [Egypt's] former youth and reviving its faded splendor."[40]

Against the threat of being eclipsed by Mehmed Ali, the Gülhane Decree sought to reinvigorate the discourse of renewal and revival and in a sense to recapture it for Istanbul. However, in doing so, it consummated a transfer of the discourse of revival from the framework of the New Order, which had formed its basis since the late eighteenth century, to a policy agenda that differed significantly from the New Order. The decree was promulgated at a time when the Ottoman Empire had recently made a decisive shift towards economic liberalization, as enshrined the previous year in the Anglo-Turkish Commercial Convention agreed at Baltalimanı.[41] This Convention, which stipulated the elimination of barriers to British trade

[38] Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," 199.
[39] Abu-Manneh, "Mehmed Ali Paşa and Sultan Mahmud II," 17–20.
[40] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz* (Būlāq: Dar al-Tiba'ah al-Khidīwiyyah, 1834), 8.
[41] Feroz Ahmad, "Ottoman Perceptions of the Capitulations 1800–1914," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2000): 5; Deniz T. Kilinçoğlu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 18; Donald Quataert, "Part IV. The Age of Reforms, 1812–1914," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Halil Inalcik and Suraiya Faroqhi (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 825–6.

throughout the Ottoman Empire, is revealing of the intimate relationship between Ottoman economic liberalization and the need for European support to address the threat of Mehmed Ali. Although the shift towards economic liberalization had been developing since the late 1820s and reflected the influence of Ottoman officials who believed that free trade would be most beneficial to the economy and treasury,[42] the Convention of August 1838 was the immediate product of British pressure exerted in the context of a flare-up of the tension between Istanbul and Egypt, following a declaration of intent by Mehmed Ali to establish "independence" from the Sublime Porte in May of that year; relatedly, among its main aims from the British perspective was the opening up of Egypt to British trade.[43] The extent to which the Gülhane Decree was itself designed to garner strategic support from the European powers, as an assertion of the Sublime Porte's determination to reestablish control over the Empire, has been over-emphasized: it was principally intended for internal audiences, which it succeeded in impressing.[44] But without question the decree formed part of a new policy agenda—known in historiography as the Tanzimat—that involved a much greater degree of integration into the world market and a closer relationship with the European powers.

The combination of the discourse of revival with this new policy agenda, as crystallized in the Gülhane Decree, fostered an association between the concept of revival and the prospect of dramatic social change. In practice, the previous forty to fifty years had already witnessed considerable social and economic upheaval in Anatolia and, if anything, to an even greater extent in Egypt and Syria. In this context, the new policy agenda sought to stabilize and strengthen the

[42] Quataert, "Part IV. The Age of Reforms, 1812–1914," 825–6.
[43] Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 50. "Independence" may have meant "self-rule" within the Ottoman framework, rather than full independence, but this was still a provocative statement of intent; see Abu-Manneh, "Mehmed Ali Paşa and Sultan Mahmud II," 15–16.
[44] Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," 198–201; Abu-Manneh, "Mehmed Ali Paşa and Sultan Mahmud II," 22.

Empire by explicitly accommodating a degree of structural change. This is clear from the writings of key Ottoman bureaucrats in the decade or so prior to the issuing of the Gülhane Decree. In shaping the new agenda, they were making the case for a more profound degree of administrative and economic—which implied also social—change and transformation than had been projected in New Order discourse. This partly reflected the perception that the New Order reforms had not succeeded, at least not in Istanbul; no doubt, it also reflected a shift in these bureaucrats' sense of the horizon of political possibilities, owing to their own lived experiences of change. At the discursive level, the case for a more profound degree of change was articulated, on one hand, through intensification of the critique of the Ottoman past, over and above the critique that was expressed in New Order discourse, and, on the other, through a further elevation of the Sharīʿa as the ultimate foundation of order, which relied on distancing Ottoman customs and practices from the Sharīʿa as an abstract ethical ideal.[45] This latter component enabled the integration of the discourse of revival into the new policy agenda. Insofar as the new policy agenda was formulated more explicitly as a transformative program than the New Order had been, its integration with the discourse of revival implied a partial loosening of the relationship between the concept of revival and the cyclical conception of history that had previously underwritten it; and it formalized an association between the notion of revival and a program of change and transformation.

1.4 The Tanzimat reforms and revivalism in Egypt and Syria

The distribution of the Gülhane Decree around the Empire meant the transmission of the concept of revival in this precise context; that is, in association with a program for change and

[45] The account presented here is based on Topal, "From Decline to Progress," 102–42; within this, see especially, pp. 122, 106–12.

transformation. This combination of elements—the concept of revival in combination with an orientation toward dramatic change—formed the basis for the development of an association between the idea of reviving the past and the construction of the future in Arabic reformist discourse in the ensuing decades. This association developed both in Egypt and among intellectuals from Mount Lebanon based in Beirut; however, the reassertion of Ottoman power that the Gülhane Decree represented had differing significance for the social and political worlds of the two places, and this was reflected in particular features of revivalist discourse as it developed in each place.

In Egypt, owing in part to the fraught connection between the initial formation of the Tanzimat and the status of Egypt within the Ottoman Empire, but equally to the persistence of Egypt's quasi-independent status throughout the Tanzimat era, revivalist discourse did not come to identify the Ottoman sultan as the figurehead of revival. As we have seen, the Gülhane Decree was part of an attempt to curtail the power of Mehmed Ali's regime. On the whole the attempt succeeded: the Egyptian army in Syria was defeated by a joint Turkish, British, and Austrian and force in 1840, following a collapse in the morale of the Egyptian troops in Syria;[46] a treaty the following year officially stripped Mehmed Ali of his territories outside Egypt apart from the Sudan; and the Anglo-Turkish Commercial Convention was imposed on the country.[47] In the process, however, an important concession was made in the granting of hereditary rule over Egypt to Mehmed Ali.[48] This resolution of Mehmed Ali's relationship with the Sublime Porte was marked with official celebrations in Egypt, and the sultan's ultimate authority there thus

[46] Abu-Manneh, "Mehmed Ali Paşa and Sultan Mahmud II," 23.
[47] Afaf Lutfi Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 246–7.
[48] Abu-Manneh, "Mehmed Ali Paşa and Sultan Mahmud II," 22–3.

nominally restored.[49]

But this, of course, followed the attempt by Mehmed Ali to establish himself as the champion of revival. It is probably as a result of this fact, and the broadly related fact of Egypt's ongoing special status within the Empire, that the notion of revival in Egypt seems to be explicitly associated with local figures rather than the Ottoman sultan in the Tanzimat era. I have noted that the idea of Mehmed Ali as a reviver had found expression in Ṭahṭāwī's travel work already in 1834; Ṭahṭāwī's works of the late 1860s retrospectively amplify the framing of Mehmed Ali in such terms, as well as holding out "revival" as the ultimate possible achievement for Mehmed Ali's descendants, who by this time had been further ennobled in their status within the Ottoman Empire by the unique title of "khedives."[50] This framing of the ruling family appears in a range of other texts, and the language of revival is also extended to local figures of significance beyond the ruling family.[51]

This local emphasis of the discourse of revival reflects a number of important factors in the history of Egypt in the nineteenth century: the intensity and breadth of the experience of social and economic transformation and upheaval under Mehmed Ali, which ensured the primacy of the local state apparatus as the framework of reference for the expectations of social transformation that the term "revival" came to denote; on top of this, the self-representation of Mehmed Ali in terms of revival when he was at the height of his powers; and finally the lasting reality of Egyptian quasi-state power, which was largely a result of Mehmed Ali's state-building efforts. This should not, however, be taken to imply that the liberalizing economic and legal

[49] Adam Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism: The Ideology and Culture of Power in Late Ottoman Egypt* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), 35–6.
[50] Mestyan, 61–67.
[51] For example in the colophon to the 1866 Bulaq edition of Ibn Shākir's (1287–1863) *Fawāt al-Wafāyāt* (Addendum to "The Obituaries [of Eminent Men]"). Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020), 87.

transformations of the central Ottoman Tanzimat agenda did not have a profound impact on Egyptian society in general or on the Arabic discourse of revival in Egypt in particular.[52]

By contrast with the situation in Egypt, among intellectuals from Mount Lebanon, the concept of revival was explicitly associated with the figure of the Ottoman sultan and hence with the Tanzimat agenda itself. As we have seen, about ten years after the issuing of the Gülhane Decree, the idea of a revival under Abdulmejid, its promulgator, was being promoted by the renowned figure of Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī and the lesser-known figure of Ibrāhīm al-Najjār, and ten years after that by Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, a figure of similar stature to Yāzijī. The reception of the Tanzimat agenda was conditioned by the particular circumstances of the local social world. One important factor in the appeal of its language of revival was unquestionably the general disruption across Greater Syria precipitated by Ibrahim's occupation. As Ussama Makdisi has described, "while sanitation was improved, roads were secured, and various factions were disciplined, the policies of taxation, conscription, disarmament, deforestation, and corvée labor in mines exposed Ibrahim Pasha to revolts in Palestine, Syria, and Mount Lebanon that began in 1834 and continued until the collapse of the Egyptian regime in 1840."[53]

The disruption in Mount Lebanon was particularly intense, as Ibrahim's occupation created a rupture in traditional intra-elite allegiances, exacerbated relations between the elite and the commoners, and, to a limited extent, in an isolated instance, sought to secure its position by playing different religious communities off against each other. Since the sixteenth century, when the region was brought under Ottoman control, the social structure of Mount Lebanon had had

[52] The application of Tanzimat legislation in Egypt was a complex and uneven process, and one that was inflected by continuing contestation over the status of Egypt within the Empire. For a brief overview, see Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism*, 34–37; for a detailed account, see Ehud R. Toledano, *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[53] Ussama Samir Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 53.

two basic tiers, notable families and commoners, and was principally articulated along class rather than religious-sectarian lines.[54] The elite mainly comprised a mixture of Druze (a denomination of Islam) and Maronite Christian landowning families, and was headed by the Shihab family, which had held the Emirate of Mount Lebanon since the late seventeenth century, had a combination of Sunni Muslim and (by conversion) Christian branches, and was represented in the early nineteenth century by Bashir Shihab II (mentioned above), who maintained a mixed Christian and Muslim identity. Ultimate authority rested with the Ottoman governor in Sayda, but the mountain had a significant degree of independence and a distinctive social and political culture, wherein the elite families cooperated in securing the obedience of the commoners.

Ibrahim consolidated the occupation by forming an alliance with Bashir Shihab. However, the two most prominent Druze families initially stayed loyal to the Ottoman sultan, leading to their temporary expulsion from the mountain once the Egyptian victory over the Ottoman forces was complete.[55] More drastically, in 1838, following an anti-conscription rebellion among some of the Druze and a failed initial military expedition to put it down, Ibrahim adopted a strategy that included heavily arming Christian villagers to mount a brutal crackdown on the rebels. The Christian villagers were mobilized within a framework of loyalty and disobedience to the established authorities—not of religious antagonism—and following the violence the Christians were quickly disarmed, as an attempt was made to reinstate the pre-existing order of social relations.[56] That the basis for peaceable coexistence between the different faith groups of Mount Lebanon had not been altogether undermined is clear from the events of

[54] Ussama Samir Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 74–75.
[55] Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 42–47, 52–53.
[56] Mas'ūd Ḍāhir, *al-Intifāḍāt al-Lubnānīyah ḍidda al-niẓām al-muqāṭa'jī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fārābī, 1988), 98–101; Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 53–57.

June 1840, when a much broader anti-conscription rebellion arose that united Christian, Druze, Sunni, and Shiʿa villagers, as well as attracting the support of a number of shaykhs and the leader of the Maronite Church.

Reflecting a widespread experience of social breakdown, this broad-based rebellion of 1840 articulated its demands as the restoration of the old order under Ottoman rule.[57] Indeed, representatives of the Shiʿa, Druze, and Christian communities submitted petitions calling for this, in subtly different ways, to the Ottoman Sultan, and the French and British ambassadors in Istanbul respectively. The one addressed to the British expressly called for their intercession so that they could benefit from the provisions of the Gülhane Decree.[58] This rebellion was successful in that just a few months later, as mentioned above, an Ottoman, British, and Austrian coalition brought an end to Ibrahim's occupation.

However, far from spelling an end to conflict and social upheaval on Mount Lebanon, the process of "restoration" gave rise to increased friction, as competing definitions both of the old order and of the meaning of the Tanzimat came into conflict with each other. The framework for this contestation was marred by the involvement of European powers seeking influence for themselves and at the same time inclined to perceive the social dynamics of Mount Lebanon in terms of primordial sectarian rivalry; hence, a British proposal for a sectarian administration in early 1841, to include one representative from each of the denominations of Christianity and Islam practiced on the mountain.[59]

Such a plan could hardly have been further from "restoration" in the eyes of any of the parties. Druze leaders were concerned with regaining control of the properties and status they

[57] Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 58–59.
[58] Makdisi, 59, 194 n. 37.
[59] Makdisi, 61.

had lost through the Egyptian occupation: this was their understanding of the meaning of the Tanzimat, and they appealed to the British, with whom they had established an allegiance,[60] to support it. Meanwhile, the Maronite Church, directly involved in politics for the first time, sought to persuade Catholic European powers, particularly France and Austria, that Mount Lebanon was traditionally under exclusive Maronite control. In this, the Church was to some extent backing up the claims of Maronite villagers in Dayr al-Qamar, who interpreted the Tanzimat as meaning the end of their subjection to Druze control of the lands that they cultivated.[61]

In this context, a cycle of deadly intercommunal violence established itself on Mount Lebanon, which provided the immediate backdrop to the emergence of the discourse of revival among intellectuals from Mount Lebanon. A spontaneous dispute between a Christian and a Druze over hunting terrain in 1841 turned into armed conflict between members of their respective villages, leaving dozens dead. A truce was struck, but in response to reports that the new emir, Bashir Qasim (r. 1840–2), who had been installed following the end of the Egyptian occupation against the preferences of the Druze leaders, was coming to collect taxes, several Druze shaykhs mounted an armed operation against him in his seat at Dayr al-Qamar. This sparked off further violence that spread to other villages of the mountain, ultimately leaving hundreds of dead on both sides. This was a complex event, which had its roots in essentially social factors (Maronite peasants' opposition to elite Druze control of their lands) and political tensions (Druze leaders' resentment at the new dispensation of power), but which also assumed a novel sectarian dimension that had developed cumulatively, owing above all to the framework

[60] Kamal S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (New York: Praeger, 1965), 57–58.
[61] Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 61–63.

for contestation produced by outside forces.[62] In the wake of the violence, by a joint European-Ottoman initiative—but spearheaded by the Europeans—the mountain was partitioned along religious lines in December of 1842; this arrangement was entrenched in 1845, following another outbreak of violence in 1844. The partition only made matters worse, cementing the breakdown of intercommunal relations and leading to even worse violence in 1860.[63] The significance of these events is that it was this intense experience of social breakdown that grounded the enthusiasm for the "revival" proclaimed by the first Tanzimat decree, notwithstanding the fact that the process of "restoration," in which the decree was a central element, can be seen—in retrospect—to have aggravated social tensions, rather than provide a framework for mitigating or resolving them.

1.5 Christian missionaries and the discourse of revival in Mount Lebanon

The upheaval, finally, provided a golden opportunity to Christian missionaries from Europe and America to advance their programs around Mount Lebanon, by positioning themselves as purveyors of salvation in an utterly degenerate society, thus seeking both to exploit and indeed intensify the experience of the present as a site of devastation.[64] Catholic missionaries of various orders had been operating in the region since the late sixteenth century. The strongest presence had been that of the Jesuits, before the suppression of this order by the Pope in 1773.[65] The predominantly French order of the Lazarists were then installed in the region, largely as a proxy for French power.[66] Subsequently, following the reconstitution of the Jesuits in the early

[62] Ḍāhir, *al-Intifāḍāt al-Lubnānīyah*, 133–37; Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 63–66.
[63] Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 67–80.
[64] Makdisi, 88.
[65] Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon*, 13; Christine Beth Lindner, "Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, 2009), 83–86; Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 183 n. 46.
[66] Serkan Gül, "In the Service of God and France: The Syria Mission of the Lazarists in the Ottoman Empire," *Tarihçi* 1, no. 1 (January 2021): 168–70.

nineteenth century, members of this order returned to Mount Lebanon in 1831, in response to an appeal by the Greek Catholic Church of Syria to the Vatican the previous year, and to the delight of the Maronite patriarch. The reason for the appeal was the arrival on the scene of a new missionary force:[67] Protestants from the United States, who had arrived in Beirut and set up a station there in the early 1820s.[68] Following a tactical retreat to Malta at the end of that decade, the Americans returned in 1830 and established a strong presence in Beirut and parts of Mount Lebanon.[69]

Amid the upheaval of the Egyptian occupation and its aftermath, the missionaries cast themselves not only as sources of possible spiritual salvation, but more broadly as agents of a possible social transformation through the technologies and practices of "civilization." To this end, in competition with each other, the Catholics and the Protestants sought to provide the local population with useful services, such as medicine and, above all, education. The Americans began founding schools in the 1830s; the Lazarists reopened a defunct Jesuit institution in ʿAynṭūrā, to the north of Beirut, as the Collège Saint Joseph in 1834; and the Jesuits established a seminary at Ghazir, slightly further north, in the 1840s.[70] These were initially devoted to religious instruction, but the Catholics and the Protestants both soon began admitting non-ecclesiastical students in response to demand. To accompany their educational activities, the American Protestants also established an Arabic printing press in 1834 to disseminate their ideas.[71] Through their educational institutions the missionaries fostered the idea of a degenerate

[67] Caesar A. Farah, "A Tale of Two Missions," *Islamic Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1975): 75.
[68] The earliest Protestant missionaries in Mount Lebanon, around 1810, were British, but the Americans were ultimately much more influential. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 60; Hala Auji, *Printing Arab Modernity: Book Culture and the American Press in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2016), 18.
[69] Samir Khalaf, *Protestant Missionaries in the Levant: Ungodly Puritans, 1820-60* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 195–201.
[70] Khalaf, 200–3; Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 90; Gül, "The Syria Mission of the Lazarists," 173.
[71] Auji, *Printing Arab Modernity*, 35.

East, oppressed by Muslim tyranny and, in general, by sterile traditions; the Protestants also particularly emphasized the degeneracy of the Eastern Christianity, and its corruption by Roman Catholicism.[72] Among the Protestants furthermore, "revival" was a central concept in their understanding of their mission: the term appears in the writings of influential missionaries with reference to their activities in Syria.[73] The missionaries thus played a role in nurturing a conception of local society as empty and broken, in combination with the idea that a new world was close at hand, an idea that had obvious affinity with the revivalist rhetoric of the Tanzimat.

By virtue of the opportunities that they afforded, the missionaries were able to draw a wide range of young men and, less publicly, also women into their orbit.[74] The Protestants in particular forged relationships with numerous individuals who became major figures in the Arabic discourse of revival. Indeed, the Protestants' missionary activities were, in complex and various ways, themselves implicated in the formation of this discourse. Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819–1883), whom I discuss further in chapter 4, was recruited in 1840 to teach at the missionaries' school for boys in Beirut. The following year he secured a job as a translator at the missionary press,[75] and about this time he converted to Protestantism from the Maronite Catholicism in which he was raised and educated.[76] Along with a number of graduates from the boys' school and two of the American missionaries, Bustānī formed a religious discussion group in 1846 that called itself *Majmaʿ al-Tahdhīb* ("Refinement Council"). Also involved in this group was Nāṣīf

[72] Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 88–94; Khalaf, *Protestant Missionaries in the Levant*, 221–27.
[73] Eli Smith, "Mediterranean: Tracts from Mr. Smith's Report Concerning the Printing Establishment for the Year 1829," *Missionary Herald* 26, no. 6 (June 1830): 177. Cf. Khalaf, *Protestant Missionaries in the Levant*, 193, 197–98.
[74] On the latter, see, e.g., Anthony Edwards, "Revisiting a Nahḍa Origin Story: Majmaʿ al-Tahdhīb and the Protestant Community in 1840s Beirut," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 82, no. 3 (2019): 439; Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 196.
[75] Edwards, "Revisiting a Nahḍa Origin Story," 438.
[76] Yūsuf Q. Khūrī, *Rajul sābiq li-ʻaṣrihi al-muʻallim Buṭrus al-Bustānī, 1819-1883*, al-Ṭabʻah 1. (Bayrūt: Bīsān, 1995), 15; Edwards, "Revisiting a Nahḍa Origin Story," 441.

al-Yāzijī, who had been involved with the missionaries since the 1830s, as a corrector for the missionary press; an early work of his on Arabic grammar had been published on it.[77] Another member was Iskandar Abkāriyūs (1827–1885), a graduate of the Protestant boys' school who went on to publish books on the pre-Islamic Arabs and on Arabic poetry beginning in the 1850s.[78]

Majmaʿ al-Tahdhīb was devoted to matters of religion, and it seems to have been geared towards preparing its members for missionary activity.[79] It operated for just a few months in 1846; however, at the beginning of the following year, 1847, many of the same individuals were involved in the founding of the Syrian Society for the Acquisition of the Sciences and Arts, mentioned above as the venue for Yāzijī's lecture on the Arab sciences, in which he praised Sultan Abdulmejid's achievement of reviving them. This society was connected with the missionaries: its presidents were American missionaries, and a few of the missionaries contributed lectures at the society's meetings. But the impetus for the formation of the society came from the Syrians, and from the topics addressed—science, geography, history, and literature—it is clear that this was not a religious society.[80]

Despite American support for the Syrian Society, the fact that the initiative was driven by the Syrians reflects a dynamic that was widely operative in the relationship between the missionaries and their local associates, and one that must be appreciated for an accurate understanding of the place of the missionaries in the formation of the discourse of revival. This is that, while the missionaries sought to expand their sphere of influence in part through secular means, their persistent priority was the cultivation of a self-sustaining and expanding local

[77] Nāṣīf Yāzijī, *Kitāb Faṣl al-khiṭāb fī uṣūl lughat al-Aʿrāb* (Bayrūt: [s.n.], 1836).
[78] See section 4 below.
[79] Edwards, "Revisiting a Nahḍa Origin Story," 442–50.
[80] Khūrī, *Al-Jamʿīyah al-Sūrīyah*, 12, 131–32.

Protestant community. For the Syrians, by contrast, more worldly concerns were integral to their involvement with the missionaries all along. While a small number of the missionaries, most notably Cornelius van Dyck (1818–1895), were enthusiastic about the pursuit of secular knowledge among the Syrians, on the whole this was a source of concern for the missionaries.[81] Indeed, in the background of the formation of the Syrian Society is a clear illustration of this divergence of interests, in the missionaries' refusal to support an earlier initiative to use their press to publish a secular newspaper. Antonius Ameuney (1821–1821), an avowed Protestant who had both been a student of the missionaries and taught for them at the boys' school in Beirut, noted in his memoir that the Americans refused support for an Arabic periodical on the basis that it was not "of a controversial character," and that as a result of this refusal he focused his energies instead on the establishment of the Syrian Society.[82]

This divergence of interests is obvious in a broader way in the lives and careers of the individuals who shaped the discourse of revival. In the case of Yāzijī, for example, quite simply, he remained a Greek Catholic throughout his life.[83] In a different sort of case, Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq was the brother of Asʿad (1797–1830), whose conversion to Protestantism caused an immense scandal in the Maronite Church that led to his imprisonment and premature death within a monastery.[84] Aḥmad Fāris himself developed his own scholarly and literary career while in the employment of Protestant missionaries in Malta, where he adopted their faith—but only later to convert to Islam, before, in some accounts, confessing himself a Maronite on his

[81] Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 190–1.
[82] Anthony Edwards, "Serializing Protestantism: The Missionary Miscellany and the Arabic Press in 1850s Beirut," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2020, 15.
[83] It has been plausibly suggested that his involvement in the Refinement Council was an attempt to maintain the good will of the missionaries. Edwards, "Revisiting a Nahḍa Origin Story," 437–38.
[84] Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 103–37.

deathbed, though having requested a headstone marked with a crescent.[85] Even in the case of Bustānī, who remained a Protestant until his death and retained close ties of friendship at least with van Dyck,[86] from the late 1850s he directed his energies increasingly towards an anti-sectarian project of cultivating a form of ecumenical nationalism that ultimately put him at odds with the missionary establishment. Besides his publishing activities, the cornerstone of this project was the National School (*Al-Madrasa al-Waṭaniyya*) that he founded in Beirut in 1863. The Americans' refusal of support for this school—just as they were founding the Syrian Protestant College (1866), which became the American University of Beirut—along with the publication of an article criticizing the Maronite Church by the College's founder, Daniel Bliss (1823–1916), led to a breakdown of relations to the extent that Bustānī wrote an article in 1874 openly criticizing foreign schools.[87]

The broad point here is that, while the missionaries undoubtedly had an influence on the literary culture of Beirut in the mid-nineteenth century, it would clearly be wrong to regard this as an absolutely determining influence. It seems likely that the missionary spirit of the American Protestants—the aspiration to bring about a dramatic transformation of the world into which they had intruded—was indeed an important factor in the formation of the attitudes of the Syrian intellectuals towards their own social worlds. The desire for dramatic social transformation was a major element of the Arabic discourse of revival, as we shall see. But despite the fact that the American missionaries were products of the New England Protestant "revivalism" of the Second Great Awakening,[88] it seems clear from the passages that I cited above, in which "revival" is

[85] Aḥmad Fāris Shidyāq, *Leg over Leg, or, The Turtle in the Tree: Concerning the Fāriyāq, What Manner of Creature Might He Be*, trans. Humphrey T. Davies, vol. 1, 4 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 2013), xii–xvii.
[86] Khūrī, *Rajul sābiq li-'aṣrihi al-mu'allim Buṭrus al-Bustānī, 1819-1883*, 116–17.
[87] Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 207–11.
[88] Khalaf, *Protestant Missionaries in the Levant*, 4–21.

associated with the Ottoman Sultan, that the concept of revival in the Arabic discourse was itself derived directly from the rhetoric of the Tanzimat. In chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation, one of the strands of argument that I develop is that the aspirations expressed within this discourse more broadly were for the development of local strength and prosperity under Ottoman rule, thus close in spirit to those of the Tanzimat and ultimately at odds with those of the missionaries.[89] In the next chapter, I focus on the period immediately prior to the Tanzimat era to bring out the distinctiveness of the Tanzimat-era mode of engagement with the past.

[89] Cf. Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 197–98; Auji, *Printing Arab Modernity*, 35.

CHAPTER 2

"Where is he that built the pyramids?"

Living with Specters in Mehmed Ali's Egypt

Introduction: two modes of engagement with the past

امباني الاهرام كم من واعظ * صدع القلوب ولم يفه بلسانه اذكرتني قولا تقادم عهده * اين الذي الهرمان من بنيانه
Pyramids, how many a warner has transfixed hearts without speaking with his tongue? They reminded me of something spoken long ago: "where is he that built the two pyramids?"[1]

These are the opening two lines of a poem that features in the account of the pyramids in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ wa-Hidāyat al-Ḥukamāʾ* ("The Beginning[s] of the Ancients and the Guidance of the Sages," 1838 CE), a text that was read widely in the nineteenth century but has been little studied.[2] This is a composite work, combining translation from an eighteenth-century French text

[1] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ Wa-Hidāyat al-Ḥukama* (Būlāq, Miṣr: Dār al-Ṭibāʿah al-ʿĀmirah, 1838), 49. The translation is mine, as is the case in general below, unless otherwise stated. I have typed the Arabic as it appears in the text: final *yāʾ* without diacritics; generally no initial *hamza*s.

[2] In my fourth chapter I discuss a quotation from this text that appears (unattributed) in Buṭrus al-Bustānī's much-studied *Khuṭba fī Ādāb al-ʿArab* ("Lecture on the Culture of the Arabs," 1858). In my conclusion I discuss the appearance of passages adapted from this text in the first and third issues of the weekly journal *Al-Tankīt wa'l-Tabkīt* ("Comedy and Critique"), the "unofficial mouthpiece" of the ʿUrābi Revolution (1881–1882), as Juan Cole has described it in *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 123. As I also mention in my fourth chapter, part of the text formed the basis of Yūsuf Shalfūn's lecture on Greek mythology delivered before *al-Jamʿiyya al-ʿIlmiyya al-Sūriyya* ("The Syrian Scientific Society") in 1869; see Yūsuf Q. Khūrī, *Aʿmāl al-Jamʿīyah al-ʿIlmīyah al-Sūrīyah, 1868-1869* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥamrā', 1990), 197–202. The only somewhat extended discussion of the text in existing scholarship appears in Youssef M. Choueiri, *Modern Arab Historiography: Historical Discourse and the Nation-State*, Rev. ed. (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 20–22, who notes (p. 35, n. 5) that the Moroccan historian Aḥmad ibn Khālid al-Nāṣirī (1835–97) features a brief commentary on the work in an 1869 instalment of his history of Morocco: cf. Aḥmad ibn Khālid Salāwī, *Kitāb al-Istiqṣā li-akhbār duwal al-Maghrib al-aqṣá* (al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa-al-Ittiṣāl, 2001), 26.

on the history of ancient Egypt, the Near East, and Greece, with chapters on the lives of the prophets and the pre-Islamic Arabs from Abū al-Fidāʾ's (d. 732 AH/1331 CE) *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī Tārīkh al-Bashar* ("Abridged History of Humanity"), as well as a few passages of original writing.[3] The production of the text was a collaborative effort. Three students at the *Madrasat al-Alsun* (School of Languages) in Cairo were mainly responsible for translating the French text. The design of the whole was the work of this school's principal, the renowned Egyptian intellectual Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–1873), who edited portions of the translation and contributed the passages of original writing, including an extensive preface.

The piece of poetry that begins with the above lines is the first of several on the pyramids, and the section concludes with a number of other excerpts of poetry concerning Egypt more generally, mostly focusing on its landscape, in particular the Nile. The poem that begins with the above quotation is attributed in the text to "the judge ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Miṣrī" (fl. 755/1354) and, like the other poetry about the pyramids, it is drawn from the *Kitāb al-Mawāʿiẓ wa'l-Iʿtibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa'l-Āthār* ("Lectures and Lessons in an Account of the Lands and the Monuments") of the Egyptian historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442). The remainder of the excerpt describes the pyramids as "towering mountains that almost stretch from Saturn to Earth," and records their majesty and longevity, before six lines of questions in which alternative theories as to the original function of the pyramids are considered. The first of these run as follows:

هل عابد قد خصها بعبادة * حتى سمت في الجو فوق عنانه
او قائل يقضى برجعة نفسه * من بعد فرقته الى جثمانه
فاختارها لكنوزه ولجسمه * قبرا ليامن من اذى طوفانه

[3] I discuss the French sources in the next section.

Did a worshipper appoint them for worship,
so that they soared in the air over clouds?
Or did a speaker determine the return
of his spirit to his body, after its parting,
And so choose them for his treasures, and for his body
a tomb, to be safe from the harm of the flood?[4]

The excerpt then concludes with a somewhat elusive line about the effect of the pyramids on the viewer: "In the heart of one who sees them is a thought to know himself / that he clings to by the tips of his fingers."[5] The poem, I would like to suggest, invites the reader to consider the dimension of unknown-ness that attaches to the past and to its traces in the present.

Much later in his life, Ṭahṭāwī published another work of ancient history, this time a solo production, *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl fī Akhbār Miṣr wa-Tawthīq Banī Ismāʿīl* ("Lights of the Glorious Tawfīq: On Reports of Egypt and the Validation of the Sons of Ismail," 1868). This was a longer work, 550 pages compared with 270, with a wider array of sources. It is structured as a continuous history of Egypt from the earliest times down to the Islamic conquest in 641; further volumes were supposed to continue the narrative down to the present.[6] Across the work's long temporal span, it encompasses periods of Persian, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine rule, and Ṭahṭāwī gives accounts not just of conditions in Egypt under each of these empires, but also of the careers of the emperors in the various metropoles, particularly in the case of the Romans; he

[4] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 49.
[5] The version of this poem that appears in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* differs in three places from the version that appears in all editions of Maqrīzī that I have been able to consult, including the Bulaq edition of 1853 (vol. 1, p. 122). Two of the variants in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* have the effect of reducing the association between the pyramids and idolatry. Cf. Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-khiṭaṭ al-Maqrīzīyah; al-musammāh bi-al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-al-iʿtibār bi dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār, yakhtaṣṣu dhālika bi-akhbār iqlīm Miṣr wa-al-Nīl wa-dhikr al-Qāhirah wa-mā yataʿallaqu bi-hā wa-bi-iqlīmihā* ([Bulāq al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ṭibāʿah al-Miṣrīyah, 1270), vol. 1, 122.
[6] Ṭahṭāwī's account of the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, entitled *Nihāyat al-Ījāz fī Sīrat Sākin al-Ḥijāz*, was published posthumously as the second volume in the series in 1874. I have not been able to access the original publication, but the work has been reprinted in several editions; e.g. Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Nihāyat al-ījāz fī sīrat Sākin al-Ḥijāz*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥasan Maḥmūd and Fārūq Ḥamīd Badr, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb wa-Maṭbaʿatuhā, 1982).

also gives a lengthy account of pre-Islamic Arab civilization. The work features excerpts of poetry to a much greater extent than *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. In the latter work, poetry appears only in the section on Egypt, in Ṭahṭāwī's preface (a panegyric to the ruler of Egypt), and as an original part of the chapters drawn from Abū al-Fidāʾ. By contrast, in *Anwār Tawfiq al-Jalīl* poetry appears almost throughout the entire work—with one exception. The exception is roughly the first hundred pages, which deal with the geography of Egypt, including its "ancient remains" (*al-āthār al-qadīma*), and its first twenty ruling dynasties. The only part of the work that does not feature poetry is thus the part that contains precisely the two topics—and the only two topics—that Ṭahṭāwī supplied with poetry in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, namely the landscape of Egypt and the pyramids. The absence of poetry in the account of the pyramids is particularly remarkable, as the section contains a brief description in prose of one of the images of the pyramids that appears among the excerpts in the earlier work: regarding the two main pyramids of Giza, Ṭahṭāwī notes that "the poets have compared them to two breasts in the heart of the Egyptian lands."[7]

One possible explanation for the absence of poetry in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* precisely where there was poetry in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, and an explanation that coheres with the partial reappearance in prose of one of the excerpts, is that Ṭahṭāwī saw no reason to reproduce poetry that had already been printed. This cannot be right though, as we find excerpts of poetry being reproduced even between *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* and another work by Ṭahṭāwī that was published only the following year, *Manāhij al-Albāb al-Miṣriyya fī Mabāhij al-Ādāb al-ʿAṣriyya* ("Paths of Egyptian Hearts: On the Delights of Modern Culture").[8]

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[7] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl Fī Akhbar Miṣr Wa-Tawthīq Banī Ismāʿīl* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭbaʿat Būlāq, 1868), 46.

[8] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Kitāb Manāhij al-albāb al-Miṣrīyah fī mabāhij al-ādāb al-ʿaṣrīyah* (Būlāq: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Miṣrīyah, 1869). For examples of the same pieces of poetry in the two texts, compare Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Kitāb manāhij ʾal-ʾalbāb ʾal-Miṣrīyah fī mabāhij ʾal-ʾādāb ʾal-ʿaṣrīyah* (Miṣr: Maṭbaʿat Sharikat ʾal-Raghāʾib, 1912), 178, 201, with Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl Fī Akhbar Miṣr Wa-Tawthīq Banī Ismāʿīl* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭbaʿat Būlāq, 1868), 96, 171. Note that page references are to the 1912 edition of *Manāhij al-Albāb*.

There is a more plausible explanation—at least as to why, in the later work, Ṭahṭāwī did not include the particular piece of poetry partly cited above, the first and longest of the poems about the pyramids in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. "Where's the one who built the two pyramids?" As Ṭahṭāwī immediately points out, the hemistich is from a poem by Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (915–65) that continues, "What was his nation? What his day? What the place of death?"[9] In *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*, Ṭahṭāwī's account of the pyramids gives answers to the first two of these questions. Following a description of the dimensions of the pyramids and the precision of their construction, Ṭahṭāwī explains that, owing to the decipherment of hieroglyphics, the kings responsible for building each of the pyramids at Giza are now known to have been Cheops, Chephren and Menkaure, and that from "recent investigations" (*al-taḥqīqāt al-ḥadītha*) it has become apparent that they are of the fourth dynasty and from the twenty-ninth century BC, whereas previously these kings had been placed in the nineteenth century before the Hijra.[10] It is easy to see how the lengthy poem of questions about the pyramids, and indeed the accompanying excerpt of Mutanabbī, might have seemed out of place to Ṭahṭāwī in an account that provided fairly precise answers, at least to some of the questions that the poems raised.

But it would be a mistake to understand this as a simple case of a few new facts about the pyramids rendering a couple of pieces of poetry redundant. The argument that I want to make in this chapter is that Ṭahṭāwī's use of poetry in the Egypt section of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* forms part of a mode of engagement with the past and, more generally, a temporal experience that Ṭahṭāwī moved away from in the writing of *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*. A major aspect of this mode of engagement, I will argue below, is a relatively easygoing, even *laissez-faire*, relationship with

[9] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ Wa-Hidāyat al-Ḥukama* (Būlāq, Miṣr: Dār al-Ṭibāʿah al-ʿĀmirah, 1838), 49:

ما قومه ما يومه ما المصرع؟

[10] Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl*, 46–7.

the spectral dimensions of the past, as defined in my introduction to the dissertation; a relationship of coexistence with the ghostly capacities of the past. In this respect, the inclusion in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* of the two excerpts of poetry about the pyramids that I have mentioned establishes a relationship with the spectral that stands in stark contrast to the obsessively anti-spectral—and in this way haunted—modes of engagement with the non-present that Derrida critiqued in *Specters of Marx* (1993).

The tenor of these two excerpts is not simply that particular facts about the material remains of the past happen to be unknown at present; it is that in certain fundamental respects the past eludes the present, and is beyond its reach. On a number of occasions in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida makes an association between the desire to be done with the specter and the drive to determine its identity. "One must have the ghost's hide and to do that, one must have it. To have it, one must see it, situate, identify it."[11] The two pieces of poetry about the pyramids that I have mentioned convey an awareness of the ultimate futility of such an effort. The point of the series of questions in each of the poems is not that, in the particular, limited case of the pyramids, the basic facts happen to have been lost, but rather that this loss is characteristic of the past. In including these poems, Ṭahṭāwī is by no means suggesting that nothing can be known about the past, which would, of course, be absurd within a work of history, but he is drawing the reader's attention to the dimension of the past that is out of reach, and inviting the reflection that knowledge about the past is inevitably incomplete and imperfect. The poems do not explicitly evoke revenance—the return of the specter—as a potentiality of the past, but in gesturing at the past's ungraspability, they allow for the possibility that the past interacts with the present in ways that cannot be accurately predicted and may be difficult to identify. In bringing the reader to

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 165.

consciousness of the elusive qualities of the past, the poems cultivate an awareness and acceptance of the spectral as a dimension of the non-present. This sort of awareness and acceptance runs counter to the ghost-hunting attitudes that Derrida critiques in *Specters of Marx*, and marks a contrast with the mode of engagement with the past that Ṭahṭāwī adopts in his later works, particularly *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*.

There is no absolutely clear-cut line to be drawn between the respective modes of engagement with the past in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* and *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*, but there are a sufficient number of interrelated divergences to substantiate the idea of an overall shift between the two works. In the introduction to *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*, Ṭahṭāwī writes that "history is the mainstay of certainty and the negation of doubt, with its specification and determination: rights are known by it, covenants preserved, and that which is in the realm of the unseen brought forth into the realm of witness."[12] This idea of history as a domain of certainty, where "the unseen" is exposed, is characteristic of the text's relationship with the spectrality of the past. Whereas *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* takes a relatively laissez-faire approach to the spectral, *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* is, on a number of levels, an anti-spectral project, caught up in a tussle with ghosts, trying at once both to chase them away and to call them up. This is apparent not only in the treatment of individual events and topics, such as the pyramids, but also, indeed in particular, in the overall conceit of the work. As a continuous history of Egypt, the work seeks to exhaustively determine Egypt's past, which can be understood as an effort to exclude or eliminate the spectral. At the same time, insofar as it makes a strong call for the revival of ancient Egyptian civilizational strength, the work seeks to call up and reanimate a vague spectral past—which can also be understood as an attempt to conjure away the spectral, along the lines of Max Stirner's (1806–

[12] Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl Fī Akhbar Miṣr Wa-Tawthīq Banī Ismāʿīl*, 9.
فالتاريخ عمود اليقين والنافي للشك بما فيه من التخصيص والتعيين به يعرف الحقوق وتحفظ العود ويبرز ما في مقام الغيب الى مقام الشهود.

1856) idea of reembodying the ghosts of the past, discussed in my introduction to the dissertation (above). The ambivalent, uneasy relationship with the spectral capacities of the past in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* is characteristic of the discourse of nationhood, which this text takes up: the concept of the nation typically involves a claim to determinate historical integrity, impervious to anything so uncertain as the specter, but it is also often associated with the revival of the specter of ancient, lost glory. The nation can be understood, in both of these respects, as a concept that seeks to exclude the past's spectral powers by precisely defining the proper relationship between past and present in a given domain and hence ruling out any unpredictable, uncontrolled interaction between past and present. Finally, similar dynamics operate in the idea of "progress" as the underlying vector of historical change, which is adopted in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*. The doctrine of progress is anti-spectral in the sense that it purports to have identified the general rule of history as a whole. Indeed, it claims not only to have comprehended the past, but also to have determined the relationship between past, present and future as being defined by continuity of "progress." In its extension into the future, the idea of progress is spectral in the same way as communism is for Marx: it is a specter that needs to be stripped of its spectrality by becoming real.

Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ differs from *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* on each of these points. It does not purport to exhaustively determine any particular realm of the past, whether Egypt or anywhere else; it presents a conception of the homeland (*waṭan*) as a locus of personal significance, associated with life-giving nourishment and intimate affective experiences, rather than as the originary site of a cohesive transhistorical identity; and it cautions against the idea that progress is natural and inevitable. The difference between the two works in these areas is reflected in a further important difference, namely the way in which each text operates as a

dynamic intervention in their respective temporal worlds; that is, as projects of moral education. In its adoption of the idea of progress, *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* seeks to guide readers ethically with reference to a spectral goal in the remote future. The broad function of the past, on this model, is to determine the ultimate goal of human life, which is to serve as the principal determinant of ethics in the present. This ultimate goal is established through the fashioning of the past into a grand narrative that purports to demonstrate the inevitability of progress. By contrast, in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* the events of the past are presented as a direct source of ethical guidance in the present. On this model, the past is not used as a means to work out a remote future goal towards which ethics should be oriented: the events of the past are framed as models of possible events in the present, so that the experiences of people in the past can directly inform the living as to the best course of action in different possible situations. This mode of engagement with the past—drawing on the past as a source of direct exemplarity—reflects the text's relatively easy relationship with the spectral, in the sense that this mode of engagement is grounded in the assumption of the general iterability of past events. Whereas the grand narrative of progress limits the iterability of the past to the principle of progress, which implies a denial of the general iterability of the past, the exemplary mode of engagement is grounded in an expectation that the events of the past are, in a general sense, repeatable.

The main body of this chapter comprises an account of the conditions of production of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* followed by a close reading of the text that elaborates on the points outlined here: the admittance of spectral presences in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*; the conception of the homeland that goes along with this; the text's relation to the idea of progress; and its strategy of moral education. In the next chapter I return to the framing of history as the "mainstay of certainty" in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*. I argue there that the description of history in these terms

reflected the emergence of a new conception of history in Arabic around 1840, and that this conception of history was a major factor in the formation of the dominant mode of engagement with the past in Tanzimat-era Egypt and Syria. In the final chapter, I argue that the other major factor in this formation was the figuration of the region's remote pasts as symbols of a potentiality that the present was failing to realize.

