

Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Great Exhibition of 1851, and the School of Oriental and African Studies Library

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The Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies possesses an interesting collection of early Egyptian printed books in Turkish and Arabic. This paper considers the background to the production of these volumes and the setting up of the first press in Egypt, which was a by-product of the ruler Muhammad Ali Pasha's military ambitions. It traces the history of this particular collection of books which were sent to be exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851. It describes the circumstances in which the Egyptian government was invited to participate and the course of this major international event. It follows the progress of the books from the library of the Victoria and Albert Museum to their present home. Some account is also given of the setting up of the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, and it is shown how large collections are built up by such donations.

Background

Muhammad Ali Pasha, as he is usually known in the West, or Mehmet Ali Pasha as he would have called himself, was born in the late 1760s in the Macedonian port of Kavala, either of Albanian ancestry or the descendant of Turks long resident among Albanians. He landed in Egypt in 1801 as part of the Ottoman-Albanian Corps of the Ottoman Army, sent to reclaim Egypt for the Ottoman Sultan from the French Army left behind by Napoleon. By the time of his death in 1848, he had established a dynasty that ruled Egypt up to the revolution of 1952.

A brief listing of the major events of Muhammad Ali's reign will place it in its historical context. From 1803 to 1811 he established his personal power and destroyed all potential opposition within the country. The end of this process was marked by the famous massacre of the remnants of the former rulers, the Mamluks, in the Cairo Citadel. From 1812 to 1827 he continued to build up his land and sea forces. From 1811 to 1818 he suppressed the Wahhabis in the Arabian Peninsula and recaptured the holy cities of Mecca and Medina for the Ottoman Sultan. From 1820 to

1822 he conquered extensive regions up the Nile, which subsequently became the nucleus of the modern state of the Sudan. From 1824 to 1827 he suppressed the Greek Revolt and captured Athens, but was forced to retreat when the joint Ottoman, Egyptian, and Tunisian fleet was destroyed at the battle of Navarino by the joint British, French, and Russian fleet. In 1831 he began the conquest of Syria which he claimed as his reward for his efforts on the Sultan's behalf. In 1832 he defeated the Ottoman army at Konya, advanced as far as Kutahya, and was only prevented from advancing to Istanbul by the landing of Russian troops. He defeated the Ottomans again at