1.1 *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, translation, and education in Mehmed Ali's Egypt

Bidāyat al-qudamāʾ was produced within the framework of a translation movement that saw at least 191 texts translated in Egypt and, in the vast majority of cases, also printed, overwhelmingly at Būlāq in Cairo, between 1819 and 1853.[13] The majority of these (111 items) were translated from French into Arabic, but a considerable minority (61 items) were rendered from French into Turkish, the language of the ruling elite in Egypt; the remainder were mostly translations between Turkish and Arabic in both directions (15 items), with a few early instances of Italian–Arabic translation and a single instance of Persian–Arabic.[14] This movement was linked to Mehmed Ali's state-building project, whereby, beginning in 1811, he oversaw a massive expansion of the army by conscription,[15] "established a central authority, brought about a control of trade and commerce, the total reform of agriculture, the establishment of industry, and finally expansion beyond the frontiers of his territory."[16] A key overarching aim of this

[13] Jamāl al-Dīn. Shayyāl, *Ta'rikh al-tarjamah wa-al-ḥarakah al-thaqāfīyah fī aṣr Muḥammad 'Alī / ta'līf Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl.* (Miṣr: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1951), Appendix, 6–36. Shayyāl's list notes three printing locations other than Būlāq: the war ministry (*al-jihādiyya*); the medical school at Abū Zaʿbal; and Raʾs al-Tīn in Alexandria. A small number of the earliest translations remained in manuscript, most famously a translation of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, on which see Elisabetta Benigni, "Translating Machiavelli in Egypt: The Prince and the Shaping of a New Political Vocabulary in the Nineteenth-Century Arab Mediterranean," in *Machiavelli, Islam and the East: Reorienting the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, ed. Lucio Biasiori and Giuseppe Marcocci (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 199–224.
[14] Shayyāl, Appendix, 38.
[15] Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 76–111.
[16] Afaf Lutfi Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 100.

project was to secure Mehmed Ali's quasi-independent status as ruler of Egypt within the Ottoman empire.[17] This was not only a matter of constraining the support of the Ottoman sultan for his continued tenure by the strength of his army, but also a question of staving off European control of Egypt. The main threat in this regard, after the ouster of the French with British assistance in 1801, was now Britain itself, which had attempted an invasion in 1807, and which made persistent efforts thereafter to gain free access to Egypt's markets, by pressuring Istanbul to force the opening up of Egypt's economy to British commerce. In line with the priorities of the state-building project, the largest category of works selected for translation was that of treatises on warfare (64 items, mostly French–Turkish); medicine and veterinary medicine were the next largest categories (34 and 22 items respectively; overwhelmingly into Arabic), reflecting the need for medical expertise in the army; the remainder were mostly in a wide range of technical disciplines, from agriculture and chemistry to engineering and accounting, largely into Arabic.[18] However, the single largest category of translated texts after veterinary medicine was that of history (14 items): two Arabic–Turkish translations in 1819 and 1833; one Italian–Turkish and three French–Turkish translations between 1829 and 1834; and eight French–Arabic translations between 1838 and 1850, including *Bidāyat al-qudamāʾ*.[19]

The immediate application of the translation texts was, for the most part, in new educational institutions founded as part of the state-building project, and in this respect *Bidāyat al-qudamāʾ* was no exception. Its publication date of 1838 places it in the context of the major education reforms of 1836–7. Mehmed Ali had been concerned with education as early 1811,[20]

[17] Sayyid-Marsot, 100. Cf. Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*, Rev. pbk. ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 65–72.
[18] Shayyāl, Appendix, 38. On the army's need for doctors, see Shayyāl, 18; Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, 89.
[19] Shayyāl, *Ta'rikh al-tarjamah*, 6–23.
[20] Aḥmad ʻIzzat ʻAbd al-Karīm, *Tārīkh al-Taʻlīm fī ʻAṣr Muḥammad ʻAlī,* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣrīyah, 1938), 82–92.

after his massacre of the Mamluks, the former powerholders in Egypt, set the stage for his consolidation of power.[21] These efforts gathered pace in the 1820s with the establishment of new military academies for the Turkish-speaking officers and, from the 1830s, schools of agriculture, medicine, engineering, accounting, chemistry, languages, and other fields, largely for (Arabic-speaking) Egyptian students, as well as primary schools and a "preparatory school" to feed the specialist institutions.[22] Some Europeans were employed in setting up these schools and as teachers, but the aim of the schools was ultimately to obviate the need for foreign assistance.[23] In an indication of the primary impetus behind these developments, the schools were initially under the authority of the war ministry (*dīwān al-jihādiyya*). This changed with the reforms of 1836–7, which established a ministry of education (*dīwān al-madāris*; lit. "of schools"), and provided for the founding of a new "preparatory school" and fifty primary schools across Egypt,[24] reflecting the increasing importance of Egyptians within the state over the course of the 1820s and even more so in the 1830s.[25] While meeting the practical needs of the state continued to be a central purpose of the new schools system as a whole, the reforms mark an official broadening of the educational mission: the first item of the 1837 statute that provided for the foundation of the new primary schools specified their purpose as both "providing and preparing students for the preparatory school and spreading the principles of the sciences among the communities [*nashr mabādiʾ al-ʿulūm liʾl-ahālī*]."[26] In 1839, in a letter to one of his men, Mehmed Ali himself described the aim of the education reforms as the "instruction and edification of the sons of the

[21] Khaled Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 34–7.
[22] ʿAbd al-Karīm, *Tārīkh al-Taʿlīm fī ʿAṣr Muḥammad ʿAlī,* 251–385.
[23] ʿAbd al-Karīm, 33; Archana Prakash, "Reappraising the French Role in Nineteenth-Century Egyptian Education," *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, no. 4 (July 4, 2018): 539–40.
[24] ʿAbd al-Karīm, *Tārīkh al-Taʿlīm fī ʿAṣr Muḥammad ʿAlī,* 173.
[25] Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 115.
[26] ʿAbd al-Karīm, *Tārīkh al-Taʿlīm fī ʿAṣr Muḥammad ʿAlī,* 172.

people" (*taʿlīm wa-tathqīf abnāʾ al-ʿibād*).[27] That the production of *Bidāyat al-qudamāʾ* was linked to the education reforms is clear from its preface, which explicitly claims that the work is "fit for use in the schools."[28]

The education reforms—and, hence, *Bidāyat al-qudamāʾ*—stood at the nexus of Mehmed Ali's state-building project, on one hand, and a distinct trend within the Arabo-Islamic intellectual tradition in Egypt, pre-dating the Mehmed Ali era, on the other. These two spheres of activity were brought into a relationship of mutual influence by the increasing importance of Egyptians of a particular class within the civil institutions of the state, which was itself the result of a complex of economic and political factors: not just the obvious availability of Egyptians to fulfil state functions, but more particularly the regime's need for legitimacy and its inevitable dependence on regional notables to maintain Egypt's agrarian economy. Unable to eliminate the power and influence of the Egyptian *ʿulamāʾ* (religious leaders), who actively opposed him on various fronts, such as his use of foreign merchants in the agriculturally crucial Nile Delta rather than Egyptian ones, Mehmed Ali established an allegiance with the charismatic scholar Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār (1766–1835), son of an immigrant to Egypt from the Maghrib.[29] Following more than a decade of travels within the Ottoman empire in pursuit of a wide range of studies, al-ʿAṭṭār had returned to Egypt in 1815 and quickly achieved renown as a lecturer at al-Azhar, the center of religious education and authority in Egypt since the tenth century CE.[30] Though apparently a somewhat isolated figure at al-Azhar, al-ʿAṭṭār developed relationships with members of the ruling class, which gave him a degree of influence at the Būlāq press in the 1820s and led to his appointment as editor of the government's Arabic gazette in 1829 and then as Shaykh al-Azhar

[27] ʿAbd al-Karīm, 35.
[28] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 7.
[29] Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism*, 114–20.
[30] Gran, 102–10, 123.

(principal of al-Azhar) in 1831.[31] Crucially, through his influence with Mehmed Ali, al-ʿAṭṭār was in a position to nominate one of his students, Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī, for the position of *imām* (spiritual guide) to the first delegation of students from Egypt to Europe in 1826–31,[32] which gave Ṭahṭāwī the platform to carve out an even more important role in Mehmed Ali's state on his return to Egypt. As the protégé of al-Aṭṭār, Ṭahṭāwī became a conduit for a critical and broadly classicizing trend within Islamic thought that had condensed in Egypt in the last third of the eighteenth century around the figure of Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (1732–91),[33] a prolific scholar of Indian origins and another charismatic teacher at al-Azhar, on whom al-ʿAṭṭār may self-consciously have modelled his own teaching persona.[34] The two major ways in which Ṭahṭāwī would transmit the influence of al-Aṭṭār were through the printing of classic works of Arabo-Islamic literature, starting in the 1840s,[35] and through the education of a host of cultural figures at the School of Languages (*Madrasat al-Alsun*), which he was appointed by Mehmed Ali to establish and lead in 1836.[36] It was at this school that *Bidāyat al-qudamāʾ* was produced, with the translation work assigned to three of the students.

Ṭahṭāwī's transmission of al-ʿAṭṭār's influence within Mehmed Ali's state-building project was mediated by his own experiences in Paris, and this can clearly be seen in the production of *Bidāyat al-qudamāʾ*. Ṭahṭāwī's time in France, like that of the students on the mission, was spent under the intensive supervision of the French geographer-engineer Edmé-François Jomard (1777–1862), one of the scholars who accompanied Napoleon's forces in the

[31] Gran, 125–7.
[32] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric, 1826-1831*, trans. Daniel L. Newman (London: Saqi, 2004), 39.
[33] Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020), 54–8.
[34] Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism*, 123.
[35] El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*, 71–9.
[36] Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism*, 131.

invasion of Egypt and remained there for the duration of the French occupation (1798–1801), before forging a career at the intersection of Orientalist scholarship and contemporary foreign affairs.[37] Jomard was appointed by Mehmed Ali to organize the education of the students from Egypt, having played a key role, according to his own (uncorroborated) testimony twenty-five years later, in promoting the idea of a student mission from Egypt to France from as early as 1811.[38] The works that Ṭahṭāwī went on to have translated into Arabic upon his return to Egypt were ones that he had been introduced to by Jomard and other teachers in France.[39] This includes the main source of *Bidāyat al-qudamāʾ*, which is not named in the Arabic but which I have identified as the *Abrégé de l'histoire ancienne, en particulier de l'histoire Grecque, suivi d'un abrégé de la fable* ("Abridgment of Ancient History, particularly of Greek history, followed by an abridgment of myth").[40] This is, in fact, a combination of two texts: Claude-François-Xavier Millot's (1726–85) *Abrége de l'histoire ancienne* (1777), abridged from the ancient part of Millot's nine-volume *Élémens d'histoire générale* (1772–3), with the addition of a geographical glossary; and Joseph de Jouvancy's (1643–1719) *Appendix de diis et heroibus poeticis* (1704), which was added to Millot's *Abrégé* in French translation (from Latin) in 1793.[41]

The undeniable influence of the student mission on the production of *Bidāyat al-qudamāʾ* raises the question of the extent to which not only this work but indeed the whole cultural movement that Ṭahṭāwī played a vital role in pioneering upon his return from Paris—the

[37] Yves Laissus, *Jomard, le dernier Egyptien, 1777-1862* (Paris: Fayard, 2004).
[38] Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris*, 27–8; Alain Silvera, "The First Egyptian Student Mission to France under Muhammad Ali," *Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 2 (1980): 5–6.
[39] Shayyāl, *Ta'rikh al-tarjamah*, 125.
[40] *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* has been mentioned in passing in a small number of works, often with slight errors of detail. The preface is discussed in Choueiri, *Modern Arab Historiography*, 20–1. Nowhere have its sources been identified.
[41] De Jouvancy's work was itself a Latin translation of Pierre Gautruche's (1602–81) *L'Histoire poétique pour l'intelligence des aucteurs et des poètes anciens* (Caen: Chez Iean Cavalier, 1660); cf. Charles George Herbermann et al., eds., "Jouvancy, Joseph De," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia; an International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, and History of the Catholic Church* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913).

beginnings of what would come to be known as the Nahda—was simply a product of French colonial efforts.[42] On the basis of Jomard's own writings on the student mission, in which he referred retrospectively to the students as a "*colonie*," and the fact that Napoleon himself had conceived the idea of an Egyptian student mission as a means of securing French influence, Shaden Tageldin has argued that "this *mission scolaire* was a *mission civilisatrice*: a direct descendant of Napoleon's colonial designs on Egypt thirty years earlier"; this is part of a broader argument that "colonial the shifts in early-nineteenth-century Egyptian culture surely were," and she is referring here to the activities of Ṭahṭāwī in particular, as arising from the student mission.[43]

There is no doubt that Jomard's attitude towards Egypt in general and towards the student mission in particular was that of colonizer in the familiar guise of civilizer.[44] There is also no doubt that the self-consciously colonial efforts of Jomard and others had a direct impact on the cultural shifts that Tageldin is referring to. It does not necessarily follow that Ṭahṭāwī's translation work and the student mission were "colonial," if this is to imply that they were determined by the agency of the colonizers or effectively complicit with their aims. This would be to suppose, for one thing, that Mehmed Ali was simply the dupe of the French in his educational initiatives and, hence, in his state-building project more broadly, which does not square with his obvious self-interest as would-be independent ruler of Egypt in strengthening his

[42] On the Nahda, see the opening section of the introduction to this dissertation.
[43] Shaden M. Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 110–11.
[44] He was not, however, acting on behalf of the French government: "The first educational mission of 1826 was not a French government effort to maintain influence in the eastern Mediterranean as historians have assumed. Rather it came to fruition through the efforts of a few ex-Bonapartists with tenuous links to the Restoration government following Napoleon's exile. Working without government support, these individuals saw the mission as a means to inspire a formal French cultural imperialism in Egypt, through which they would reap great personal benefit in the form of academic support and growth in Egyptological interest among their countrymen." Prakash, "Nineteenth-Century Egyptian Education," 538.

army and state. It would also be to suppose that Ṭahṭāwī's agency was fundamentally compromised, subverted, by the colonial designs that Jomard sought to effect—which is explicitly part of Tageldin's argument.[45] My main aim in the close reading that forms the bulk of this chapter is to elaborate on Ṭahṭāwī's mode of engagement with the past in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* with a view to describing the formation of a new mode of engagement with the past in Arabic literature over the course of the nineteenth century, but this close reading is also partly intended to be a refutation of the idea that Ṭahṭāwī's agency was effectively colonized, insofar as it demonstrates that Ṭahṭāwī's activities are to be understood with reference to Mehmed Ali's state-building project in his early work, to a nation-building project in his later work, and to concerns of his that do not conform to the colonial desires of his French teachers.

1.2 Beyond control: spectral presences in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*

One of the striking things about *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, given Ṭahṭāwī's status as pioneer of the idea of the Egyptian nation,[46] is the brevity of the treatment of ancient Egypt. This reflects the priorities of the French source, which was particularly focused on Greece, as its title indicates. But Ṭahṭāwī could have expanded the section on Egypt by drawing on other sources.[47] This was something that he did in other works of translation when he judged his source text to be unbalanced, as for example in his geography work of the same year, *Al-Taʿrībāt al-Shāfiya* (1838).[48] Indeed, he did this to a small extent in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, adding a paragraph at the

[45] See the subsection "Translating the Sovereign Self into Subalternity" in her chapter on Ṭahṭāwī: Tageldin, *Disarming Words*, 113–28.
[46] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 68–9; I. Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs : The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11; Yasir Suleiman, "Egypt: From Egyptian to Pan-Arab Nationalism," in *Language and National Identity in Africa*, ed. Andrew Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31.
[47] For example, the Egypt section of Louis-Philippe Ségur, *Histoire Universelle, Ancienne et Moderne.*, 10 vols. (Bruxelles, 1834), a text that Ṭahṭāwī had read in Paris; cf. Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris*, 293.
[48] Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 134–39.

end of the section that recounts the shifting of Egypt's capital from Memphis under the earliest kings to Cairo under the Fatimids, via Alexandria and Fusṭāṭ.[49] He also added a short appendix on Egyptian mythology at the very end of the work, after the translation of the French source's "*abrégé de la fable*," which was exclusively concerned with Greco-Roman myth.[50] Yet, even with these additions, the total number of pages on Egypt is just twelve, amounting to less than a fifth of the work as a whole.

Another striking thing about the section on Egypt is how little it seeks to idealize the ancient Egyptians as heroes of civilization. There are, to be sure, a couple of examples of this sort of idealization, the strongest of which concerns the inventions of the ancient Egyptians. Here, the Arabic is slightly more emphatic as to the significance of the achievements of ancient Egyptians than the French:

الفضل على المصريين خصوصا في الشهرة انما هو للعلوم والفنون فان استعمال الحديد والنار مكث مجهولا للناس دهرا طويلا بل واغلب الناس كان لا يعرف الخبز فلا اعجب من اختراع هذه الامور العظيمة المنافع واختراع آلة الحراثة ينسب الى اوزريش وهي احدى الأسباب العظيمة المستعملة في نفع الجنس البشري عموما بحيث ان علم الحراثة هو الذي ولد **التمدن** بين الناس قاطبة.[51]	The Egyptians particularly owe their renown to the sciences and the arts. The use of iron and fire remained unknown to people for a long time; indeed, most people didn't know bread, and there is nothing more amazing than the invention of these immensely beneficial things. The invention of the plough is attributed to Osiris. This is one of the great means used to benefit the human race in general [*ʿumūman*], as knowledge of the plough is what gave birth to **civilization** [*al-tamaddun*] among people as a whole [*qāṭibatan*].

[49] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 52.
[50] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 269–71.
[51] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 49.

C'est aux arts et aux sciences que les Egyptiens doivent sur-tout leur célébrité. L'usage du fer, l'usage même du feu, ont été long-temps inconnus aux hommes. L'usage du pain l'est encore à la plupart des peuples. Combien ne faut-il donc pas admirer les auteurs de tant de précieuses découvertes! On attribuoit à Osiris l'invention de la charrue: c'est un des plus grands services rendus au genre humain, puisque l'agriculture a fait naître la société civile.[52]	The Egyptians owe their renown above all to the arts and the sciences. The use of iron, the use of fire were for a long time unknown to men. The use of bread still is to most peoples. How therefore could one not marvel at the authors of such precious discoveries! The invention of the plough was attributed to Osiris: this is one of the great services rendered to the human race, as agriculture gave birth to civil society.

With the addition of the modifiers that I have underlined in the Arabic and in my translation of it, the text of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* stresses the universality of the significance of the achievements of ancient Egypt to a greater degree than the French. It is arguable that the choice of *tamaddun* ("civilization") for the French "*société civile*" has a similar effect, and the same may be said of the alteration of tense in the sentence about bread: the shift from present to past ("most people didn't know bread") implies that the Egyptians made the difference.

But the majority of the section gives a thoroughly mixed account of the ancient Egyptians, and in several places is sharply critical of them. In the final assessment of their achievements, the Arabic makes little attempt to soften Millot's harsh verdict:

[52] Claude-François-Xavier Millot and Joseph de Jouvency, *Abrégé de l'histoire ancienne en particulier de l'histoire grecque, suivi d'un Abrégé de la fable, a l'usage des élèves de l'ancienne École royale militaire*, 10th ed. (Paris: Chez Genets, 1813), 9.

وقد اطرى في مدح هذه الامة كثير من المؤرخين ونهاية القول فيهم انهم كانوا ذوي معارف عظيمة وخصال صلحية وبر بوالديهم بحيث انه ينفذ ما قضى به والدوهم ولا يحبون نقض العوائد الثابتة، ولكن كانت هممهم فاترة وكانوا ارباب جبن وبدع ويحتقرون كل ما لم تجربه عادتهم، وبسبب ذلك لم تبلغ علومهم درجة كمال.[53]	Many historians have lavished praise on this nation. The final word on them is that they had immense knowledge, along with peaceable qualities, and reverence for their parents, such that their parents' judgments remained in force over them, and they didn't like criticizing established customs. But their ambitions were slack. They were masters of faint-heartedness and heresies, and they disdained everything that custom hadn't tested. On account of this, their sciences didn't reach the level of perfection.
Ce peuple célèbre a donc été trop vanté par ses admirateurs. Il avoit des talens et des vertues pacifiques, un grand respect pour l'autorité paternelle, un attachement inviolable aux coutumes établies ; mais il étoit mou, lâche, superstitieux, esclave de ses préjugés, méprisant tout ce qu'il ne pratiquoit pas, et dès-lors incapable de rien perfectionner.[54]	This famous people has, therefore, been excessively praised by their admirers. They had talents and peaceable virtues, a great respect for paternal authority, an inviolable attachment to their established customs; but they were indolent, cowardly, superstitious, slaves to their prejudices, despising all that they did practice, and hence incapable of perfecting anything.

The Arabic is slightly more restrained than the French. Whereas the French explicitly claims that praise of the ancient Egyptians has been excessive, the Arabic simply indicates that it has been abundant; and the statement in the French that the Egyptians were "*incapable de rien perfectionner*" is rendered as the more limited claim that "their *sciences* did not reach the level of perfection," which dispenses with the contention that they were "incapable" of perfection. But even despite these modifications, given the critical tenor of this and other similar passages, and the paucity of idealizing passages, *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* can hardly be construed as an effort to construct a glorious ancient past for Egypt.

Ṭahṭāwī's major strategy of modifying the French source text in this section, namely the

[53] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 51.
[54] Millot and Jouvency, *Abrégé*, 12.

incorporation of excerpts of poetry, pulls in a quite different direction. The poetry about the pyramids, my main focus in this section, works to admit the past's spectrality into the text, not in anxious pursuit of the reanimation of lost potentialities and the ultimate elimination of the spectral capacities of the past, but rather to foster a form of coexistence with them.[55] The poetry about Egypt, which I address in the following section, models a relationship with the homeland that coheres with this type of relationship with the spectral capacities of the past. In both cases, albeit in different ways, the poetry works to express and cultivate awareness of the limitations of human powers of control. The poetry about the pyramids does this by representing the world in which humans live as one that they cannot fully understand, inhabited as it is by the remains of past worlds that in certain ways elude their grasp. The inability to comprehend these remains implies a limitation on the human power to control the past. This might seem an insignificant limitation, insofar the remains of past worlds are lifeless objects that ostensibly pose no threat to the living. But without the possibility of complete epistemic mastery over the past and its traces in the present, such remains are potentially a source of great anxiety and instability for human societies, not merely as sites of particular uncertainties on the part of a given society about its

[55] It is safe to assume that the poetry in the Egypt section was placed in the text by Ṭahṭāwī, although the main work of translating the ancient history part of the French text was undertaken by one of his students. This assumption is based in part on clear evidence that Ṭahṭāwī introduced other material into the translation in the ensuing section on the Tyrians [*al-Ṣūriyyūn*], namely a story about the origins of Tyrian purple dye, which we can be sure was interposed in the text by Ṭahṭāwī, because the same story appears in his earlier work: Rifā'ah Rāfi' Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz* ["Extracting pure gold: Paris condensed"] (Būlāq: Dar al-Tiba'ah al-Khidīwiyyah, 1834), 5–6; cf. Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 54.The assumption is founded also on the frequency with which Ṭahṭāwī features poetry in his writings in general. Finally, by contrast with the other translated parts of *Bidāyat al-Qudamā'*—the glossary and the summary of myth—no translator is listed at the beginning of this part. This would be explained by my contention that the production of this—by far the largest—part of the text was effectively a collaborative effort, with Ṭahṭāwī making edits and additions to a greater degree than elsewhere in the translation. We may still deduce that the initial translator for this part of the text was a man called Muṣṭafā al-Zarābī. His is the only name listed in the bibliographical material that is not credited with any part of the translation within the text; and his name is listed first, which lines up with the fact that, as well as being the largest, this part of the translation comes first: the other two names are listed in the same order as the parts of the work they translated. I have not been able to find further information on al-Zarābī other than that he went on to translate a work of medieval European history, Chrysanthe Ovide DesMichels, *Kitāb Qurrat al-nufūs wa-al-'uyūn bi-sayr mā tawassaṭa min al-qurūn*, trans. Muṣṭafa al-Zarābī (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah al-'Āmirah, 1846).

lived environment, but also, more profoundly, as symbols of the general condition of human society as being built on uncertain foundations. The poetry on the pyramids cultivates awareness of this condition, conjuring a way of living with the remains of the past in consciousness of this limitation on human powers of control, without trying to deny or defy it. The poetry about the landscape of Egypt, in a slightly different vein, conveys the dependence of humans on their environment, disclosing the ultimate precarity of human existence and, hence, the limits of human autonomy or, in other words, of the ability of humans to exercise complete control over their own existence.

In cultivating an awareness and appreciation of the limits of human powers of control, the poetry in this section strains against a tendency in the French text to fetishize and magnify these powers. We see the two main elements of this aspect of Millot's *Abrégé* in the above passages: glorification of human ingenuity, on one hand, particularly in service of mastering "nature"; castigation of perceived shortcomings of earlier peoples, on the other, particularly failures of "reason." These are two sides of the same coin in Millot, combining to effect a consecration of human rationality as a means of control that is founded on a sharp division between the forces of reason and those of unreason. Incidentally, this does not turn out to be a simple matter of Millot championing the Greeks by contrast with the "oriental" peoples, despite his deployment of classic Orientalist motifs in numerous places, including the above passage: irrationality proves to be a persistent, and for the most part irresistible, threat among the Greeks as well, repeatedly getting the upper hand over the forces of reason, as we will see below.

The sharp division between the forces of reason and unreason that Millot constructs was not itself subject to significant modification or resistance in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. In fact, it seems to have mapped onto a certain dimension of Mehmed Ali's state-building project: its

capacity as an effort to radically transform Egypt in part through coercion of the peasantry.[56] In his preface to *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, Ṭahṭāwī twice represents Mehmed Ali as having destroyed the tyranny of "superstitions" or "deluded beliefs" (*awhām*) in Egypt, which implies just this sort of division. Castigation of perceived irrationality can thus be understood to have had a distinct point in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, particularly if we remember that the text was partly geared towards the education precisely of a new elite tasked with carrying forth Mehmed Ali's ambitions.

But while there was no occasion for Ṭahṭāwī to diminish the source text's posture of anti-irrationality—as is to some extent apparent in the above translation of Millot's final verdict on the Egyptians—Ṭahṭāwī did challenge the other component of Millot's fetishization of human powers of control, drawing attention to the limits of these powers and challenging the fantasy of total control that Millot's text expresses. This is apparent on the first page of the Egypt section, which features a significant point of departure from the French text. In the French, a picturesque description of Egypt in summer and winter gives way to emphasis on the necessity of vanquishing nature to reap the Nile's benefits:

Pendant l'été elle ressemble à une mer parsemée de villes, de villages et de bosquets ; pendant l'hiver, c'est une plaine riante, couverte de moissons, d'arbres odoriférans, de troupeaux et de laboureurs. Mais pour qu'un peuple s'y formât des habitations au milieu des eaux, pour qu'il trouvât les moyens de profiter de la crue du Nil et d'en éviter les inconvéniens, il a fallu que les hommes fussent assez habiles pour vaincre les obstacles de la nature.[57]	During summer it resembles a sea sown with towns, villages, and groves; during winter it's a laughing plain, covered in crops, fragrant trees, cattle and laborers. But for a people to settle there about the waters, to find the means of benefiting from the rising of the Nile and to avoid its troubles, humans have had to be sufficiently skillful to conquer the obstacles of nature.

It is in the middle of the translation of this passage that Ṭahṭāwī first introduces a piece of poetry

[56] Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*; Kenneth M. Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants: Land, Society, and Economy in Lower Egypt, 1740-1858* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially chapter 7.
[57] Millot and Jouvency, *Abrégé*, 2.

into the text, two lines by the Abbasid-era poet Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 296/909):

وعند فيضان النيل على ارضها تراها كانها بحر نبتت به المدن والقرى والنخيل والأشجار المجتمعة واما في زمن الشتاء فتراها سهلا نضرا مغطى بالزروع والأشجار العطرة مزينة بالمواشى والحراثين ولله در القائل اما ترى الارض قد اعطتك زهرتها * مخضرة واكتسى بالنور عاريها وللسماء بكاء في حدائقها * وللرياض ابتسام في نواحيها ولكن يلزم للامة التي تبتغى التوطن وسط هذه المياه لاغتنام خيرات النيل وللتحصن من المضار ان تكون ذات مهارة ونشاط جدا حتى تدفع مضراته الطبيعية.[58]	When the Nile is in flood upon its [Egypt's] land, it will look to you like a sea in which towns, villages, palms and trees have gathered and grown. As for wintertime, it will look you like a fertile plain, covered in crops and fragrant trees, adorned with cattle and plowmen. How well, thanks to God, it was said: Surely, you see how the land has given you its green flowers, and its naked form has burst into blossom; The sky weeps in its parklands, and gardens smile in its vistas. But for a people that wants to settle about these waters, in order to take advantage of the Nile's benefits and to defend against losses, it's necessary for them to have much skill and energy to stave off its natural dangers.

Whereas in Millot's text the emphasis is squarely on human mastery as the foundation of prosperity, the poem in the Arabic presents the land, or "earth," as a vital, beneficent agent, and also animates the sky and areas of cultivation (gardens) with expressions of emotion. In drawing attention to the dependence of human life on other, non-human beings, Ṭahṭāwī indicates the limits of human autonomy and hence of human control over the conditions of human existence. The intensifying formula with which the excerpt begins seems to urge appreciation of this perspective on the reader, and the same perspective can be discerned in the prose. The French "rising of the Nile" becomes "the benefits of the Nile." The Arabic also tones down the opposition between man and nature, and the violence of this opposition, by rendering *vaincre* ("conquer," "overcome," "vanquish") with the more measured *dafaʿa* ("push back," "repel"), and by eliminating "nature" as an abstract noun in favor of the adjectival construction "natural

[58] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 44.

dangers," or "natural sources of harm." The Arabic is, at the same time, slightly more emphatic as to the demands that agriculture in Egypt places on humans, with "much skill and energy" expanding on Millot's "sufficiently skillful."

The use of this poem by Ibn al-Muʿtazz is distinguished by the fact that it is the only excerpt of poetry in this section that is not, in itself, specific to Egypt and does not seem to be drawn from another text about Egypt.[59] In this respect, the excerpt has a particular kind of legitimacy as a framework for interpreting the other selections, as there can be no suggestion that he was simply including excerpts that he found in a source on Egypt that he consulted for the purpose: the excerpt must have occurred to him spontaneously in the editing process. It will guide my interpretation of the other poems in the section: those about the pyramids, and those about Egypt more generally.

As regards the poetry about the pyramids, I made the case above, with reference to the first and longest of the excerpts, that it works to cultivate a relationship of coexistence with the spectrality of the past, and a link can be established between the way it does this and the effect of the Ibn al-Muʿtazz excerpt. The poem that I cited in the introduction to this chapter dwells on the unknown-ness of the pyramids, and it does so in such a way as to imply that the past is in important and major respects unknowable. The poem's abundant questions, which fill eight of its thirteen lines, confront the reader with this fact. The link between this and the effect of the Ibn al-Muʿtazz excerpt is that, in different ways, both convey that there are limits to human powers of control. The Ibn al-Muʿtazz excerpt does this by framing human life as dependent on other

[59] It appears in two compendia that were published later in the century: Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibshīhī, *Kitāb al-mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaẓraf* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Muḥammad Shāhīn, 1860), vol. 2, 275–6; Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan Nawājī, *Kitāb ḥulbat al-kamīt fī al-adab wa-al-nawādir al-mutaʿalliqah bi-al-khamriyāt* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibāʿah al-Miṣrīyah, 1859), 240. It seems likely that Ṭahṭāwī knew the poem from one of these, probably Ibshīḥī's as the more general work.

beings. The poem about the pyramids does this by contemplating the limits of human knowledge about the past or, in other words, the power of humans to understand the world which they inhabit, sharing it as they do with the traces of past peoples. To be clear, this is not about romanticizing or aestheticizing the unknown-ness of the past as an end in itself: rather, it expresses and cultivates a mode of consciousness that can be described as awareness or appreciation of limits to human powers of control. It is Millot's unlimited veneration of these powers that Ṭahṭāwī's admittance of the spectral into the text serves to modify—and not, to be precise, a positivistic mode of engagement with the past per se. For, in fact, as a late-eighteenth-century production, Millot's *Abrégé* does not quite display the vigorous positivism of nineteenth-century historiography. The fetishization of human powers of control in Millot is not articulated through the symbolism of complete epistemic control over the past, as it would be in nineteenth-century works of universal history,[60] but rather through explicit valorization of human rationality and human control over nature within the text's narrative of past events. It is this valorization that Ṭahṭāwī's admittance of the spectral capacities of the past in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* calls into question.

There are other ways in which the poems about the pyramids achieve this combined effect of conjuring the spectral without seeking to conjure it away, and at the same time cultivating awareness of the limits of human powers of control. Altogether there are four excerpts about the pyramids. While the two that I have mentioned so far—including the excerpt of Mutanabbī—achieve these effects principally by thematizing the unknownness of the pyramids, another does so by animating the pyramids and the Sphinx of Giza, called Abū al-

[60] For example, the sixty-seven volume *L'Univers: histoire et description de tous les peoples, de leurs religions, mœurs, coutumes, etc.* (Paris: F. Didot Frères, 1834–56), which was an important source for many of the works that I discuss in chapter 4.

Hawl (“Father of Terror”) in Arabic, with feelings of sorrow and loss associated with erotic experience:[61]

تامل هيئة المرمين وانظر * وبينهما ابو الهول العجيب كعمار بيتن على رحيل * بمحبوبين بينهما رقيب وفيض البحر عندهما دموع * وصوت الريح بينهما نحيب وظاهر سجن يوسف مثل صب * تخلف فهو محزون كئيب	Look at the site of the two pyramids and observe: between them is strange Abū al-Hawl. Like dwellers on a journey passing the night: two lovers and between them a watchman. The flood of water[62] is tears with them, the sound of the wind between them is weeping. The appearance of Joseph’s prison[63] is like a lover that was left behind, and is sad, dejected.[64]

The second half of the poem clearly associates the site of the pyramids with sorrow and, as readers of this poem, we are invited to see the pyramids themselves as quasi-subjects of this sorrow. As the poem has it, it is not simply that the pyramids elicit sorrow from the onlooker as, perhaps, he or she reflects on the ravages of time; rather, it is that in the presence of (*ʿinda*) the pyramids such organic features of the environment as “the flood of water”—probably a reference to the Nile—and “the sound of wind” become expressions of grief. The pyramids have a dynamic presence that apparently has the power to transform the surrounding environment. This dynamism is hinted at in the comparison of the monuments to “dwellers” on a journey, stopping

[61] Elliott Colla identifies the theme of loss as a key focus of classical Arabic treatments of the pyramids, with specific reference to al-Idrīsī’s *Kitāb Anwār ʿuluw al-ajrām fī’l-kashf ʿan asrār al-ahrām* (“Lights on Lofty Forms: Revealing the Secrets of the Pyramids”) in *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 88–91. He also (pp. 80–6) relates this aspect of representations of the pyramids in classical Arabic literature to the concern with ruins and time going back to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, as I do below, and situates Arabic accounts of the pyramids within the genre of *ʿajāʾib* (“wonders”) literature, which underlies a point in my analysis further below.

[62] “*Baḥr*,” which generally means “ocean,” can specifically refer to the Nile in Egypt.

[63] Joseph’s prison is identified in local tradition with sites near the pyramids, most famously with a small structure near the Pyramid of Djoser at Abu Sir, roughly fifteen miles from the Giza pyramids.

[64] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā’*, 50.

to pass the night: *ʿummār yabitna* ("dwellers passing the night") evokes the phrase *ʿummār al-buyūt*, which has the specific sense of "the jinn … that inhabit houses."[65] More specifically, the monuments' dynamism is associated with the erotic: they are figured to be in the throes of erotic experience. These erotic dynamics do not involve the imagined observer directly. Rather, the register of the erotic offers a way for the reader to appreciate the monuments as having their own distinct presence and force, one that exists in a state of erotic tension. In this mode of appreciation there is no prospect of fully grasping or comprehending these traces of the past. Erotic experience is an archetypally confounding form of experience in Arabic poetic tradition; so, to appreciate the monuments as subjects of erotic experience is to recognize and live with their enigmatic, unfathomable power. It is also, precisely, to recognize and be conscious of the limits of human powers of rationality and control, not simply because the erotic is emblematic of the non-rational—as is apparent in the figure of Majnun (literally, "Mad," "Jinn-possessed"), most famous of lovers in the Arabic poetic tradition—but also specifically because the figuring of these remains of the past as erotic subjects places them beyond the limits of these powers.

The mode of engagement with the monuments in this poem reflects the Arabic literary tradition of regarding the pyramids as *ʿajāʾib* ("wonders"), as is signalled by the term *ʿajīb* in the opening line. The last piece of poetry about the pyramids also invokes this tradition, beginning with the question, "In your life have seen a more wondrous [*aʿjab*] sight, among all that you've seen, the two pyramids of Egypt?"[66] The term "wondrous" here denotes the attribute of surpassing rational comprehension. Elliott Colla has explained that Arabic *ʿajāʾib* literature described both natural and man-made wonders with a view to eliciting the reader's amazement at

[65] Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, ed. Stanley Lane-Poole (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1955), 2156.

[66] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 50:

بعيشك هل ابصرت اعجب منظرا * على طول ما ابصرت من هرمى مصر

the divine act of creation. Specifically regarding the place of man-made marvels of the ancient world within this tradition, Colla has written that "by contemplating the unknown—and ostensibly unknowable—circumstances of their making, one might learn, by analogy, something about the mystery of divine creation. The marvel is thus foremost a concrete sign of creative agencies whose causes and workings lie beyond the pale of human reckoning."[67]

1.3 Intimate homeland: Egypt as classical *waṭan* in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*

The poems about the pyramids thus work in a way that is akin to the Ibn al-Muʿtazz poem. While the latter urges recognition of the dependence of humans on other beings and hence of the absolute contingency of human existence, the poems about the pyramids situate human beings in a world of pasts and presences that go beyond their powers of understanding and, in this way, bring the reader to consciousness of the limits of human powers of control. The poems about Egypt in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* with which the section concludes, actually overlap with the Ibn al-Muʿtazz poem in theme and effect, both implying a relationship of dependence between human beings and their environment, as in the following example:

كان النيل ذو فهم ولب * لما يبدو لخيد الناس منه فيأتى حين حاجتهم اليه * ويمضى حين يستغنون عنه
It's as if the Nile has understanding and sense in how it appears to the best of people: it comes when they need it and passes on when they don't.[68]

Much as the Ibn al-Muʿtazz poem did with reference to "earth" or "the land," the poem frames the Nile as a benevolent agent, and clearly implies that human beings depend on it for their

[67] Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 83.
[68] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 52–3.

welfare.

But this poem, and the others at the end of the Egypt section, introduce a new degree of specificity into the relationship between human beings and their environment. Whereas a description of the Nile's flood constitutes the context for the Ibn al-Muʿtazz poem, these poems actually refer to the Nile, as well as to other features of Egypt's landscape and social life. They thus raise the question of the conceptualization of the homeland in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. This is clearest in the following poem, which evokes the genre of Arabic love lyric (*ghazal*) to frame the bond between the human being and their homeland as an erotic and, indeed, exclusive one:

بالله قل للنيل عنى اننى * لم اشف من ماء الفرات غليلا وسل الفؤاد فانه لى شاهد * ان كان طرفى بالبكاء بخيلا يا قلب كم خلفت ثم بثينة * واظن صبرك ان يكون جميلا
By God, say to the Nile from me that I've not quenched my thirst at the waters of Euphrates, and ask my heart—it's my witness— if my eyes were poor in tears. Heart, how many a Buthayna did you leave behind there?[69] I consider your steadfastness beautiful.[70]

This poem goes beyond drawing attention to the dependence of humans on their environment in a general way and clearly imagines a form of attachment to a particular place.

From the way in which this *ghazal*-like poem and the other poems in this part of the text represent Egypt and the Nile, we can see that this form of attachment was grounded not in an identification with the particular place as the originary site of a cohesive transhistorical identity in which the poetic persona participates, but rather in a personal relationship with the place on the part of the poetic persona. An awareness of the particular place as having been an intimate

[69] Buthayna is one of the famous beloveds of Arabic lyric.
[70] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 52.

and personal source of sustenance seems to be one dimension of this relationship; in this sense, the conceptualization of the relationship with Egypt ties into the broader theme of the dependence of human life on other beings.

But the relationship has other aspects too. Egypt is not only conceived of as a source of sustenance in these poems, but also as the site of life's pleasures and delights. This is implicit in the framing of the Nile as the poet's beloved, but it also figures explicitly in a couple of slightly longer poems, one of which runs as follows:

سقيا لمصر وما حوت * من انسها واناسها ومحاسن في حسنها * تبدو او في مقياسها ومسرة كاساتها * تجلى على اكياسها وسطور قرط خطها الـــــــبارى على قرطاسها ودمى كنايسها ولا * تنسى ظباء كناسها ولطافة بجلالة * تبدو على جلاسها ونواسم كل المنى * للنفس في أنفاسها ومراكب لعبت بها الـــــــأمواج في وسواسها
Water upon Egypt and all it contains: its social life and its people, and charms that appear in its beauty or its measure, and joy whose vessels are polished upon its towels, and the lines of an earring which the creator drew on its page, and the images of its shy women, and not to forget the gazelles of its coverts, and gracefulness in majesty that appears at its gatherings, and breezes in whose breaths are all the hopes of the soul, and boats played with by the waves as they whisper.[71]

The poem is built on a traditional prayer-formula appealing for rain. In this respect, the poem as a whole implicitly expresses a form of deep feeling, if not love, for Egypt. Given how unspecific the images are, it seems clear that this deep feeling is rooted not in a conception of Egypt as being culturally unique, or even especially distinctive, but in direct personal experience. The point is not that what Egypt has to offer is fundamentally distinct from what anywhere else on

[71] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 53.

earth might have to offer (though the poem does not rule out that it could be), but that the feeling expressed in the poem is that of someone who has intimate personal experience of life in Egypt.

With one exception, which I discuss below, the poems on Egypt and the Nile in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* are drawn from a work to which Ṭahṭāwī had probably been introduced by Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār, the *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb min Ghuṣn al-Andalus al-Raṭīb wa-Dhikr Wazīrihā Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb* ("Breath of Scent from the Fresh Branch of al-Andalus and an Account of its Minister, Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb," 1629) by the Maghribī scholar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maqqarī (1577–1632), who was living in Cairo at the time he completed this work.[72] At least one of the poems also appears in the *Riḥla* ("Travels") of the fourteenth-century scholar and explorer Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304–69).[73] To varying degrees, all of the poems represent variations on an idiom of "yearning for the homeland" that can be traced to the early Islamic era, specifically to the poetry of the Umayyad era (661–750 CE).[74] The term for "homeland" here is *waṭan*, which developed the sense of "national homeland" later in the nineteenth century. Yaseen Noorani has summarized "the classical notion of the *waṭan*" in the following terms: "In pre-modern Arabic usage the term *waṭan* rarely has any political sense and is not often geographically precise, usually evoking a localized area of personal attachment on the scale of a neighborhood, town, or village … More important than geographical content in the pre-modern usage … is the subjective meaning of the *waṭan*, in the sense of its imputed essential place in the affective make-up of

[72] Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Maqqarī, *Kitāb nafḥ al-ṭīb min ghuṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb, wa-dhikr wazīrihā Lisān al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿah al-Azharīyah al-Miṣrīyah, 1885), vol. 1, 20–2. Cf. E. Lévi-Provençal and Ch Pellat, "Al-Maḳḳarī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, April 24, 2012, https://referenceworks-brillonline-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-makkari-SIM_4832?s.num=211&s.rows=100&s.start=200.

[73] Ibn Batuta, *Voyages de 'Ibn Batoutah: texte arabe, accompagné d'une traduction* (Imprimerie nationale, 1893), 69.

[74] Yaseen Noorani, "Estrangement and Selfhood in the Classical Concept of Waṭan," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 47, no. 1–2 (2016): 22–4.

individuals."[75] Although the above poems do not feature the term *waṭan*, they fit Noorani's description of the concept in both the imprecision of their treatment of Egypt and the Nile and—at least in the *ghazal*-like poem and to some extent in "Water on Egypt"—in implying that these places have deep psychological significance for the poetic personae.

Ṭahṭāwī's inclusion of these poems about Egypt in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* suggests that they represent a form of attachment to Egypt that was operative for him at this point in his life and career, and that their place in the text expresses this form of attachment and to some extent represents this form of attachment as a normative model. Against this supposition, it might be objected first that they derive from a text of a different era (that was itself drawing on earlier material), and second that he would surely have featured original compositions here if this conception of the *waṭan* was indeed operative for him. There are good reasons for dismissing this possible objection. First, there is no doubt that something approaching the classical notion of the *waṭan* that Noorani outlines was alive in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Egyptian culture, as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī features numerous contemporary poems unmistakably in this idiom in his chronicle.[76] Second, as for the fact that Ṭahṭāwī did not compose original poems for the section, this can easily be understood as a matter of genre: the inclusion of a newly-composed poem within a work of history would be a different matter from the incorporation of poetry by others, and centuries-old poetry at that. On top of these arguments, there is separate positive evidence that Ṭahṭāwī was imbued with this conception of the *waṭan* in this phase of his life. In his famous account of his time in Paris from a few years earlier, following a discussion of

[75] Noorani, 18. This way of thinking about the homeland was thus more transferable, in the sense that the longing for the homeland could be assumed to be essentially the same for two individuals from different places. This helps explain why it is not incongruous that they should have featured in the works of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and al-Maqqarī, both non-Egyptians.

[76] E.g. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jabartī, *ʿAjā'ib al-āthār fī al-tarājim wa-al-akhbār*, ed. Shmuel Moreh and David Ayalon (Jerusalem: al-Jāmiʿah al-ʿIbrīyah, 2013), vol. 2, 326–7.

the virtues of travel, Ṭahṭāwī assures the reader, "none of this belies the fact that love of one's native land is an article of faith" (*ḥubb al-waṭan min shuʿab al-īmān*),[77] citing therein a hadith (saying of the Prophet Muḥammad) that was to become an important point of reference in the formation of ideas of nationhood in the century.[78] He explains that travel "does not prevent the attachment of human being[s] to their *waṭan* and place of birth [*masqaṭ raʾsihī*], as this is a matter of instinct [*jibillī*],"[79] and proceeds to quote verses of poetry on the theme of longing for one's homeland.[80]

The currency of this conception of the *waṭan* in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* is significant in light of the identification of Ṭahṭāwī as a pioneer of the modern concept of the nation in Arabic. Noorani himself frames Ṭahṭāwī as such in a footnote, as well as making the point in the body of his article that the modern Arabic concept of the *waṭan* developed "through the transformation of the affective structure of the pre-existing *waṭan* literary topos."[81] As testament to a phase in Ṭahṭāwī's career when a version of the classical notion of the *waṭan* remained his principal frame of reference, *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* helps reveal aspects of what was at stake in the shift to the modern concept of the nation, in particular in terms of the mode of engagement with the past that each concept corresponded with. I have identified two main effects of Ṭahṭāwī's modifications of the French source of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*: the cultivation of a relationship of coexistence with the spectral capacities of the past and acknowledgment of the dependence of

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[77] Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris*, 128.
[78] As noted in U. Haarmann, "Waṭan," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, April 24, 2012, https://referenceworks-brillonline-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/watan-SIM_7891?s.num=153&s.start=140. The usual form of the saying is simply "*ḥubb al-waṭan min al-īmān*."
[79] Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, 17. My translation.
وهذا لا يمنع من تعلق الانسان بوطنه ومسقط رأسه فان هذا الامر جبلىّ.
[80] Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris*, 128–9.
[81] Noorani, "Estrangement and Selfhood in the Classical Concept of Waṭan," 18 and ibid. n. 4. Noorani mentions in the note that Ṭahṭāwī composed a number of "patriotic poems." He did this in the 1850s; cf. Adam Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism: The Ideology and Culture of Power in Late Ottoman Egypt* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), 45.

human life on other beings, both of which, in different ways, convey the limits of human powers of control. To propose a special correspondence between the acknowledgment of the dependence of human life on other beings with Ṭahṭāwī's conceptualization of the *waṭan* in this text would be misleading, as I have already suggested that Ṭahṭāwī represents Egypt and the Nile—that is, the *waṭan*—in terms that imply or make explicit that human beings depend on their environment: this element is embedded in the particular model of relationship with the *waṭan* that Ṭahṭāwī represents here, and it would be fatuous to propose a correspondence of a thing to an integral element of itself.

But the type of settlement with the spectral powers of the past that the poetry in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* cultivates does cohere in a significant way with the model of relationship with the *waṭan* that this part of the text articulates. By contrast with the insistence in the modern concept of the nation—not just in Arabic, but as a global phenomenon—on the historical integrity of the nation, and this as a matter of historical certainty, the classical Arabic notion of the *waṭan* makes no such intensive demands on the past. It is not concerned with reanimating a vague spectral past or the chasing away of the spectral that corresponds to such reanimation; it can easily coexist with the uncertainty that is a function of the past's spectral dimensions, and it readily accommodates the idea that the past is largely unknown. Indeed, Noorani emphasizes that, in its classical form, the *waṭan* is intrinsically saturated with loss through its association with childhood. This is in fact implicit in the representation of the relationship with the *waṭan* in the language of the *ghazal*, which as a genre is defined by a form of yearning that cannot be fulfilled or satisfied. The independence of this notion of the *waṭan* from history helps explain why Ṭahṭāwī should have seen no particular need to expand the section on Egypt.

1.4 The classical *waṭan* and Mehmed Ali's state-building project

There is, nevertheless, a connection to be drawn between the model of relationship with the *waṭan* that *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* seems to be working with and the character of Mehmed Ali's state-building project. This is that, without meaning to suggest that it is inherently elitist, this model of relationship is not one that depends to any extent on romanticization of "the Egyptian people" or indeed on any particular notions about or theorization of the general public as a unit. In this sense it was compatible with the elitist character of Mehmed Ali's state-building project, which, as I have noted, sought to radically transform Egypt in large part through coercion of the peasantry and in a way that involved the disruption of established networks of influence. I have suggested that the confrontation that this top-down reform process implied, particularly vis-à-vis the peasantry, may be reflected in Ṭahṭāwī's representation of Mehmed Ali as a smasher of *awhām* ("false beliefs," "superstitions") in the preface to this work. In fact, the theme of *awhām* reappears frequently in the body of the work, mostly in relation to ancient religious practices: in the sections on the Greeks,[82] the Indians,[83] the Tyrians,[84] and emphatically in the section on the Egyptians.[85] The particular emphasis on the *awhām* of the ancient Egyptians can be judged from a line in the section on the Tyrians, where it is written that "despite the abundance of their knowledge and commercial activities, they had *awhām*, but these were fewer than the *awhām* of the Egyptians."[86] The text thus gives the impression that *awhām* are a constant, general threat to society, allowing for the inference that top-down correction is needed to keep people on the right path. Supposing we read the emphasis on the *awhām* of the ancient Egyptians as somehow

[82] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 63, 105, 156.
[83] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 61.
[84] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 55.
[85] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 48.
[86] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 55:

ومع كثرة معارف الصوريين ومتاجرهم كانت لهم أوهام ولكنها اقل من أوهام المصريين.

prefiguring the *awhām* that Mehmed Ali is framed as confronting, and thus as affirming the need for his massive project of reform, it emerges that insofar as there is a characterization of the Egyptians as a people in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, it has a distinctly negative dimension.[87]

The particular emphasis on the *awhām* of the ancient Egyptians is carried over from the French text, which might seem to diminish its significance, but Ṭahṭāwī included a separate short passage on the character of Egyptians that is in line this reading. At the conclusion of the translated portion of the Egypt section, the text continues without a break: "and someone said that the Egyptians have skill in trickery and deception" (*wa-qāl baʿḍuhum inna li'l-Miṣriyyīn khibra bi'l-kayd wa'l-makar*).[88] The authority is not named, but is in fact al-Maqrīzī again, and the passage is a near-verbatim quotation.[89] The excerpt links the Egyptians' purported skill in trickery to the characteristic of cheerfulness (*bashāsha*), in which the Egyptians are said to surpass the ancients and the moderns, to a degree of excess beyond all nations (*ikhtaṣṣū bi'l-ifrāṭ fīhā dūna jamīʿ al-umam*).[90] To illustrate the proverbial status of this characteristic of the Egyptians, a poem by Abū Nuwās (756–814 CE) is quoted in which the poet warns the Egyptians:

تخصكم يا اهل مصر نصيحتى * الا فخذوا من ناصح بنصيب رماكم امير المؤمنين بحية * اكول لحيات البلاد شروب فان يك باق افك فرعون فيكم * فان عصى موسى بكف خصيب	My counsel concerns you, people of Egypt! Accept an offering from one giving counsel! The commander of the believers has thrown you a snake that eats and drinks the snakes of the country.[91]

[87] This does not contradict my account of the representation of the *waṭan* in this text, because "national character" is simply not a constituent of the classical conception of the *waṭan*.
[88] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 51.
[89] Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-khiṭaṭ al-Maqrīzīyah; al-musammāh bi-al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-al-iʿtibār bi dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār, yakhtaṣṣu dhālika bi-akhbār iqlīm Miṣr wa-al-Nīl wa-dhikr al-Qāhirah wa-mā yataʿallaqu bi-hā wa-bi-iqlīmihā* ([Bulāq al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ṭibāʿah al-Miṣrīyah, 1270 [1853]), 49.
[90] Al-Maqrīzī ascribes the purported skill to *malaq* (flattery) as well as *bashāsha*.
[91] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 52.

> If Pharaoh's falsehood remains among you,
> well, Moses' staff is in the hand of a Khaṣīb.[92]

Skill in deception does not imply false beliefs, but there is a clear link between the two in that both imply some sort of departure from the truth. Moreover, the poem explicitly invites the reading across of pharaonic-era falsehood into a much later era, just as I have suggested that the text might invite the reading across of the *awhām* of the ancient Egyptians into the Mehmed Ali-era. The poem also threatens the people of Egypt with a ruler that will not stand for falsehood, much as Mehmed Ali would not stand for *awhām*.

One way of reading the representation of the Egyptians as preeminently superstitious and also given to deception in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* is as an instance of Orientalist motifs making their way into Arabic literature through translation in circumstances of inequality. The quotation of the passage from Maqrīzī could be interpreted, on this reading, as an editorial decision that was influenced by the Orientalist representation of non-European peoples. My own sense is that such a reading would be only partially true. Millot's *Abrégé* is, as we have seen, extremely critical of perceived irrationality, and I suspect that it is this aspect of Millot's work that explains why his universal history, in which this aspect is even more pronounced, was promoted by the French revolutionaries for use in French public schools.[93] One of the formative influences on this critical attitude was the early modern European experience of obliterating civilizations in the Americas and the mass exploitation of other humans through enslavement to turn the discovered lands for profit: the denigration of destroyed or exploited forms of life as irrational could help to

[92] "Khaṣīb" is a reference to al-Khaṣīb ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, finance director of Egypt in 190–1/805–6; see Paul Balog, *Umayyad, ʿĀbbasid, and Ṭūlūnid Glass Weights and Vessel Stamps* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1976), 224–5.

[93] Matthias Meirlaen, "'Reaping the Harvest of the Experiment?' The Government's Attempt to Train Enlightened Citizens through History Education in Revolutionary France (1789–1802)," in *Free Access to the Past: Romanticism, Cultural Heritage and the Nation*, ed. Lotte Eilskov Jensen, Joseph Theodoor Leerssen, and Marita Mathijsen (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 247–79.

screen the disgracefulness of the enterprise from the consciousnesses of its agents. This rhetorical strategy of denigrating other forms of human life certainly informed much European Orientalism, but in the case of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* I think it makes more sense to understand the rhetoric of anti-irrationality and, specifically, the negative characterization of Egyptians not in terms of seduction by Orientalism, but in terms of the expedience in the context of Mehmed Ali's state-building project of depreciating those who needed to be coerced in order to bring about the desired transformation of society or, more generally, the expedience of cultivating the sense that strong, top-down authority was a necessity. One implication of this is that in framing the Egyptians in negative terms to the extent that he does, Ṭahṭāwī should not be regarded as expressing a sense of cultural inferiority that he might have internalized from his readings in European literature: he will unquestionably have considered himself one of the *khāṣṣa* ("elite"), and thus not implicated in the delusions of the masses. Rather, he is partially reusing a critical attitude that had a precise utility in the context of Mehmed Ali's state-building project: the formation of a particular kind of moral subject to implement this project, specifically a rationalistic, critical subject imbued with a kind of logic of reform. In making this connection, I am not proposing any sort of moral equivalence between, on one hand, the conduct of the European powers and European individuals in the New World and, on the other, Mehmed Ali's state-building project. For one thing, as I noted in my contextualization of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, this project was to a considerable degree mounted in an effort to resist the threat of European domination. For another, it did not entail anything like the massive degree of coercion and control that the domination of the Americas entailed.[94]

[94] This is notwithstanding the fact that, under Mehmed Ali, Egypt was itself an expansionist power, conquering and establishing control over several neighboring regions, most notably Syria (as discussed briefly in the previous chapter) and the Sudan. For a discussion of the categorization of this expansionism with reference to the Sudan, including an account of Ṭahṭāwī's view of Mehmed Ali's activities in this area, see Eve Troutt Powell, *A Different*

The partial reuse of the hypercritical, anti-irrational posture of the French text attaches, in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, to a strain of symbolism that has much deeper roots in Arabic poetic tradition. This is the representation of Mehmed Ali as a just king, holding off the perennial, cosmic threat of chaos. This strain of symbolism is instituted explicitly in the preface to the work, most clearly in Ṭahṭāwī's thirty-eight-line panegyric to Mehmed Ali. It is immediately prior to this poem that Mehmed Ali is referred to as "destroyer of the power of delusions" (*mubīd tamakkun awhām*). The poem reprises this image in a three-line sequence that binds together reason, the destruction of *awhām*, and triumph over *dahr*, which has the basic sense of "time" but is particularly associated with the malevolent and destructive capacities of time; it is frequently translated as "fate" and can also be rendered by "chaos":

يقول أناس طالع السعد حظه * وما السعد الا عقله وعقاله محا غيهب الأوهام قسرا بمصره * اما تبصر العرفان يسمو هلاله على الدهر نذر قد وفى فيه وعده * ببحر خضم قد روتنا سجاله
People say ascendant happiness is his [Mehmed Ali's] lot; and what is happiness but his reason and his men of reason? He has dispelled the darkness of delusions in his Egypt: don't you see the crescent of knowledge is rising? A vow against fate: he has kept his promise upon it, his bounties have watered us with an abundant sea.[95]

These lines show the integration of the language of reason and anti-irrationality with what is one of the fundamental motifs of classical Arabic panegyrics to rulers, namely the representation of the ruler as the guardian of order against destructive, cosmic forces, of which *dahr* is the

Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 38–54. See also P. J. Lane and D. Johnson, "The Archaeology and History of Slavery in South Sudan in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*, ed. A. C. A Peacock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 509–37. On Ṭahṭāwī's later development of "a racialist idiom in relation to the Sudan," see also Jeffrey Sacks, *Iterations of Loss: Mutilation and Aesthetic Form, Al-Shidyaq to Darwish* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 125–128.

[95] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 4.

archetypal example.[96] The reference to Mehmed Ali's *sijāl* ("bounties") having "watered us" invokes another major motif of this panegyric tradition, namely the framing of the ruler as the custodian of life and life-giving forces in opposition to the barrenness of chaos.[97] This is conveyed by the noun as well as the verb: the basic sense of *sijāl* (sg. *sajl*) is "bucket containing water," from which it developed the sense "gift."[98]

The picture of the cosmos that is laid out in Ṭahṭāwī's panegyric is the underlying foundation of the text's representation of irrationality/*awhām* as a constant threat. Understanding this helps to resolve what might appear to be an apparent tension in the text as analyzed here: between, on one hand, a strong posture of anti-irrationality, implying valorization of human reason, and, on the other, the cultivation of awareness of the limits of human powers and indeed, in the admittance of spectrality, the limits of human knowledge. One of the notable things about the representation of the just ruler as the essential bulwark against *dahr* in the tradition of classical Arabic panegyric is that the conflict between these two forces is interminable: "the Caliph can never ultimately defeat fate. Like the pre-Islamic hero he is enmeshed in constant warfare: unceasingly he is forced to reaffirm the divine order in the face of erupting chaos."[99] In this respect, it is perfectly consistent for Ṭahṭāwī to have drawn attention to the limitations of human powers, as I have argued above. The text does not conjure a fantasy of complete control by human beings over their environment.

1.5 Iterability and the spectral: the exemplary past in *Bidāyat al-qudamā*

The foundation of the text's attitude of anti-irrationality in the symbolism of the just ruler points

[96] Stefan Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 1977, 31–3.
[97] Sperl, 25–31.
[98] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1131.
[99] Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century," 32–3.

to the overarching aims of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* as an instrument of moral education, and its rhetorical strategy as such. Despite its highly centralized structure and disruptive methods of establishing state power, the horizon of Mehmed Ali's project for Ṭahṭāwī, as it appears in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, was unquestionably the general improvement of life in Mehmed Ali's domains. This was surely an important element of the text's operation as an instrument of moral education. As well as representing Mehmed Ali as the destroyer of *awhām*, Ṭahṭāwī states in the preface that the "benefit" of history is "general, for the elite and the masses" (*fa-manfaʿatuhu ʿāmma li'l khāṣṣa wa'l-ʿāmma*),[100] and the theme of "the common good" (*al-maṣlaḥa al-ʿāmma*) is one that recurs in the body of the text. In the Egypt section, for example, it is stated that the "Lake of Moeris, also called the Lake of Qārūn" is one whose "inventor is more greatly deserving of being remembered and glorified, as it was a common good."[101] The contrast being made is with the pyramids, which have just been described. Apart from the elaboration on the name, the Arabic closely follows the French here, but obviously this does not diminish the impact of the content. The positive valence of *al-maṣlaḥa al-ʿāmma* is reiterated in the section on the Greeks, where the phrase appears twice.[102] It is a translation of the French "*bien public*,"[103] but the term *maṣlaḥa* will have carried weight as a well-established concept of Islamic ethico-legal discourse, having served as a broad, generalized notion of human welfare in a variety of contexts since the 2nd/8th century.[104]

Both the way in which the text projects a horizon of improvement for Mehmed Ali's domains and the way in which it seeks to operate as a dynamic intervention in Mehmed Ali's

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[100] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 3.
[101] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 50.
وبحيرة ماريس المسماة أيضا بحيرة قارون.. فهى اعظم ما يستحق مخترعه ان يستمر ذكره ويدوم فخره اذ هى مصلحة عامة.
[102] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 72, 92.
[103] Millot and Jouvency, *Abrégé*, 10.
[104] Felicitas Opwis, "Maṣlaḥa in Contemporary Islamic Legal Theory," *Islamic Law and Society* 12, no. 2 (2005): 187–9.

project are of a piece with the text's approach to the spectral capacities of the past, as analyzed above, and mark a clear contrast with Ṭahṭāwī's later works. As regards the projection of a horizon of improvement, the crucial thing is its relationship to the notion of progress. In a complex way, without actually invoking the corresponding Arabic term, Ṭahṭāwī implicitly cautions against the idea that progress is natural and inevitable, while also affirming that general improvement of the conditions for human prosperity is possible. His implicit rejection of the idea that progress is inevitable ties in with the admittance of spectral presences into the text and, relatedly, the acknowledgment of the limits of human powers, for the following reason. The doctrine of progress—which consists precisely in the idea that progress is natural and inevitable—amounts, in a literal sense, to a rejection of the idea that the events of the past are generally repeatable; in other words, it rejects the iterability of past events. In this respect, it seeks to eliminate the spectral capacities of the past, insofar as these encompass the past's power to return, and it seeks to do this through the elaboration of a complete, comprehensive, foolproof account of the overall pattern of all human history, which presupposes that this sort of total binding of the past is within the scope of human powers of control. In the preface to *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, Ṭahṭāwī challenges the idea that progress is inevitable by emphasizing reversal and instability as essential features of human affairs. He goes on to represent the improvement of conditions for human prosperity as *possible*, but contingent on a mode of engagement with the past as a source of exemplarity, which is itself founded on the expectation of the iterability of the past. He achieves all this within what is the conventional form of a preface in a wide range of genres of Arabo-Islamic literature; that is, starting with praise of God and blessings on the Prophet before transitioning to the topic at hand.

Ṭahṭāwī's emphasis on reversal and instability features as part of the praise of God. He

begins by addressing God as the one who "revealed the heavenly books in writings and scriptures," which he acclaims as "disclosing [*musfira*] the best of reports [*akhbār*] and reports of the best." Ṭahṭāwī then identifies the main protagonists of these *akhbār* as "messengers and prophets, angels and chosen ones [*aṣfiyā*]," as well as "rebels and outlaws, tyrants and potentates," before elaborating on the content of the stories, as follows:

> How often you have taken responsibility for [*kam takaffalta bi-*] the story of entrustment and dismissal, lowering and raising, barring and giving, appointment and removal, morals and ethics, advice for rulers and kings, the adoption of religions, the changing of dynasties, the fluctuation of prosperity, the alternation of strengthening and weakening—praise be to you![105]

Other than "morals and ethics" and "advice for rulers and kings," all of the topics that Ṭahṭāwī lists are explicitly about reversal or instability in human affairs. The placement of these two exceptions in the middle of the list—with four items on either side—ensures that the abiding impression of this passage is the emphasis on reversal or instability. The abundance of types of reversal and instability that Ṭahṭāwī mentions conveys that, in the divine perspective, these are pervasive features of the whole spectrum of human affairs. Furthermore, Ṭahṭāwī's formulation that God has "taken responsibility for" stories of this sort affirms their veracity; to adduce other possible translations of the verb, God "stands behind" or "guarantees" these stories. Finally, the term "*akhbār*" evokes the genre of historiography, thus framing the characterization of human affairs in terms of instability and reversal as a truth of authentic historiography.[106]

Having emphasized reversal and instability in human affairs in the praise of God, Ṭahṭāwī shifts to the foundations for ethical conduct and the possibility of the improvement of

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[105] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 2:
قصصت فيها من انباء الرسل والانبيا * والملائكة والاصفيا * ما يكون تذكرة * ومن أحوال المتمردين والاشقيا * والجبارين والاقويا * ما يكون تبصرة * فكم تكفلت بحكاية تولية ونزع * ووضع ورفع * وحرمان وبذل * وتنصيب وعزل * وآداب وسلوك * ونصايح سلاطين وملوك * وانتحال ملل * وانتقال دول * وتداول اقبال * وتبادل اعزاز واذلال.

[106] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5, 42–3, and passim.

human prosperity in the ensuing section of blessings on the Prophet Muḥammad. The transition is effected through an avowal of revelation as the source of all knowledge (*ʿilm*), which gives way to an affirmation of the Prophet as the source of all guidance (*rashād*). Ṭahṭāwī proceeds to extol the Prophet, in particular his "law" (*sharīʿa*), which is clearly meant in the extended sense of "ethical system":

> His state [*dawla*; also, "dynasty"] surpassed the [other] states; his creed the creeds; indeed, his law [*sharīʿatuhu*] replaced the laws; and the sciences and crafts [*al-ʿulūm wa'l-ṣanāʾiʿ*] became established in it; and it exemplified [*sannat*][107] all that bestows benefit and profit; and turned away from everything else: it removed the veil from the virtues; and brought them out of concealment clear into view. It thereby attained all learning and elegance; and every ruler and sect turned to it.[108]

Ṭahṭāwī frames the Prophet as the most exemplary of human beings, specifically in respect of his unveiling of the Sharīʿa. In doing so, he broaches the issue of general improvement in human society, that is, in other words, the idea of progress: the phrase "sciences and crafts" (or "science and industry") specifically evokes the idea of progress, in that advances in these fields provided the foundation for development of this idea. And clearly, Ṭahṭāwī implies in the passage that general improvement in human society is possible: it has been made possible by the Prophet's example. This has the implication that such improvement is not a matter of inevitability or necessity; it depends on individuals following the Sharīʿa.[109]

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[107] Or "established," but cf. Lane, p. 1436, middle column, "set the example of"; and also *Lisān al-ʿArab*, p. 2124, "سننت لكم سنة فاتّبعو ها", where "follow" implies a prior act of "exemplifying."

[108] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 2–3:
فضلت دولت الدول * وملته الملل * بل نسخت شريعته الشرائع * ورسخت بها العلوم والصنائع * وسنت كل ما اجدى نفعا وربحا * وضربت عما سواه صفحا * فاماتت القناع عن المزايا * واطلعتها حسن الاطلاع من الخبايا * فبذلك حازت جميع المعارف واللطائف * وقصد اليها كل ساع وطائف.

[109] My contention that, at this point in his life, Ṭahṭāwī rejected the idea that "progress" was inevitable is borne out by other texts of his from this period. He implicitly refutes this idea in a complicated passage in *Takhlīṣ*, 53, = *Imam in Paris*, 183; and in translating Georges-Bernard Depping's *Aperçu historique sur les mœurs et coutumes des nations* (Paris, 1826), Ṭahṭāwī nowhere reproduces Depping's fully abstract notion of "progress" or "progress of civilization," but only ever writes of "progress *in*" a concrete domain, typically industry (*al-ṣanāʾiʿ*). Compare, e.g., Georges-Bernard Depping, *Qalāʾid al-mafākhir fī gharīb ʿawāʾid al-awāʾil wa-al-awākhir*, trans. Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī (Būlāq: Maṭbaʿat Būlāq, 1833), 33, 80, 95, with Georges-Bernard Depping, *Aperçu historique sur les moeurs et coutumes des nations* (Paris: Mairet & Fournier, 1842), 67, 172, 210.

Ṭahṭāwī is not suggesting in the above passage that Islamic civilization, as guided by the Sharīʿa, has been the exclusive source of earthly goods across human history. The claim is rather that the Prophet has exemplified all that is good, and that his Sharīʿa encompasses all that is good. The point, in this sense, is not that the Prophet is the only valid source of examples for humans, but that he provides the standard, or paradigm, of exemplarity; in other words, he is the foundation of exemplarity. This is the sense in which there is no "guidance" but that provided by the Prophet. His Sharīʿa is represented as determining what is beneficial to human society and what is virtuous but, of course, as a historically circumscribed event, the Prophet's life cannot provide concrete examples of all possible situations that humans might find themselves in. This is the function of history—not to provide examples of all possible situations, of course, but to expand on the examples of situations and events that have occurred, to give human beings in the present a greater repertoire of experience on which to draw in the effort to choose the correct action in any given situation. This conception of the role of history is grounded in the expectation of the iterability of past events.

The importance of exemplarity to *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* becomes clear in the section that immediately follows this, as Ṭahṭāwī turns directly to the subject matter of the book with the conventional transitional formula (*ammā baʿd*). Here he sets about affirming the value of history on the basis of a naturalistic account of human society that is closely derived from Ibn Khaldūn's account of human social organization and authority in human society at the beginning of the *Muqaddima*, beginning with the Aristotelian proposition that man is "social" (*madanī*) by nature.[110] The naturalism of the Ibn Khaldūnian account of human society provides a foundation

[110] The importance of Ibn Khaldūn to the thought of Ṭahṭāwī, with particular reference to his later works, is argued in a general way by Atoor Lawandow, "Situating Rifāʿah Al-Ṭahṭāwī within an Islamicate Context," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 51, no. 1–2 (April 6, 2020): 130–46.

for history's value as a means of expanding the experience of the living through examples. In a passage of great syntactical complexity, Ṭahṭāwī claims that history is crucial to understanding "that which the pursuit of his [viz. 'man's'] perfection consists in" and "the factors behind its preservation, change and transformation; and the basis of the ruler's condition in himself and vis-à-vis his subjects, and how to build up the cities of his domain," and so on.[111] Ṭahṭāwī contends that successful governance requires a ruler who is:

> experienced in reports [*akhbār*] and probed by biographies and histories until he is versed in the events of east and west and has imbibed from their breadth all manner of savors and draughts, and has returned from the visiting of [mere] likeness [*ṭurūq al-shibh*] to the people of memory [*ahl al-dhikr*], and raced to the ways of history with conviction and thought.[112]

This elaborate affirmation of the value of history serves as the preamble (and is in fact syntactically subordinate) to an affirmation of Mehmed Ali's commitment to history. The conception of the value of history as a means of expanding experience is by no means unique to this text. Al-Jabartī gives a similar appraisal in the introduction to his chronicle.[113] More generally, the specific emphasis on the importance of history as a means of educating rulers recalls the long tradition of classical Arabic literature that was framed as serving this purpose.

This importance of this conception of the utility of history is evident in the main body of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* in the recurrence of themes that have discernable exemplary significance. The theme of *awhām* can be placed in this category. Another such theme is the importance of "taking account of consequences" (*al-naẓar fī al-ʿawāqib*). This phrase appears eight times in the section on the Greeks, in all but two cases as something that different leaders failed to do. In half

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[111] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 3.
ما يكون به استجلاب كماله * ومعرفة أسباب حفظه او تحوّله وانتقاله * وما يكون عليه حال الملك فى نفسه او مع رعيته * وعمارة مدائن مملكته.

[112] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 3:
من للاخبار اختبر * وللسير والتواريخ سبر * حتى تضلع من وقائع المشارق والمغارب * وتجرع من محيطها بانواع الاذواق والمشارب * ورجع عن طروق الشبه الى اهل اهل الذكر * وهرع الى طرق التاريخ بالهمة والفكر.

[113] As cited by Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism*, 72.

of the cases, the corresponding phrase in the French "*imprudent*" and in another case it is "*prudence*" (but the Arabic is negated where necessary to give basically the same sense). In each of the three other cases, the corresponding phrase in the French is different. The Arabic translation works *al-naẓar fī al-ʿawāqib* into the text to render "*sans une folle témérité*," "*negocier avantageusement*," and "*prévoyant*." In the repetition of the same phrase, the Arabic provides a clearer point of instruction than the French: the reader of Millot might well pick up the importance of "*prudence*"; the reader of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* could not miss the insistence on *al-naẓar fī al-ʿawāqib*.

We can be sure that the particular emphasis on this principle was no accident. In the introduction to his travel work, *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz*, in the context of a general discussion of civilization, Ṭahṭāwī claims that the spread of the sciences depends on the patronage of the rulers, before explaining that "the might of the caliphs" has been eclipsed in recent centuries by "the power of the Franks" on account of "their skill, their organization, even [*bal*] their justice, and their technical know-how, versality and inventiveness in matters of warfare."[114] Ṭahṭāwī suggests that, were it not for the protection of God, then "Islam" would have been helpless (*ka-lā shayʾ*) in the face of European power, and he continues:

> There is a famous saying: "the most intelligent [*aʿqal*] kings are those who are most mindful of the consequences of things [*abṣaruhum fī ʿawāqib al-ʾumūr*]." This is why the Benefactor [Mehmed Ali] – may God the Exalted protect him – since he was made the ruler of the land of Egypt the victorious [*Miṣr al-Qāhira*] by God – praise be to Him the Exalted – has set his mind [*tanabbaha an*] to restoring its former youth and reviving [*yuḥyiya*] its faded splendor.[115]

This indicates that the concept of "taking account of consequences" was central to Ṭahṭāwī's

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[114] Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, 8. My translation lightly adapts Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris*, 113. وقد تشتت عز الخلفاء وانهدم ملكهم.. وقد قويت شوكة الافرنج ببراعتهم وتدبيرهم بل وعدلهم ومعرفتهم فى الحرابات وتنوعهم واختراعهم فيها.

[115] Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, 8. Again, my translation lightly adapts Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris*, 113. ومن المثل المشهور ان اعقل الملوك ابصرهم بعواقب الامور ولهذا تنبه ولىّ النعمة حفظه الله تعالى حيث ولاه الله ستحانه وتعالى على بلاد مصر القاهرة ان يرجع اليها شبابها القديم * ويحيى رونقها الرميم.

understanding of Mehmed Ali's project, and in particular to his understanding of this project as being in the best interests of Egypt.

The wording of this passage might be taken to indicate that the precise horizon of this project in Ṭahṭāwī's eyes was the revival of the perceived glories of *ancient* Egypt, which would be at odds with my analysis of the Egypt section of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* above. However, in referring to Egypt's "former youth" and "faded splendor," Ṭahṭāwī almost certainly does not intend a reference to ancient Egypt. The paragraph as a whole is concerned with the dramatic increase of European power in recent centuries and explicitly vis-à-vis Islam, and it is surely the youth and splendor of Egypt in the Islamic era that Ṭahṭāwī is referring to. In line with this, while Mehmed Ali is framed here in his principal role as ruler of Egypt, a little earlier in *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz* in the preface to the text, Mehmed Ali is described as spreading the "banners manners of might and justice" not just across Egypt, but also the Ḥijāz, the Sudan and Syria,[116] all of which he had conquered and which remained under his control.[117] The significance of Egypt for Ṭahṭāwī at this point, as I understand it, is principally as one of the historic capitals of Islamic civilization and thus as a fitting center for Mehmed Ali's rule; that is, rather than as the locus of national pride in itself.[118]

In a broad way, this clearly ties in with my argument above that the preface represents the Prophet's Sharīʿa as the foundation of exemplarity. There is little evidence that the exemplary dimension of the translated portion of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* was, in a thoroughgoing or systematic way, mediated by distinctively Islamic ethical considerations, but the text is certainly

[116] Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, 2; Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris*, 102.
[117] Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 196–232.
[118] The reference to him in the above passage as ruler of "*Miṣr al-Qāhira*" ("Egypt the Conqueror") is consistent with this interpretation: the word for "the conqueror" here is the name of Egypt's capital, and "*Miṣr*" ("Egypt") can itself refer specifically to Cairo.

nowhere in obvious conflict with Islamic principles, and there are in fact instances of the translation introducing Islamic concepts that do not correspond directly to anything in the French. For example, regarding the progress of decadence among the Athenians in the era of Pericles, the text reads: "The virtues of the Athenians continued to decrease, their vices to increase, until they reached the point of denying the existence of God, be He extolled and exalted. Every day, error and unbelief [*al-ḍalāl wa'l-kufr*] grew greater than before."[119] The corresponding passage in the French reads: "*La décadence des mœurs amenoit, pour les Athéniens, celle des principes, et l'athéisme pratique voyoit le nombre de ses sectateurs s'accroître tous les jours*."[120] The Arabic intensifies the impression of decline by expanding "*décadence des mœurs*" into decrease of virtues and increase of vices—but it also elaborates on the spread of atheism in terms of the growth of *ḍalāl* and *kufr*, which can be read as implying that it was when the Athenians were closest to the Sharīʿa, that they were most successful. Elsewhere, to similar effect, the Arabic refers to God as the cause of certain historical events or developments, when there no is no such reference in the French. For instance, following an account of the laws of Minos on Crete, Millot remarks, "*Il étoit réservé à d'autres Grecs de laisser à la postérité des modèles de législation*."[121] The equivalent sentence in the Arabic reads, "but God strengthened the Greeks after [Minos] with other men who left behind traces of the perfection of their laws."[122] Of course, the text also features examples of concepts in the French being rendered in terms that have a particular Islamic resonance, such as *ishrāk* ("associating God with partners") for "*impieté*."[123] In a particularly audacious instance of this, the

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[119] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 97.
وما زالت فضائل الاثينيين فى النقصان ورذائلهم فى الزيادة حتى وصلوا الى انكار وحود الله سبحانه وتعالى.
[120] Millot and Jouvency, *Abrégé*, 77.
[121] Millot and Jouvency, 30.
[122] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 69.
ولكن قد ايد الله اليونان بعده برجال آخرين بقيت بعدهم آثار اتقانهم فى احكامهم.
[123] Ṭahṭāwī et al., 97, 104; cf. Millot and Jouvency, *Abrégé*, 76, 88.

mythological dictionary at the end of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* is preceded by a short passage in which Ṭahṭāwī identifies the Greek gods and heroes with Arabic *jinn*, and also refutes the identification of Alexander the Great with Dhū al-Qarnayn, arguing that this figure was in fact to be identified with Herakles.[124]

1.6 Conclusion

The previous section has shown that *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* presented the events of the past as a source of useful examples for guiding action in the present. The text presents *al-naẓar fī al-ʿawāqib* as an important principle in this way, and likewise an attitude of anti-irrationality. The presentation of the past as conveying these principles was in part an expression of enthusiasm for the particular demands of Mehmed Ali's project, and in part an attempt to cultivate such enthusiasm among individuals tasked with furthering the project. This is transparent in the attitude of anti-irrationality, which I have suggested reflects the nature of the relationship between Mehmed Ali's state and the Egyptian peasantry. A somewhat similar thing can be said for *al-naẓar fī al-ʿawāqib*, or "the consideration of consequences": while, on one level, this simply expresses the value of thinking through the merits and demerits of any given possible action, on another level it can be understood as justifying a degree of disruption in the present for the sake of (positive) consequences. In this respect, this principle has in common with the attitude of anti-irrationality that both could serve to validate high levels of disruption in the present in service of the broader interests of the project at large. But despite this orientation towards the future in the principles purportedly being derived from the past, the past in *Bidāyat*

[124] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā'*, 119–20. Ṭahṭāwī reused this passage in the preface to his translation of Fénélon's *Télémaque*: François de Salignac de La Mothe- Fénélon, *Mawāqiʿ al-aflāk fī waqā'iʿ Tilīmāk*, trans. Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī (Bayrūt: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Sūrīyah, 1870), 24–5. Tageldin has analyzed the passage as an original production for this context in "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn: Trans-Mediterranean Fictionalities," *Philological Encounters* 2, no. 1–2 (2017): 139–158.

al-Qudamāʾ holds immediate exemplarity for the present; in other words, the past is presented as providing models for action that can be directly imitated. That is to say, for example, the text presents "consideration of consequences" in the past as a direct model for action in the present, reflecting its grounding in a sense that the events of the past are generally repeatable, which is itself an aspect of the text's relatively easygoing relationship with the spectral capacities of the past.

The mode of engagement with the past in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*—direct exemplarity—stands in contrast to a grand-narrative mode that established itself in Arab intellectual culture later in the century, including in the writings of Ṭahṭāwī himself, and was in fact an extremely widespread mode of engagement with the past in the nineteenth century across the globe. Both modes of engagement with the past seek to influence the behavior of individuals in the present. The distinction is that the grand-narrative mode does so by constructing a remote but inevitable future goal as the primary consideration in determining the proper forms of conduct for human beings in the present. The function of the past is not to provide direct models of conduct for individuals in the present, but rather to demonstrate the inevitability of a future goal that serves as the determinant of correct action in the present. The grand-narrative mode shapes the past as a whole into a narrative that purports to predict the inevitable course of the future, claiming to reveal the underlying principles of change in human civilization as a whole across time. Although the major contention of the grand-narrative mode is that the future is effectively predetermined in line with the predictions of the narrative, it nevertheless presents the act of striving to attain the predicted future as the essence of ethical conduct, which is to say the appropriate form of behavior for human beings in the present. In this respect, the grand-narrative mode preserves an element of direct exemplarity, but this is reducible to a single point: the

exemplarity of "progress." Other than this point, the grand-narrative mode tends to exclude the exemplary function of the past because it represents the entirety of the past as a process of basically linear change: the past ceases to be directly exemplary for the present because, on this model, it becomes a different world. In this sense, the general non-exemplarity of the past and likewise the general non-repeatability of the past are built into the specific exemplarity and infinite repeatability of progress.

The importance of the principle of "considering consequences" in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* foreshadows the shift towards the focus on the remote future in the grand-narrative mode of engagement with the past. But in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* this is still a principle—one among several—that is presented as having been operative in the past in a way that has direct exemplary force for the present. In this respect, it constitutes part of a mode of engagement with the past that is distinct from the grand-narrative mode. This distinctness is substantiated by other features of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* that correspond to this direct exemplarity in working to accommodate the spectral capacities of the past. One of these is Ṭahṭāwī's negotiation of the idea of progress in the preface, where he frames the improvement of human affairs as a matter of possibility on the foundations of exemplarity, as rooted in the exemplarity of the Prophet—and not a matter of inevitability or natural law. Another is the active cultivation of a relationship of coexistence with the spectral dimensions of the past in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* in the inclusion of poetry that imagines this sort of relationship. A final feature in this veing that I have outlined consists in the conception of the homeland that figures *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, where the homeland is conceived of as a locus of intimate personal significance and not as the originary site of a historically cohesive identity as in Ṭahṭāwī's later writings, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Identifying the precise operations of exemplarity in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, particularly in

the section on the Greeks, is important not only in order to understand the text's mode of engagement with the past, but also because there is scope for reading *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* as simply, if not essentially, a means of establishing the European idealization of the Greeks in Arab culture, and with it a Eurocentric account of civilization. The section on the Greeks opens in a way that could be used to support such a reading:

> The basis of the thought that their history is more beneficial [*aḥsan fāʾida*] than the history of the great empires of Asia is the bravery of its people; their defense of their liberty; the greatness of their stature; the perfection of their politics; the greatness and perfection of the engineering of their temples. Through this, this part of Europe has attained great renown, to the extent that ignorance of what they did and its results is considered a blemish and dishonor among men.[125]

The corresponding French passage characterizes the Greeks in more abstract and mythologizing terms. The first item is "*l'héroïsme de la liberté*," which the Arabic divides into two items: the more concrete "courage of its people" and the more circumscribed "defense of *their* liberty." It is possible that the relatively abstract "greatness of their stature" (*ʿaẓm shaʾnihim*), which has no parallel in the French, is meant to restore some of the grandeur of "*héroïsme*." The reference to the engineering of Greek temples is considerably more concrete than the corresponding French: "*les monumens du génie et des beaux-arts*." The attribution of dishonor to those ignorant of Greek closely follows the French ("*il seroit honteux d'ignorer*").[126]

Despite these modifications, the passage might still form the basis of a reading of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* as serving, above all, to import an idealizing picture of the Greeks into Arab culture and to facilitate a refashioning of Arabic historiography in Eurocentric form. Such a reading needs to be qualified by two points. The first is that, as the account of Greeks unfolds, it is far

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[125] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 62:
ما كان الظن بتاريخها ان يكون احسن فائدة من تاريخ ممالك اسيا العظيمة فشجاعة اهله وحمية حريتهم وعظم شانهم واتقان سياستهم وعظمة واتقان هندسة هياكلهم اشتهر بها هذا الجزء من أوروبا اشتهارا عظيما حتى صار الجهل بما صنعوه ونتايجه يعد عيبا وعارا بين الناس.

[126] Millot and Jouvency, *Abrégé*, 26.

less idealizing than this opening anticipates. I have noted that, of the eight instances of *al-naẓar fī al-ʿawāqib* in the section on the Greeks, all but two describe failures in this area; indeed, the air-headedness (*khiffat ʿuqūl*) of the Athenians in particular is a recurring theme; and the Greeks are by no means exempt from *awhām*. The second point is that, apart from the explicit claim that Greek history is more useful than that of the ancient powers of Asia, this opening is hardly more idealizing than accounts of the Greeks in earlier Arabic works. The sixteenth-century universal history of Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Dimashqī al-Qaramānī (d. 1610), for example, opens his account of the Greeks by framing them as "among the most rational of people" (*min aʿqal al-nās*), and he continues, "their kings were among the greatest [*aʿẓam*] of kings, and their state was among the proudest [*afkhar*] of states."[127]

My identification of the precise operations of exemplarity in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* makes clear that the text had a definite purpose other than simply idealizing European culture. We have seen that Ṭahṭāwī understood Mehmed Ali's state-building project as a necessity for restoring a more even balance of power between Islam and Europe. *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* presents the past as exemplifying principles that had a clear utility to Mehmed Ali's project. The main principles that I have identified are a critical attitude of anti-irrationality and a focus on consequences. Both can be linked to the radically transformative and, indeed, disruptive character of Mehmed Ali's state-building project. *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* does not idealize European culture per se, but it does repurpose a vigorously critical attitude and an appetite for the disruption of traditions that, I have suggested, can be traced genealogically to the European experience of destroying other cultures. This repurposing had, as one of its primary aims, the avoidance of destruction by one or other of the European powers.

[127] Ahmad ibn Yusuf Qaramani, *Hadha Kitab Akhbar al-duwal wa-athar al-uwal fi al-tarikh* (Baghdad: Matba`at `Abbas al-Tabrizi, 1865), 368.

But while I have suggested that this vigorously critical attitude of anti-irrationality has genealogical links to the experiences of early modern Europe, one of the overarching points that emerges from my analysis of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* in this chapter is the extent to which, in this text, Ṭahṭāwī expresses and cultivates a form of temporal consciousness that defies the logics of "modern" temporality. I put this in scare quotes to indicate that the association between the material practices of modernity and what became its dominant temporal regime—the narrative of "progress" and the paranoid relationship with the spectral capacities of the past that goes with this—should not be regarded as inevitable; indeed, *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, as I have analyzed it, illustrates precisely this point. Yet, there is a final point to be made in this regard, which is that there is one exception to the generally laissez-faire approach to the spectral in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*: Mehmed Ali is referred to in the preface as "the restorer of the civilization of Islam" (*muʿīd tamaddun al-Islām*), in an apparent instance of the kind of anxious revivalism that seeks to conjure away the spectral dimensions of the past by the full reanimation of the past, as discussed above. There is also an instance of this in one of passages of *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz* referred to above, where Ṭahṭāwī speaks of the project of Mehmed Ali as the revival of the faded glory of Egypt. While these might seem to undermine the general tenor of my argument, on closer examination each of these passages is exceptional in a certain way. In the *Takhlīṣ* instance, Ṭahṭāwī is making a narrow claim about the need to restore a more even balance of power between Europe and Islam, given the massive increase in relative European power in recent centuries, going back to the time of the conquest of al-Andalus "almost 350 years" earlier.[128] While the language is that of spectral revivalism, it has a precise significance here that distinguishes the sentiment from the increasingly loose, ever *more* spectral revivalism that

[128] Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, 8.

characterizes the discourses of nationhood, civilization and progress later in the century. In the instance in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, the appellation *muʿīd tamaddun al-Islām* is in fact attributed to "the kings of Europe" (*mulūk Ūrubbā*); it is preceded by the phrase "is he not called among them" (*aw laysa annahu yulaqqabu ʿindahum*). Of course, at one level, this is a token of the complicated and dangerous game that Ṭahṭāwī was playing, trying to rebalance power vis-à-vis Europe by so closely engaging with European culture. But as an exception to the approach to the spectrality of the past adopted in the rest of the text, it sets in relief the distinctness of the form of temporal consciousness that Ṭahṭāwī articulates in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* as a whole.

Finally, it seems conceivable that this particular distinctness may be tied to the apparent strength of Mehmed Ali's state-building project and the grounds for hope of Egypt resisting European domination that it seemed to afford, not least to Ṭahṭāwī himself as a key participant in it. In this respect, it is important to remember the precise context for its production. *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* came off the Būlāq press in July of 1838. Egypt had staved off direct European interference since 1807. Mehmed Ali had built an empire that was at its height, and he had yet to suffer any major reversals. Ṭahṭāwī had every reason to believe that Mehmed Ali could hold his own against the European powers. As it turned out, only a month after *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* was printed, relentless British pressure to undermine Mehmed Ali's regime and open up Egypt's economy to British commerce finally achieved its aim, in the striking of the Treaty of Balta Liman with the Ottomans. It was imposed on Mehmed Ali in 1841, and stripped him of his monopolies on large parts of the Egyptian economy and thus of his ability to maintain his empire.

CHAPTER 3

History as the "Mainstay of Certainty":

Arabic Historical Thought in the Tanzimat Era

Introduction: a new conception of history

In the opening pages of his history of Egypt, *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl fī Akhbār Miṣr wa-Tawthīq Banī Ismāʿīl* ("Lights of the Glorious Tawfīq: On Reports of Egypt and the Validation of the Sons of Ismail," 1285/1868), the Egyptian intellectual Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–73) presents the reader with a remarkable passage on the value and capacities of "history" (*al-tārīkh*), which he attributes to an unnamed scholar. It begins, "One scholar has said that history is a virtual return, because it brings back eras once they have passed, and it resurrects their people once their traces have gone and disappeared."[1] The passage appears at the beginning of a section entitled, "A foreword to the history of Egypt and an affirmation indispensable to the diligent student."[2] The scholar that he refers to is Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637/1239), author of several works on Arabic prose and poetry and advisor to some of the great political leaders of his day.[3] The source is his work *al-Washy al-Marqūm fī Ḥall al-Manẓūm* ("Stripe-Embroidered Cloth: On the Prosifying of Verse").[4]

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[1] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl Fī Akhbar Miṣr Wa-Tawthīq Banī Ismāʿīl* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭbaʿat Būlāq, 1868), 8:

قال بعض العلماء التاريخ معاد معنوي لانه يعيد الاعصار وقد سلفت وينشر أهلها وقد ذهبت آثارها وعفت.

[2] Ṭahṭāwī, 8.

تمهيد لتاريخ مصر وتوطيد لا غنى عنه للطالب المستفيد.

[3] He was also the brother of ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), author of one of the most widely-read Arabic universal histories, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* ("The Complete History"). F. Rosenthal, "Ibn Al-Athīr," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, April 24, 2012, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-al-athir-SIM_3094.

[4] The work had apparently not been printed in Arabic at the time that Ṭahṭāwī published *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*. Another, more famous, work of Ibn al-Athīr's had been, however: his *Al-Mathal al-Sāʾir fī Adab al-Kātib wa'l-Shāʿir* ("The Current Model: On the Discipline of the Writer and the Poet"), printed at Bulaq in 1282/1865–6. *Al-Washy al-Marqūm* was itself printed in Beirut in 1881 at Maṭbaʿat Thamarāt al-Funūn.

The passage by Ibn al-Athīr in *al-Washy al-Marqūm*, which runs to two paragraphs, and which Ṭahṭāwī quotes in full, ranges across several aspects of "history"—by which I mean here the study of the past, as opposed to the past itself. Ibn al-Athīr remarks, for example, that through history "those who are inexperienced" can gain "the faculty of experience." He notes that the importance of history is reflected in the fact that "none of the revealed books of God has been empty of it," and he states that prior to learning the arts of writing, the Arabs relied on oral preservation of history.[5] Both the idea of history as a means of gaining "experience" and the point about historiographical content in scripture were elements in the account of history with which Ṭahṭāwī had begun his earlier (collaborative) work, *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ wa-Hidāyat al-Ḥukamāʾ* (1838). As I argued in the previous chapter, this idea of history—as a framework for enlarging the scope of readers' experience through the exemplary function of past events—was fundamental not simply to the moral project of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, but to its overall mode of engagement with the past.

But the passage by Ibn al-Athīr also includes an array of rather more expansive claims about history, more in the vein of the opening line. Within *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* these serve as a platform for the introduction of an idea of history that differs in important respects from that which was operative in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. After making the point about experience, Ibn al-Athīr writes that in history one "encounters Adam and the nations that came after him, and so on; for, in it, though the bellies of their tombs have enclosed them, they are alive in the number of the present." Later, after his comments on the Arabs' initial dependence on oral history, Ibn al-Athīr concludes with a pair of rhetorical questions that seem to accord history an absolutely

[5] Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl*, 8–9; Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Washy al-marqūm fī ḥall al-manẓūm*, ed. Jamīl Saʿīd (Baghdad: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1989), 145–6.
وبه يستفيد ملكة التجارب من كان غرّا.. ولمكان العناية به لم يخل منه كتاب من كتب الله المنزلة.. وكانت العرب على جهلها بالقلم وخطه والكتاب وضبطه تصرف الى التاريخ جل دواعيها وتجعل له أوفر حظ من مساعيها وتستغنى بحفظ قلوبها عن حفظ مكتوبها.

fundamental place in human life: "Are humans [lit. 'the human'] anything but what the record of them has established and built? Would the form of their flesh and blood survive were it not for the survival of their significance?"[6] Building on these expansive claims, Ṭahṭāwī introduces an idea of history as a practice that produces firm knowledge of the past and thereby provides a solid foundation for human social life. With no indication that the quotation of Ibn al-Athīr has ended,[7] he writes, "So, history is the mainstay of certainty and the negation of doubt, with its specification and determination: rights are known by it, covenants preserved, and that which is in the realm of the unseen brought forth into the realm of witness."[8]

Ṭahṭāwī's framing of history in these terms—as "the mainstay of certainty and the negation of doubt"—is characteristic of a wider trend in Arabic historical thought of the mid-nineteenth century, roughly coextensive with the Tanzimat era (1839–1876), whereby a range of elite Arab intellectuals came to regard historical knowledge as an indispensable foundation of a prosperous and flourishing society. A similar sentiment was expressed, for example, by ʿAbdullāh Abū al-Suʿūd (1820–1878), who had completed some of the translation work for *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, and who later composed a lengthy work of ancient history in his own right, titled *Al-Dars al-Tāmm fī al-Tārīkh al-ʿĀmm* ("Complete Lesson in Universal History," 1872). In the course of a lengthy essay on history that forms part of the preface to this work, he wrote: "there's no doubt that history is a solid science [*ʿilm matīn*] and a powerful art [*fann makīn*],

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[6] Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl*, 8–9; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Washy al-marqūm*, 145–46.
ويلقى آدم ومن بعده من الأمم وهلم جرّا فهم لديه وقد ضمنتهم بطون القبور أحياء في عداد الحضور..
وهل الانسان الا ما أسسه ذكره وبناه وهل البقاء لصورة لحمه ودمه لو لا بقاء معناه.

[7] The standard indication for the end of a quotation is the letters "*āh*," denoting "*intahā*" ("end"). Ṭahṭāwī uses this frequently. In the present case, the final word of the quotation ends with the letters "*āh*" ("*maʿnāh[u]*"). It is possible, perhaps likely, that this occasioned accidental omission of the marker. It is also possible that the ensuing "so" ("*fa*") is being used to signal the transition in this case.

[8] Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl*, 9.
فالتاريخ عمود اليقين والنافى للشك بما فيه من التخصيص والتعيين به تعرف الحقوق وتحفظ العهود ويبرز ما في مقام الغيب الى مقام الشهود.

built on strong rules and firm, proper, correct principles."[9]

Focusing mostly on historiographical literature produced in Cairo, with occasional references to work produced in Greater Syria (*Bilād al-Shām*), I argue in this chapter that, in subtle but important ways, the framing of history in such terms was a novel development in Arabic historical thought. I argue furthermore that these developments underpinned a shift in the status of history as a source of ethical guidance, by which I simply mean a source of normative guidance as to the best way to act. Whereas previously the value of history as a source of ethical guidance had been contingent on an external set of ethical standards derived from the exemplarity of prophecy and the exemplary actions of prophets, I argue that history now came to be regarded and rendered forth as an autonomously foundational source of ethical guidance; that is, it was understood to have ethical lessons to convey that were independent of any other framework of authority. In line with a long-standing association between history and the education of rulers in Arabic literature (as in European literature), the type of ethical guidance that was understood to inhere most typically in the historical record was guidance for ruling elites.

Ṭahṭāwī's introduction of his account of history in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* via Ibn al-Athīr reflects two important points about the trend within Arabic historical thought that I describe in this chapter. One is that it did not entail a complete or even a drastic rupture with pre-Tanzimat-era traditions of Arabic historical thought. Ṭahṭāwī's use of a passage by an earlier authority to introduce his account of history represents this fact both symbolically and also in point of detail. I have noted that the passage by Ibn al-Athīr encompasses the idea that history is a means of

[9] ʿAbd Allāh Abū al-Suʿūd, *Kitāb Al-Dars al-Tāmm Fī al-Tārīkh al-ʿām al-Mulakhkhaṣ Min Kutub al-Tawārīkh al-Ūrūbīyah Wa-al-ʿArabīyah Fī al-Sāḥah al-Khidīwīyah : Li-Qaṣd Tadrīsihi Li-Ṭalabat al-ʿilm Bi-Madrasat Dār al-ʿUlūm al-Miṣrīyah* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭbaʿah Wādī al-Nīl al-Miṣrīyah, 1872), 22.

expanding experience, and that this was central to the mode of engagement with the past in Ṭahṭāwī's earlier, pre-Tanzimat-era work, *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. This idea, which had clearly been a staple of Arabic historical thought for centuries, continued to be expressed widely within Arabic historical thought of the Tanzimat era; indeed, I will argue that there is substantial continuity between this idea and the status of history as an autonomous foundation of ethics. On a broader level, the notion of history as a kind of hard science that developed in the Tanzimat era in fact represented only a subtle shift in the status of history as a field of knowledge within Arabic thought. This is because history had enjoyed the status of a science (*ʿilm*)—albeit not uncontroversially—going back centuries in Arabic thought, especially but not exclusively in its capacity as a branch of religious learning.[10] The difference was not that history was now classified as a science (*ʿilm*) for the first time in the history of Arabic thought; it consisted more specifically in the degree of certainty that was now associated with historical knowledge.

The second point is that the passage by Ibn al-Athīr indicates a fundamental tension at the heart of Tanzimat-era Arabic historical thought. While Ṭahṭāwī's description of history as "the mainstay of certainty and the negation of doubt" conveys an idea of history as a domain of solid fact, the passage by Ibn al-Athīr introduces layers of complexity into the matter. In framing history effectively as a means of raising the dead, it points to a paradoxical connection between the notion of history as a domain of certainty, on one hand, and the pursuit of a sort of full-blooded encounter with the past, on the other. The paradox is that, insofar as it promises solid and certain knowledge of the past, the notion of history as a hard science is all but intrinsically

[10] See, e.g., the translation of the ninth/fifteenth-century Egyptian scholar Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī's (d. 902/1497) *Al-Iʿlān bi'l-Tawbīkh li-man Dhamma Ahl al-Tawrīkh* ("A Declaration in Rebuke of those who Impugn the Historians") in Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952), 202. = Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *al-Iʿlān bi-al-tawbīkh li-man dhamma ahl al-tawrīkh*, ed. Sālim Ghatar Sālim al-Ẓufayrī, al-Ṭabʿah al-ūlá. (al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Ṣumayʿī lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2017), 87.

linked with a drive to recover the past that tends towards the fantastical; more so than, say, a notion of history that foregrounds the limits of certain knowledge about the past tends to do.

Within the overall plan of the dissertation, the significance of the developments that I describe in this chapter is that they were major factors in the formation of a new mode of engagement with the past in the Tanzimat era, one that was characterized by just such a pursuit of the complete recovery of the past. I refer to this mode of engagement with the past as "revivalism," in reflection of the centrality of the concept of "revival" (Ar. *iḥyāʾ*) to it. In the next chapter, I analyze this mode of engagement with the past in detail. In the present chapter, I trace one of its key foundations in the development of a new conception of history in Arabic thought that formed the basis of Ṭahṭāwī's sense of history as the "mainstay of certainty."

2.1 History as the "mainstay of certainty"

2.1.1 Two aspects: epistemic certainty and independent ethical authority

In my introduction to the previous chapter I drew a contrast between the account of the pyramids that features in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, the work of ancient history produced by Ṭahṭāwī just before the Tanzimat era, and that which appears in his much later work, *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*. The difference between the two is not simply that the latter features more precise information about the pyramids, including when they were built and by whom: the earlier work features excerpts of poetry about the pyramids that focus on the lack of certain knowledge about them, and the possible validity of various theories about them. These poetic insertions, I suggested, have the effect of thematizing the limits of human knowledge about the past. I argued furthermore that Ṭahṭāwī's use of poetry across the Egypt section of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* formed part of a mode of engagement with the past that Ṭahṭāwī moved away from in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*. In the later work, Ṭahṭāwī moved towards an emphasis on the capacity of history to produce firm

knowledge about the past and, partly by virtue of this, towards an understanding of historical knowledge as an autonomously indispensable foundation of human society, which is to say of social and political organization, and indeed of human ethics in general. As above, by "history" and "historical" here, I refer to the study of the past, as opposed to the past itself.

In my understanding, Ṭahṭāwī's representation of history as the "mainstay of certainty and the repudiation of doubt" in the opening pages of *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* reflects both of these points: both the notion that history affords epistemic certainty about the past; and, related to this, the idea that historical knowledge, in and of itself, is indispensable to the proper organization of human affairs. The claim that this phrase indicates an idea of history as a means of producing certain knowledge about the past needs little further comment: this is the most obvious significance of the phrase. The claim that, by this phrase, Ṭahṭāwī was at the same time expressing a broader point—namely that history is an independently necessary foundation of human society—is less obvious and needs substantiating. But that this is indeed the case is apparent from the ensuing references to the function of history in preserving "rights" (*ḥuqūq*) and "covenants" (*ʿuhūd*). Moreover, this point is implicit the passage of Ibn al-Athīr, in particular its concluding rhetorical questions, in which Ibn al-Athīr appears to claim that humans are nothing but what "the record of them has established and built" and that without the "concept" (*maʿnā*) of the human, as preserved in history, the human being would all but disintegrate.

On both points, there is a clear contrast with the terms of Ṭahṭāwī's affirmation of history in the preface to *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. As regards the point about epistemic certainty, Ṭahṭāwī makes no suggestion in the earlier text that historical knowledge is characterized by certainty: in the course of his explicit affirmation of the value of history, he does not mention epistemic

certainty as one of its merits. Later in the preface, when he is describing the motivations for producing *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, he directly broaches the question of its epistemic merits, focusing particularly in this respect on the account of the ancient Greeks, which makes up the bulk of the work. He assures the reader of the validity of the work's contents, but the terms in which he does so express a different sort of validation than insistence on certainty. After referring to Mehmed Ali's enthusiasm for "knowledge of the luminaries of the earliest centuries" (*maʿrifat fuḥūl rijāl al-qurūn al-ūlā*), Ṭahṭāwī states that the history of these times was limited in existing Arabic books, "especially," he writes, "the history of the Greeks, which encompasses luminaries of those times" (*lā siyyamā tārīkh al-Yūnān al-mushtamil ʿalā fuḥūl tilka al-azmān*). Ṭahṭāwī then vindicates the project as follows: it is "because this [viz. the history of the Greeks] has attained the utmost glory and splendor [*kamāl al-rawnaq wa'l-bahja*] among the nation of the Europeans, and it is valid to depend upon it [*ṣaḥḥ al-taʿwīl ʿalaihi*], and it is permissible to refer to it [*sāgh al-rujūʿ ilaihi*]," that he has undertaken to organize the translation of a European work of ancient history into Arabic.[11] Regarding the "perfect glory and splendor" that the history of the Greeks has attained in Europe, it seems to me that this does not concern epistemic validity, so much as it refers to the status of ancient Greece in European culture as the quintessential source of historical exemplarity. The two verb phrases that follow clearly do concern epistemic validity. They affirm the validity of the history of the ancient Greeks as a field of knowledge—but there is no suggestion that it should be regarded as absolutely certain. The terms "it is permissible" and especially "it is valid" are powerful terms of approval, but they do not confer the kind of irrefutability that the terms "mainstay of certainty" and "repudiation of doubt" do in

[11] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamā' Wa-Hidāyat al-Ḥukama* (Būlāq, Miṣr: Dār al-Ṭibāʿah al-ʿĀmirah, 1838), 5–6.
لما ان ذلك حاز كمال الرونق والبهجة * عند امة الافرنجه * وصح التعويل عليه * وساغ الرجوع اليه..

Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl. Whereas the former serve to elevate the subject matter in question—the history of the Greeks as narrated in European sources—to the level of knowledge, the latter identify history itself as an absolutely solid form of knowledge.

On the second point, that is, on the function of history in human affairs, I argued in the previous chapter that Ṭahṭāwī's preface to *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* established the value of history in relation to the foundational exemplarity of the Prophet. The function of history, according to the account given there, is to provide a repertoire of examples by which humans can expand their practical understanding of ethical and unethical conduct through consideration of concrete events of the past, but the ultimate model of excellence in human ethics is the life of the Prophet. In the framework that Ṭahṭāwī establishes in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, history could not be described, in any sense, as the "mainstay of certainty": this status would be reserved for the Prophet's example—that is, his Sunna (literally, "example")— in combination with God's word in the Qurʾān, which together constitute the proper foundations of society, as the two sources of the Sharīʿa; that is, the Law. Ṭahṭāwī did not use the term "certainty" or any of its cognates to make this point, but he did say of the Sharīʿa of the Prophet, to recall, that "the sciences and the crafts became established [lit. 'anchored'] in it; and it exemplified [*sannat*] all that bestows benefit and profit."[12]

To be sure, Ṭahṭāwī also opened *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* with thanksgiving to God and praise of the Prophet. This has some overlap with the corresponding section in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*; for example, Ṭahṭāwī proclaims, "there is no nation that has not learned from their [viz. the Prophet and his Companions'] minds' luminous blossoms; no community that has not searched among their minds' illuminating flowers."[13] He made a similar claim about the wide

[12] See Section 1.5 above.
[13] Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl*, 2.

influence of the Prophet in the earlier text. But in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*, the praise of the Prophet does not feed directly into the affirmation of history, as I have argued it does in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. What follows in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* is a more matter-of-fact outline of the contents of the work as a series of accounts of "all the dynasties and communities who have ruled Egypt."[14] The affirmation of history comes later, under a new heading (as noted above), and in this case, building on the passage of Ibn al-Athīr, Ṭahṭāwī makes "history" in and of itself a foundational source of knowledge about human society. The point is not that history had replaced the exemplarity of the Prophet as the exclusive foundation of practical knowledge about human society in Ṭahṭāwī's understanding. The point is that its authority as a source of such knowledge was now, in part, autonomous; that is, independent of any other signifying framework for its own powers of signification and determination.

2.1.2 The *dībāja* to the Arabic translation of Robertson's *History of Charles V*

The sense of history as the "mainstay of certainty" that appears in Ṭahṭāwī's *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* was rooted in a new conception of history that emerged in Egypt around the beginning of the Tanzimat era. It would be a mistake to identify a single point of origin for this new conception of history, but the earliest explicit articulation of it appeared in a work that was produced within the same translation movement as produced *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. As I outlined in the previous chapter, starting around 1820, as part of an effort to develop the capacities of his state, Egypt's quasi-independent governor of the time, Mehmed Ali (1769–1849; r. 1805–1848), launched an initiative to produce translations of a substantial body of literature—mostly from French into Arabic, and mostly in technical and scientific fields, though including a number of

فلا أمة من الأمم الا اقتسبت من زواهر عقولهم النيرات ولا ملة من الملل الا التمست من أزاهر عقولهم المنيرات.

[14] Ṭahṭāwī, 3.

جميع من حكم حكم مصر من الدول والملل.

history works—that were then printed on the state press at Bulaq. The work that I am concerned with here was a translation, via French, of the Scottish historian William Robertson's (1721–1793) *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V: With a View of the Progress of Society in Europe* (1769), published in two volumes as *Itḥāf al-Mulūk al-Alibbāʾ bi-Taqaddum al-Jamʿīyyāt fī Bilād Ūrūbbā* ("A Gift for Prudent Kings: The Progress of Societies in the Lands of Europe," 1258/1842) and *Itḥāf Mulūk al-Zamān bi-Tārīkh al-Imbirāṭūr Sharlakān* ("A Gift for the Kings of the Age: The History of the Emperor Charles V," 1262/1846). The translation was commissioned in 1837–8, around the time that *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* was going to press, and undertaken by an Egyptian named Khalīfa ibn Maḥmūd.[15] The most significant part of the work, as far as this chapter is concerned, is not in fact the translation of Robertson itself, but a thirteen-page introductory section on the development of history across the ages that appears at the beginning of the first volume. As above, by "history" here I mean the discipline by which knowledge of the past is produced, as opposed to the past itself; though, as I discuss in the final part of Section 3 (below), these two senses of the term intersect in complicated ways.

Framed as "an introduction [*dībāja*] to assist with the reading of history, abridged from the book *Pattern of the Historical Sciences*,"[16] this section on the development of history is in fact a fairly complete translation of the opening pages of a now-obscure French text.[17] It is an

[15] For a detailed discussion of how Maḥmūd dealt with Robertson's representation of the Ottoman Empire in this translation, see Peter Hill, "Ottoman Despotism and Islamic Constitutionalism in Mehmed Ali's Egypt," *Past and Present* 237, no. 1 (2017): 135–66, with an overview of the contexts of the production of the translation at pp. 142–3. Maḥmūd also translated *Logique et principes de grammaire* (1760), a posthumous assemblage of writings by the French philosopher César Chesneau Dumarsais' (1676–1756), as *Tanwīr al-Mashriq bi-ʿIlm al-Mantiq* ("Illuminating the East with the Science of Logic," 1838).

[16] William Robertson, *Kitāb itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā' bi-taqaddum al-jamʿīyāt fī bilād Ūrūbbā: wa-huwa al-muqaddimah li-tārīkh al-Imbirāṭūr Sharlakān*, trans. Khalīfa ibn Maḥmūd (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Būlāq, 1258/1842), 3. ديباجة | معينة على قرآءة التاريخ ملخصة من كتاب انموذج العلوم التاريخية.

[17] Frederic Pascal de Brotonne and Adolphe Laugier, *Résumé de l'histoire universelle*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imp. de Marchand du Breuil, 1825), 1–24. The book may be accessed here: https://books.google.com/books/download/R%C3%A9sum%C3%A9_de_l_histoire_universelle_Premi.pdf?id=pN9X_CySJXQC&output=pdf (Feb 15, 2022, 10:00 AM).

entirely Eurocentric account. As it appears in the French work, the first two-thirds focus on Greek and Roman historiography; the remainder covers European historiography from the "*renaissance des lettres*" to the eighteenth century. The development of history is presented as homologous with the development of civilization itself. History begins in a state of "*barbarie*," in which events are recorded but no connections drawn between them.[18] In a second phase, events are subjected to some examination and connections are drawn between them, but "historical truth" is subordinated to eloquence and artistry.[19] In a third and final phase, the causes, consequences, and moral lessons of events are investigated, and this is achieved through the introduction of philosophy into history.[20] The same process of development is traced in Greek, Roman, and modern European historiography, except that the latter two cases are supposed to have benefited to some extent from the models of Greek and Greco-Roman historiography respectively. Polybius (*c*. 200 BCE–*c*. 118) and Tacitus (*c*. 56 CE–*c*. 120) are singled out as the first—and ostensibly the only—philosophical historians within their respective traditions. Among modern European historians, the authors distinguish Voltaire (1694–1778), Montesquieu (1689–1755), David Hume (1711–1776) and Robertson himself as outstanding examples.[21] Under the influence of eighteenth-century philosophy, modern European historiography ("*notre histoire moderne*") is said to have made advances in "theory" beyond Greek and Roman historiography, though it is claimed that these theoretical advances have yet to be perfectly executed in practice.[22] Altogether, the French text describes the gradual perfection of "the historical science" ("*la science historique*"),[23] and it establishes a relationship of

[18] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:2–4, 11, 16.
[19] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:4–8, 10–11.
[20] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:7–9, 22–24.
[21] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:23–24.
[22] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:17, 22–23.
[23] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:16–17, 21–22.

complete correspondence between the development of this science in a given spatio-temporal setting and the level of "civilization" existing therein.[24]

Maḥmūd's Arabic closely follows the French. He omits just a single paragraph, in which the source text discusses some historians of the seventeenth century;[25] and he makes only occasional, fairly small departures from the French, beyond the kind of differences in phrasing and nuance that are unavoidable in interlingual translation. Presently, I will spell out how the resulting text articulates both components of the conception of history as the "mainstay of certainty" that I analyzed above with reference to Ṭahṭāwī's *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*. I will also argue that, although Maḥmūd's departures from the French source are subtle, there are in fact important distinguishing features in the conception of history that the Arabic text expresses by comparison with the French. Moreover, I will argue that these distinguishing features are representative in important ways of the broader trend in Tanzimat-era Arabic historical thought that Ṭahṭāwī later expressed in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*, in his framing of history as the "mainstay of certainty." Specifically, I will argue that these distinguishing features reflect the complex status of history as a science going back centuries in Arabic thought, as discussed above; and that they also express the rejection of a peculiar association between history (as discipline) and European hegemony that forms part of the conception of history in the French source. But since Maḥmūd's Arabic reproduces the basic Eurocentric focus of the French text, it should first be noted that two relatively straightforward contextual factors limit the scope of this Eurocentrism in the Arabic.

The first is that the function of this segment is to introduce a work of recent European historiography, at a time when the translation of European historiography into Arabic was a new

[24] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:10.
[25] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:21–22.

phenomenon. In this context, it seems likely that contemporary readers will have understood this segment to a considerable extent as providing assistance with understanding the specificities of the work that follows. This seems especially likely given that the final paragraphs of the segment deal with Robertson himself. So, although Maḥmūd does not explicitly circumscribe the subject of the segment as the history of historiography in Europe, the context ensures that no reader could take it for anything like a comprehensive account of the development of history as a science—even if the French authors and their European readers may have understood it as such.

The other factor is that, within *Itḥāf al-Mulūk al-Alibbāʾ*, the *dībāja* on the development of history is the third prefatory section. The preceding two are original compositions by Maḥmūd, and both explicitly address the relationship between contemporary European learning and Islamic learning. The first is styled a "preamble" (*sābiqa*) and begins, "It is known that the abodes of Islam have been a wellspring of knowledge and wisdom, and a seat of civilization and elegance."[26] Maḥmūd elaborates in quite general terms on the immense production of scientific works in these abodes in past times, before celebrating Egypt in particular as a special haven for both "the rational and the traditional sciences" (*al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya wa'l-naqliyya*), not only in the Islamic era, but also in the Jāhiliyya.[27] He states that this great flourishing of the sciences was "through the help of just caliphs and the support of great kings and sultans," but that these were followed by "rulers with little to offer, of limited capacity in administration and skill."[28] Under the latter, "injustices blocked up every domain; so knowledge took flight from among us, to take

[26] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā'*, preface, 2.
من المعلوم ان ديار الاسلام كانت للعلم والحكم منبعا * وللتمدن والرفاهية مضجعا.

[27] Robertson, preface, 2. "Jāhiliyya" roughly means "period of ignorance." It is most typically used to refer to the pre-Islamic era in Arabia, but it has also often been used, as here, to denote pre-Islamic times elsewhere. Despite its sense of "ignorance," the term's connotations are by no means entirely negative.

[28] Robertson, preface, 2.
وكان هذا باعانة الخلفاء العادلين * واغاثة كبار الملوك والسلاطين .. اذ مكث حقبة وهو [أي، الدهر] لا يسمح الا بحكام قليلى البضاعة * قصار الباع في الإدارة والبراعة.

refuge in another terrain; and it adopted the lands of Europe as a homeland and made them its resting place," until "the Europeans began to vaunt over us what in reality they had acquired from us, and irrigated by means of us."[29] Finally, Maḥmūd relates, "time" (*al-ayyām*) and "fate" (*al-dahr*) have been favorable, and God (*al-bārī*) has "granted noble commanders to the lands of Islam, and sultans who are vying in glory with the ancient kings."[30] This sets up an extensive passage in celebration of Mehmed Ali.

The main elements of this account are reproduced in the work's second prefatory section, which takes the conventional form of praise for God, blessings on the Prophet, and a prayer for Mehmed Ali—whose achievements are celebrated again but in even more emphatic terms. Maḥmūd avows that "his era has surpassed the time of the Abbasid caliphs; for he has revived what had disappeared of culture and the arts, and shown forth what had been hidden, concealed from sight," and so on.[31]

This narrative of a post-Abbasid-era decline in Islamic civilization and a present-day revival of ancient glories became a pervasive structure of Arabic historical thought in the Tanzimat era, and it raises its own set of questions regarding Eurocentrism and, more specifically, European colonial ideology. I analyze this narrative and these questions in detail in the next chapter. My point here is that, leaving aside for the moment the complex relationship between this narrative and European colonial ideology, these two prefatory sections explicitly affirm that European learning does not constitute a discrete tradition, let alone the sole paradigm of true science, but rather forms part of a wider network of traditions of learning that includes

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[29] Robertson, preface, 2–3.
ومظالم سدت كل باب * فابدت المعارف من عندنا * لتنتجع غير ارضنا * واتخذت بلاد اوروپا وطنا * وجعلتها لها عطنا .. حتى صار الافرنج يفتخرون علينا بما اقتسبوه في الجقيقة منا * ورووه بالواسطة عنا.

[30] Robertson, preface, 3.
اتاح البارى لبلاد الإسلام امراء ناحبين * وسلاطين يتنافسون فى الفخر مع الملوك الاولين.

[31] Robertson, 3.
فاق عصره على زمن الخلفاء العباسية فاحيى ما كان مندرسا من الادآب والفنون واظهر ما كان كامنا مستورا عن العيون.

those of Islamic civilization. Against this backdrop, it seems certain that the Eurocentrism of the third prefatory section will not have been taken by its early readers as an indication that the development of history as a science had in any sense been an exclusively European achievement.

2.2 History and epistemic certainty in Maḥmūd's *dībāja*

2.2.1 An ideal form of history

Indeed, to return now to the *dībāja* itself, this text figures history precisely as a transcendent ideal, with the implication that it stands beyond differences of culture. This figuration of history is fundamental to the way in which the text articulates a conception of history both as a vector of epistemic certainty and as an autonomously indispensable foundation of human society, which I analyzed above as the two aspects of Ṭahṭāwī's conception of history as the "mainstay of certainty." There are multiple ways in which the Arabic text figures history as a transcendent ideal. The simplest is a way of speaking about history that implies there is an absolutely correct and true form of history. For example, in the account of the slow re-development of historiography in Europe following the fall of the Roman Empire, Maḥmūd introduces a paragraph on the earliest stage of this process with the statement that "the ancient historians of the Franks [*al-Afranj*] did not know … what [is] the true sense of history [*ḥaqīqat al-tārīkh*] and what [are] its requirements."[32] The point that I want to emphasize here is a simple one: "history" is represented as having a "true sense" or "essence,"[33] and a set of "requirements" or "necessities" (*lawāzim*) that are inherent to it. In representing history in this way, Maḥmūd is reproducing a major feature of the French source, as I will presently demonstrate, but in this

[32] Robertson, 14.

فنقول ان قدماء مؤرخى الافرنج لم يعرفوا .. ما حقيقة التاريخ وما لوازمه.

[33] For this sense of *ḥaqīqa*, see Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh ʿAlī. Kabīr et al. (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981), 942; Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, ed. Stanley Lane-Poole (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1955), 612; Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton. Cowan, 4th ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Spoken Language Services, 1994), 226.

particular passage, he has introduced these phrases about history's "true sense" and "requirements" as his own expansion of the French, which reads, "*Nos anciens chroniqueurs paraissent n'avoir pas même deviné ce que c'était que l'histoire*."[34] The notion that there is a fundamentally true sense of history is implicit in this sentence, in that "history" is represented as a determinate thing; Maḥmūd has simply drawn out this point in his translation. The representation of history—that is, again, the discipline of history—as having an intrinsic "true sense" has the implication that the development of history is not a function of historians devising or gradually perfecting methods and principles for producing accurate knowledge about the past. Rather, history is a kind of ideal form that exists independently of the activities of historians; the challenge for historians is to approximate this ideal form.

This should not be understood simply as an emphatic way of affirming a mundane set of norms for conducting historical inquiry in a particular manner. In both the French source and Maḥmūd's translation, but with important differences, history is represented as a transcendent ideal in a metaphysical sense; as something like a Platonic form. In the French text, this comes across most clearly in a passage that explicitly frames the historical science as an ideal that will never be fully realized on earth. Towards the end of the account of Greek and Roman historiography, the French authors discuss the essential qualities of the historian, emphasizing "impartiality" as the most important. They contend that it is "*facile d'établir*, *d'après ces bases, quelles seraient les qualités de l'historien parfait*." But noting of this "*modèle unique*" that it is "*plus facile d'imaginer que de faire naître*," the authors comment that, while some of the historians they have discussed feature some of the qualities of the perfect historian, to combine all of them into one would be "to exceed the power of humanity, so voracious in its needs, so

[34] Brotonne and Laugier, *Résumé*, 1:18.

limited in its means" ("*excéder le pouvoir de l'humanité, si avide dans ses exigences, si bornée dans ses moyens*"). They then conclude:

> Mais sans oser prétendre égaler ce modèle idéal, on peut et l'on doit se le proposer, comme le peintre et le sculpteur se proposent d'imiter ce type d'une beauté divine que la nature ne fournit pas, et que l'imagination seule a revêtu de ses prestiges.[35]

The French authors thus introduce a notion of an unrealizable "ideal model" of the historian. They do not explicitly indicate that this model has real existence beyond the material realm, as Plato's Forms are generally understood to have. But through the introduction of the figures of the sculptor and the painter—favorite points of reference for Plato—and most obviously through the Platonic notion of "divine beauty," the authors clearly establish an analogy between this ideal model of the historian and Plato's Forms.[36]

This analogy is reflected, moreover, in the way in which the authors speak of the achievement of their two preferred historians from among the Greeks and Romans. This achievement is framed as a function of these authors' having discerned "the true aim of history," as follows: "*Polybe*, plus philosophe que ses prédécesseurs, vit le véritable but de l'histoire ; *Tacite*, après les brillans écrivains de Rome, vit aussi mieux que ses devanciers."[37] As the French authors have it, the achievement of these historians was not the development of an altogether new way of conducting historical inquiry, but rather a more faithful approximation of the "true aim of history." The phrase represents this aim as an innate feature of "history" itself, and thereby accords history some sort of existence beyond the actual practices of historians. The French text states that Polybius and Tacitus "saw" this inherent aim of history, as if by the force

[35] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:14.
[36] The phrase "divine beauty" (*τὸ θεῖον καλὸν*) appears in Plato, *Symposium*, 211e. On Plato's frequent references to painting, see Nancy Demand, "Plato and the Painters," *Phoenix* 29, no. 1 (1975): 1–20.
[37] Brotonne and Laugier, *Résumé*, 1:8.

of revelation; the language of vision in relation to the perception of truth is characteristically Platonic.[38]

We have already seen that Maḥmūd's translation features a similar way of speaking about history, specifically in his phrase "the true sense of history" (*ḥaqīqat al-tārīkh*), which had no precise parallel in the French.[39] However, in the case of the Arabic text, the proper point of reference for understanding the representation of history as a transcendent ideal is not Plato, but rather the framework of Neoplatonic Sufism in the tradition of Ibn ʿArabī (558–638/1164–1240), which remained a dominant force in Arabo-Islamic thought into the nineteenth century.[40] It is conceivable that, even in isolation, a phrase like "the true sense of history" might have evoked this framework for Maḥmūd's contemporary readers, as the notion that worldly phenomena have a "true nature" (*ḥaqīqa*) that is not immediately apparent is one of the major principles of Sufism.

Other details of the text point in the same direction. In particular, there are unmistakable resonances of the esoteric Sufi tradition in Maḥmūd's rendering of the passage on the "perfect historian" that I quoted above. Most obviously, the figure of the "perfect historian," rendered into Arabic as "*al-muʾarrikh al-kāmil*," recalls the figure of the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*), one of the core ideas of Sufism.[41] Several other terms and phrases in the same passage

[38] See, e.g., Plato, *ibid*.; *Phaedrus*, 254b4–7.
[39] For *ḥaqīqa* as "true sense," see Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 224. Cf. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 609.
[40] On the rise of esoteric Sufism and its dominant position into the nineteenth century, see Nathan Hofer, *Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173-1325* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020), 41–62; Patrick Scharfe, "Muslim Scholars and the Public Sphere in Mehmed Ali Pasha's Egypt, 1801-1841" (PhD Thesis, Columbus, OH, Ohio State University, 2015), 201–231.
[41] The basic idea of the Perfect Human is that the prophets in general and/or the Prophet Muḥammad in particular embodied human perfection; but it also denotes the theoretical perfectibility of all humans. Fitzroy Morrissey, *Sufism and the Perfect Human: From Ibn ʿArabī to al-Jīlī* (London: Routledge, 2020), 1–4.

affirm this point of reference. Regarding the qualities of the perfect historian, Maḥmūd writes:

> Among the historians we have mentioned, there exists in each of them one [or "some"] of these qualities [*ṣifāt*], while the others are missing. The fulfilment of these conditions in their entirety in a single historian is just a model and an ideal [*laysa illā unmūdhaj wa-mithāl*], whose existence in the mind [*fī al-adhhān*] is easier than its existence among exterior phenomena [*fī khārij al-aʿyān*].[42]

Ṣifāt and *mithāl* both have Sufi resonance: *ṣifāt* as the "divine attributes" that God alone fully possesses, but which are imperfectly manifested in the phenomenal world; *mithāl* as an object of the imagination, which, in Sufi thought, is the faculty of inner perception and hence the intermediary between the phenomenal world and the higher realities.[43] In combination with the concept of the "perfect historian," these terms foster an understanding of the earthly practice of history as the reflection of a metaphysical ideal of history.

The concluding clause of the quotation has a similar effect, indicating that history in the ideal sense is to be apprehended in the mind. In doing so, it expresses an opposition between the mind and the phenomenal world that is paralleled in what is arguably the classic expression of the idea of the Perfect Human, namely Ibn ʿArabī's chapter on Adam in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* ("Bezels of Wisdom").[44] Ibn ʿArabī writes of "the universals"—by which he means categories such as "life," "knowledge," "ability," and "will"[45]—that "even if they have no [tangible] existence in their essence [*fī ʿaynihā*], they are conceived of and known without doubt in the mind [*fī al-dhihn*]."[46] The term that I have rendered "essence" here is the singular of the term for

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[42] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā'*, 12.
ومن ذكرناه من المورخين يوجد فى كل فرد منهم بعض هذه الصفات ويفقد منه البعض وتوفر هذه الشروط باسرها فى مورخ واحد ليس الا انموذجا ومثالا وجوده فى الاذهان اسهل من وجوده فى خارج الاعيان.

[43] On the significance of *ṣifāt* ("attributes") and *mithāl* in Sufi thought, see William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 20–23, 67–72.

[44] On this chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ* as the classic expression of the idea of the Perfect Human, see Morrissey, *Sufism and the Perfect Human*, 51–52.

[45] Dā'ūd ibn Maḥmūd al-Qayṣarī, *Maṭla' Khuṣūṣ al-Kilam Bi-Ma'ānī Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (Bombay: Mīrzā Muḥammad Shīrāzī al-mashhūr bi-Malik al-Kuttāb, 1883), 31.

[46] Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abū al-ʿIlā ʿAfīfī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1966), 51.

"phenomena" in the above quotation; likewise, the term for "mind" here appears in the plural in the above passage. The point that Ibn ʿArabī is making is that, although the "essence" or "particularity" of, for example, life itself does not exist in the phenomenal world, the mind nevertheless has certain knowledge of the category. The same could be said of history: although its essence has no existence in the phenomenal world, the mind nevertheless has a definite apprehension of it.

The representation of history as an imaginal form—and therefore implicitly as the reflection of a higher reality—is reaffirmed a few lines later in the same section. After enumerating the particular merits of the historians that have been mentioned earlier in the text, and noting that no single individual could hope to encompass them all, Maḥmūd translates the French passage on the need for the historian nevertheless to aim for the ideal as follows:

> Even so, the human must not depend on what we have mentioned [regarding human limitations], making an excuse of the impossibility of weaving according to this pattern, which has no existence except in the imagination [*al-khayāl*]. Rather, they should set about testing themselves against it, as the painter attempts in his painting of imaginary things [*umūr takhayyuliyya*] whose form [*ṣūratuha*] has not appeared among exterior phenomena [*fī khārij al-aʿyān*] and which exist only in the bare mind [*fī mujarrad al-dhihn*].[47]

In this passage, which concludes the section on the perfect historian, it is reiterated that the model of the perfect historian exists in the imagination. This point is expressed even more emphatically here: it is not that the existence of the ideal is "easier" in the mind, as above, but rather that it "has *no* existence except in the imagination." On this occasion, Maḥmūd explicitly

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اعلم أن الأمور الكلية وإن لم يكن لها وجود في عينها فهي معقولة معلومة بلا شك في الذهن.

Translation adapted from Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R. W. J. Austin (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), 53.

[47] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā'*, 12. In the body of the work, the printed text reads *fī tārīkh al-aʿyān*: the list of corrections at the beginning of the work confirms that the correct reading is *fī khārij al-aʿyān*, which I have translated:

ومع ذلك فلا ينبغى للانسان ان يتكل على ما ذكرنا متعللا بعدم امكان النسج على المنوال الذى لا وجدود له الا فى الخيال بل يشرع فى بجربة نفسه فيه كما ان المصوّر يحاول فى تصويره امورا تخيلية لم تظهر صورتها فى [خارج] الاعيان وليس لها وجود الا فى مجرد الذهن.

mentions the imaginative faculty (*khayāl*), and in rendering the analogy with the painter, he introduces another characteristically Sufi term in "form" (*ṣūra*).[48] Finally, the passage ends with a restatement of the opposition between the material world and the perceptions of the human mind that we saw earlier.

The resonances of esoteric Sufism in the *dībāja* might be explained simply as a function of Maḥmūd finding an appropriate idiom for rendering the Platonic language of the French source. Of course, this will have been of no consequence for nineteenth-century readers of the text, who—apart from perhaps Ṭahṭāwī and conceivably other proofreaders—will not have been comparing Maḥmūd's translation with the French. But, in any case, my argument does not require that the text establishes, or seeks to establish, a precise place for history within a rigorously Sufi metaphysical scheme. The crucial point is, more simply, that the language of Neoplatonic Sufism serves to convey that the earthly practice of history is a reflection of a determinate, metaphysical ideal of history. The implication of this, as of the representation of history as a kind of Platonic form in the French source, is that there is a true form of history in the strongest possible sense: a standard that is embedded in the fundamental structure of reality. In and of itself, of course, this notion reveals nothing about the earthly practicalities of historical inquiry, and therefore gives no indication as to how in practice—in mundane terms—history could be expected to deliver epistemic certainty: it simply affirms that there is an ideal form of history that has its foundations in the fundamental structure of the universe. To understand how such a notion could have practical significance, as is my claim, it is necessary to examine more closely the actual earthly form of history that was identified with the ideal.

[48] On *khayāl* and *ṣūra* as Sufi technical terms, see Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 67–72.

2.2.2 The content of the ideal form: structure-oriented history

As it appears in the *dībāja*, the notion of a true form of history was connected to the development of new modes of historical inquiry in Europe over the course of the eighteenth century; new, that is, at least as far as Europe was concerned. This process had various permutations across Europe. Appropriately, given the work that follows, the permutation of most relevance in the *dībāja*, as derived from the French source, was that of the Scottish Enlightenment, of which Robertson was one of the major exponents, alongside Hume and Adam Ferguson (1723–1816). As I noted above, the French source mentions both Robertson and Hume as exemplars of contemporary historiography, as well as Montesquieu and Voltaire; Maḥmūd omits Hume, presumably because he thought that readers would be unlikely to recognize the name. The combination of French and Scottish historians makes sense, as the developments in historiography in Scotland were profoundly influenced by the historical thought of the French Enlightenment, in particular that of Montesquieu.[49]

The distinguishing feature of Scottish Enlightenment historiography was not a novel approach to historical sources, but rather the establishment of what was termed the "science of man" as both the foundation and the ultimate object of historical inquiry.[50] This had the implication that history was not simply a valid method for discovering facts about past events; it was ultimately a framework for developing a structural understanding of human society as a

[49] Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment : Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, trans. Jeremy Carden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 23–43; László Kontler, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenments : William Robertson in Germany, 1760-1795* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 30; Iain McDaniel, "Ferguson, Roman History and the Threat of Military Government in Modern Europe," in *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature*, ed. Eugene Heath and Vincenzo Merolle (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 118–25; Murray G. H. Pittock, "Historiography," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 261–75.

[50] Kontler, *Translations*, 20–31; Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 45–71; Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith : An Enlightened Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 64–71, 138–58.

system of causes and effects that unfold through time in determinate, predictable ways.[51] This conception of history also implies the theoretical possibility of the perfection or near-perfection of history in practice. The reason for this is that, according to this conception of history, the ultimate challenge is not the obviously impossible one of reconstructing past events with perfect accuracy and complete certainty, but rather more simply that of establishing the events of the past sufficiently to be able to draw general inferences about human society.[52] Moreover, the assumption of a universal model had the implication that some contemporary or recently-existing societies could supposedly provide insights into the remote pasts of the European present.[53] Based on this understanding, the philosopher-historians of the Scottish Enlightenment developed a universal theory of social development that purported to be grounded in the fundamentals of human nature and that took the form of a stadial theory of "progress" or what one scholar has termed a "teleology of civility."[54] It was this form of history—history as the investigation of the underlying structure of human society—that the *dībāja*, following the French source, identified with the true form of history.

In fact, it is not simply that this mode of history happens to be identified with the true form of history in these texts. The configuration of history as the investigation into the underlying structure of human affairs is integral to the very idea of a true form of history in a metaphysical sense. The reason for this is that such a configuration of history entails the disarticulation of historical events into two orders of reality: the events themselves, and the

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[51] Kontler, *Translations*, 20–31.
[52] This explains the contemporary use of the phrase "conjectural history" to describe the approach. See Simon Evnine, "Hume, Conjectural History, and the Uniformity of Human Nature," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31, no. 4 (1993): 589–95.
[53] Alfonso M. Iacono, "The American Indians and the Ancients of Europe: The Idea of Comparison and the Construction of Historical Time in the 18th Century," in *European Images of the Americas and the Classical Tradition*, ed. Wolfgang Haase and Meyer Reinhold, vol. 1:1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 658–91.
[54] Pittock, "Historiography," 259–64. See also Iain McDaniel, "Philosophical History and the Science of Man in Scotland: Adam Ferguson's Response to Rousseau," *Modern Intellectual History* 10, no. 3 (2013): 547–54.

underlying structure. Inevitably, the discovery of the underlying structure assumes greater importance than the discovery of the surface-level minutiae of events; the discovery of the latter becomes the less-true or the merely-superficial form of history. The significance of the structure-oriented mode of history within my argument is thus twofold. First, it is a mode of history that constitutively pursues the unseen, in the shape of the underlying structure of events. At the same time, it is a mode of history in which epistemic certainty is, at least potentially, attainable. This is because, as noted in the previous paragraph, it establishes a finite and determinate, albeit abstract, structure as the ultimate object of historical investigation—whereas, otherwise, historical investigation is directed at the description of past events, and hence at phenomena that are both infinitely detailed and also, in a sense, non-existent or at least ontologically elusive.

The investigation of the underlying structure of human society in the name of "history" was not in itself new in Arabic. In the 8th/14th century, Ibn Khaldūn had developed in the *Muqaddima* a mode of inquiry that was, at a fundamental level, very similar to that of the Scottish Enlightenment historians' science of man. Through the identification and analysis of apparent regularities in human affairs across time, Ibn Khaldūn sought to elucidate the "nature" (*ṭabīʿa*) of human society; in other words, its basic structure. He presented this structural understanding of society as the proper and necessary foundation of knowledge of past events. Like the Scottish Enlightenment historians, Ibn Khaldūn placed "civilization" (*ʿumrān*) at the center of his analysis; though, unlike them, not as the telos of all human life, but rather as a system in which peripheral social formations have a distinct and integral function, and are not understood simply to be developmentally behind civilized society. The fundamental similarity between Ibn Khaldūn's mode of inquiry in the *Muqaddima* and Scottish Enlightenment history is reflected in Ṭahṭāwī's comment in his account of his travels in Paris, *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz*

("Extracting Pure Gold"), that "[a]mong the French, Montesquieu is nicknamed the European Ibn Khaldūn, whereas the latter is known as the Eastern Montesquieu or the Montesquieu of Islam."[55] I have noted the influence of Montesquieu on Scottish Enlightenment history: it was he that provided the model of a naturalistic account of human society, which the Scottish historians developed into their theory of stages.

Indeed, not only had Ibn Khaldūn developed a very similar mode of inquiry to that which is associated with the true form of history in Maḥmūd's *dībāja*, he also affirmed the value of this mode of inquiry with reference to a true form of history in a way that bears a resemblance to Maḥmūd's framing of history in the *dībāja*. The opening book of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* comprises an extensive discussion of the value of his new mode of inquiry for the practice of history, and it begins: "Know that, since the true sense of history is that it is an account of human society, which is [the same as] the civilization of the world, and [also] of what is attached to the nature of this civilization in terms of conditions such as brutality, refinement, group feelings [etc.]."[56] Ibn Khaldūn's use here of the phrase "the true sense of history" (*ḥaqīqat al-tārīkh*) seems to be the only genuine precedent in Arabic for Maḥmūd's use of the same phrase, at least prior to the nineteenth century.[57] In both cases, the phrase is used to refer to a form of history that incorporates a theory of absolute regularities in human affairs.

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[55] Rifāʻah Rāfiʻ Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric, 1826-1831*, trans. Daniel L. Newman (London: Saqi, 2004), 296.

[56] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, ed. Darwīsh al-Juwaydī (Ṣaydā: Al-Maktabah al-ʻAṣrīyah, 1995), 40.
اعلم أنه لما كانت حقيقة التاريخ أنه خبر عن الاجتماع الإنساني الذي هو عمران العالم، وما يعرض لطبيعة ذلك العمران من الأحوال مثل التوحش والتأنس والعصبيات.

[57] I searched for instances of the phrase "*ḥaqīqat al-tārīkh*" through the 12th century AH (= up to 1785 CE) in al-Maktaba al-Shamela (shamela.ws), a database of Arabic literature. The search turned up two results (excluding a case where it appears in a later editor's preface), neither of which was comparable to Maḥmūd's use of the phrase or Ibn Khaldūn's: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-Zamān Fī Tawārīkh al-A'yān*, ed. Muḥammad Barakāt, Kāmil al-Kharrāṭ, and 'Ammār Rīḥāwī, vol. 2 (Dimashq: Dār al-Risāla al-'Ālamiyya, 2013), 346; Shams al-Dīn Sakhāwī, *Fatḥ al-mughīth bi-sharḥ Alfiyat al-ḥadīth lil-'Irāqī*, ed. ʻAlī Ḥusayn ʻAlī, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Sunnah, 2003), 304–5.

Ibn Khaldūn's use of this phrase is also consistent with the claim I made above that it has a resonance of Sufism. Tarif Khalidi has observed the "imprint" of what he calls "high" Sufism—meaning the systematic, intellectual Sufism of figures such as Ibn ʿArabī, as opposed to its expressions in ritual performance—on historiography in the Mamluk era (7th/13th–10th/16th c.).[58] Indeed, Khalidi identifies Ibn Khaldūn himself as a particularly acute example of this. He demonstrates the point by quoting (intentionally) conflated passages from a work by Ibn Khaldūn on Sufism and from the *Muqaddima* itself, in which Ibn Khaldūn uses the language of "unveiling" and "inspiration" to describe what he accomplished in his work of history.[59]

2.2.3 History and epistemic certainty in earlier Arabic historical thought

Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* thus appears to feature the two elements that I have identified as the basis of the association between history and epistemic certainty in Maḥmūd's *dībāja*: first, the notion of an approach to history that derives from the metaphysical realm; second, the identification of this approach to history with the structure-oriented approach to history that he had himself pioneered. It is in fact quite clear that, for Ibn Khaldūn, epistemic certainty is, at least potentially, attainable within his approach to history. Book One of the *Muqaddimah* begins with an argument as to the distinctness of the work: Ibn Khaldūn claims that he has pioneered a new science, and for the first time established the proper basis for assessing the veracity of historical information.[60] Following a review of the shortcomings of earlier authors, Ibn Khaldūn describes his own approach as deriving from divine inspiration, and he goes on to imply that it is, in a practical sense, perfectible. The opening line here, regarding inspiration, forms part of Khalidi's conflated quotation referred to above:

[58] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 210–15.
[59] Khalidi, 215.
[60] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 42.

> In our case [*wa-naḥnu*], God inspired us to this, and had us happen upon a science of which He made us give a true and certain account. If I have treated its problems in full, and distinguished its insights and aspects from all other crafts, success and guidance [are] from God. If anything has escaped me in the articulation of it, and its problems have got confused with something else, it is for the critical observer to correct it.[61]

As well as demonstrating the unequivocal way in which Ibn Khaldūn figures this new science as having emerged from the metaphysical realm, the passage appears to indicate that this science admits of completion or perfection. This is implicit both in Ibn Khaldūn's reference to the possibility that he has "treated its problems in full" (*istawfaytu masāʾilahu*), and also in the suggestion that his account might be corrected if there are any mistakes in it. Furthermore, the terms in which he affirms his own account are emphatic: "true and certain account" in the above translation is a rendering of two proverbial phrases. "Certain," in particular, corresponds to the phrase *juhaynat khabarihi*, of which a closer translation would be "the Juhayna account of it," wherein Juhayna denotes an Arabian tribe. The full proverb is "Juhayna have the certain account" (*ʿinda juhayna al-khabar al-yaqīn*).[62]

Ibn Khaldūn's development of structure-oriented history, along with his framing of it as the product of divine inspiration, raises two questions. First, what is the relationship between Ibn Khaldūn's work and the framing of history in Maḥmūd's *dībāja*? Second, was the conception of history that figures in Maḥmūd's *dībāja* in fact a new development within Arabo-Islamic thought? Regarding the first question, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that Ibn Khaldūn very likely exerted some degree of influence on Maḥmūd in the production of the *dībāja*. There

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[61] Ibn Khaldūn, 44. Khalidi's quotation concludes with the line, "It is through divine inspiration that I came to discover this science."

ونحن ألهمنا الله إلى ذلك إلهاماً؛ وأعثرنا على علم جعلنا سن بكره وجهينة خبره. فإن كنت قد استوفيت مسائله، وميّزت عن سائر الصنائع أنظاره وأنحاءه، فتوفيق من الله وهداية. وإن فاتني شيء في إحصائه واشتبهت بغيره مسائله، فللناظر محقق إصلاحه.

The translation is largely my own but I have drawn on Franz Rosenthal's in Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, ed. N. J. Dawood, trans. Franz. Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 42.

[62] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 44, n. 7.

is no doubt that Ibn Khaldūn was a major influence on Ṭahṭāwī, who was not only Maḥmūd's teacher at the School of Languages but also oversaw of his translation of Robertson as a whole. As I noted in the previous chapter, Ṭahṭāwī's account of history in the preface to *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* was based on the ideas of Ibn Khaldūn, to whom Ṭahṭāwī had probably been introduced by his own mentor Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār.[63] There is also no doubt that Maḥmūd himself was familiar with Ibn Khaldūn. He refers to Ibn Khaldūn in the second volume of his translation of Robertson's *History of Charles V*: in explaining that he made the introduction (*muqaddima*) a standalone volume, Maḥmūd notes that this is line with an established practice of earlier Arabic literature, whereby introductions and appendixes were sometimes produced as independent works, and he gives the examples of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* and the medical author Dāʾūd al-Anṭākī's (d. 1008/1599) appendix.[64]

Such a passing reference does not reveal any deep familiarity with Ibn Khaldūn on the part of Maḥmūd. However, in the case of another mentee of Ṭahṭāwī's at the School of Languages in the late 1830s, Ibn Khaldūn's conception of history certainly made a deep impression. In the introduction to this chapter I mentioned Abū al-Suʿūd as the author of *Al-Dars al-Tāmm fī al-Tārīkh al-ʿĀmm* ("Complete Lesson in Universal History," 1872). In his prefatory essay on the practice of history, which runs to twenty-five pages, Abū al-Suʿūd includes a discussion of "social history" (*al-tārīkh al-madanī*), or, as the context suggests, "civilizational history." He introduces this as "true history" (*wa-huwa al-tārīkh al-ḥaqīqī*) and then defines it as "a science in which the human is investigated in terms of civilization [*tamaddun*] and civilized

[63] El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*, 77.
[64] William Robertson, *Itḥāf mulūk al-zamān bi-tārīkh al-Imbirāṭūr Sharlakān*, trans. Khalīfa ibn Maḥmūd (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Būlāq, 1262 [1846), 3. The work by Dāʾūd al-Anṭākī is the *Tadhkirat Ūlī al-Albāb wa'l-Jāmiʿ li'l-ʿAjab wa'l-ʿUjāb*. It was printed in three volumes at Būlāq in 1282/1866.

living [*ʿumrān*]."[65] Abū al-Suʿūd begins his discussion of this type of history with a naturalistic account of human civilization drawn explicitly from Ibn Khaldūn, whom he quotes by name several times.[66]

Abū al-Suʿūd's reference to "true history"—a subtle variation on "true sense of history"—in close association with Ibn Khaldūn establishes a definite link between, at least, the kind of framing of history that features in Maḥmūd's *dībāja* and Ibn Khaldūn. Of course, this does not prove anything about Maḥmūd's *dībāja*. But it seems highly likely, given Ṭahṭāwī's similar channeling of Ibn Khaldūn as far back as *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, that the prominence of Ibn Khaldūn in Abū al-Suʿūd's account of "social history" reflects the direct influence of Ṭahṭāwī. Indeed, Abū al-Suʿūd's first quotation of Ibn Khaldūn is the latter's version of the Aristotelian proposition that "man is social [*madanī*] by nature"—which also opens Ṭahṭāwī's account of history in the preface *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, as noted in the previous chapter.[67] There are various possible explanations for this sort of overlap, but the overwhelming likelihood is that Abū al-Suʿūd was introduced to Ibn Khaldūn by Ṭahṭāwī during his time as a student at the School of Languages, in the course of his training in the translation of European historiography—and, moreover, that the same goes for Maḥmūd. That Maḥmūd himself had more than a passing familiarity with Ibn Khaldūn is positively indicated by at least one echo of the *Muqaddima* in the course of the *dībāja*: I identify this in the next section.

Apparent overlaps between Maḥmūd's *dībāja* and Ibn Khaldūn—as between their framing of history in metaphysical terms—are thus highly unlikely to be pure coincidence. In other words, although, as it appears in the *dībāja*, the notion of a "true sense of history" is most

[65] Abū al-Suʿūd, *Al-Dars al-Tāmm*, 8.
[66] Abū al-Suʿūd, 8 ff.
[67] Abū al-Suʿūd, 8. Cf. Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 3.

immediately connected with a mode of history that was developed in the Scottish Enlightenment, it is by no means an incidental detail that this notion has a precedent in Ibn Khaldūn's, where it forms part of a discussion of the value of structural analysis of society in the practice of history. It is impossible to quantify the importance of this precedent in the translation process, but it would certainly be a mistake to understand the significance of Ibn Khaldūn here exclusively, or even mainly, in terms of his authority as a revered figure in the Arabo-Islamic tradition. Rather, insofar as Maḥmūd's translation reflects the influence of Ibn Khaldūn, it is the substance of Ibn Khaldūn's work—his particular approach to history and his metaphysical framing of this approach—that has exerted this influence.

But notwithstanding the points of overlap with Ibn Khaldūn that I have identified, there is a significant contrast to be drawn between the conception of history that emerged out of this translation process and that of Ibn Khaldūn himself or, for that matter, that of other earlier theorists of history in the Arabo-Islamic tradition, whether influenced by Ibn Khaldūn or not. Ibn Khaldūn's structural analysis of society in the name of history, and his framing of this mode of analysis in metaphysical terms, did not produce a comparable idea of history as the "mainstay of certainty." There is an explanation for this. For Ibn Khaldūn the structural description of human social organization is not the ultimate aim of history; rather, he seeks to establish the investigation of the underlying structure of society as a basis for determining the truth or otherwise of historical reports. As he puts it towards the end of the introduction to the *Muqaddima*, the theme of which is the "excellence of the science of history" (*fī faḍl ʿilm al-akhbār*):

> Let us mention here a benefit [*fāʾida*] with which to close this chapter. History is the account of reports particular to an age or a generation. As for the account of the conditions common to the [various] regions, generations, and ages, this is a foundation for the historian, upon which most of his aims are built and by which

his reports are ascertained.[68]

Ibn Khaldūn makes it explicit here that the utility of an account of the conditions of society in general is as a "foundation" or "basis" (*uss*) for "history," which consists in the description of particulars.

This is not to say that, from Ibn Khaldūn's perspective, the general account had no inherent value. In the lines that Khalidi quotes from his work on Sufism, Ibn Khaldūn writes that "to gain access to the secrets of the divinity and to know, by intuition, inspiration and unveiling, how the divinity arranges and encompasses all existents is the highest type of knowledge, the most perfect, the clearest and the most pleasurable."[69] The kind of knowledge that he speaks of here—"how the divinity arranges and encompasses all existents"—would include the structural knowledge of human society that Ibn Khaldūn pursues in the *Muqaddima*. In line with this, as we have seen, he frames his pursuit of this kind of knowledge in terms of "inspiration"; he also uses the language of "unveiling" in reference to it. The implication of this is that structural knowledge of human society has inherent value as a type of general knowledge of God's ordering of "existents." Indeed, in this capacity it would be of higher value than knowledge of particulars at a given point in time. Nevertheless, as the above block quote makes clear, it is the latter that is the ultimate aim of "history." It should be noted that there is no contradiction here with his definition of the "true sense of history" as "an account [*khabar*] of human society." In identifying the latter as the "true sense of history," Ibn Khaldūn was defining history in such a way that the structural analysis of society should have an essential place in the production of

[68] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 37–38.
ولنذكر هنا فائدة نختم كلامنا في هذا الفصل بها، وهي أنّ التاريخ إنّما هو ذكر الأخبار الخاصّة بعصر أو بجيل. فأمّا ذكر الأحوال العامة للآفاق والأجيال والأعصار فهو أسّ للمؤرخ تنبني عليه أكثر مقاصده وتتبين به أخباره.

[69] Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, 215. The work cited is *Shifāʾ al-Sāʾil wa-Tahdhīb al-Masāʾil* ("Healing the Questioner and Refining the Questions").

historical knowledge. But the "account" that he refers to here is an account consisting of historical particulars, and not of the pure the structural description of human society that he aims to produce in the *Muqaddima*. My point is that the configuration of history as the investigation, ultimately, of historical particulars precluded a general association of history with certainty of the sort that Ṭahṭāwī affirms in characterizing history as the "mainstay of certainty."

This should not be taken to imply that history was understood by Ibn Khaldūn or more widely within Arabic thought to be a realm of pervasive doubt and uncertainty. There was, incidentally, an early Arabo-Islamic tradition of radical skepticism as to the possibility of historical knowledge, associated with the figure of Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām (d. 225/840) of the hyper-rationalist Muʿtazilite theological school. But the mainstream tradition, grounded in the work of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), was that even historical reports with only a single line of transmission could be accepted as valid provided they met certain rules, above all the credibility of the transmitters, as determined through personality criticism (*al-jarḥ wa'l-taʿdīl*). The immediate concern of both Naẓẓām and Shāfiʿī was the problem of distinguishing true reports about the life of the Prophet Muhammad, with a view to the determination of basic juristic principles and specific legal questions.[70] This problem exerted a shaping influence on early Arabic historical thought, establishing the credible report as the paradigm of historical evidence.[71] So, for example, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) made clear in the preface to his monumental work of universal history, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa'l-Mulūk* ("History of Nations and Kings"), that his role as historian was simply to transmit reports, and he went so far as to state that the transmission of historical reports is the only source of knowledge about the

[70] Khalidi, 137–42.
[71] Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 92–97.

past "to the exclusion of rational deduction and mental inference."[72] But in the field of specifically historical thought—as distinct from legal theory and theology—Ṭabarī's position was, in fact, substantially narrower than what ultimately became the dominant trend. According to the latter, basic considerations of possibility and impossibility, as well as insights derived from the systematic study of nature and society, have an important place in the evaluation of historical reports. The polymathic thinker al-Jāḥiẓ (766–868) was an early exponent of this trend, and it was embraced and elaborated by the most famous of Abbasid-era historians, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/957).[73] Ibn Khaldūn's approach to the production of historical knowledge—developed not incidentally amid the exceptionally rich historiographical culture of Mamluk-era Egypt—was an extension of this trend.[74] In his view, not only did basic considerations of possibility and impossibility have a role to play, but reports about the past should systematically be considered in light of a general account of human society; hence, his claim for the utility of such an account as a "foundation" for the historian.

Ibn Khaldūn was emphatic as to the value of this approach for the establishment of truth and falsehood in historical reports; yet, he was under no illusion that the record of past events could be purged of uncertainty. To cite him at his most emphatic, midway through his argument in Book One of the *Muqaddima* as to the value of structural analysis of society in the practice of history, he writes:

The general rule [*qānūn*] for distinguishing reality from unreality in historical

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[72] As quoted and translated by Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, 74.
[73] Khalidi, 106–7, 131–6.
[74] Notwithstanding the common framing of Ibn Khaldūn as a "solitary genius": Donald Little, "Historiography of the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk Epochs," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Volume 1: 640–1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 421. On Ibn Khaldūn and Masʿūdī, see Robert Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 9–12. For an illustration of Ibn Khaldūn's immersion in Mamluk historiographical culture, see Fozia Bora, *Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World: The Value of Chronicles as Archives* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 1. For an overview of Mamluk historiography, besides Little's chapter, pp. 420–44, see Li Guo, "Mamluk Historiographic Studies: The State of the Art," *Mamluk Studies Review*, no. 1 (1997): 15–43.

> reports on the basis of possibility or impossibility is to investigate human society, that is, civilization: to distinguish what are its essential conditions by dint of its nature; what is an accidental feature, which is not be relied upon [viz. in evaluating a report]; and what cannot occur in it at all. If we do this, this will serve as a general rule for distinguishing reality from unreality in the report, and truth from untruth, through a proof-principle that admits of no doubt.[75]

This whole passage clearly implies that there is abundant scope for establishing valid information about past events. Ibn Khaldūn is not, however, claiming here that historical reports past can invariably be verified one way or another beyond all doubt—let alone, of course, that the past can effectively be known in its entirety. He describes the "proof-principle" (*wajh burhānī*) itself—which is to say the general account of "human society" (*al-ijtimāʿ al-basharī*) or "civilization" (*ʿumrān*)—as being beyond all doubt (*lā madkhal li'l-shakk fīhi*). The use of this principle, he says, should be the "general rule" for "distinguishing reality from unreality in historical reports on the basis of possibility or impossibility." Ibn Khaldūn's claim is that the general account of society is an absolutely reliable means of eliminating the impossible from the historical record; he is not suggesting that it can eliminate what is possibly true but in reality false.

Indeed, despite Ibn Khaldūn's confidence in the utility of his structural account of society for the production of accurate historical knowledge, his project in the *Muqaddima* was underpinned by an acute sense as to the fallibility of historical knowledge. Shortly before the above passage, following a summary of the proper subject matter of history, Ibn Khaldūn launches into a discussion of the inevitability of falsehood in historical reports, which he frames as a fact of nature, writing: "since falsehood finds its way into reports by the nature of them"

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[75] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 42.
فالقانون في تمييز الحق من الباطل في الأخبار بالإمكان والاستحالة أن ننظر في الاجتماع البشري الذي هو العمران، ونميز ما نلحقه من الأحوال لذاته وبمقتضى طبعه، وما يكون عارضا لا يعتدّ به وما لا يمكن أن يعرض له. وإذا فعلنا ذلك كان ذلك لنا قانونا في تمييز الحق من الباطل في الأخبار والصدق من الكذب بوجه برهاني لا مدخل للشكّ فيه.

(*lammā kāna al-kadhib mutaṭarriqan li'l-khabar bi-ṭabīʿatihi*).[76] This apprehension of historical reports as having a natural tendency to admit falsehood was fundamental to the whole tradition of Arabo-Islamic historical thought in all of its variety. The utility that Ibn Khaldūn claims for his general account of human society is as a novel means of mitigating this problem.

The major development of Tanzimat-era Arabic historical thought was that what had been the "proof-principle" for Ibn Khaldūn became, in the newly dominant trend, the ultimate aim of history. That is to say, the structural understanding of human society—the discovery of general rules—became the overarching objective of historical investigation, in place of the particulars of past events. In practice, this was a very subtle shift, for the reason that any structural account of society must inevitably both depend on an analysis of historical particulars and make abundant reference to particulars. Both the shift itself and the subtlety of it are apparent in the final paragraph of Maḥmūd's *dībāja*, which—closely following the French source—comprises a summary of the concerns of philosophical history. It opens with the statement that history has "two aims": to "delight the people of its time" and "to teach them history." It is claimed that "philosophers favor only the second aim," and that, to their approval, "historians in this age expend their efforts on it," with Robertson and Voltaire distinguished in this, and others like them "of sound taste."[77] There follows a list of the preoccupations of such historians. Roughly the first half of it focuses on issues of cultural difference, which might give the impression that this kind of history is concerned with the investigation of historical particulars as its proper task. By the end of the list, it is apparent that the interest in such

[76] Ibn Khaldūn, 40.

[77] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā'*, 16.
وللتاريخ غرضان ان يعجب الانسان اهل زمانه وان يعلمهم التاريخ ولا تميل الفلاسفة الا للغرض النانى ويعجبهم ان المؤرخين فى هذا العصر يبذلمون جهدهم فيه وممن امتاز منهم فى ذلك وليز وروبرتسون ومن له ذوق سليم مثلهما.
= Brotonne and Laugier, *Résumé*, 1:23.

particulars is subordinate to the pursuit of general rules about human society:

> What is investigated is different morals, customs, opinions, and creeds; indeed, the peculiarities of the human race. They inquire about the beginnings of the nations' societies; what were their laws, their basic principles, their languages, their initial crafts, and their means of living; their different mentalities; what were the harms and benefits deriving from the different politics; what was the source of the power and wealth of nations where this differed; what was the mentality of prominent figures, and their laudable and reprehensible characteristics that made an impact on the people of their country; what caused the progress of civilization, the crafts, and the sciences. This is the aim of the age that we are in, and it is what is called philosophical or moral [*adabī*] history.[78]

It is obvious that there is no drastic shift away from the investigation of historical particulars here. Less obvious is how the passage indicates that a structural understanding of human society is the ultimate objective of history.

That it does so becomes increasingly apparent beginning with the mention of "the harms and benefits deriving from the different politics." This phrase subsumes the opening series of items into a question of "harms and benefits"; the ensuing items are all similarly geared towards questions of impact and/or causation on a grand scale, as opposed to the task of verifying details about past events. The final item on the list—"what caused the progress of civilization, the crafts, and the sciences"—crystallizes the point. As well as providing the terms of reference for the value judgments implicit in the preceding items,[79] this item makes clear that the type of history that is being described seeks to discover the workings of the notional system of "civilization" itself. This is, of course, explicitly the object of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*: the contrast consists simply in the relationship that is established between structural analysis and "history." For Ibn

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[78] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā'*, 16.
انما ينظر اختلاف الاخلاق والعوائد والآراء والمذاهب بل وغرائب النوع البشرى ويسألون عن اوائل اجتماعات الأمم وما كانت عليه من احكامهم واصولهم ولغاتهم وصنايعهم الاولية ومعايشهم واختلاف عقولهم وما هى المضار والمنافع المرتبة على اختلاف السياسات وما اصل قوة الأمم وغناهم علي اختلاف ذلك وما عقل مشاهير الناس وخصالهم الحميدة والذميمة التى اثرت فى اهل بلادهم وما سبب تقدم التمدن والصنايع والعلوم فهذا هو غرض العصر الذى نحن فيه وهو ما يسمى بالتاريخ الفلسفى او الادبى.
= Brotonne and Laugier, *Résumé*, 1:23–24.

[79] It might be argued that none is needed in relation to "the source of the power and wealth of nations," but even here value judgments are operative.

Khaldūn, as we have seen, notwithstanding its inherent value as a form of knowledge about God's order, the structural analysis of human society serves as a proof-principle for the discovery of the particulars of past events, which are identified as the proper object of "history." In Maḥmūd's *dībāja*, by way of the construct of "philosophical or moral history,"[80] the discovery of the structure is established as the ultimate task of history. The significance of the contrast can be discerned within the above passage. In the dominant trend of Tanzimat-era Arabic historical thought, the structural account of human society was understood to have a kind of normative ethical force in and of itself. In Ibn Khaldūn's understanding of history, by contrast, the value of history lay in the exemplary and counter-exemplary capacities of past events; these capacities were understood to be contingent on ethical criteria derived not from the structural analysis of past events, but rather from divine revelation and the exemplary conduct of prophets.

In the next section I elaborate on precisely how the structural account of history was understood to have normative ethical force in Arabic historical thought in the Tanzimat era. I address in particular how this normative ethical force did not encompass, and in fact opposed, the normative European supremacism that was generally characteristic of the structure-oriented mode of history in its contemporary European forms. The point that I want to make here, however, is that the establishment of what had been Ibn Khaldūn's "proof-principle"—that is, the structural account of society—as the ultimate objective of historical inquiry rendered "history" a domain of epistemic certainty to a degree that was unprecedented in Arabic historical thought. It did so in two ways. Most simply, along the lines I have set out above, it provided

[80] See Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 65–70, on Ibn Khaldūn's account of the relationship between history and "philosophy." In short, Ibn Khaldūn accounts history to be a form of *ḥikma*, which is rendered in Rosenthal's translation as "philosophy," but which actually (Irwin argues) has the broader sense of "wisdom" as a discursive field. The specific term for "philosophy" in Arabic is *falsafa*. There is no doubt that philosophy in this sense is an important influence Ibn Khaldūn's project in the *Muqaddima*, but he certainly does not conceive of his work as "philosophical history." At pp. 67–70, Irwin discusses "Ibn Khaldun's distance from philosophy."

historical inquiry with an object that was theoretically finite and determinate, and hence, at least potentially, thoroughly and perfectly knowable, by contrast with the infinity of historical particulars. More obscurely, but no less importantly, without eliminating the significance of historical particulars, the establishment of this theoretically finite and determinate structure as the ultimate object of historical inquiry had the implication that, insofar as this structure was known, historical particulars were also, to all intents and purposes, known. That is, in crude terms, so long as a given event could be located within the structure of "civilization," the event in question was thereby itself also essentially known; at least, there was a way in which it could be experienced as such. The significance of this point for the dissertation as a whole is that this development in historical thought produced a new sense of the past as a generally knowable realm.

Two further factors are likely to have corroborated the sense of history as a domain of epistemic certainty among Arab intellectuals in Egypt in the Tanzimat era. First, there was the fact that, during this period and in the immediately preceding decades, a considerable body of new and apparently solid information was being brought to light about the pasts of Egypt and, to an extent, the wider region. This was most spectacularly the case with the decipherment of hieroglyphics between the 1820s and 1850s,[81] which of course meant that inscribed monuments suddenly became pieces of precise historical evidence.[82] This, in combination with the intensive excavation of monumental sites of Pharaonic culture and the development, in this context, of archaeology as a distinct science, generated a dramatic expansion of available information on Egypt's pasts. The impact of this on perceptions of the knowability of the past among

[81] R. B. Parkinson, *Cracking Codes: The Rosetta Stone and Decipherment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 12–45.
[82] Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 93–96.

intellectuals in Egypt was perhaps intensified by the fact that the new information pertained to relatively remote pasts. Second, in a more general way, it seems likely that the sense of history as a domain of epistemic certainty was corroborated by a wider experience, across the nineteenth century, of an expansion in knowledge of the "laws of nature," both in the form of abstract understanding and, no doubt more importantly, as manifest in the development of new technologies. Whereas the expansion in available information about particular remote pasts would have produced a stronger sense of the knownness of historical particulars, this wider experience may have strengthened the sense of the solidity of the structural account of human society itself.

I began this chapter with a discussion of Ṭahṭāwī's framing of history in the preface to his work of 1868, *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*, focusing in particular on his affirmation of history as the "mainstay of certainty." I argued in Section 1 that this comprised two elements: an avowal of history as a domain of epistemic certainty, and also, more figuratively, as an autonomously indispensable foundation for human society. I argued furthermore that, in respect of both, the affirmation of history as the "mainstay of certainty" marked a departure from the terms in which Ṭahṭāwī affirmed history in his earlier collaborative work, *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, published in 1838, on the cusp of the Tanzimat era. In the present section I have argued that the avowal of history as domain of epistemic certainty was grounded in a new configuration of history as the pursuit of a structural account of human society, and in an understanding of this configuration of history as reflecting the ideal form of history in the full metaphysical sense.

2.3 History as instrument of social development in Maḥmūd's *dībāja*

2.3.1 The development of history and the development of human society

The projection of an ideal form of history in Maḥmūd's *dībāja* was not merely a means of

maximally endorsing the structure-oriented mode of history. The text not only makes clear that this form of history is literally to be understood as emanating from the metaphysical realm; it also endows history with an earthly function that adequately corresponds to its status as an ideal form in the metaphysical sense. This function and its metaphysical status make up the other aspect of Ṭahṭāwī's conception of history as the "mainstay of certainty" that I outlined above: it is by virtue of this function and its metaphysical status that history was established as an autonomously indispensable foundation of human society.

I want to argue that the way in which Maḥmūd's *dībāja* establishes history as this sort of foundation constitutes a significant point of difference from his French source. To be clear, the French source, no less than Maḥmūd's Arabic translation, endows history with a function that corresponds to its status as an ideal form in the metaphysical sense. The difference consists in how each text respectively does this; in other words, in precisely what function each text assigns to history in the grand scheme of things. In essence, the Arabic text establishes history as something like a God-given technology for the improvement of human society; the ideal form of history constitutes the optimal form of this technology, as determined ultimately by God. The French text, by contrast, establishes history as something like a vector of "spirit" in a proto-Hegelian sense, such that, within a given society, the closeness of earthly history to the ideal form of history is an organic reflection of that society's closeness to the absolutely ideal form of human society. In the case of the French text, the sense in which history has a distinct earthly "function" is thus less clear-cut, in that its apparent function is simply to manifest the ideal form of history in varying degrees of completeness, and to do this in an organic way as one element of the concrete realization on earth of the ideal form of earthly order in general. Whereas in Maḥmūd's translation the function of history is clearly instrumental, the function of history in

the French text is effectively symbolic. The significance of this contrast has to do with the effective content of this symbolism. Since the true form of history is identified most closely with modern European history, what history serves to symbolize in the French text is, in effect, the absolute superiority of modern European culture. In other words, history serves in the French text as an extremely subtle discursive mechanism for a metaphysical valorization of modern Europe as global hegemon. In Maḥmūd's translation, by contrast, history is construed and presented as an instrument of genuinely universal value for the improvement of human society.

I have argued above that, through resonances of esoteric Sufism, Maḥmūd's *dībāja* presents the earthly practice of history as the reflection of a metaphysical ideal of history. These resonances provide some support for my contention that Maḥmūd's *dībāja* presents history as emanating from the metaphysical realm. But there is more direct textual support for this contention; namely, explicit statements to the effect that God underwrites the earthly practice of history, and specifically that He authorizes its true form. The clearest case of this appears in the midst of the account of Greek and Roman historiography. Following the introduction of Polybius as the first person to have combined history with philosophy, the development of history from a non-philosophical to a philosophical form is presented, in the Arabic, ultimately as a function of "the custom of God":

> It is strange that among the two great nations of the ancients, namely the Greeks and the Romans, the philosophical historians [*al-muʾarrikhūn al-ḥakīmiyyūn*] only appeared after the historians from the orators and the people of eloquence. This is because there was need for the passage of time in order for historical events to become a target for scrutiny and the examination of their factors and causes. And in reality the custom of God (be He exalted) has proceeded [such] that envisioning and imagining come before thinking and reasoning, and that the human is able to describe something superficially [*ẓāhiran*] before being able to understand its reality [*ḥaqīqatihi*].[83]

[83] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā'*, 8.

This passage explicitly identifies the development of philosophical history as a reflection of God's order. The passage also features clear Sufi resonances: in the opposition between the description of phenomena in a superficial way (*ẓāhiran*) and the understanding of their reality (*ḥaqīqa*). These resonances affirm the impression that the development of philosophical history is somehow a reflection of God's order. Indeed, the appearance here of terms with potential Sufi resonance alongside explicit mention of God lends credence to my claims of Sufi resonances elsewhere in the *dībāja*, and to my analysis of them as conveying that the earthly practice of history is a reflection of a determinate, metaphysical ideal of history. The passage on the "perfect historian," analyzed in this way above, appears just a few pages after this one. Furthermore, the description of the approach of the "philosophical historians" of Greece and Rome in terms of the "scrutiny" (*naẓar*) of events and the investigation of their "causes" (*asbābihā*) and "causations" (*musabbibātihā*) serves to frame their achievement with reference to what I am terming the structure-oriented mode of history. That is, these terms are consistent with the way in which this form of history is presented elsewhere in the *dībāja*; for example, in the final paragraph of the *dībāja*, which features the most complete description of philosophical history in the text (cited above): as the pursuit of the underlying "cause" (*sabab*) or, alternatively, the "source" (*aṣl*) of different phenomena.[84] This passage thus not only substantiates the claim that Maḥmūd's *dībāja* represents earthly history as the reflection of a metaphysical ideal; it also more specifically represents the structure-oriented mode of history as the closest earthly approximation of this ideal. At the same time, in support of my claim in the previous section as to the likely direct influence of Ibn Khaldūn on Maḥmūd, this passage features an apparent echo of Ibn Khaldūn. In

ومن المستغرب انه عند الامتين العظيمتين من القدماء وهما اليونان والرومانيون لم يظهر المؤرخون الحكيميون الا عقب المؤرخين من الخطباء واهل الفصاحة وذلك لانه احتيج على تداول الايام الى جعل الحوادث التاريخية عرضة للنظر فيها وامتحان اسبابها ومسبباتها وفي الحقيقة قد جرت عادة الله تعالى ان يكون التصور والتخيل قبل التفكر والتعقل وان الانسان يمكنه ان يصف الشئ ظاهرا قبل ان يقتدر على الوقوف على حقيقته.

[84] Robertson, 16.

the opening preface (*khuṭba*) of the *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldūn sets out an opposition between history "on its surface" (*fī ẓāhirihi*) and history "in its interior" (*fī bāṭinihi*). In the latter aspect, history is described firstly as "scrutiny and verification" (*naẓar wa taḥqīq*) and shortly after as "a profound science of the qualities of events and their causes" (*ʿilm bi-kayfiyyāt al-waqāʾiʿ wa-asbābihā ʿamīq*).[85] The appearance of the term "scrutiny" (*naẓar*) similarly as the first item in Maḥmūd's description of the achievement of the "philosophical historians," in addition to the contrast with superficial (*ẓāhir*) forms of history, seems unlikely to be a mere coincidence.

The features of this passage that I have drawn attention to are all without parallel in the corresponding French passage, and therefore especially telling as to the distinctness of the conception of history that is expressed in the Arabic. The French text features no mention of God; no terms that equate either to "superficially" or to "reality"; and nothing equivalent to Maḥmūd's specification of the particular character of the approach of the "philosophical historians." The French authors figure the achievement of the philosophical historians, more abstractly and more vaguely, as that of having "perceived the need to submit historical events to reason"; and they account for the emergence of the two philosophical historians, again more abstractly, in terms of "the march of the human spirit":

> Il est remarquable que chez les deux grands peuples de l'antiquité, ce fut un assez long temps après les historiens orateurs, que s'élevèrent les deux écrivains philosophes qui sentirent le besoin de soumettre à la raison les événemens historiques. Telle est en effet la marche de l'esprit humain, l'imagination s'éveille avant le raisonnement, et l'on sait peindre avant de savoir étudier.[86]

Both the French and the Arabic texts make clear that the philosophical historians of Greece and Rome practiced a form of history that was objectively superior to that of their predecessors and peers; in other words, closer to the ideal form of history. But whereas the French text expresses

[85] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 9–10.
[86] Brotonne and Laugier, *Résumé*, 1:8.

this superiority simply in terms of the conformity of philosophical history with "reason," the Arabic text specifies the actual role of reason in this form of history; namely, as a means of investigating the fundamental causes of "historical events." In this way, the Arabic text gestures at the potential practical utility of this form of history, while the French text has the ascendance of reason in this form of history speak for itself. The contrast between the abstraction of the French here and the relative concreteness of the corresponding Arabic indicates the distinction that I am trying to draw between the function that each text, respectively, assigns to history in the grand scheme of things. The earthly function of history in the Arabic is always an instrumental one: to provide useful knowledge of earthly matters. In the French text, the function of history often appears to be ultimately symbolic: to reflect the ascendance of reason.

I am not claiming that the French authors nowhere define philosophical history with any more precision and substance than in the above passage. My point is that they repeatedly speak of history as if it were merely an abstract mechanism for expressing the ascendance of reason and, thereby, as is sometimes made explicit, as a kind of index of civilizational superiority. Maḥmūd consistently avoids reproducing this aspect of the French text, and instead affirms the practical utility of philosophical history as a means of improving human societies. This distinction is substantiated by an array of subtle points of contrast along the same lines as that discussed in the previous paragraph.

The above passages provide another example. Besides their contrasting ways of describing philosophical history, each text accounts for the emergence of philosophical history in a different way. As noted, in the French text, the achievement of the philosophical historians is explained in terms of "the march of the human spirit: the imagination awakens before the reasoning, and one knows how to paint before knowing how to study." The French authors thus

present the development of history as all but inextricable from the movement of the "human spirit": philosophical history consists in the submission of events to reason; in parallel, the "march of the human spirit" consists in the ascendance of the reasoning over the imagination. The effect of this is to inscribe philosophical history within a complete system of human development; one that is predicated of the very category of the human; and moreover one whose properties are implicitly already established and known. At the same time, insofar as this system is inextricable from philosophical history, which is presented in the text as the reflection of a metaphysical ideal of history, it follows that this system of human development must altogether be a reflection of some metaphysical order, with the implication that it has literally universal significance and validity. Finally, by virtue of this relationship of mutual inextricability, it follows that earthly history can have no real function within this system beyond that of symbolizing its fundamental principle, which is the ascendance of reason.

The Arabic text, by contrast, relates the particular course of history's earthly development to the "custom of God." The significance of this is that it creates a degree of separation between the development of philosophical history and the process of human development as a whole. Without any such separation, the development of philosophical history must inevitably entail an all-encompassing process of human development, or, simply, everything that is implied by the "march of the human spirit." One obvious implication of this would be that, to whatever extent philosophical history was associated with Europe, human development as a whole would also be inextricable from Europe. In other words, by framing the development of philosophical history in terms of the "custom of God," Maḥmūd allows for philosophical history to play an instrumental role in a process of development, and one that is not necessarily identical with European development.

Indeed, no less significantly, in a somewhat paradoxical way, Maḥmūd's framing of the development of philosophical history in terms of the "custom of God" has the effect of destabilizing the whole notion of a process of development that is immanent in the very category of the human, such as that in which the French text inscribes the development of philosophical history. It does this by introducing a fundamental layer of contingency into the picture, insofar as—despite His unique metaphysical standing, omnipotence, etc.—God is an agent. Indeed, the phrase "custom of God" itself underlines this element of contingency, as "custom" indicates an established norm but not an absolutely fixed one. The paradox here is that contingency is generally associated with specifically human agency and action: so, on the face of it, the French "march of the human spirit" might seem to denote a contingent, indeterminate framework of human development, while the Arabic "custom of God" might seem to indicate a universe in which human agency is effectively non-existent. In fact, at least in these instances, the reverse is the case. The French text declares a normative framework of human development without any qualification; the Arabic also affirms a normative framework of human development, but one which includes a fundamental element of contingency, insofar as the framework as a whole rests on the agency of God. This element of contingency is fundamental in the obvious sense that God's agency is fundamental to the framework; and it obtains even though God's agency is in itself, unlike human agency, absolutely determinate with respect to the relationship between intention and result. The element of contingency obtains at the level, and as a property, of human affairs. Simply put, in the Arabic text, there is no such thing as the "march of the human spirit," insofar as this denotes an inexorable process that is predicated of the category of the human. Rather, there is an external principle, the "custom of God." On this basis, philosophical history can be both the absolutely true form of history—by virtue of its conformity with the custom of

God—and also a genuinely instrumental force in human affairs, because the development of philosophical history is not already, in and of itself, proof of general conformity with the "march of the human spirit."

The distinction that I am attempting to draw between the respective functions that each text assigns to history does not rest solely on this passage: it is corroborated by other subtle points of contrast between the two texts. From the outset, the French text presents history as having developed by an impetus internal to itself. This is consistent with the framing of the development of philosophical history in terms of the "march of the human spirit" because it implies the predetermination of the development of history. At the same time, it strengthens the symbolic and indexical function of history by establishing it as a quasi-independent system within the overarching system of human development. The text as a whole begins with a version of the Roman statesman Cicero's (106–43 BCE) famous dictum on history, upon which the French authors briefly expand, before giving a snapshot of the initial stages of history's development:

> Cicéron définissait l'histoire, le témoin des temps, la lumière de la vérité, l'école de la vie, la messagère de l'antiquité. Cette définition peut être étendue encore ; au lieu d'être présentée seulement comme l'école de la vie, l'histoire doit être envisagée aussi comme la leçon éternelle des peuples et des rois. Ce ne fut que long-temps après son origine mal assurée, que l'histoire prit une attitude imposante ; il fallut attendre le développement des idées et des événemens, pour voir éclore ces premiers chefs-d'œuvre, qui seuls ont lié par le souvenir, et les homme et les temps.[87]

Before addressing how this passage relates to the text's framing of the development of history, I should first note that it provides an example of the French text giving a substantive indication of the function of history. As well as implicitly affirming Cicero's definition of history as the "school of life," the French authors state that history should be regarded as "the eternal lesson of

[87] Brotonne and Laugier, 1:1. Cicero's description of history appears in *De oratore* 2, 9, 36.

peoples and kings." Broadly speaking, they are thus clearly expressing a conception of history as a source of instruction of some kind. In light of this passage, I should reiterate: my argument is not that the French authors say nothing substantive about history as a social practice; it is rather that they blend history into a process of development such that history's capacities and potential utility as a social practice are effectively submerged within this process; and further, most importantly, that Maḥmūd's translation consistently amplifies the capacities of history as a useful social practice, while establishing a degree of separation between history and any overarching system or process of development.

The elements of the above passage that support this account of the French text are several. First is the way in which the initial stages of the development of history are described; in particular, the predication of this as a function of history itself: some considerable time after its uncertain beginnings, "history assumed an imposing attitude." Second is the vague way in which the emergence of the first great works of history is linked to "the development of ideas and events." Third is the framing of the development of history as a kind of spectacle: "it was necessary to wait […] in order to see these first masterpieces hatch." This ties in with my claim that the ultimate function of history in the French text is a symbolic, indexical one. The impersonal construction in "it was necessary to wait" ("*il fallut attendre*") coheres with this: the symbolic, indexical function of history within this ideological framework is not principally for an audience in any ordinary sense (viz. of humans); rather, it operates at the level of pure objectivity, which intensifies its normative power. Fourth is the organic imagery of these masterpieces "hatching" ("*éclore*"). This obviously conveys an impression of the development of history as a self-determining and effectively automatic process. Fifth, and finally, is the French authors' expansion of Cicero's dictum. The primary sense of the claim that history should be

regarded as "the eternal lesson of peoples and kings" may simply be that history is perennially a source of (mundane) instruction for human beings. Yet, the phrase "eternal lesson"—particularly as contrasted with "only" the "school of life"—inevitably has the additional effect of imputing a certain transcendent significance to the instructional content of history, thereby elevating history above the status of a God-given instrument of utility for human society to that of a source of direct insight into the highest matters of metaphysics.

Each of these features of the French text is either toned down or eliminated in the Arabic. Maḥmūd translates the opening paragraph of his French source in such a way as to present the development of history not as a self-determining process that is organically linked with some overarching system of development, but rather as the effect of human agency, with all that this implies of contingency and indeterminacy. In doing so, he also gestures towards the function of history as a useful tool or instrument:

> Cicero defined history as the witness of times; the light of truth; the school of life; the messenger of ancestors to their offspring. (End [of quotation].) Without objection, the definition may be enlarged: [it is also] the instructor and educator of kings and subjects. Only with the passage of time did it find a place in the chain of the esteemed sciences, after having remained for an extensive period on unsure footing. When ideas expanded, and events became abundant and diffused, and needed to be bound together and assessed, then did the great compositions and weighty compilations on it appear: to link times and people with places and traces, and to remind of what has passed with fullest remembrance.[88]

History's initial development is presented here as a process whereby history gradually became secure in its "footing," to use Maḥmūd's metaphor, and on this basis was accorded a place among "the esteemed sciences." Ostensibly, as in the French text, history itself plays an active

[88] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā'*, 3–4.
حد سيسرون التاريخ بانه شاهد الأزمنة نور الحقيقة مدرسة الحياة رسول السلف الى الخلف ولا بأس بان يزاد فى التعريف أستاذ الملوك والرعايا ومعلمهم ولم ينتظم في سلك العلوم المعتبرة الا على ممر الايام بعد ان مكث مدة مديدة غير راسخ القدم فلما اتسعت الافكار واخذت الحوادث في الكثرة والانتشار واحتاجت الى التقييد والاعتبار ظهرت فيه المؤلفات العظيمة والمصنفات الجسيمه لتربط الازمان والناس بالاماكن والآثار وتذكر ما مضى اتم تذكار.

role in this, insofar as, syntactically, it is the subject of an active verb. However, this verb (*intaẓam*) is one with a semi-passive sense (lit. "be ordered," "be organized," "be incorporated"),[89] and the remainder of the clause makes clear that the change in history's status was a function not of some internal impetus on the part of history itself, but rather of its elaboration and construction as a valid system of knowledge-production—that is, at the hands of human agents. Such is the effect of Maḥmūd's reference to "the chain of the esteemed sciences." This phrase—which has no parallel in the French—identifies the development of history in practice as being contingent on something like social consensus: accession to the status of a "science" centrally implies social consensus within Arabo-Islamic tradition in general; moreover, "esteemed," by virtue both of its meaning and its being in the passive voice, draws attention to this point. The way in which Maḥmūd describes the state that history was in prior to its shift in status is consistent with this: the description of history as having been "on unsure footing" implies a practice that was without settled discursive rules. The French text, by contrast, conjures a completely obscure, long-drawn-out before-times, at some point during which, as if spontaneously, "history assumed an imposing attitude."

Maḥmūd's departures from the other features of the French passage that I noted above work to similar effect. Where the French text establishes a vague correspondence between the "development of ideas and events" and the emergence of the first great works of history, Maḥmūd introduces a precise connection, and one that unmistakably implies the agency of humans: the expansion of ideas and the increasing abundance and diffusion of events (as he puts it) "needed binding and assessment" (*iḥtājat ilā al-taqyīd wa'l-iʿtibār*); that is, one has to assume, by (and for) humans. Similarly, where the French text states of the first masterpieces

[89] Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 1147.

that they "alone linked together, by memory, both men and times," Maḥmūd changes the construction to a purpose clause, which serves to imply human agency and interestedness: the first great works appeared "in order to link together" (*li-tarbuṭ*) people and places, etc. Besides this introduction of human agency into the text, Maḥmūd tones down the language of spectacle: there are no verbs of seeing. While there is an instance of the visual verb "appeared" (*ẓaharat*), the various indications of human agency in the surrounding context mitigate any impression that the development of history is a matter of pure spectacle. "Appeared" is itself a replacement of the organic imagery of the French text's "hatch." Also eliminated is the imputation of transcendent significance to the instructional content of history: in Maḥmūd's version, history is mundanely "the instructor and educator of kings and subjects." In a further point of contrast that follows the same trajectory of divergence, where the French text describes history as the "messenger of antiquity" as part of Cicero's definition, Maḥmūd represents history as the "messenger of ancestors to their offspring." The Arabic figures history as a form of communication between generations of humans, while the French presents history itself as the emissary of abstract "antiquity."[90]

These various points of contrast support my contention that, whereas the French text has a tendency to represent the development of history as a self-determining, effectively automatic process, Maḥmūd pushes against this in his translation, inserting human agency into the process. This implicitly introduces contingency into the development of history; it also situates the development of history within a framework of human desires and needs, which suggests that, at least, a sense of history as having some sort of utility has played a part in the development of

[90] On the face of it, the French is a straightforward reflection of the Latin: "*nuntia vetustatis*." On the other hand, by the nineteenth century, "antiquity" had long acquired a periodizing and often also spatial—and hence, on both counts, abstract—valence that had no equivalent in Cicero's time. This produces a level of abstraction in the phrase as a whole that is not present in Cicero.

history. But the point that I want to make is not simply that the Arabic text presents the development of history as a process involving human agency, contingency, and an apprehension of history as a useful practice, while the French text presents it as an effectively automatic process, devoid of human agency and contingency. It is that Maḥmūd's departures from the French text in these respects form part of a more profound contrast, whereby the Arabic text presents the development of history as a process that is ultimately distinct from any overarching process of development, while the French text inscribes the development of history within just such a process, namely the "march of the human spirit."

This contrast is apparent in another subtle departure that Maḥmūd makes from the French source. In my initial overview of the French source of Maḥmūd's *dībāja*, I noted that it frames the development of history as homologous with the development of civilization itself. One of the ways in which it does this is by using the same evaluative terminology for both; by describing the different stages of history in terms that could equally be applied to the supposed stages of human social development, as for example with reference to the state of historical writing after the fall of Rome: "*Lorsqu'à son tour Rome fut abattue*, *l'histoire retomba dans sa première barbarie*."[91] The contrast with the corresponding Arabic is subtle. In literal translation, the relevant sentence runs as follows: "When Rome itself weakened, as the people of Greece had weakened before it, history returned to that which had been upon it of crudeness."[92] Like the French, the Arabic features a term that could equally describe a form of human society, namely "crudeness," which is my rendering of the Arabic *khushūna*. This literally means "roughness," "crudeness," and cognate terms appear elsewhere in *Itḥāf al-Mulūk* with reference to forms of

[91] Brotonne and Laugier, *Résumé*, 1:16.
[92] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā'*, 13.
فلما ضعفت رومة نفسها كما ضعف اهل اليونان قبلها رجع التاريخ الى ما كان عليه من الخشونة.

human society.[93] *Khushūna* is not the most obvious or direct translation choice for "*barbarie*"; that would be *tabarbur*, which also appears in the text, both in nominal and adjectival form.[94] It may be said of *khushūna* that, unlike "*barbarie*" and *tabarbur*, its basic sense does not refer to a notional mode of human society or human behavior, and that therefore it has nothing like the striking effect of the use of "*barbarie*" with reference to history. However, the point of contrast that I want to emphasize is not Maḥmūd's word-choice but the syntax: whereas the French authors state that history "fell back into its initial barbarism," Maḥmūd writes that history "returned to that which had been upon it [*ʿalaihi*] of crudeness"; and not, as would be a more direct translation, "to its initial crudeness" (*ilā khushūnatihi al-ūlā*). Like several of the other points of contrast that I have mentioned, Maḥmūd's chosen phrasing implicitly introduces an external force into the shaping of history: the crudeness is not predicated directly of history, as "its (own) crudeness"; rather, it is "upon" it, which implies that it is an effect of something other than internally-determined transmutations on the part of history itself. This establishes a degree of separation, however slight, between the transformations of history and the rise and fall of civilization. In the French, by contrast, the fall of civilization—surely implied by the fall of Rome—goes hand in hand with the collapse of history itself into barbarism.

The parallelism between the fall of Rome and the collapse of history into "its original barbarism" in the French text builds on the establishment of a parallel between the "infancy of society" and the "infancy of history" in a passage towards the beginning of the text. In his translation of this passage, in a rather different sort of contrast and the final point that I will

[93] E.g., *takhashshun* (p. 6 in the *sābiqa*); *khushniyya* (p. 2 in the main text).
[94] In collocation with *takhashshun* (see previous note); in adjectival form, *mutabarbirīn* (p. 7 in the *sābiqa*). *Tabarbur* had apparently come to encompass the sense of "barbarism" current in European languages by loan-shift from the European term, with which it clearly shares its etymology. In pre-nineteenth-century Arabic it had meant "speak obscurely," without necessarily implying a lack of "civilization."

discuss, Maḥmūd explicitly claims an instrumental function for history in the development of "civilization," elaborating to this end on a detail of the French text that does not—at least, not clearly—amount to such a claim. The key sentence comes at the end of a paragraph that discusses some of the earliest Greek and Roman historians: "*L'enfance de la société fut aussi l'enfance de l'histoire*, *mais ces annales incomplètes étaient déjà un aiguillon puissant et une source d'exemples*."[95] The crucial phrase is "*un aiguillon puissant*." There are two possible readings of this phrase. If the ensuing "*une source d'exemples*" is taken to mean "a source of moral exempla," then "*aiguillon puissant*" would be "a powerful spur of ethical behavior." Alternatively, "*exemples*" might be "examples of how to write history," in which case "*aiguillon puissant*" would be "a powerful spur to the advancement of historical writing."

In his translation, Maḥmūd expands on both the parallelism between the infancies of society and history, and then also on the function of history as "*un aiguillon puissant*," which he construes as meaning "a strong cause of [*sabab qawiyy fī*] civilization":[96]

> From here it may be understood that the cradle of civility [*taʾannus*] and human society was also the cradle of history; that is, the time of humans existing close to the source of nature and without progress in education and civilization was equally the time of history existing in its beginnings and its infancy; but this history, despite its lack of perfection, was a strong cause of civilization and a source for lessons.[97]

This passage provides a different sort of example of Maḥmūd establishing a degree of separation between history and civilization. In this case, he does so by identifying history as a cause of civilization, and specifically as an efficient cause in Aristotelian terms. That he is identifying history as specifically this sort of cause is clear from the passage as a whole: he writes that

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[95] Brotonne and Laugier, *Résumé*, 1:3.
[96] On *sabab fī*, see Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 456; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʻArab*, 1910.
[97] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbāʾ*, 5.
ومن هنا يفهم ان مهد التأنس والاجتماع الانسانى هو مهد التاريخ يعنى زمن وجود النوع الانسانى بالقرب لاصل الفطرة وعدم تقدمه فى التربية والتمدن هو كذلك زمن وجود التاريخ في مباديه وطفوليته ولكن هذا التاريخ مع عدم كماله كان سببا قويا فى التمدن ومنشأ للاعتبارات.

history was “in its beginnings and its infancy” when the human species was “without progress in education and civilization,” but that “this history” was, despite its shortcomings, “a strong cause of civilization.” Given that this was a time of supposedly limited or no civilization, the only sense in which history can be a “strong cause” of civilization here is as an efficient cause, which is to say a cause that makes something happen. This sort of cause is clearly distinct from its effect; hence, the establishment of a degree of separation here between history and civilization. In the French text, by contrast, whether “*aiguillon puissant*” means “powerful spur” to ethical action or to the further advancement of historical writing, there is no such separation. In the first case, history may be understood as a formal cause of “*société*”; that is, as an essential component of “society,” insofar as it fosters ethical action. In the second case, the development of history goes hand in hand with the development of society, as an organic facet of society, without having any causal function with respect to society. Crucially, on neither reading of the French text does history function as an efficient cause with respect to society. This point is affirmed by “*déjà*,” which situates the effect of the “incomplete annals” within “the infancy of society.” In the French text, history may thus be understood at best as an efficient cause with respect to ethical action, but as no more than a formal cause of the phenomenon of “society” itself—whereas it is explicitly an efficient cause of “civilization” in Maḥmūd’s translation (albeit not the only such cause).

It seems likely that Maḥmūd will have understood these—after all, fairly modest—departures from his source not as an attempt to substantially, let alone radically, rework the meaning of the French text, but simply as an effort to introduce greater precision and clarity into his translation. The points of contrast that I have identified generally take the form of brief elaboration on some dense phrasing in the French, or small differences of syntax or semantics.

His introduction of the "custom of God" is a slightly different case, but even this may well have seemed to Maḥmūd to be a relatively minor departure from the reference to the French text's "march of the human spirit," and of limited consequence in terms of the meaning of the text as a whole. My argument is that nevertheless, by virtue of these departures, Maḥmūd's *dībāja* expresses a significantly different conception of history from that which the French authors convey. This is not to suggest that Maḥmūd's account of history is unreflective or accidental: rather, it is to ascribe the divergence between the texts to a fundamental difference of perspective, and not to a purely abstract intellectual exercise in critique.

2.3.2 History and metanarrative

The issue at stake in the points of contrast that I have discussed is what kind of metanarrative each text constructs around history: in other words, what theory of "history"—meaning now events themselves in aggregate—each text brings to bear on history in the more circumscribed sense that I have so far exclusively been addressing; that is, history as discourse or discipline. This may seem to be an intensely obscure problem, but it goes directly to the question of what history (in the latter sense) was expected, or not expected, to do in each case; in other words, what its function was taken to be in the grand scheme of things. In summary, my argument has been that, whereas the French authors inscribe history within a metanarrative of the "march of human spirit," Maḥmūd establishes a degree of separation between the development of history and any such overarching process of "human" development. When it comes to accounting directly for the development of philosophical history, he refers instead to the "custom of God." I should note that the same exchange of God's initiative or agency in the development of history for an apparently automatic, self-determining, organic process of development appears elsewhere in the *dībāja*. Regarding the transition from Homer's quasi-historiographical poetry to history in

a truer sense (to speak in the idiom of the two texts), the French authors write: "*mais des siècles s'écouleront encore*, *avant que cette aurore imparfaite ait fait place aux premiers rayons d'une clarté plus vive*."[98] Maḥmūd translates: "And perhaps a number of centuries continued in this situation, until God (be He praised and exalted) facilitated understanding of what He indicates with the clearest of indication[s]."[99]

That a theological metanarrative for the development of history is not to be dismissed as an accidental feature of Maḥmūd's translation is confirmed by the *khuṭba*-style preface that immediately precedes the *dībāja*. As part of the customary praise of God, Maḥmūd explicitly incorporates an account of the emergence of "useful sciences of life" in Europe in the near past, and he frames this as a function of God's agency. "Life" here is *maʿāsh*, which implies "the practicalities of living," as opposed to "biological life" (which would be *ḥayāt*):

> Praise be to a god [*subḥānahu min ilāh*] that created man and distinguished him with knowledge, and made his tongue the mediator of the heart, and appointed it with wisdom and high purpose, and made particular countries the site of appearance of this: thus he has ennobled Asia with the pride of the message and the prophecy, and honor and chivalry; and now he has appointed Europe with the pride of useful sciences of life, and brilliant arts of education, and brought its people from barbarism to settled civilization, and made them masters of sciences and gleaming industries.[100]

This short passage anticipates Maḥmūd's framing of the development of philosophical history in terms of the "custom of God," insofar as it frames the emergence of "useful sciences of life"—which may be assumed to include history—in terms of God's agency.

The explicitness of the metanarrative in this passage raises more acutely the question of

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[98] Brotonne and Laugier, *Résumé*, 1:2.

[99] Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbā'*, 4.
وربما استمرت عدة قرون على هذه الحالة حتى ييسر الله سبحانه وتعالى بالوقوف على ما يدل عليها اوضح دلالة.

[100] Robertson, 2. The square brackets indicate the correct text as per the list of corrections:
فسبحانه من اله خلق الانسان وميزه بالعرفان وجعل لسانه ترجمان الجنا[ن] وخصه بالحكمة وعلوّ الهمة وجعل مظهر ذلك بعض البلدان فشرف آسيا بفخار الرسالة والنبوة والكرم والفتوه ثم خص الآن اوربا بفخار علوم المعاش النافعة وفنون التربية الساطعة واخرج أهلها من حاز الخشنية الى الحضارة المدنية وجعلهم ارباب علوم وصناعات سنية.

its discursive value, which is to say the discursive value of this particular metanarrative, pertaining as it does not only to philosophical history, but also—for this is clearly at stake here—to contemporary Europe in a quite general way, as well as to Asia. There is, of course, the point that an explicitly theological understanding of human affairs was conventional in the context in which Maḥmūd was operating, and that therefore it had the advantage of familiarity. But it had another less obvious and more substantial advantage, implicit already in my analysis of Maḥmūd's framing of the development of philosophical history. This is that, notwithstanding the infinite possibilities of theology, an account of human affairs in terms of God has inherently less normative force, as far as any given status quo of human affairs is concerned, than an account in terms of the "march of the human spirit." From the perspective of Egypt around 1840, to account for the status quo of world affairs in terms of the "march of the human spirit" would be to endow Europe's dominant position with all-encompassing normative force. To suppose, on the other hand, that particular "useful" practices had fairly recently been discovered in Europe, in accordance with the ways of God, had no such sweeping implications. In extricating history from a normative account of the status quo, Maḥmūd was rejecting the normativity of the status quo. He was also, more specifically, articulating an understanding of human affairs in which history (as discipline) could play a genuinely instrumental role in transforming the status quo—and in which, moreover, insofar as history was bestowed by God, it was indispensable in this role.

The establishment of history in this role—as an indispensable instrument of social transformation—is linked to what I identified in the previous section as the major development of Arabic historical thought in the Tanzimat era, namely the establishment of the underlying structure of human society as the ultimate object of historical inquiry. As I noted towards the end of the previous section, the latter development entailed a transformation in how exactly history

was understood to operate as an ethical discipline. Whereas in earlier Arabic historical thought the ethical value of history was understood to consist in the exemplary and counter-exemplary force of historical reports; by contrast, in the dominant trend of Tanzimat-era Arabic historical thought, the ethical value of history was understood to inhere in the structural account of human society, which was understood to have normative ethical force in and of itself. As I implied above, the contrast here is that, in the Tanzimat-era configuration, the ethical force of history was understood to be immanent in historical inquiry, and not—as in earlier Arabic historical thought broadly speaking—fundamentally derivative from other sources of authority, in particular those of revelation and prophetic exemplarity. This transformation had the implication that history was indispensable to social transformation in the sense that I introduced above with reference to Ṭahṭāwī's framing of history as the "mainstay of certainty": as an autonomously indispensable foundation of human society—where "society" is normatively understood to be subject to transformation or development. The argument of this section, finally, is that the establishment of history in this capacity, as evidenced in Maḥmūd's *dībāja*, was one of the major foundations of Ṭahṭāwī's affirmation of history as the "mainstay of certainty," in addition to the establishment of the underlying structure of human society as the ultimate object of historical inquiry.

2.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has thus been to describe the emergence of a new conception of history in Egypt around the beginning of the Tanzimat era, and to argue that this conception of history formed the basis of a new sense of history as what Ṭahṭāwī referred to, much later in the Tanzimat era, as the "mainstay of certainty." I argued in the first section of the chapter that, in framing history in this way, Ṭahṭāwī was expressing both the notion that history afforded epistemic certainty about the past and also a view of history as a necessary foundation of human

society. I drew a contrast between Ṭahṭāwī's framing of history in these terms in the late Tanzimat era and the terms in which he had affirmed history in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, on the cusp of the Tanzimat era. From there I argued that the two aspects of Ṭahṭāwī's affirmation of history as the "mainstay of certainty" were rooted in a new conception of history that developed in the course of the same translation movement in Egypt as produced *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. I identified a short translation of a French work on historiography as the earliest articulation of this new conception of history. In the main body of the chapter I have argued that this work articulates a conception of history that differs from earlier Arabic historical thought in the fundamental respect that it identifies structural analysis of historical information as the ultimate aim of historical inquiry. I have argued furthermore that this formed part of a transformation of the way in which history was understood to operate as an ethical discipline, such that history's ethical force was understood to inhere entirely in the structural analysis of historical information. However, I have also argued that by referring the normativity of this approach to history to God—and not to the "march of the human spirit," as does his French source—Maḥmūd extricates this conception of history from a framework of human social development according to which the status quo must inevitably reflect, in all possible respects, the natural and proper state of affairs, as guaranteed by the metaphysical order. The contrast on this point between Maḥmūd's *dībāja* and his French source thus maps onto the respective positionalities of the authors: Maḥmūd as participant in a project geared towards the development of localized power and increased economic capacity in Egypt, at a time of gross power imbalances vis-à-vis Europe; the French authors as participants (however undistinguished) in European historiographical discourse at a time of well-established, and also still expanding, European dominance.

Over the course of the chapter I have indicated sufficient connections between Maḥmūd

and Ṭahṭāwī to substantiate a fairly direct link between the conception of history in Maḥmūd's *dībāja* and Ṭahṭāwī's own sense of history; and, in a somewhat different way, with Abū al-Suʿūd. Beyond Egypt, as it happens, Maḥmūd's *dībāja* was used as the model for a portion of the introduction to a major historical dictionary that was printed in Beirut in 1877, as part of an essay on the writing of history.[101] This is a good indication of the influence that the early Bulaq history works had on Arabic historical thought across the Tanzimat era more broadly, and particularly in Beirut. In the way of other such indications, at the start of the previous chapter I noted a number of references to *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* from Morocco to Beirut through the late 1860s.[102] In a different kind of example, Maḥmūd's translation of Robertson is referenced in considerable detail in a letter to the editor, sent from Aleppo, that appeared in the Beirut-based weekly *al-Zahra* in 1870.[103] In a less clear-cut case, the introduction to the aforementioned historical dictionary of 1877 also quotes the opening line of the passage by Ibn al-Athir with which Ṭahṭāwī begins his account of history in *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*.[104]

My argument is not, however, that Maḥmūd's *dībāja* itself exerted the decisive influence on Tanzimat-era Arabic historical thought. It is rather that it evidences the emergence of a new

[101] Salīm ibn Jibrāʾīl Khūrī and Mīkhāʾīl Shehāda, *Kitāb Āthār al-Ādhār: al-Qism al-Tārīkhī* (Bayrūt: Al-Maṭbaʿah al-Sūrīyah, 1877), *wāw–khāʾ*. Cf. Robertson, *Itḥāf al-mulūk al-alibbāʾ*, 3–13.

[102] See chapter 1, n.2 (above). I have also incidentally come across a reference to one of Ṭahṭāwī's geography works from the late 1830s in a text by the renowned mid-nineteenth century Baghdad-based scholar Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854): *Kitāb gharāʾib al-ightirāb wa-nuzhat al-albāb*, ed. ʿAbbās ʿAzzāwī and Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn (Bayrūt: al-Dār al-ʿArabīyah lil-Mawsūʿāt, 2015), 188.

[103] It was the opening item in Issue 19 (May 7), and appears at pp. 146–8 in Volume 1 (1870), which comprised all issues from the journal's first year.

[104] Khūrī and Shehāda, *hāʾ*. Shehāda (sole author of the introduction, as Khūri had passed away during the production of the work) mentions *Ghurar al-Muḥāḍara* by Ibn al-Khāzīn as his source; that is, *Ghurar al-Muḥāḍara wa-Durar al-Mukāthara*. Ibn al-Khāzin (al-Baghdādī) is now better known as Tāj al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Anjab Ibn al-Sāʿī (d. 674/1275). Since Ṭahṭāwī does not mention a source, it seems possible that Shehāda had come across the lines of Ibn al-Athīr in Ṭahṭāwī and then looked for the source of the quotation in *Ghurar al-Muḥāḍara*, which, to judge by Evliya Çelebi's (d. 1095/1685) note on the author, was a compendium of writings on history. (The work does not seem ever to have been printed.) But it is also, of course, possible that Shehāda's quotation of Ibn al-Athīr is independent of the influence of Ṭahṭāwī. Cf. Kâtip Çelebi, *Kitāb kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn*, ed. Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn Yāltaqāyā, Muallim Rifat Kilisli, and Ismāʾīl Bāshā Bābānī, vol. 2 (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthanna, 1941), 1202.

conception of history that was in fact a crucial element in the formation of the Arabic discourse of "revival" in Tanzimat-era Egypt and Syria. As I argue in the next chapter, this discourse was animated by a desire to cultivate and control the potentiality of the past. The significance of the conception of history that I have analyzed in this chapter was that, in its capacity as the basis of a new sense of history as the "mainstay of certainty," it raised the specter of the possible restoration of past times to full life, and thereby provided an apparent means for realizing this desire.

CHAPTER 4

"Where were our ancestors yesterday?"

Ancient Pasts in Tanzimat-Era Egypt and Syria

Introduction: a new structure of historical experience

In his famous lecture on "the culture of the Arabs," delivered in Beirut on February 15th of 1859 and printed soon after, Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819–83) speculated that "the condition the Europeans have abided in for numerous years and lengthy periods, perhaps [*yumkin*] the Arabs may attain in the shortest possible time with the utmost perfection and precision."[1] Appearing amidst Bustānī's reflections on the hopes of reviving the historic glories of Arab culture in the field of knowledge production, this is a near-quotation of a line in Ṭahṭāwī's preface to *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ wa-Hidāyat al-Ḥukamāʾ* ("The Beginning[s] of the Ancients and the Guidance of the Sages," 1838 CE), the text that I analyzed in detail in chapter 2. Regarding the achievements of Mehmed Ali, Ṭahṭāwī had written, "the condition the Europeans have abided in for numerous years and lengthy periods, he is attaining in the shortest possible time with the utmost precision and perfection."[2] The closeness of the wording leaves no doubt that Bustānī was drawing on Ṭahṭāwī here, and the context gives a clue as to why. Bustānī has just referred approvingly to the vigorous printing and translation activities undertaken during the rule of "Mehmed Ali of undying renown" (*al-mukhallad al-dhikr Mehmed ʿAlī*). He mentioned these as an example of the kind of efforts that would restore, to cite Bustānī's words from earlier in the paragraph, "the glory of

[1] Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Khuṭbah fī ādāb al-ʿArab* (Beirut: n.p., 1859), 28. This line is quoted by Jeffrey Sacks, *Iterations of Loss: Mutilation and Aesthetic Form, Al-Shidyaq to Darwish* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 82. The Arabic is as follows:
وما مكث فيه الافرنج السنين العديدة والمدد المديدة يمكن العرب ان يكتسبوه في اقرب زمان مع غاية الاتقان والإحكام.

[2] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ Wa-Hidāyat al-Ḥukama* (Būlāq, Miṣr: Dār al-Ṭibāʿah al-ʿĀmirah, 1838), 7:
ما مكث فيه الافرنج السنين العديدة والمدد المديدة يكتسبه في اقرب زمان مع غاية الاحكام والاتقان.

Baghdad," "the pride of Aleppo," "the dazzle of Alexandria, the splendor of al-Andalus, and the brilliance of Damascus."[3] The line from *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* was presumably one that had lodged in Bustānī's mind in association with Mehmed Ali's projects, perhaps thanks in part to the mnemonic utility of the rhyming prose (*sajʿ*) that Ṭahṭāwī used in that preface. Setting aside for the moment the significance of the reference to "the Europeans" in the two contexts, and the substitution of "the Arabs" for Mehmed Ali in Bustānī, what is striking is that the line emerges here with a modification in the mood of the main verb. Where Ṭahṭāwī had written that Mehmed Ali "*is attaining*" the condition of the Europeans in the shortest possible time, Bustānī had it that "*perhaps* the Arabs *may* attain" this condition.

This shift in mood is symptomatic of a process whereby, in the context of the Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876), Arab intellectuals in different parts of the Ottoman Empire articulated a complex new structure of historical experience.[4] The major features of this were a possible but remote future that was imagined to be significantly different from, and better than, the present; a remote past that was imagined to have been far more glorious and prosperous than the present and that was taken, on this account, to indicate that a future substantially different from the present was a genuine possibility; and, caught between these remote, imaginary temporal realms, a present that was weighed down by the recent past but showed some fragile signs of progress towards the hoped-for future. The aim of this chapter is to elucidate how the past was implicated in the formation of this new structure of historical experience: how a new mode of engagement with the past, particularly the remote past, played a crucial role in it. At the heart of this structure of experience, and central to this mode of engagement with the past, was the concept of "revival"

[3] al-Bustānī, *Khuṭbah*, 27–28.
[4] On the concept of "historical experience," see Stephan Palmié and Charles Stewart, "Introduction: The Varieties of Historical Experience," in *The Varieties of Historical Experience*, ed. Stephan Palmié and Charles Stewart (London: Routledge, 2019), 1–29.

(Ar. *iḥyāʾ*). On this basis, as noted in the previous chapter, I use the term "revivalism" to refer to both the structure of historical experience and the mode of engagement with the past. I have organized the chapter around historiographical works produced in Beirut by intellectuals from Mount Lebanon, which formed part of the Ottoman province of *al-Shām* ("Greater Syria"), but I also extensively compare developments in the intellectual culture of Egypt in this period, focusing above all on the later works of Ṭahṭāwī.

I begin the chapter by arguing that, under the influence of the Tanzimat agenda, but also, in Mount Lebanon, that of Western missionaries, and in dialogue with European Orientalist literature, Arab intellectuals in this period articulated an idea of certain times in the remote past as having enjoyed a fuller, altogether more vital form of life than existed in the present. Across a variety of genres, they figured these remote pasts as symbols of a potentiality that the present was failing to realize.[5] These were, to be precise, remote pasts that the intellectuals identified as parts of their own history, whether by virtue of geographical location (Syria, Lebanon, Egypt), cultural tradition (Arabic, Islamic), or political framework (Ottoman): the symbolic potentiality of these remote pasts represented, for these intellectuals, the potential of their own societies to flourish and prosper, and hence a promise of future prosperity. At the same time, however, the symbolic potentiality of the region's pasts represented a threat: in European colonial discourse, the figuration of the region's remote pasts as symbols of potentiality indicated the region's potential for colonization and, through contrast with a supposedly degenerate present, the inability of the local population to realize this potential. I argue that the revivalist mode of engagement with the past was animated by a twofold desire corresponding to these two aspects of the symbolic potentiality of the past: a desire to cultivate the promise and, at the same time,

[5] Cf. Mark Payne, *Hontology: Depressive Anthropology and the Shame of Life* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2018), 27–28, which has shaped my thinking on this topic.

control the threat of the potentiality of the past. I argue that this desire can be traced in the particular historiographical works that are the main focus of this chapter, notably in their aspirations for comprehensiveness, but also more broadly in the expansive scope of the Arabic discourse on the remote past in this period; I argue furthermore that the printing of historic works of Arabic literature on a massive scale, which was also a development of the Tanzimat era, was an overlapping phenomenon.

Revivalist ideas have played an important role in Arabic thought well beyond the Tanzimat era. Revivalist thinking was integral to the formation of the influential account of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Arab culture as the Nahda ("awakening," "rising"; sometimes as a proper noun, "Renaissance"). As I noted in the introduction, this account developed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century—that is, within the period itself—and has since exerted a powerful, wide-ranging influence on Arabic social thought, as well as on the historiography of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Arab culture in both Arabic and European languages. Revivalism was likewise an ingredient of the Salafism of Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), probably the most influential Islamic thinker of the era, and revivalist ideas can be traced in subsequent mass ideologies, most obviously nationalism and Salafi movements, in all their respective varieties. In this chapter, I am not seeking to present the revivalism of the Tanzimat era as the origin of all subsequent revivalist thinking in Arabic. This is not to say that Tanzimat-era revivalism did not form part of the genealogy of these later developments: it did. But here I analyze the revivalism of the Tanzimat era precisely as a phenomenon of this era. My broad aim in doing so is to contribute to the development of a more nuanced account of nineteenth-century Arabic literary production, attentive to its variety across the century as a

whole.[6] More narrowly, the limited scope of this chapter helps bring to light the counterhegemonic—which is to say anti-colonial—dimensions of Tanzimat-era revivalism; it also serves to dislodge the nation as the ultimate paradigm and inevitable telos of nineteenth-century Arabic historical thought—which is not to say that "the nation" (*waṭan*) was absent from the concerns of the authors that I discuss in this chapter.

Within the plan of the dissertation, this chapter develops my argument as to the kind of settlement with the spectral dimensions of the past was characteristic of the Tanzimat-era discourse of revival. In the main body of the chapter I show how this discourse was animated by an acute sense of the past as a field of potentialities that can be harnessed and mobilized, to both benign and malign ends, and I relate this sense of this past in concrete ways to the threat of colonialism and the desire to resist this threat. This "sense of the past" is precisely a particular sense of the spectral capacities of the past: a sense, or feeling, as to what these capacities are and how they must be approached.

3.1 The discourse of revival and the potentiality of the past

The rhetoric of revival in the Gülhane Decree of 1839, the inaugural document of the Tanzimat reforms, was wide-ranging. As I mentioned in the opening chapter of this dissertation, the decree speaks of "the revival of religion, state, property, and [religious] community." It names here a mixture of expansive domains of activity and basic social structures that supposedly warranted "revival." This has the obvious implication that these domains of activity and social structures were all somehow lacking in "life" in the present. As I also noted above, the document explicitly identifies a period of decline of 150 years that had seen deviation from "the noble religious law

[6] See the Introduction (above), pp. 2–3, and the note there on recent trends in the scholarship on the Nahda.

and the divine ordinances."[7] In view of the expansiveness and basic character of the domains of activity and social structures that supposedly need reviving, it seems fair to say that the document conjures, in a quite general way, a present world that is not fully alive, and it gestures to a past world that implicitly contrasted with the present one on this point.

I showed in the opening chapter that the rhetoric of revival in the first Tanzimat decree was taken up by a variety of intellectuals from Mount Lebanon. I cited statements to the effect that a revival was underway made by three major figures of nineteenth-century Arabic intellectual culture, namely Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī (1800–1871), Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq's (1804–1870), and Khalīl al-Khūrī (1836–1907), as well as one by the lesser known figure of Ibrāhīm ibn Khalīl al-Najjār (1822–1862). In three of the passages that I quoted, the explicit object of revival was "the sciences"; in the fourth it was "the state [*dawla*] of the caliphate," one of the objects listed in the Tanzimat decree. Taken in isolation, these are relatively specific claims. However, they formed part of a wider process whereby authors of this period from Mount Lebanon, in various ways, constructed a past that was full of life to stand in contrast to a present that was lacking in life, elaborating in this respect on the implicit construction of these two temporal realms in the first Tanzimat decree. In the passage by Khalīl al-Khūrī that I cited, he wrote of Abdulmejid I (in verse), "His thoughts have renewed the most glorious feats, that is * he revived the sciences, over which the darkness has now cleared."[8] As I noted, this poem formed part of the introduction to the first edition of *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār* (Jan. 1, 1858). It was titled *Buhjat al-ʿAṣr* ("The Splendor of the Age"), and as Peter Hill has discussed, the poem formed part of a proclamation of a "'new age' of prosperity and enlightenment."[9]

[7] See Chapter 1, section 1.1 (above).
[8] Khalīl al-Khūrī, *Al-'Aṣr al-Jadīd* (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Sūrīyyah, 1863), 7.
[9] Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 87–93.

On the face of it, Khūrī's poem is an expression of unreserved optimism and confidence: the revival has apparently happened. Just over a year later, however, on March 15, 1859, Khūrī painted a rather different picture in a lecture that he delivered before a gathering of "*al-ʿUmda al-Adabiyya*" ("Cultural Committee") in Beirut. This was a partnership whose purpose was to publish and distribute Arabic books, in which the members would share expenses, "without desire for profit," according to a notice in Khūrī's newspaper, but "in pursuit of the revival of what the passage of time, along with the lapse of pens, had all but effaced of the books of our noble language."[10] The majority of its fourteen members were individuals with prior links to the Protestant missionaries—Buṭrus al-Bustānī, Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī and Iskandar Abkāriyūs, for example, all mentioned above, as well as Khūrī himself—but their number also included Muslim intellectuals, notably the poet and book-collector Ḥusayn Beyhum (1833–1881) of Beirut and the prolific novelist and poet Ibrāhīm al-Aḥdab (1826–1891) of Tripoli.[11] Khūrī's lecture in 1859 probably functioned as a preview of a work for which he was seeking the group's support for publication, and which went on to be printed the following year as *Kharābāt Sūriyya* ("The Ruins of Syria," 1860).[12] This is a short history of a number of "Syrian" cities, ranging from Antakya in the north (now part of Turkey) to Jerash (now in Jordan) and Jerusalem in the south, and encompassing a number of cities within the borders of present-day Syria and Lebanon. "Syria" was an emergent construct in this period, and one which Khūrī played an important role

[10] *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār* 112 (Feb. 23, 1860):
مجردين عن المطامع بالكسب قاصدين احيا ما كاد توالى الأيام يدرسه مع هفوات الاقلام من كتب لغتنا الشريفة.
I am grateful to Peter Hill for providing me with images of the relevant pages of the newspaper.

[11] I have taken this information from https://www.kachaf.com/wiki.php?n=5ed92f6e67717625af0ec63d (accessed March 23, 2021, 02:59 PM). The source is given as Eghia Nacharean, *Al-Nahḍa al-Qawmiyya al-Thaqāfiyya al-'Arabiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥaffal, trans. Boughos Sarachean (Damascus: Al-Dār al-Waṭaniyya al-Jadīda, 2005). I have not been able to access a copy of this book. On Ḥusayn Beyhum, see Jens Hanssen, "The Birth of an Education Quarter: Zokak El-Blat as a Cradle of Cultural Revival in the Arab World," in *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut: The Quarter of Zokak El-Blat*, ed. Hans Gebhardt (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2005), 169–71.

[12] The title page indicates that the book reproduces the content of a lecture given on the date I have mentioned.

in forming.[13] I have more to say about this in the next section.

The part of the work that I want to focus on here is the introduction, in which Khūrī laments the current state of Syria's cities in the present day as a travesty of their former grandeur. He opens with a line from the classical Arabic poet Abū Tammām (803–845): "If you look to the lands, you will see they suffer according to the sufferings of the people, or their happiness."[14] He proceeds to declare that anyone who looks upon Syria today will feel sadness at its condition, and he elaborates on this over the course of a couple of pages of elaborate prose, before concluding the section with an assertion of the emptiness of the Syria of his day and an explicit contrast between "the old Syria" and "the new Syria," as follows:

> Without doubt whoever visits these places finds only emptiness. Where are the temples of Baalbek and Jerusalem? Where is the purple of Tyre? Where are the factories of Sayda? Where are the schools of Beirut? Where are the many ships? Where is the mass of sailors? Where are the wide roads? Where the fertile fields which were all an adornment of these lands? How far [*hayhāt*] all of it has gone and become scattered dust! The splendors have fallen, the temples have collapsed, the doors have been filled in, the cities have crumbled, and the land is almost empty of its inhabitants. Compare the old Syria with the new Syria and reflect: Where were our ancestors yesterday? Where are we today?[15]

The passage obviously contrasts with the spirit of Khūrī's inaugural article in the first edition of *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār*. This is not a hopeful vision of a world that has been revived or is partway through a glorious revival, but a desperate vision of desolation and collapse.

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[13] Fruma Zachs, "Pioneers of Syrian Patriotism and Identity: A Re-Evaluation of Khalil al-Khuri's Contribution," in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[14] Khalīl al-Khūrī, *Kharābāt Sūrīya* (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Sūrīyyah, 1860), 2.
لا شك ان من يزور جميع هذه الاماكن لا يصادف سوى الفراغ. اين هياكل بعلبك واورشليم. اين ارجوان صور. اين معامل صيدا. اين مدارس بيروت. اين السفاين الكثيرة. اين البحارة الغفيرة. اين الطرقات الفسيحة. اين المراعي الخصيبة التى كانت جميعها زينة لهذه البلاد هيهات قد ذهب الكل وصار هباء منثورا. العظايم قد سقطت. الهياكل قد هبطت. الأبواب قد ردمت. المداين قد هدمت. وكادت الأرض ان تعرى من سكانها فقابلوا بين سورية القديمة وسورية الجديدة وافتكروا اين كانت اسلافنا فى الامس وأين نحن اليوم.

[15] al-Khūrī, 5. Part of this passage is quoted in Jens Hanssen et al., *The Clarion of Syria: A Patriot's Call against the Civil War of 1860* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 47, and earlier in Fruma Zachs, "Building a Cultural Identity: The Case of Khalil al-Khuri," in *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2004), 33.

Yet, this is not, I want to suggest, a case of Khūrī having suddenly transformed his view of the matter; rather, this conception of a devastated present was integral to the dazzling vision of revival; the two existed in a state of mutually sustaining tension. The first Tanzimat decree implied in a quite general way that the world of the present was not fully alive, by identifying several major domains of activity or social structures as needing revival, and it gestured at the same time to a past world that supposedly did not have this problem. But unless "revival" was to be achieved in a single, electrifying moment of reanimation, the call for revival of the first Tanzimat decree was in practice, as it played out across time, apt to produce the bifurcated experience of the present that Khūrī's two visions of the present, taken together, express. Insofar as any sort of revival was underway—and as a central element of state rhetoric in this period, there was strong motive for intellectuals operating in the public sphere to commit to the idea that it was—the present was a time of remarkable happenings; but at what point could it be said, once and for all, that the revival had happened and the present was now fully alive?

In the opening chapter I suggested that social upheaval across Mount Lebanon during and after the Egyptian occupation was the basic foundation of the enthusiasm for the discourse of revival among intellectuals from Mount Lebanon, though the missionaries also played a role in fostering the idea that Syrian society was in need of revival. In the further elaboration of the notion of revival, another ingredient was important, namely direct engagement with Orientalist literature. This may be distinguished as a distinct ingredient despite the fact that the Orientalist literature in question has complex genealogical ties both with the revivalism of the Tanzimat and, separately and more deeply, with missionary ideology. The above segment is partly modeled on a passage by the French traveler and Orientalist Constantin-François de Chassebœuf, comte de Volney (1757–1820), from the opening chapters of *Les Ruines, ou Méditations sur les*

revolutions des empires ("Ruins, or Thoughts on the revolutions of empires," 1791), in which Volney ruminates at length on the decadence, emptiness, and lifelessness, as he sees it, of the East:

> Ah ! que sont devenus ces âges d'abondance et de vie ? Que sont devenues tant de brillantes créations de la main de l'homme ? Où sont-ils ces remparts de Ninive, ces murs de Babylone, ces palais de Persépolis, ces temples de Balbeck et de Jérusalem ? Où sont ces flottes de Tyr, ces chantiers d'Arad, ces ateliers de Sidon, et cette multitude de matelots, de pilotes, de marchands, de soldats ? et ces laboureurs, et ces moissons, et ces troupeaux, et toute cette création d'êtres vivans dont s'enorgueillisait la face de la terre ? Hélas ! je l'ai parcourue, cette terre ravagée ! J'ai visité les lieux qui furent le théâtre de tant de splendeur, et je n'ai vu qu'abandon et que solitude… J'ai cherché les anciens peuples et leurs ouvrages, et je n'en ai vu que la trace, semblable à celle que le pied du passant laisse sur la poussière.[16]

As well as translating specific phrases (underlined), Khūrī has carried over Volney's vision of a "ravaged land" of nothing but "abandonment and desolation." The final element of Khūrī's passage—the injunction to compare "the old Syria and the new Syria"—is, however, taken from another text, the French Orientalist Jules David's *Syrie Moderne* (1848), which was Khūrī's main source for the body of *Kharābāt Sūriyya*. Towards the end of a long, mainly geographical, introduction, and immediately before a section on the "ruins" of Baalbek and Palmyra, David writes, "*Comparêz maintenant la Syrie ancienne à la Syrie moderne; nulle part décadence ne fut plus manifeste!*"[17]

I will discuss some implications of the Orientalist and colonial affiliations of the trope of an empty and degenerate East at length in the next section, but first I want to dwell on the intrinsic characteristics of Khūrī's passage, in respect of the kind of relationship with the past

[16] C.-F. Volney, *Les Ruines, Ou, Méditation Sur Les Révolutions Des Empires*, 10th ed. (Paris: Bossange frères, 1822), 8–9.

[17] Jules David, "Syrie Moderne," in *Syrie Ancienne et Moderne*, by Jean Yanoski and Jules David, L'Univers: Histoire et Description de Tous Les Peuples (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1848), 43. It is possible that the whole introduction is a translation of another French source that had previously integrated the Volney and David passages as well as others, but I think it is more likely that Khūrī was incorporating a variety of sources into an original piece of writing here.

that it cultivates. Ostensibly, one of the noteworthy things about the passage is the extent to which it seems to idealize "antiquity" in the European sense; that is, "pagan antiquity." The two references to "temples" (*hayākil*) make it abundantly clear that Khūrī is referring to "antiquity" in this sense. Indeed, this sort of idealization—the lamenting of the loss of non-monotheistic civilizations—represents a new element in Arabic historiography. This is not to suggest that earlier Arabic historiography typically, let alone invariably, framed non-monotheistic civilizations of the remote past as worthless realms of vice and depravity. At the end of chapter 2 I noted a passage from a sixteenth-century Arabic work of universal history in which the Greeks, for example, were framed as paragons of virtue and wisdom. Many other examples could be adduced of earlier Arabic literature—both historiography and indeed poetry—celebrating the wisdoms and virtues of ancient non-monotheistic civilizations; and not just Greece, but also, for example, India, China, and Persia, not to mention that of the Arabian Peninsula.[18] But the notion that the demise of any of these civilizations was an absolute loss for humanity or a major cause for regret in and of itself was not part of this tradition.

But while it is of some significance that the region's non-monotheistic pasts were being made objects of this idealizing attention—and I will elaborate on this point below—the more profoundly significant development is the idealizing attitude towards past times per se, and not the particular focus of this idealization on non-monotheistic pasts in the passages of Khūrī and Ṭahṭāwī. That this idealization can be identified in itself as a distinct feature of the discourse in which Khūrī was participating is clear from the fact that shortly before Khūrī's lecture in front of *al-ʿUmda al-Adabiyya*, a very similar series of sentiments had been expressed by Buṭrus al-Bustānī, but with reference to the high Abbasid era (9th–10th centuries) of Arabo-Islamic culture.

[18] The most famous text that features material of this sort is probably al-Masʿūdī's (896–965) *Murūj al-Dhahab wa-Maʿādin al-Jawhar* ("Fields of Gold and Mines of Gems").

The occasion was his "Lecture on the Culture of the Arabs," with which this chapter began, and which he delivered one month to the day before Khūrī's lecture. The passage in question follows an account of the Arabs' role in preserving and developing scientific knowledge at a time when the "Western world" was consumed by internal conflicts; hence, in providing the link between the "ancient sciences" and the "modern sciences," and in rousing the Europeans from the "heavy slumber" of the dark ages to begin pursuing science and industry after the example of the Arabs.[19] The account concludes with a decline in the Arab sciences from the twelfth century (CE), as the desire of "kings and leaders" for knowledge fell away,[20] exactly as in the account of Yāzijī quoted in chapter one above. Bustānī then launches into a passage that bears obvious resemblances to the passage in Khūrī's lecture that I quoted above. It begins,

> So, where were the Arabs? And where are they now? The golden age of their culture has passed [*maḍā*], and its dark age has encamped upon them. The beginning of its dark age [*jīl*] was the late fourteenth century [*jīl*], and it has continued to grow and expand until it has pervaded the lands and the people.[21]

Bustānī carries on from here with a long list of questions highlighting the supposed absence of all manner of fields of activity and types of institution in contemporary Arab culture. This begins, "Where are the poets? Where are the doctors? Where are the orators? Where are the schools?" Bustānī then acknowledges that there still are sciences being pursued with intensity "in every religious community and sect" for the purpose of preserving them, but, he asks, "what is this in relation to the ocean of the true sciences?" This leads into another series of rhetorical questions (alluded to in my opening paragraph above), asking where is the "glory of Baghdad, the pride of Aleppo," etc., and finally, "Where is [the caliph] al-Mustanṣir [1029–1094; r. 1036–

[19] al-Bustānī, *Khuṭbah*, 17.
[20] al-Bustānī, 25–26.
[21] al-Bustānī, 26.

1094]? Where is al-Mutanabbī? Where is Abū al-Fidāʾ?"[22] The similarities with the passage from Khūrī's lecture are obvious. The opening line of the Bustānī passage is echoed in Khūrī's pair of questions, "Where were our ancestors yesterday? And where are we today?" Both passages also feature a series—in Bustānī's case two series—of rhetorical questions asking "where" particular past glories are now, with the implication that they are nowhere to be found.

These passages by Khūrī and Bustānī present us, in emphatic terms, with what I want to suggest is at the heart of revivalism as a structure of historical experience and mode of engagement with the past in the Tanzimat era: namely, the construction of particular times in the remote past as symbols of potentiality. By "times" here I mean, strictly speaking, "times and places"; in other words, "spatial-temporal units"; and indeed the spatial aspect, as I will argue below, was absolutely crucial. With this clarification, it can be said that the two passages represent times in the remote past as having enjoyed a level of vitality, a fullness of life, that the present has lost utterly.[23]

On the basis of these two passages, we can see how the construction of past times as symbols of potentiality was constitutive of an anxious structure of historical experience. It formed part of a process of diminishing the present as a realm of lifelessness and decay. But, as we have seen, the construction of the present in these terms was only half the story. I have noted that elsewhere in his work from around the same time, Khūrī figures the present in thoroughly different terms, as an era of prosperity, enlightenment, and "revival." Even more strikingly, the two opposing constructions of the present both figure in Bustānī's *Khuṭba*. Shortly after the bleak vision of the present in the passage quoted above, the lecture closes with a peroration in which Bustānī characterizes the age as "the century of knowledge and light, the century of

[22] al-Bustānī, 27.
[23] Cf. Payne, *Hontology*, 27. I discuss certain aspects of the genealogy of this idea in subsequent sections.

inventions and discoveries" (*jīl al-maʿrifa wa'l-nūr*, *jīl al-ikhtirāʿāt wa'l iktishāfāt*), etc., and in a series of imperatives calls on "the sons of the nation" (*abnāʾ al-waṭan*) to "get moving, wake up, produce, stir yourselves, get to work" (*habbū*, *istafīqū*, *intabahū*, *istayqaẓū*, *shammirūn ʿan sāʿid al-ʿazm*).[24] The symbolic potentiality of past times was implicated in both constructions of the present: in the fallen present as its counterpoint; and in the glorious present of prosperity and enlightenment through the concept of "revival." This ambiguous status of the present was an essential feature of revivalism as a structure of historical experience. The modification of mood in Bustānī's quotation of Ṭahṭāwī with which I began this chapter—whereby "Mehmed Ali is attaining" became "perhaps the Arabs may attain"—was a reflection of the anxiety and uncertainty in the present that was characteristic of this structure of historical experience.

My argument here is about the conditions of its formation. This structure of historical experience must itself partly be understood as arising from the authors' respective experiences of the transformations in their immediate social worlds. I suggested in chapter 1 that the enthusiasm for "revival" among intellectuals from Mount Lebanon can be linked to these individuals' experiences of turmoil and breakdown in the social relations across Mount Lebanon. But it is important to emphasize that it was not simply a static reflection of passive experiences; rather, it was produced as part of a dynamic process: as a product of the intellectuals' respective projects as agents seeking to shape their social worlds in particular ways. This is apparent most obviously in the overt rhetorical dimensions of this structure of historical experience. The figuration of past times as symbols of potentiality and the concomitant denigration of the present had the function of stressing the urgency of particular kinds of action in the present: the urgency of "revival." In his *Khuṭba*, as we have seen, Bustānī explicitly sought to mobilize the "sons of the nation"

[24] al-Bustānī, *Khuṭbah*, 39.

behind this project. Khūrī's *Kharābāt Sūriyya* does not feature anything like Bustānī's string of imperatives, but I would suggest that there is an implicit call to action in the rhetorical questions that conclude the contrast between "old" and "new Syria": "Where were our ancestors yesterday? Where are we today?"

For Bustānī and Khūrī, the symbolic potentiality of the past was evidently a rhetorical means of framing the world of the present as inadequate and desperately in need of revitalization. More positively, it served to affirm the possibility of such revitalization, insofar as it seemed to establish that a dramatically more vital world was within the realms of the possible. But how had remote pasts come to symbolize and be associated with potentiality in this way? What exactly was this potentiality that they had come to symbolize?

3.2 Potentiality, colonialism, and the nation's pasts in the Tanzimat era

The revivalist idea of the present as a realm of emptiness and devastation in contrast to a flourishing remote past, which we have seen in the passages of Bustānī and Khūrī, has links to a trope of Orientalist literature that was inextricable from European fantasies of colonization. I have noted that the passage of Khūrī is modelled on two French works, Volney's *Ruines* and David's "Syrie Moderne." In the case of both of these French works, the fantasy of colonization lies beneath the surface of the proclamations of the emptiness or comparative inadequacy of the present. In the *Voyage En Orient* (1835) of Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869)—with whom Khūrī had a personal acquaintance, and whose poetry about Syria he elaborately critiqued[25]—the contrast between Asia's "ancient" civilization and its current state is quite clearly adduced as an argument for European colonization of the Near East. In a section on the "ruins of Baalbek," Lamartine pronounces,

[25] Peter Hill, "Arguing with Europe: Eastern Civilisation versus Orientalist Exoticism," *PMLA* 132, no. 2 (2017).

> Il est temps, selon moi, de lancer une colonie européenne dans ce cœur de l'Asie, de reporter la civilisation moderne aux lieux d'où la civilisation antique est sortie, et de former un empire immense de ces grands lambeaux de l'empire turc, qui s'écroule sous sa propre masse, et qui n'a d'héritier que le désert et la poudre des ruines sur lesquelles il s'est abîmé.[26]

In a "*Resumé Politique*" at the end of the *Voyage*, in a passage partly discussed by Edward Said,[27] Lamartine fleshes out his precise vision for the "*colonie européenne*" as the establishment of European "protectorates" over the lands of the Ottoman Empire in both Asia and Africa. He proclaims the fertility and material wealth of these lands in hyperbolic terms: they are "*la plus belle partie du monde*"; Mesopotamia has "*les plus beaux climats de l'univers*"; Syria is "*un intarissable dépôt de houilles*." But left in Ottoman hands, Lamartine declares, these regions stand at risk of being left "*stérile, inculte, ou ravagé par une éternelle barbarie*"; it would be an act of impiety and inhumanity for Europeans not to exploit the potential of these lands.[28]

The basic argument here, which Lamartine does not quite spell out, is that since these lands were the birthplace of "ancient civilization," they will surely be fertile ground for "modern civilization." This argument presupposes one of the fundamental structures of European colonial thought, namely a conception of "civilization" as a singular phenomenon that can be charted on a single developmental axis.[29] It is on the basis of the supposed singularity of civilization that the development of ancient civilization in these lands indicates their natural receptivity to modern civilization: according to the logic of the idea, the latter is essentially the same phenomenon as the former, only at a more advanced developmental stage. In European Orientalist thought, the "ancient" pasts of the lands of the Ottoman Empire thus symbolized potentiality in a very

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[26] Alphonse de Lamartine, *Souvenirs, Impressions, Pensées et Paysages Pendant Un Voyage En Orient, 1832-1833* (Paris: Gosselin, 1849), 15.
[27] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 177–81.
[28] Lamartine, *Voyage En Orient*, 487–88.
[29] Alfonso M. Iacono, "The American Indians and the Ancients of Europe: The Idea of Comparison and the Construction of Historical Time in the 18th Century," in *European Images of the Americas and the Classical Tradition*, ed. Wolfgang Haase and Meyer Reinhold, vol. 1:1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 658–91.

specific sense: potentiality for "modern civilization." Crucially, the Ottoman Empire is, in Lamartine's account, failing totally to exploit this potentiality. It cannot produce an "heir"—in other words, it cannot sustain life—besides "the desert and the dust of the ruins upon which it has deteriorated." Colonization by Europe, is the only option, if the lands are not to languish perpetually in this lifeless state, "ravaged by eternal barbarism."

To make the crucial piece of the argument about the failure and implicitly the inability of the Ottoman Empire to exploit the potentiality of these lands, Lamartine conjures the trope of "Asiatic" or "Oriental despotism," which became widely accepted in European thought following Montesquieu's (1689–1755) elaboration of the idea in his *De l'esprit des lois* ("The Spirit of Laws," 1748).[30] It is invoked in the above passage by the representation of the Ottoman Empire as a system of rule that cannot sustain life. In the subsequent "*Resumé Politique*," it is indicated by the phrase "*éternelle barbarie*": the eternal inevitability of Oriental despotism is a prominent feature of Montesquieu's account of it.[31] The precise significance of this trope in the context of Lamartine's argument is that it preserves the integrity of the conception of civilization as a singular phenomenon, which it does by placing the Ottoman Empire outside the normal laws of civilization; by establishing the Ottoman Empire as an anti-civilizational force. This was necessary because otherwise the Ottoman Empire was quite obviously proof of the absurdity of the singular European narrative of civilization, even on its own terms. Not only did the Ottoman Empire encompass much of the terrain that was most symbolic of ancient civilization within it, including all of Greece until 1821; it also had deep historic ties, through Arabo-Islamic

[30] On the history of the concept in European thought, see Franco Venturi, "Oriental Despotism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, no. 1 (1963): 133–42; Frederick Whelan, "Oriental Despotism: Anquetil-Duperron's Response to Montesquieu," *History of Political Thought* 22, no. 4 (2001): 619–47; Markus Winkler, "Towards a Cultural History of Barbarism from the Eighteenth Century to the Present," in *Barbarism Revisited: New Perspectives on an Old Concept*, ed. Maria Boletsi and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 45–62.
[31] Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, vol. 1 (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2002), 264–69.

civilization, with Hellenistic culture.[32] The exclusion of the Ottoman Empire from the bounds of civilization is indispensable to the logic of Lamartine's argument, as outlined above, whereby the existence of ancient civilization in the lands of the Ottoman Empire proves their potentiality for modern civilization and, by the same token, the necessity of their colonization by Europe.

It is worth dwelling on this point. In Lamartine, the ancient pasts of the lands of the Ottoman Empire mark these lands out for colonization. In a certain sense, indeed, the ancient pasts of these lands are the very object of Lamartine's colonial desires: the lands of the Ottoman Empire are to be colonized not in their capacity as the site of currently-existing forms of life, but precisely in their capacity as "the places from which ancient civilization emerged." The function of the trope of Oriental despotism is to render a vision of "this heart of Asia" as constitutively, to all intents and purposes, a land of ancient civilization—albeit in a state of arrest at the hands of anti-civilizational forces to the extent that it is now decaying. It is on the basis of its being a land of ancient civilization that it must be colonized by Europe: Lamartine constructs the lands of the Ottoman Empire as essentially ancient lands in order to justify their colonization. There is a two-way operation going on here: Lamartine is not simply positioning ancient civilization as the object of his colonial desire; he is, equally and at the same time, constructing the object of his colonial desire (that is, the lands of the Ottoman Empire) as essentially a site of ancient civilization. But why should Lamartine have wanted to construct the object of his colonial desire as a site of ancient civilization?

In doing so, Lamartine was participating in a tradition that goes back to the very beginnings of modern European colonial thought, which is to say to the sixteenth-century

[32] This may account, paradoxically, for the insistence in European literature on the complete and utter lifelessness of Ottoman lands in the present, which we have seen also in the passage of Volney quoted above: the excessive rhetoric is perhaps a sign of repression, masking a fault in the narrative.

discourse on the colonization of the Americas. Ideas about "antiquity"—meaning, by and large, the civilizations of Greece and the Roman Empire before the rise of Christianity—were deployed in a variety of ways within this discourse, some of them in fact mutually antagonistic. The background to this was the status of antiquity within European Humanism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The crucial point was simply the association between antiquity, particularly ancient literature, and the concept of the "human." This association was obviously inscribed in the term "Humanist," which explicitly connected the teaching, study, and centrally the emulation of ancient literature with the category of the human. In line with the basic sense of "*humanus*" in Medieval Latin, namely "to do with man," the "human" in "Humanist" served in part simply to distinguish the Humanists' concern from the "divine."[33] It also connoted "learnedness," through the recuperation of one of the meanings of "*humanus*" in Classical Latin,[34] and the learnedness in question—proficiency in Classical Latin—was of a prestigious variety that was highly prized by Europe's ruling classes.[35] But the most important point as regards colonial thought was simply the association between antiquity and the category of the human. This association was strengthened by the fact that the standard Humanist definition of the human was itself derived from a certain reading of Aristotle to the effect that what distinguishes man is "reason" or "rationality."[36] Furthermore, this definition furnished a basis on which the Humanists could

[33] Vito R. Giustiniani, "Homo, Humanus, and the Meanings of 'Humanism,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, no. 2 (1985): 171.
[34] Giustiniani, 168, 174.
[35] Kristian Jensen, "The Humanist Reform of Latin and Latin Teaching," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63–64; Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 23–24.
[36] See Christian Kietzmann, "Aristotle on the Definition of What It Is to Be Human," in *Aristotle's Anthropology*, ed. Geert Keil and Nora Kreft (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 26–29, who argues that this is in fact a misreading. The key phrase is *zōon logon echon* (Ar. *Pol*. I 2, 1253a17–18), "animal that has *logos*." The key word here, *logos*, was rendered as *ratio* ("reason") in the Latin translations of Aristotle on which the Humanists relied.

claim a fundamental affinity with the ancients, despite their not being Christians.[37]

This association between antiquity and the human was operationalized in the discourse on the colonization of the Americas in two opposing ways, both of which, however, can be traced in Lamartine. Advocates for the outright military conquest and subjugation of the "Indies" deployed these ideas to construct an imagined community of the human and the rational that encompassed the ancients and the moderns but excluded the "Indians." Their argument was that the indigenous peoples of the Americas were not fully human, with the implication that it was legitimate to exterminate or enslave them.[38] This exclusionary use of antiquity can be traced in Lamartine's contention that the "ancient civilization" of the lands of the Ottoman Empire can only properly be developed by the European agents of "modern civilization." By contrast, among proponents of the evangelization of the "Indians," the inhabitants of the New World were figured as equivalent to those of the "ancient" world in order to argue for the practical viability of evangelization. The comparison of forms of life in the New World with "ancient" forms of life was adopted as a means of demonstrating that, even though the Indians were not Christian, they were nevertheless "rational" and "human," and lived in accordance with the "law of nature"—with the implication that they were viable candidates for evangelization.[39] This inclusionary use of antiquity can also be traced in Lamartine, but in secularized form, and with reference to

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[37] On the mixture of familiarity and remoteness in the Humanists' experience of reading ancient literature, see Ronald G. Witt, *"In the Footsteps of the Ancients": The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 22–23.

[38] This was the argument of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1494–1573), as expressed in *Democrates Alter, sive, De Justis Belli Causis apud Indos* ("The Second Democrates, or, On the Just Causes of War against the Indians," 1544), which is assumed to have formed the basis of his contribution in the famous debate between Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) in Valladolid in 1550. The importance of antiquity to his argument is evident from his articulating it in the persona of a Greek philosopher, but it runs deeper than this. For examples, see Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Demócrates segundo, o, De las justas causas de la guerra contra los indios*, ed. Angel. Losada, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Francisco de Vitoria, 1984), 35–56.

[39] See, e.g., Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, ed. Edmundo O'Gorman, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1967), 688–696; José de Acosta, *De procuranda Indorum salute*, ed. Luciano Pereña, vol. 1 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1984), 60–62.

territory rather than a living society: since the lands of the Ottoman Empire were the original site of ancient civilization, Lamartine argues, they must be receptive to modern civilization.

In both varieties of early colonial thought, the significance of antiquity went beyond the function of simply identifying a viable object of colonization. The reference to antiquity played an important role in valorizing the European colonizer as a moral agent, framing him, precisely in the role of colonizer, as the conscientious disseminator of Christianized humanity, whether by conquest or evangelization. This was partly a function of the status of Humanism as an ethical practice in European culture. The practice of Humanism—the engagement with and emulation of ancient authorities—was in itself a kind of performance of humanity and rationality, which is to say of morality and virtue;[40] so, even apart from the detail of the respective arguments, for the European to justify colonization through the framework of Humanist debate was to highlight his credentials as a moral agent in relation to the activity of colonization. This function of antiquity was operative in both varieties of sixteenth-century colonial thought, and the same can be said of nineteenth-century colonial thought, as represented by Lamartine: Lamartine's framing of his colonial desire with reference to ancient civilization is, among other things, an attempt at dignifying it with moral respectability.

But the significance of antiquity was not limited to placing modern Europe on the same moral level as antiquity: antiquity was part of a framework that implied, albeit with an important caveat, the superiority of modern Europe; that is, its superiority over antiquity. As for the caveat, until the time of the Columbian expeditions, this superiority was largely confined to the domain of religion. The Humanists had in fact long regarded antiquity, conversely, as being superior to

[40] Cf. Kenneth Gouwens, "What Posthumanism Isn't: On Humanism and Human Exceptionalism in the Renaissance," in *Renaissance Posthumanism*, ed. Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 53–54.

modern Europe in particular respects, above all in its modes of literary expression, but also to an extent in matters of science in general.[41] Indeed, the assumed superiority of antiquity in these respects was the basis for its valorizing function discussed in the previous paragraph. In reflection of this mixed picture, in the mid-sixteenth century, the notional superiority of modern Europe over antiquity only had functional significance in the missionary variety of colonial thought, in which it was simply a matter of religion: the superiority of contemporary Western Christendom over antiquity is clearly implicit in the formula that identified the "Indians" as candidates for evangelization by establishing their equivalence to the nations of antiquity.

However, in processing the very experience of the "discovery" and colonization of the Americas, Europeans began to assert the superiority of modern Europe over antiquity in much broader terms—not simply on religious grounds, but even, independently of Christianity, on a purely secular reckoning. This assertion had its foundations principally in the recognition of certain shortcomings of ancient learning. Most obviously, since antiquity had no knowledge of the Americas, modern Europeans could now confidently claim to have gone beyond the ancients in their grasp of geography.[42] Of course, the expansion of knowledge in this particular domain was intimately related to an unprecedented experience of power and domination, and it is perhaps significant that this exercise of power and domination was at the expense of societies in the Americas that had been construed in European thought (in the best case scenario) as analogues of ancient nations. In reflection of this combination of factors, by the late sixteenth century, a wide range of European thinkers had developed a broad sense of the superiority of modern Europe—over antiquity and its analogues in the New World alike—and were beginning

[41] Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 2–3.
[42] Grafton, 1–10.

to articulate this sense of superiority in the form of a general theory of social development.[43] Over the next two centuries, successive European thinkers gradually elaborated this theory into the idea of progress as a historical norm, which crystallized at the end of the eighteenth century, and established the absolute superiority of modern European civilization as a quasi- and pseudo-scientific fact.[44] This generalized, secularized notion of the absolute superiority of modern civilization is operative in Lamartine's argument for a European colony within the Ottoman Empire: given that ancient civilization emerged in these lands (so his argument runs), it goes without saying that modern civilization not only could, but that it must be implanted in them, as a matter of moral necessity.

Antiquity was thus implicated in a multitude of overlapping ways in the process by which Europeans constructed the objects of their colonial desires. But ideas about antiquity played another, somewhat distinct, role in European colonial thought: as a component of the colonizers' fantasies as to the ultimate horizon of the colonial project. This too developed in relation to the colonization of the Americas. Europeans did not conceive of the ultimate aim of this project simply as the exploitation of foreign peoples and lands in the interests of European commerce. To be sure, commercial interests formed part of the conscious and explicit motivations of the early colonizers, and the enslavement and extermination of the colonized were countenanced (and, of course, implemented) as perfectly acceptable means of advancing the work of colonization, by way of the kind of rationalizations that I have outlined above. But beginning with Columbus himself, the European colonizers also projected a wider purpose for the colonial project. The basic elements of this, in line with these rationalizations, were the expansion of

[43] J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New 1492-1650* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 50–53.
[44] Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 224–34.

Western Christendom, whether by conversion or replacement of the indigenous peoples; the enrichment of Christendom; and, as a result of one or both of these developments, the attainment of effective ascendancy over the "Turks."[45] However, alongside these relatively concrete aspirations for the colonial enterprise, the European colonizers—beginning, again, with Columbus himself—constructed an idea of the New World as a possible utopia, where a purified and perfected, but still European-Christian, form of life might be established. Paradoxically, this construction was, to a considerable extent, built out of an idealized conception of the indigenous societies of the Americas themselves, onto which the Europeans had immediately projected various myths and legends about the existence of an undiscovered island paradise of limitless abundance.[46] Ideas about antiquity were another major component of this construction of a possible utopia.

This was the case in several overlapping ways. For one thing, the key myths that shaped the idealizing figurations of life in the Americas were derived from Greek literature, notably the myth of a Golden Age at the beginning of time and the Platonic myth of Atlantis.[47] On top of this, both social theory in general and the question of the ideal society in particular were closely associated with antiquity; to engage in social theory and utopian thinking was thus to be in dialogue with and share the aspirations of the ancients, with the implication that to establish an ideal society in reality would be to fulfil the promise of antiquity.[48] More broadly, one of the guiding principles of European Humanism was the notion that the emulation of antiquity would

[45] Stelio Cro, "Classical Antiquity, America, and the Myth of the Noble Savage," in *European Images of the Americas and the Classical Tradition*, ed. Wolfgang Haase and Meyer Reinhold, vol. 1:1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 393–94.
[46] Beatriz Fernández Herrero, "The 'New World': The Shaping of Utopia," in *A Companion to Early Modern Spanish Imperial Political and Social Thought* (Boston: Brill, 2020), 321–28.
[47] Herrero, 323–25; Cro, "Myth of the Noble Savage," 396–97.
[48] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 39–96.

help to create a better society in Europe.[49] This notion survived the elevation of contemporary European Christendom over antiquity that went along with the colonization of the Americas (as described above): the late-seventeenth-century "quarrel" of the ancients and the moderns demonstrates this point, but even beyond the quarrel, antiquity remained an important, arguably the primary, vehicle for critiquing modern culture in Europe through the eighteenth century.[50] By extension of this status of antiquity as an object of emulation, the European construction of the New World as a possible utopia combined mythicized notions about the existing forms of life in the Americas with idealizing notions about ancient forms of life.[51]

This utopian dimension of European colonial thought was still operative in the nineteenth century, including unmistakably in Lamartine's appeal for the establishment of a European colony in the lands of the Ottoman Empire. Above I noted the hyperbolic terms in which Lamartine celebrated the fertility and material wealth of these lands: it is "*la plus belle partie du monde*," encompassing "*les plus beaux climats de l'univers*" in Mesopotamia and "*un intarissable dépôt de houilles*" in Syria. Although Lamartine did not explicitly make the association, within the framework of European colonial thought, the representation of the lands of the Ottoman Empire as a possible utopia interlocked in its significance with his representation of them as lands of ancient civilization: both served to frame them as lands of potentiality for "modern civilization," which was to say for European colonization. Equally, when Volney in his

[49] James Hankins, "Humanism, Scholasticism, and Renaissance Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 32.
[50] J. G. A. Pocock, "Perceptions of Modernity in Early Modern Historical Thinking," *Intellectual History Review* 17, no. 1 (2007): 55–63.
[51] Thomas More's *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu, Deque Nova Insula Utopia* ("On the Ideal Statue of a Republic, and On the New Island of Utopia," 1516), written in Latin, is a rich illustration of this. It describes an ideal society located in the New World that is imagined as possibly having originated as an actual colony of the ancient Greeks, on the basis of the Utopians' aptitude for learning Greek, which the European traveler, the internal narrator in the work, introduces to them. Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Paul Turner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), 99–100. On the broader phenomenon, see Stelio Cro, "Las fuentes clásicas de la utopía moderna: el Buen salvaje y las Islas Felices en la historiografía indiana.," *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana* 6 (January 1, 1977): 39–39.

Ruines and David in his *Syrie moderne* lamented the deficiencies of contemporary forms of life in these lands by comparison with their ancient counterparts, they were signaling the same, albeit with extreme economy.

3.3 The potentiality of the past as promise and threat

To return now to the passages by Bustānī and Khūrī that I discussed in section 1, I have suggested that these two authors figure lifeworlds of the past as symbols of potentiality in contrast with an empty or fallen present.[52] It is clear that, in doing so, they were drawing on a trope of European colonial and Orientalist thought. But it is also perfectly obvious that, in one crucial respect, the logic of the contrast between glorious past and empty present in the Arabic texts is diametrically opposed to that of the European ones. Whereas, in the latter, the implicit—or, in the case of Lamartine, explicit—fantasy is specifically European exploitation of the potential of non-European lands, Bustānī and Khūrī were without question committed to local cultivation of the region.

In this respect, the figuration of past times in terms of potentiality looked to the same horizon as the construction of a new concept of "the nation" in Arabic among intellectuals from Mount Lebanon, and likewise in Egypt, in this period.[53] The new concept of the nation was that of a cohesive community with primordial historical roots, and the overarching purpose of articulating the national community was to define its proper sphere of operation, which is to say, above all, the territory which this community had the preeminent responsibility, or rather the

[52] The period also saw the production of a work of utopian literature in Arabic in a narrower sense, *Ghābat al-Ḥaqq* ("Forest of Justice," 1865) by Fransīs Marrāsh (1836–73) of Aleppo. This work is analyzed in detail by Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 188–244.
[53] Yaseen Noorani, "Estrangement and Selfhood in the Classical Concept of Waṭan," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 47, no. 1–2 (2016): 17–18.

right, to cultivate.[54] Potential for cultivation—in the first place in the commercial interests of the local bourgeoisie, but theoretically with a view to the benefit of the community as a whole—was thus an essential component of the concept of the nation.[55] The overlap, in this respect, between the figuration of past times in terms of potentiality and the construction of the nation is clear.

I want to argue that the former was not secondary or subordinate to the latter but an integral part of the process. We have seen that Bustānī and Khūrī cultivated similar attitudes towards quite different potential vectors of communal identity: respectively, the Arabs and Syria. We might plausibly understand both of the above passages as efforts at constructing a national identity, in the sense of the previous paragraph. The variance between them would then be explicable on the basis that there were a number of possible factors by which the national community might be defined—notably, language, "culture," political system, and effective socio-economic domain—and that these did not perfectly coincide. Bustānī focuses on the Arabic language and the cultural traditions associated with it, particularly those of the Islamic, and specifically the Abbasid, era. Khūrī's construction of Syria, as Fruma Zachs has observed, had more to do with the contemporary realities of local trade, i.e. socio-economic domain: "since the Beiruti bourgeoisie of the time conducted their business mainly between the Syrian coast and Europe, they had an interest in seeing Syria as a single entity, linking Beirut (their place of operation) with the hinterland on which they depended economically – a Syrian framework could provide a wide domain for their activities."[56] But these were not in fact rival national ideas, as is clear from Bustānī's appeal to the "sons of the nation," referred to above. He immediately

[54] I am drawing here on the classic essay by Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus," *New Left Review* 94, no. 1 (1975): 3–29.
[55] For a detailed analysis of the relationship between social structure and intellectual activity in Egypt and Syria in this period, see Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 18–78.
[56] Zachs, "Pioneers of Syrian Patriotism and Identity," 92.

glosses this phrase with a second appeal: "offspring of those greats [viz. the Arab culture heroes he has just been discussing], grandchildren of communities of the Assyrians and the Greeks" (*yā dhurriyyat ūlāʾika al-afāḍil wa-ḥafadat maʿāshir al-Suryān waʾl-Yūnān*).[57] From the collocation of these three figures of historic filiation in a single sequence, it would appear that the diversity of the national idea was not a reflection of indecision or competing views about how exactly to define the nation: rather, it was integral to the idea of the nation that was operative within this milieu in this period.[58]

My argument is that this diversity is a function of the kind of relationship with the past on which the new concept of the nation was built; specifically, a relationship in which the past was associated with potentiality. Once the region's pasts—or at least some of them—had come to represent the region's potential for cultivation, it followed that all of the appropriate pasts should be cultivated, which is to say nourished and tended to as objects of knowledge. In this sense, the association of past times with potentiality gave rise to an expansive desire to cultivate the region's pasts. This was in part a positive expression of local desires for wealth and prosperity among members of the bourgeois and official strata. But there was also a defensive dimension. In European literature, as we have seen, the figuration of the region's pasts as symbols of potentiality was the expression, in varying degrees of complexity, of a colonial attitude towards the region, one that carried the threat of European domination. For local elites, the potentiality of the region's pasts was, in this way, not only a source of hope to be cultivated, but also a threat to be controlled; indeed, among other things, a threat to these elites' aspirations for local wealth and

[57] al-Bustānī, *Khuṭbah*, 39. The appearance of the Greeks may seem anomalous here. The reasoning is (I believe) not only that Arabic intellectual culture was heavily influenced by the Greeks, but also that Greek communities had, of course, existed within the lands of Syria. Cf. Jurjī Dīmitrī Sursuq, *Tārīkh al-Yūnān* (Bayrūt: [s.n.], 1876), ب.
[58] This is not to say that there were no other concepts of the nation taking shape in this period. In Mount Lebanon, at least, there was arguably a distinct "Lebanist" idea of the nation being developed within the Maronite Church. See Carol. Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea: 1840-1920.* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 13–64.

prosperity. At a practical level, controlling this threat had to mean, above all, knowing the past and knowing it, as far as possible, exhaustively and with certainty. This was not at odds with the cultivation of the region's pasts, but in effect part of the same process: the pursuit of certain knowledge of the past. These two types of pressure—positive desires for wealth and prosperity, and resistance to domination by foreign powers—shaped the diversity of the national idea in this period: it had to be comprehensive, encompassing the potentiality of all of the region's pasts.

This demand for maximal cultivation and control of the region's pasts accounts for the idealizing figuration of the region's non-monotheistic pasts, which, as I noted above, was a new feature of Arabic historiography in this period. This was not limited to productions of intellectuals from Mount Lebanon; there was a parallel development in Egypt in this period. While the above passage by Khūrī is unusually emphatic in its idealizing tenor, there was a clear shift in this era in the historiographical writings of Ṭahṭāwī in the Tanzimat era towards an idealizing conception of his country's non-monotheistic pasts. I remarked in chapter 2 that the account of the Egyptians in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*—produced just before the Tanzimat era—makes no special point of idealizing the ancient Egyptians, and in fact casts them in many ways in a disparaging light. As I also mentioned there, Ṭahṭāwī produced another historical work much later in his life by the name of *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl fī Akhbār Miṣr wa-Tawthīq Banī Ismāʿīl* ("The Glorious Tawfīq Illuminated: Reports on Egypt and Validation of the Sons of Ismail," 1868), from which I quoted at the beginning of the previous chapter. The shift in his perspective on ancient Egypt is apparent in the basic plan of this work: as has been noted, Ṭahṭāwī conceived it as the first volume of a continuous history of Egypt from the earliest times down to the present, and the majority of it addresses Pharaonic, Ptolemaic, and Roman Egypt. More pointedly, the shift is illustrated in the modification of a passage from *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* that Ṭahṭāwī partly

reproduces in the prefatory material to *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*. Giving an overview of the various ancient peoples whose histories will feature, at least to some extent, within the work, Ṭahṭāwī writes that "the Greek nation surpasses all of these [other ancient] nations *apart from the Egyptians*; its history is the most beneficial of the histories of the empires of Asia owing to the bravery of its people [etc.]."[59] The corresponding passage in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* (quoted above in full) does not make an exception of the Egyptians.[60] In line with this modification, Ṭahṭāwī writes admiringly of the "ancient Egyptians" throughout his later works, not just *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*, but also his work of political theory published the following year, *Manāhij al-Albāb al-Miṣriyya fī Mabāhij al-Ādāb al-ʿAṣriyya* ("Paths of Egyptian Hearts: On the Joys of Contemporary Culture," 1869).[61]

The shift in Ṭahṭāwī's perspective was part of a wider intensification of interest in local non-monotheistic pasts in Egypt in the Tanzimat era. It was in 1869 that Ṭahṭāwī's long-time rival, the education minister and author ʿAlī Mubārak (1823–1893), with the support of Egypt's ruler, Khedive Ismāʿīl (1830–1895; r. 1863–1979), engaged the German Egyptologist Heinrich Brugsch (1827–1894) to train Egyptians as Egyptologists in a new institution, the School of the Ancient Language (*Madrasat al-Lisān al-Qadīm*).[62] It was also about the same time that ʿAbdullāh Abū al-Suʿūd (1820–1878) produced *Al-Dars al-Tāmm fī al-Tārīkh al-ʿĀmm*

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[59] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl Fī Akhbar Miṣr Wa-Tawthīq Banī Ismāʿīl* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭbaʿat Būlāq, 1868), 8. Italics added.
ويفوق جميع هؤلاء الأمم ما عدا المصريين أمة اليونان التى تاريخها احسن تواريخ ممالك آسيا فائدة لشجاعة أهلها [إله].

[60] Ṭahṭāwī et al., *Bidāyat Al-Qudamāʾ*, 62. Another perhaps noteworthy modification: *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* describes the history of Greece as "more beneficial than the history of the great empires of Asia"; *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl* has it that "the history of Greece is the most beneficial of the histories of Asia." The need to resituate ancient Greece within the history of Asia is a key point of Samir Amin's argument in *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989).

[61] E.g. Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Kitāb manāhij 'al-'albāb 'al-Miṣrīyah fī mabāhij 'al-'ādāb 'al-'aṣrīyah* (Miṣr: Maṭbaʿat Sharikat 'al-Raghā'ib, 1912), 121 ff. "Ancient Egyptians" approximates "*qudamāʾ Miṣr*" and "*qudamāʾ al-Miṣriyyīn*," both of which Ṭahṭāwī uses.

[62] Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 142.

("Complete Lesson in Universal History," 1872), discussed briefly in the previous chapter. The work covered ancient peoples from Egypt to Persia, including a chapter on the Jews.[63]

Similarly, Khūrī's book on the "ruins of Syria" was one of several texts produced in Beirut in the Tanzimat era that focused on the region's non-monotheistic pasts. Among the lectures delivered at the Syrian Society (1847–1852),[64] the Beiruti businessman Mīkhāʾīl Mudawwar (1822–1889) gave one "on the origin of trade and its vicissitudes."[65] Following an account of the earliest types of trade as barter and direct exchange, Mudawwar records that "easterners" were the first traders, "owing to the excellence of their abodes [*munākhāt*; also, "climates"] and their natural preparedness; and [besides,] the principles of their faiths, which ordered them to make pilgrimage and to change location, helped them on their travels and in the development of close mutual relations."[66] Mudawwar then devotes the bulk of the lecture to the dramatic trading success of the Phoenicians, which he argues was particularly not simply function of the fertility of their terrain; rather, its relative infertility was a factor in spurring expansion of the Phoenicians beyond their lands.[67] Two books on Alexander the Great were printed in Beirut in the 1860s,[68] and among the lectures delivered at the Syrian Scientific Society (*Al-Jamʿiyya al-ʿIlmiyya al-Sūriyya*, 1868–1869)—which, despite the similar name, was distinct from the earlier Syrian Society,[69] and was multi-confessional and unconnected to the

[63] ᶜAbd Allāh Abū al-Suʿūd, *Kitāb Al-Dars al-Tāmm Fī al-Tārīkh al-ʿām al-Mulakhkhaṣ Min Kutub al-Tawārīkh al-Ūrūbīyah Wa-al-ʿArabīyah Fī al-Sāḥah al-Khidīwīyah : Li-Qaṣd Tadrīsihi Li-Ṭalabat al-ʿilm Bi-Madrasat Dār al-ʿUlūm al-Miṣrīyah* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭbaʿah Wādī al-Nīl al-Miṣrīyah, 1872).
[64] On this society, see 1.1 (above).
[65] Yūsuf Q. Khūrī, ed., *Al-Jamʿīyah al-Sūrīyah Li'l-ʿūlūm Wa'l-Funūn, 1847–1852* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥamrā', 1990), 57–61. On Mudawwar and his broader role in the cultural life of Beirut at this time, see Anthony Edwards, "Serializing Protestantism: The Missionary Miscellany and the Arabic Press in 1850s Beirut," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2020, 16.
[66] Khūrī, *Al-Jamʿīyah al-Sūrīyah*, 57.
[67] Khūrī, 58–59.
[68] Ibrāhīm Sarkīs, *Ṣawt Al-Nafīr Fī A'māl Iskandar al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Ibrāhīm wa-Shāhīn Sarkīs, 1864); Anon., *Tārīkh Iskandar Dhī Al-Qarnayn al-Makdūnī* (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Waṭaniyya, 1868).
[69] On which, see Chapter 1, section 1.1 (above).

missionaries—were an account of the life of Socrates, some of Seneca's letters to Lucilius, and a lecture on Greek and Egyptian myth.[70] The last of these, delivered by Yūsuf Shalfūn (1839–1895), was in fact largely derived from the final part of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*, but it features additions regarding ancient cults of Venus and Adonis in Beirut and the town of Jubayl to the north of Beirut, as well as comments on some engravings relating to these deities in the mountain town of al-Ghineh, which Shalfūn had been to visit.[71] In a rather different sort of text printed in 1863 from a manuscript produced some time in the late 1840s or early 1850s, the Maronite patriarch Būlus Buṭrus Masʿad (1806–1890) discussed the same engravings, as part of a long discourse on the ancient peoples of the region, in what is framed as a response to questions from another cleric about the origins of the Greek *ṭāʾifa* ("sect") and how this *ṭāʾifa* and its tongue spread across Asia and Africa.[72] In 1872, Buṭrus al-Bustānī's son Salīm published the serialized novel *Zenūbiā* (1872) in the weekly journal *al-Jinān*, of which he was the editor. The novel glorifies the eponymous queen of Tadmur (Palmyra) as a champion of regional strength against the incursions of the Roman Empire, despite her eventual defeat. In 1876, Jurjī Sursuq, an employee of the German consulate, published a history of the Greeks. In the preface to the work, he expresses the hope that "the wealthy among the sons of the nation" (*al-muthrīn min abnāʾ al-waṭan*) will support his work on the basis of the "unity" (*ittiḥād*) it brings, and that "we will all be worthy to be known as the people of ancient Phoenicia and the inhabitants of Greater Aeolia" (*nakūn jamīʿan jadīrīn bi-an nuʿraf bi-ahl Fīnīqiyya al-qadīma wa-sukkān Yūliyya al-ʿUẓmā*).[73]

These hopes of Sursuq's, and particularly the mention of unity, point toward the

[70] Yūsuf Q. Khūrī, *Aʻmāl al-Jamʻīyah al-ʻIlmīyah al-Sūrīyah, 1868-1869* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥamrāʾ, 1990), 235–36.
[71] Khūrī, 199–200.
[72] Būlus Buṭrus Masʾad, *Kitāb al-durr al-manẓūm raddan ʻalā al-asʾilah wa-al-ajwibah al-mumḍāh bi-ismi al-sayyid al-baṭrīrk Maksimus Maẓlūm* (Dayr Sayyidah Tamish: Matba ʻat al-Ruhbān al-Lubnanīyīn, 1863), 193–214.
[73] Jurjī Dīmitrī Sursuq, *Tārīkh al-Yūnān* (Bayrūt: [s.n.], 1876), ب.

development of a narrower project of constructing a cohesive national story at the very end of the Tanzimat era, one that gathered momentum increasingly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. This development was marked in both Egypt and Mount Lebanon, and it reflected an intensification of the problem of European hegemony, which was brought into focus by an economic crisis across Syria beginning in the late 1860s and by financial crises in Egypt and Istanbul that led, respectively, to British occupation and European control of the Ottoman finances. Already in the last years of the Tanzimat era, a sense of pessimism arising from these events inscribed itself in the historiographical literature, especially that of Syria, which was hit first by economic crisis. Indeed, the economic crisis is referenced directly by Sursuq in the preface to his history of the Greeks: printing of the work was delayed because some of the stakeholders in the project had been unable to keep up with their contributions, "owing to a narrowing of their wealth, resulting from the cessation of works and political turmoil" (*li-ḍayq dhāt yadihim al-nātij min waqf al-aʿmāl wa-tashwīsh al-siyāsa*).[74] In Salīm al-Bustānī's *Zenūbiā*, this sense of pessimism is woven into the narrative: despite her exemplary conduct as ruler of Tadmur, an imbalance of power leads ultimately to her inevitable defeat at the hands of the Romans. I have noted in various places in this dissertation the impact of the unraveling of the Tanzimat project on Arabic writings about the past.

The point that I want to stress here is that, at the height of the Tanzimat era, the attention to the region's non-monotheistic pasts was not essentially an attempt to isolate a single "ancient" civilization as the source of the nation's identity; rather, it was the product of a wide-ranging historiographical impulse to bring the full spectrum of the region's pasts clearly into view; an impulse that was built on an association between past times and potentiality. We can see this

[74] Sursuq, ب.

neatly encapsulated in another lecture that was delivered at the Syrian Society, in which Buṭrus al-Bustānī traced the history of the city of Beirut from its founding by the Phoenicians through Roman, Christian, Islamic, Crusader, and post-Crusader times, culminating finally in the city's renewed importance as a trading hub and rapid expansion in the nineteenth century.[75]

But the breadth of the Tanzimat-era historiographical impulse is especially apparent at a discursive level. We have seen how Bustānī and Khūrī cultivated similar attitudes, at almost exactly the same time, towards the Abbasid Arabs and the ancient inhabitants of "Syria" respectively. A couple of years earlier, in further evidence of this breadth, an idealizing view of the Ottoman past had been articulated by the aforementioned Ibrāhīm al-Najjār. *Miṣbāḥ al-Sārī wa-Nuzhat al-Qārī* ("The Lamp of the Night Traveler and the Pleasure of the Reader," 1856) features a detailed account of the author's experiences as a medical student in Mehmed Ali's Egypt and in Istanbul, and then transitions into a history of the Ottoman Empire from its earliest days until the present. In introducing the historical section, which is organized by sultanic reign, Najjār writes that "every one of them [viz. the sultans] did amazing things, and won crushing military victories that deserve to be immortalized in books for later rulers to imitate." He carries on in this vein before declaring,

> So, the hearts of all European states quaked at their power, and offered them obedience and submission. Most years, all of the neighboring peoples mounted wars against them: from Asia the Persians, Arabs, and Russians; from Europe Austria, Hungary, Venice, and Greece, and other states rose to help them, like England, France, Spain, Italy, and others; and despite all this, they triumphed over all these states.[76]

In this case, the symbolic significance of the past is transparent and precise: it is not that the

[75] Khūrī, *Al-Jamʿīyah al-Sūrīyah*, 71–72.

[76] Ibrāhīm ibn Khalīl Najjār, *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-sārī wa-nuzhat al-qārī* (Beirut: I. b. Kh. al-Najjār, 1856), 80–81.
فكانت ترتعد من سطوتهم قلوب جميع الدول الافرنجية وتقدم لهم الطاعة والخضوع * وكان يحدث فى اكثر السنين ان جميع الشعوب المحيطة بهم تقوم عليهم بالحروب * فكان من جهة اسيا تحاربهم الاعجام والعرب والمسكوب ومن جهة أوروبا دولة النمسا والمجر ومشيخة البندقية واليونان وتنهض لمساعدتهم الدول الاخر كالانكليز وفرنسا وسبانيا وإيطاليا وغيرهم ومع كل هذا كانوا يتغلبون على جميع هذه الدول.

region has, in some general sense, the potential to flourish in a way that it has ceased to do in the present; it is specifically that the Ottoman Empire, as a ruling dynasty and political framework, has the potential to stand up to Europe militarily. But this more precise symbolism did not imply an altogether narrower mode of engagement with the past, as might be imagined. In the preface to the work, Najjār refers to a follow-up volume in which he described the ancient history of Egypt and Syria, as well as his travels in Europe.[77] I have not been able to find any trace of this second volume, but the fact that Najjār at least had it planned illustrates the point about the breadth of revivalist historiographical discourse at the height of the Tanzimat era. The close relationship between the Tanzimat project itself and this discourse is particularly clear in Najjār's work: *Miṣbāḥ al-Sārī* concludes with the Arabic text of the Gülhane decree.[78]

Within this broad discourse of revivalism, notwithstanding the novelty of the idealizing focus on the non-monotheistic pasts of Syria and Egypt, the preponderant focus of attention in the high Tanzimat era in both Syria and Egypt was, without question, Arab history and Arabic literature. We have seen that Abbasid culture was the focus of Buṭrus al-Bustānī's lecture on "the culture of the Arabs." Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī had covered similar terrain some years earlier in his lecture on "the sciences of the Arabs" at the Syrian Society around 1850, in which, as I mentioned in chapter 1, he hailed a revival of these sciences under the incumbent sultan. At the same society, Bustānī delivered a lecture on the celebrated late Abbasid author al-Ḥarīrī (1054–1122), master of the *maqāmah*, a genre of prose fiction of roughly short-story length; and Yāzijī gave a reading of one his own works in this classical genre, a collection of which he soon published under the title *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn* ("Meeting of the Two Seas," 1856).

About the same time, a range of historic works of Arabic literature—by which I simply

[77] Najjār, *Miṣbāḥ al-sārī*, 2, 285.
[78] Najjār, 282–85.

mean works written in the past, as opposed to new creations—began to be printed in Beirut, in some cases on the missionary presses but largely through independent initiatives. Among the texts that were printed were relatively recent works of local provenance, such as the diwans (that is, poetry collections) of the Aleppo-born Maronite cleric Jirmānūs Farḥāt (1670–1732) and of the Aleppan monk Nīqūlā al-Ṣāʾigh (1692–1756);[79] but they also included an assortment of older works from further afield. Buṭrus al-Bustānī himself produced an edition of the diwan of Mutanabbī in 1860. The same year saw the publication, surely related, of the literary critic al-Ḥātimī's (d. 988) short work *al-Risāla al-Ḥātimiyya* ("Hatimi's Epistle"), in which the author presents numerous lines of Mutanabbī's poetry alongside sententiae attributed to Aristotle, in an attempt to show the latter's influence on the poet. Other Beirut publications of the period included the diwan of the Egyptian mystical poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ (1181–1234); a fifteenth-century arrangement of early Islamic love poetry;[80] selections from the Egyptian al-Ibshīhī's (1388–1448) encyclopedia; and a series of works on the pre-Islamic Arabs and pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, compiled by Iskandar Abkāriyūs.[81] The last of these were not simply prints of historic works, but new arrangements of material drawn from earlier texts.

Concurrently, a much bigger movement to print historic works of Arabic literature of all kinds was getting underway in Cairo, beginning in earnest around 1850.[82] We saw in chapter 2 that, from the early 1820s through the 1840s, a large number of works, particularly works in

[79] Jirmānūs Farḥāt, *Dīwān* (Bayrūt: Dayr al-Yasūʿīyah, 1850); Nīqūlā Ṣāʾigh, *Dīwān* (Bayrūt: Maṭbaʾat al-Yasūʿīyīn, 1859).
[80] Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Ayyūbī, *Dīwān al-Qaṣd al-Jalīl min Naẓm al-Sulṭān Khalīl* (Bayrūt: al-Maṭbaʾa al-ʾUmūmiyya, 1866).
[81] Iskandar ibn Yaʿqūb Abkāriyūs, *Nihāyat al-arab fī akhbār al-ʿArab* (Marsīliyah: Maṭbaʿat al-Faʿalah, 1852); Iskandar ibn Yaʿqūb Abkāriyūs, *Rawḍat al-adab fī ṭabaqāt shuʿarāʾ al-ʿArab* (Bayrūt: [publisher not identified], 1858); ʾAntara Ibn Shaddād, *Munyat al-nafs fī ashʿār ʿAntar ʿAbs*, ed. Iskandar ibn Yaʿqūb Abkāriyūs (Bayrūt: [al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿUmumīyah], 1864); Iskandar ibn Yaʿqūb Abkāriyūs, *Tazyīn nihāyat al-arab fī ʾakhbār al-ʿArab* (Bayrūt: [al-Maṭbaʿat al-Waṭanīyah], 1867).
[82] El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*, 71, 74.

translation, were printed at the state press in Bulaq to meet the needs of Mehmed Ali's state-building project. These were mostly technical works, though they included works of geography and history, such as *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. As for historic Arabic works, the output of the press in these decades included grammatical primers and a small number of texts that formed part of the "postclassical" curriculum of Islamic education;[83] that is, the standard curriculum of the sixteenth century and thereafter, in which the core teaching texts were commentaries on earlier "classical" (ninth- to fifteenth-century) works, to the exclusion of the classical works themselves.[84] A still smaller selection of historic Arabic literary works was printed in these decades. The works selected were of a relatively popular character, such as *Alf Layla wa-Layla* ("A Thousand and One Nights"), or had popular appeal, such as the poems attributed to the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and a commentary on al-Būṣīrī's (1213–1295) *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* ("Ode of the Mantle"),[85] a long poem in praise of the Prophet Muhammad with an important role in public celebrations of the Prophet's birthday, as well as being credited in popular belief with a variety of special powers.[86] Beginning in the 1850s and increasingly through the Tanzimat era, a much wider range of historic Arabic works began to be printed in Cairo: compendia of poetry, encyclopedias, historiography, and Islamic scholarship of the classical era. The main outlet for this print activity remained the Bulaq press, which, at some point in the 1830s, had been made available for hire by private individuals wishing to commission particular texts,[87] but private commercial presses became increasingly significant

[83] El Shamsy, 67.
[84] El Shamsy, 31–32.
[85] El Shamsy, 70.
[86] Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 71.
[87] El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*, 71.

from the 1850s on.[88]

I am claiming that this literary activity—by which I mean both the printing of historic works and the writing about the past in this era—reflected, among other things, an expansive desire to cultivate and control the region's pasts; a desire that was linked to the development of an association between potentiality and the past in the Tanzimat era. This was the desire that Buṭrus al-Bustānī gave expression to in his *Khuṭba* with reference to the Abbasids, and that Khalīl al-Khūrī expressed in his yearning for ancient Syria. That the same desire was at stake is apparent above all from the fact that the same milieu and, indeed, to a considerable extent, the same individuals were responsible for both. We have seen how this was the case in Beirut. In Egypt, it may be seen in the fact that Ṭahṭāwī played an important role in promoting the publication of numerous major works of Arabic literature, particularly in the field of historiography, most notably al-Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ* and Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*.[89] His student, Abu al-Suʿūd, founded a publishing house that mostly printed historic works of Arabic literature, but also, for example, his own work on the ancient pasts of Egypt and the surrounding region, *al-Dars al-Tāmm* (mentioned above). Moreover, as in Beirut, the rhetoric of revival that encapsulated the association between the past and potentiality was explicitly applied to the printing of Arabic literature. In his colophon to the 1866 Bulaq edition of Ibn Shākir's (1287–1863) *Fawāt al-Wafāyāt* (Addendum to "The Obituaries [of Eminent Men]"), the important *muṣaḥḥiḥ* (a role combining editing, manuscript collation, and textual criticism) Naṣr al-Ḥūrīnī (d. 1874) praises the financer of the edition, Muḥammad Pasha ʿĀrif, as having "been successful in reviving the sciences of literature, linguistics, and exegesis through the multiplication of the

[88] Kathryn A. Schwartz, "The Political Economy of Private Printing in Cairo as Told from a Commissioning Deal Turned Sour, 1871," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 1 (2017): 27–32.
[89] El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*, 78.

[available] texts on these [subjects] and their dissemination through accurate prints."[90] While this is only one instance, Muḥammad ʿĀrif was an important figure in the printing of historic Arabic works, as the founder, in 1868, of a successful society with this as its express purpose, namely the *Jamʿiyyat al-Maʿārif al-Miṣriyya* (Egyptian Scholarly Society).[91] My argument, to be clear, is not that the association between potentiality and the past, and hence the desire to cultivate and control the past, were the only factors driving all of this activity, but simply that these were important animating factors. In practical terms, while the period did see the emergence of new objects and fields of knowledge, this desire was mainly applied to an elaborate network of deeply-rooted traditions of learning and of knowledge-production and meaning, and its precise impact was mediated by these traditions and realized in relation to them. I come back to this point in my next chapter, where I argue that these traditions were integral to the experience of revivalism.

3.4 Resistance to European power in Tanzimat-era Arabic historiography

In the present context, beyond claiming that this literary activity was animated by a desire to cultivate and control the potentiality of the past, I am claiming furthermore that this desire was bound up with local desires for wealth and prosperity and, relatedly, with a desire and will to resist to the threat of European domination. The last part of this claim is backed up by expressions of a desire to resist European power within the historiographical works of the period. The passage cited above from Najjār's work is a case in point.[92] A more elaborate—and specifically anti-colonial—example features in Ṭahṭāwī's history of Egypt, in his chapter on the

[90] El Shamsy, 87.
[91] El Shamsy, 93–97.
[92] It is interesting to note in this context that Ibrāhīm al-Najjār was the grandson of a member of Napoleon's entourage, a carpenter ("*najjār*"), in the unsuccessful siege of Acre in 1799. Khayr al-Dīn Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām, qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-al-nisāʾ min al-ʿArab wa-al-mustaʿrabīn wa-al-mustashriqīn*, 15th ed., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm Li'l-Malāyīn, 2002), 38.

twenty-third dynasty of the kings of ancient Egypt. Ṭahṭāwī reports that in the time of this dynasty, which he assigns to the years 1432 to 1343 before the Hijra,[93] the Pharaonic "colonies" (*muḍāfāt*) and "annexes" (*lawāḥiq*) in the Sudan—which Ṭahṭāwī distinguishes from the "true regions of Egypt" ("*al-aqālīm al-Miṣriyya al-ḥaqīqiyya*") that formed the heart of the Pharaonic realm—managed to break away and "became sovereign in themselves" ("*istabaddat bi-nafsiha*"), before going on to attack and succeed in gaining control of part of Upper Egypt. His main source here is the *Aperçu de l'Histoire d'Égypte* (1864) by Auguste Mariette (1821–1881), director of the Egyptian Department of Antiquities. This work had been immediately translated by Ṭahṭāwī's former student Abū al-Suʿūd for publication both separately and under a single cover with the French text. Verbal correspondences indicate that Ṭahṭāwī was, at least partly, working with Abū al-Suʿūd's translation. But neither the French nor Abū al-Suʿūd's Arabic features anything corresponding to "colonies" and "annexes": both texts simply make clear that the people in question—identified in these texts as "Cushites" and "Ethiopians," rather than "Sudanese"—had been under Egyptian authority before gaining independence.

After giving a basic outline of the events, as above, Ṭahṭāwī refers to the recent discovery of a stela (*lawḥ ḥajarī ṣiwānī*) in the region of Dunqula (northern Sudan) as corroborating the fact that this was a period of political upheaval, and he notes that the stela was inscribed by Sudanese and not Egyptian kings. In a new paragraph, he comments on the broader significance of this discovery, as follows:

> The meaning to which the writing [on the stela] attests is that when the Cushites—that is, the Sudanese of the sons of Ham[94]—founded for themselves an independent kingdom, they adopted the religion of the Egyptians, and used their

[93] In this he is following Auguste Mariette, *Aperçu de l'histoire d'Égypte Depuis Les Temps Les plus Reculés Jusqu'à La Conquête Musulmane.*, trans. Abd Allah Abū al-Su'ūd (Alexandrie: F. Mourès, 1864), 71. The corresponding Christian dates are 810–721 BC (Mariette gives both).

[94] The Arabic term for "the Sudanese" has the literal sense "Black people," which is clearly present here, given the reference to Ham.

> way of writing, and learned their language. Thus, the civilization [*tamaddun*] of the Sudanese arose from the civilization of the Egyptians. [It also attests] that the Sudanese attacked their teachers and their civilizers [*mumaddinīhim*] and overcame them by what they had learned from them.[95]

His comment is based on a passage in Mariette's text that runs as follows:

> Les Couschites, en formant un royaume séparé, adoptèrent la religion, l'écriture, la langue des Egyptiens ; leur civilisation est ainsi fille de la civilisation égyptienne, et la stèle du Musée, en nous montrant les Ethiopiens imposant leur domination à l'Egypte, nous font ainsi assister au spectacle d'un fleuve qui s'insurge contre sa source.[96]

Abū al-Suʿūd had produced a literal translation of this passage, and some of Ṭahṭāwī's comment is identical to this translation; for example, the phrases used in rendering "adopted the religion of the Egyptians, and used their way of writing" ("*tadayyanū bi-dīn al-Miṣriyyīn wa'staʿmalū ṭarīqat kitābatihim*"), among others. Other parts of Ṭahṭāwī's translation feature small modifications of Abū al-Suʿūd's translation: Ṭahṭāwī has it that the Sudanese "founded [*assasū*] for themselves an independent [*mustaqilla*] kingdom," while Abū al-Suʿūd writes (of "the Ethiopians") that they "created for themselves a distinct [*makhṣūṣa*] kingdom."[97]

But Ṭahṭāwī's comment on the stela also makes explicit and amplifies a point that features only as metaphor in Mariette's text: the point that the Sudanese ultimately used technologies that they had adopted from the Egyptians to gain the upper hand against their former rulers. In the French, and in Abū al-Suʿūd's translation, this is conveyed in the image of a river turning back against its source. Ṭahṭāwī not only translates this image into literal terms, but he goes on to compare the events of the Haitian revolution against the French in 1806, and the

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[95] Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl*, 106.
ومضمون ما دلت عليه الكتابة أنّ طائفة الكوشيين يعنى السودان من بنى حام لما أسسوا لانفسهم مملكة مستقلة تدينوا بدين المصريين والستعملوا طريقة كتابتهم وتعلموا لسانهم فكان تمدّن السودان صادرا عن تمدن قدماء المصريين وأن السودان أغاروا على معلميهم وممدنيهم وغلبوهم بما تعلموا منهم.

[96] Mariette, *Aperçu*, 104.

[97] Auguste Mariette, *Kitāb tārīkh qudamā' al-Miṣrīyīn: al-musammá, Qannāṣat ahl al-'aṣr min khulāṣat tārīkh Maṣr*, trans. ᶜAbd Allāh Abū al-Suᶜūd (Būlāq: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Khīdīwīyah, 1864), 180.

revolt of the European colonies in America ("*muḍāfāt*" again) in opposition to European rule. Only then does he introduce the image of a river in flood turning back against its source, specifically mentioning the Nile in this regard. He remarks, "this is not strange among the sons of the sons of every age," before underlining the point of the paragraph as a whole, as he often does, with a piece of poetry, in this case some famous lines by Maʿn ibn Aws (d. 683), a Companion of the Prophet:

> I taught [lit. teach] him shooting every day.
> When his arm was true, he shot me.
> And how often I taught him versification.
> When he spoke a verse, he lampooned me.[98]

Ṭahṭāwī, of course, devoted much of his life to rendering European literature and contemporary European learning into Arabic. It is certain that he would have understood this as part of a project of introducing elements of the "civilization" of Europe into his own society. It seems likely that his amplification of a connection between the adoption of "civilization" from foreign sources and the achievement of political power by the Sudanese in this section reflects his personal perspective on his own work of cultural transfer. His further mention of anti-colonial uprisings against European states corroborates this, insofar as it was products of European "civilization" that he was in the business of rendering into Arabic, and it suggests moreover that the threat of European power informed his personal sense of mission—even though, at the time he was writing *Anwār Tawfīq al-Jalīl*, Egypt was not formally subject to any European state; indeed, insofar as it was formally subject to an external power, it was to the Ottoman Empire. Ṭahṭāwī's recognition of European power as a threat is not, in itself, remarkable: decades earlier, as I noted in chapter 2, he had highlighted the contemporary power imbalance between "Europe"

[98] Ṭahṭāwī, *Anwār Tawfīq Al-Jalīl*, 106.

أعلمه الرماية كل يوم * فلما استدّ ساعده رماني
وكم علمته نظم القوافى * فلما قال قافية هجاني

and "Islam" as a problem to be remedied. But in the context of a work whose basic shape was derived from a volume in a European series entitled *L'Univers*, it is important to observe that Ṭahṭāwī did not conceive of "civilization" as a straightforward universal good that could be expected to be generously shared, but that he saw it clearly as a system of power.

My argument here is that these expressions of resistance to European power within the historiographical writings of Ṭahṭāwī and Najjār suggest that their works were animated by a desire to resist European hegemony. This indirectly supports my contention that the broader preoccupation with the past in this era reflected a desire to cultivate and control the imagined potentiality of the past, which might otherwise be exploited by European powers as a means of extending European hegemony in the region. There are more direct intimations of a desire for local control of the past as a mode of resistance in *al-Dars al-Tāmm*, Abū al-Suʿūd's historical work on the region's ancient pasts. The chapter on ancient Egypt begins with a brief summary of the sources on which he will be drawing, followed by a paragraph of "introductory thoughts and generally valuable points" (*afkār taqdīmiyya wa-fawāʾid ʿumūmiyya*). This focuses on the importance of readers knowing the history of Egypt. He states that "of the types of knowledge with which a human being must be furnished, first he should know the history of his nation and understand the reality of the changes that have affected the form of its civilization [*hayʾat tamaddunihi*]."[99] He proceeds to describe how Europeans are rushing to see the remains of ancient Egypt, such as the pyramids, while Egyptians themselves, he says, have little desire to go and see them. He observes that there is now a whole class of European scholars "called Egyptologists" (*yuqāl lahum al-Īgībtiyūlūgiyūn*) who are devoted to the study of "the conditions of Egypt in the past" (*aḥwāl Miṣr fī sālif al-ʿaṣr*), before asking: "Is it not for us rather than them

[99] Abū al-Suʿūd, *Al-Dars al-Tāmm*, 85.

[*a-fa-lasnā awlā minhum*] to care about this sort of matter? Is it not necessary that the owner of the domain [*ṣāḥib al-dār*] be the most knowledgeable [*adrā*] about what is in it and most entitled [*awlā*] to know the realities of its conspicuous and its hidden [features] [*ẓawāhirihā wa-khawāfīhā*]?"[100] The phrase "conspicuous and hidden" discloses a concern that the people of Egypt should know Egypt's pasts thoroughly, and it is clear from the rest of this passage that Abū al-Suʿūd is also specifically concerned that Egyptians should know Egypt's pasts more thoroughly than the Europeans. Furthermore, the mention of "the changes that have affected the form of [a country's] civilization" as a particularly important object of knowledge for its inhabitants reflects the grounding of this desire for local knowledge of the past in the association between past times and potentiality, in that the term "civilization" had come to signify the ultimate realization of human potential and was explicitly the object of elite hopes for the future of local society in both Egypt and Syria.[101]

These instances of what may broadly be termed expressions of resistance to European hegemony are important to note because, without question, the more obvious fact regarding Arabic writing about the past in this period is the profound extent to which it was influenced by European historiography. I have noted that Khūrī's *Kharābāt Sūriyya* was largely a translation of part of *Syrie Moderne* by Jules David. This work was an instalment in a fifty-seven-volume series whose full title was *L'Univers: Histoire et Description de Tous Les Peuples* (1834–1856). Another volume in the same series was the basic source for Ṭahṭāwī's history of Egypt: he drew on a great many sources in this work, including a vast array of Arabic ones, but it was Jacques-Joseph Champollion-Figeac's (1778–1867) *L'Égypte ancienne* in the *L'Univers* series that

[100] Abū al-Suʿūd, 86.
افلسنا اولى منهم بالعناية بمثل هذا الامر وهل يقتضى أن يكون صاحب الدار ادرى بما فيها وأولى بمعرفة حقائق ظواهرها وخوافيها.
[101] Indeed, the term is used in this way in the preface to this very work: Abū al-Suʿūd, 2–3.

provided the overarching framework for most of Ṭahṭāwī's text.[102] Another volume in the same series was the main source for Ibrāhīm al-Najjār's account of Ottoman history in *Miṣbāḥ al-Sārī*.[103] Abū al-Suʿūd's *al-Dars al-Tāmm* was based on a variety of recent European sources.[104] Buṭrus al-Bustānī's idealizing account of Abbasid culture in his *Khuṭba* reflected the influence of the Protestant missionaries in conveying what was essentially a Eurocentric narrative of history, according to which the key historic contribution of the Arabs was to spur the development of European modernity.[105] In this light, the claim that Arabic writing about the past in this period was in any way animated by a desire to resist European hegemony might seem far-fetched. The fact that three of the main source texts were part of a series whose title intimates the European desire for universal hegemony in this period sharpens the point.

The engagement with contemporary European historiography in these works should be understood as reflecting the basic strategy of the Tanzimat project. The Tanzimat project was, among other things, self-consciously an attempt—both at the heart of the Ottoman Empire and among provincial elites—to generate wealth and power through a combination of close economic ties to Europe and rapid, largescale adoption of the latest technologies and practices of "civilization" as it was understood to exist in certain European countries. In this context, given the perception of a close association between Europe and the state of "civilization" to which the

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[102] The sources have been misidentified in a recent article on this text that nevertheless makes an interesting about it: Renaud Soler, "Une Autre Histoire de La Civilisation: Comment Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī Repensa l'histoire de l'Égypte Dans Les Années 1860," *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 74, no. 2 (2019): 265–96. Besides Mariette's *Aperçu*, another important French source was Guillaume Belèze, *L'histoire romaine mise à la portée des enfants avec questionnaires* (Paris: Imprimerie et librairie classiques de Jules Delalain, 1861).

[103] Najjār is the only one of these three authors to identify the source text by giving the name of the author. Najjār, *Miṣbāḥ al-sārī*, 80. According to Ercüment Kuran, the same series was the inspiration behind Ahmed Midhat's (1841–1912) later fifteen-volume universal history entitled *Ka'inat* ("Universe," 1871–1880). Ercüment Kuran, "Ottoman Historiography of the Tanzimat Period," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, vol. [4] (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 424.

[104] Abū al-Suʿūd also names his European sources. The main ones were: J. J. Guillemin, *Histoire ancienne de l'Orient* (Paris: Hachette, 1863); Victor Duruy, *Abrégé d'histoire ancienne* (Paris: Hachette, 1864); François Lenormant, *Histoire du peuple juif* (Paris: A. Lévy, 1869).

[105] al-Bustānī, *Khuṭbah*, 17.

Tanzimat project aspired, the threat of Europe was generally suppressed in the Tanzimat era, and appears in the literature of the period for the most part in a vague and shadowy form. The unraveling of the Tanzimat project was in fact co-incident with the materialization of this vague and shadowy threat, in the European takeover of the Ottoman finances in the mid-1870s and even more drastically in the British occupation of Egypt in the early 1880s. The expressions of resistance to European hegemony within the historiographical literature are important precisely because they bring into view a dimension of antagonism that was, to a large extent, suppressed in relations between the Ottoman Empire and Europe in this period.

This point about suppression has the implication—important to my argument—that a production like Buṭrus al-Bustānī's *Khuṭba*, which exemplifies this process of suppression, should be regarded as participating in the same dynamics of cultivation and control as a work like Abū al-Suʿūd's *al-Dars al-Tāmm*, which explicitly advocates local mastery of the nation's pasts. This is to claim that Bustānī's *Khuṭba* is animated by a desire to resist European hegemony, even though such a desire appears only in fleeting expressions of unease at the existing dynamics between "East" and "West,"[106] and even though these moments of unease run counter to the general thrust of his lecture. As for the general thrust, as mentioned, Bustānī gives an account of Arab culture that focuses on the achievements of Abbasid learning. After going into some detail on this topic, he reports that eventually the sciences came to be neglected among the Arabs, at which "they went off downcast in pursuit of Europe, by way of the Maghreb and Spain, seeking refuge there under Western banners." As Bustānī has it, "the light [of the sciences] thus began diminishing in the East and increasing in the West from the twelfth century, until it reached [the point] it has reached today among the Arabs and the Europeans

[106] Bustānī uses the terms "East" and "West" in this way, undoubtedly in reflection of the influence of the missionaries on him.

[respectively]."[107] This is the context for Bustānī's representation of the Arab present as a site of total devastation, in the passage discussed above. At the conclusion of this, in a more optimistic vein, he avers that "if we look to the nineteenth century, the door to hope has opened for us." Deploying medieval European racial-genealogical terms, which also feature elsewhere in the text, Bustānī then calls on his fellow "Sons of Shem" to "rejoice, as their cousins the Sons of Japheth [i.e., European peoples] have begun to return to them in printed form what they had taken from them and, on top of it, their later discoveries, corresponding to the benefit of interest for a period of four hundred years."[108]

There is, however, an immediate concession. The Sons of Shem should rejoice at this returning of the sciences by the Sons of Japheth—"even if most of the time [*fī akthar al-awqāt*] it is marred and obstructed by the arrogance and pride that some of the aforementioned cousins display towards our Eastern race, and their insulting of it."[109] In this concessive clause Bustānī expresses an acute awareness of contemporary European racism. He is calling on his audience to look past this fact and celebrate the returning of the sciences; that is, by fostering their development. The implicit argument, broadly consistent with the strategy of the Tanzimat project as a whole, is that the benefits to be gained from welcoming in what he frames as the offerings of the West are so great as to demand overlooking the framework of racism in which they are

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[107] al-Bustānī, *Khuṭbah*, 26.
وسارت كاسفة البال قاصدة بلاد أوروبا عن طريق المغرب واسبانيا تلتجئ هناك تحت الالوية الغربية.. وهكذا اخذ نورها يتناقص في الشرق ويتزايد في الغرب منذ الحيل الثاني عشر حتى وصل الى ما وصل اليهِ الآن.

[108] al-Bustānī, 27.
اننا اذا نظرنا الى الجيل التاسع عشر ينفتح باب للامل. فلتبشر بنو سام لان أولاد عمهم بني يافث قد ابتدأوا يرجعون لهم ما اخذوا منهم مطبوعاً وعلى ظهره اكتشافاتهم المتاخرة نظير فائدة لاربآءٍ عن مدة اربعماية سنة.
The mention here of "what they had taken" is not only a general reference to Arab learning, but also specifically recalls an earlier point in the lecture, in which Bustānī stated that "the Europeans have taken mounds, or rather mountains, of Arabic texts of which no speck or trace has remained among the Arabs": hence the mention of print. al-Bustānī, 16.

[109] al-Bustānī, *Khuṭbah*, 27.
وان يكن في اكثر الاوقات منغصاً ومعاقاً بما يظهرهُ البعض من أولاد عمنا المذكورين من العتوّ والاستكبار على جنسنا الشرقيّ والاستهانة بهِ.

generally borne.

The acknowledgment of European racism makes plausible my contention that Bustānī was seeking in the *Khuṭba* not only to cultivate the Abbasid past as a symbol of potentiality, in expression of a desire for local wealth and prosperity, but also to claim control of this symbol of potentiality, in expression of a desire to resist European hegemony. It reveals a definite motivation for such resistance. To be clear, the general thrust of Bustānī's lecture runs in a different direction. His main aim is to mitigate concerns about embracing European learning, and he presents an account of cultural exchange that is geared towards this aim. Immediately after the acknowledgment of European racism, Bustānī proceeds to frame the transfer of sciences as a gracious process of mutual benefit: "We delivered the sciences to them with our left hand by one route, and they are setting about the return of them with their right hand by a variety of routes."[110] He then highlights the role of the various missionary groups in facilitating the transfer of learning from Europe, and explicitly rebukes those who deny the "good example and fine intentions" of the Americans (*ḥusn qudwatihim wa-faḍl masāʿīhim*), saying that such people could only be "ungrateful or people of prejudice and fanaticism" (*nākir al-jamīl aw min aṣḥāb al-gharaḍ*).[111] But there is further evidence that Bustānī consciously desired, at least, to move beyond European hegemony, if not altogether to resist it. At a later point in the lecture, at the beginning of its final section "The Culture of the Arabs in Our Time" (*Ādāb al-ʿArab fī Hādhihi al-Ayyām*), Bustānī states that "there are many things that strengthen our hopes in the future." He continues, "although we are indebted in most of these things to foreigners, we can lift up our heads on account of the existence of [these things] among us, while averting our gaze from their

[110] al-Bustānī, 27.

نحن سلمناهم العلوم من يدنا اليسرى عن طريق واحد واماهم فآخذون في ارجاعها لنا بيدهم اليمنى عن طرق شتى.

[111] al-Bustānī, 27.

source, not through lack of appreciation or ingratitude, but for the purposes of strengthening and encouragement."[112]

3.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to describe and analyze the formation of a new revivalist mode of engagement with the past among intellectuals from Mount Lebanon and Egypt in the Tanzimat era. At the heart of Arabic revivalism of the Tanzimat era was, I have argued, the figuration of certain remote pasts as symbols of potentiality; specifically, the remote pasts of the region itself, though "the region" here is to be taken as a loose concept encompassing territorial, political, and social factors of community. The figuration of these remote pasts as symbols of potentiality was shaped by multiple influences. In particular, I highlighted the importance of the revivalist rhetoric of the Tanzimat project, along with a trope of European colonial and Orientalist literature, whereby Europeans figured the objects of their colonial desires, including the lands of the Ottoman empire, as "ancient" lands as a way of affirming these lands' potential for European colonization. For the intellectuals from Mount Lebanon and Egypt that I have discussed in this chapter, the figuration of the region's remote pasts as symbols of potentiality formed part of a structure of historical experience in which the potentiality of the past represented both the promise of wealth and prosperity for the region and also the threat of possible colonization by Europe. Arabic revivalism of the Tanzimat era, I have argued, was animated by a desire both to cultivate and to control the potentiality of the past; a desire that animated both historiographical writing and the printing of historic works of Arabic literature. As a contribution to the scholarship on nineteenth-century Arabic historiography and historical

[112] al-Bustānī, 30.
يوجد امور كثيرة تقوي آمالنا في المستقبل. ومع اننا ميونون في اكثر هذه الامور للغربآء يمكننا ان نرفع رؤُوسنا بما وجد منها عندنا مع قطع النظر عن مصدرها لا على سبيل عدم الشكر وانكار الجميل بل لاجل التقوية والتشجيع.

thought, the broad point of my argument is that the formation of Arabic revivalism should neither be understood simply as the effect of deception, misguidedness, or false consciousness on the part of Arab intellectuals under the spell of the monumental edifice of European colonial ideology, nor as the immaculate expression of resistance to European colonial power and of the realization of something like national consciousness. It should be understood rather as an intellectual formation that was deeply imbued with the ethos and strategies of the Tanzimat project, conceived here as an ambitious, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, attempt at developing the strength and resources of the Ottoman state in the face of the challenges presented by Mehmed Ali's state-building project, on one hand, and the economic and military threat of the European powers, on the other, through a program of rapid economic liberalization, social reform, and the formation of close economic and cultural ties to Europe.

Conclusion

In the summer of 1881, the first issue of a new Alexandria-based publication featured a short article titled "A Recap: Abridged from *The Beginning[s] of the Ancients*" (*Tadhkār: Mulakhkhaṣ min Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*).[1] The journal had been founded by ʿAbdallāh al-Nadīm (1842–1896), an Egyptian of middle-class (artisanal) background, who was by this point well established in elite cultural circles as a writer and an activist in the nascent and then-largely-underground revolutionary movement against European imperialism, with a distinctive conviction that the movement needed to foster mass participation.[2] Initially titled *Al-Tankīt wa'l-Tabkīt* ("Comedy and Critique"), his journal soon became the "unofficial mouthpiece" of the ʿUrābī Revolt (1881–1882) under the new title of *al-Ṭāʾif* ("The Wanderer"),[3] and al-Nadīm himself its foremost spokesperson.[4] This was a multifaceted and socially broad uprising against the dominance of European interests in Egypt, and against Ottoman rule, administered in Egypt by the khedive Tawfīq Pasha (1852–1892, r. 1879–1892), especially but not entirely insofar as this was taken to be complicit in producing preferential conditions for European interests.[5] The uprising was led by Aḥmad ʿUrābī (1841–1911), a colonel in the Egyptian army, himself of peasant background. In late 1881 it succeeded in instituting a form of consultative government under Tawfīq. Joint British and French opposition led to Tawfīq's dismissal of the new administration in the summer

[1] ʿAbd Allāh Nadīm, *al-Tankīt wa-al-tabkīt* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣrīyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Kitāb, 1994), 39–40. The journal appeared weekly or fortnightly and was originally published at the "press of *al-Maḥrūsa* [Protected [City], viz. by God; i.e. roughly, The Capital] and *al-ʿAṣr al-Jadīd* [The New Age]," two other Alexandria-based newspapers.
[2] Mansoor Mirza, "Between 'Umma, Empire and Nation: The Role of the 'Ulama in the 'Urabi Revolt and the Emergence of Egyptian Nationalism" (PhD Thesis, London, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2014), 179–84.
[3] Juan Ricardo Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 123–24.
[4] Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians!: The Socio-Political Crisis in Egypt, 1878-1882* (London: Ithaca Press for the Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1981), 223–224.
[5] Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 14–22.

of 1882. The ʿUrabists responded by forming an alternative "common-law council" (*al-Majlis al-ʿUrfī*) independent of Tawfiq, before the British invasion of July 1882 imposed British colonial rule on Egypt under the nominal authority of the restored khedive.[6] The journal *al-Tankīt wa'l-Tabkīt* had positioned itself as part of a "national" project from the outset, styling itself "a national weekly paper of culture and wit" (*ṣaḥīfa waṭaniyya usbūʿiyya adabiyya hazaliyya*). Al-Nadīm's opening editorial had begun, "I present to you a service to the nation" (lit. "a national service"; *ataqaddamu bayna yadayk bi-khidma waṭaniyya*).[7] This is the context for the aforementioned article.

As its title indicates, the article consists of an excerpt from *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ wa-Hidāyat al-Ḥukamāʾ* ("The Beginning[s] of the Ancients and the Guidance of the Sages"), the work that I analyzed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, a product of Mehmed Ali's state-building project, first published just prior to the Tanzimat era in the summer of 1838. A second edition had been produced in 1865, and the work had continued to serve as a standard textbook in the state education system, which had been among its original aims.[8] The appearance of this text in the inaugural issue of *al-Tankīt wa'l-Tabkīt* obviously indicates a degree of continuity in the mediation of "ancient" pasts in Egypt from the time when Mehmed Ali was at the height of his power to beyond the Tanzimat era. This sort of continuity can be traced by way of *Bidāyat al-*

[6] Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, 273–303; Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 276–82.
[7] Nadīm, *al-Tankīt wa-al-tabkīt*, 35–36.
[8] "Recap" (*tadhkār*) in the title of the article may allude to this. Donald Reid states that the 1865 printing of the text was for use in schools. Donald M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 112. See also the following note. Al-Nadīm had himself been educated in the school of the Shaykh Ibrahim Pasha mosque, built by Mehmed Ali's son Ibrahim in Alexandria in 1825. Mirza, "Between 'Umma, Empire and Nation," 179. Given the mosque's connection with the ruling family, it seems probable that this school came under the influence of the state-education system. In the time of Ismāʿīl (r. 1863–79), at least, mosque schools including this one were subject to the government's educational reform initiatives. Ilyās al-Ayyūbī, *Tārīkh Miṣr Fī ʿAhd Al-Khidīw Ismāʿīl Bāshā: Al-Juzʾ al-Awwal* (al-Qāhira: Wikālat al-Ṣaḥāfa al-'Arabiyya, 2022), 170.

Qudamāʾ into the 1890s.[9]

But I argued in Chapter 4 that a subtle modification of a line from the preface to this text in Buṭrus al-Bustānī's *Khuṭba fī Ādāb al-ʿArab* in 1858 expressed a structure of historical experience that was significantly different from that expressed by Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī in *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* itself in 1838. Similarly, the way in which excerpts from this text were reproduced in *al-Tankīt wa'l-Tabkīt* expressed a structure of historical experience that was distinct from that which had been articulated by Arab intellectuals in the Tanzimat era. The major difference consists in the fact that the ancient past was now unmistakably, if not quite explicitly, implicated in a struggle against foreign domination. I argued in Chapter 4 that the dominant mode of engagement with the past in Tanzimat-era Egypt and Syria was animated by a desire to cultivate the promise and, at the same time, to control the threat of the symbolic potentiality of the region's remote pasts. The threat here was the threat that this potentiality might otherwise serve as a pretext for European colonization; in other words, it might be cultivated by European forces at the expense of local and regional interests. This threat was to be neutralized by the cultivation of this potentiality by local forces. In *al-Tankīt wa'l-Tabkīt*, by contrast, the symbolic potentiality of the past is invoked as a dynamic force against the threat of Europe, which is now perceived to be fundamentally and essentially hostile; that is, as a means of actively repudiating the effects of European colonialism.

This contrast is apparent in a number of ways in the first issue of *al-Tankīt wa'l-Tabkīt*,

[9] A new textbook of ancient history that was produced in 1311/1893 for use in Egyptian primary schools reworks the early parts of *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*: Al-Sayyid Afandī ʿAzmī, *Kitāb al-masālik al-ibtidāʾīyah fī tārīkh al-umam al-mashriqīyah: li-talāmidhat al-makātib wa-al-madāris al-ibtidāʾīyah* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Amīrīyah, 1893), 6–15. A four-volume work of universal history printed at Bulaq in 1312/1894 begins with an account of the division of history into *atharī* (meaning "sacred" here) and *basharī* ("human") that is also clearly derived from *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ*. This was the work of an important figure in the ʿUrābī Revolt, Maḥmūd Fahmī al-Muhandis ("the Engineer," 1839–1894). He produced the work in exile in Sri Lanka, where he died. Maḥmūd Fahmī (al-Muhandis), *Al-Baḥr al-Zākhir Fī Tārīkh al-ʿĀlam Wa-Akhbār al-Awāʾil Wa'l-Awākhir*, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Amīrīyah, 1894), 3.

and in the third issue, where the "Recap" is resumed and completed.[10] In the first issue, the segment based on *Bidāyat al-Qudamāʾ* appears between an article ironically describing "a medical council for a case of affliction by Europeanness" (*majlis ṭibbī ʿalā muṣāb bi'l-afranjī*) and a satirical dialogue in Egyptian colloquial titled *ʿArabī tafarnaj* ("A Self-Europeanizing Arab"). In the former article, a family member goes to visit the patient, who is inhabiting a "ruin" (*khirba*), and the visitor finds "nothing but a ghost [*shabaḥ*], distracting himself with hopes, letting out moans, the bones of his faces protruding, his eyes sunken, his face distorted."[11] The family member goes on to ask, "Where is your strength, in which the ghosts have revelled? Where is your graciousness, by which the spirits have been enticed?"[12] Although no explicit connection is made, in following on from this, it is as if the "Recap" article presents ancient history as part of the remedy for the affliction. The opening lines of the article are a good indication of its tenor: "The histories have shown that the Egyptians are among the oldest civilized nations. This kingdom was flourishing and splendid from the time of the prophets."[13] The vitality of Egypt's ancient pasts is called upon to free its present from occupation by the demonic, parasitic ghostly powers of Europe. The contrast with the Tanzimat era is that then the lifelessness of the present was framed as a problem of decadence and neglect within Egyptian and Syrian society; the pursuit of "revival" was therefore principally a struggle with the past as an internal problem, and only obliquely related to the threat of Europe, which, for most of the period, was felt to be at some degree of distance. This changed with the economic crises of the late 1860s onwards and the crystallization of debt imperialism in the 1870s.

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[10] Nadīm, *al-Tankīt wa-al-tabkīt*, 80.

[11] Nadīm, 38.
وزاره في خربة لم يجد فيها غير شبح يعلل نفسه بالأماني ويصعد الزفرات وقد برزت غظام وجهه وغارت عيناه وتشوه وجهه.

[12] Nadīm, 48.
اين قوتك التي اسرت بها الاشباح اين رقتك التي جذبت بها الارواح.

[13] Nadīm, 39.
دلت التواريخ على ان المصريين من اقدم الامم المتمدنة وكانت هذه المملكة من عهد الانبياء زاهية بهية.

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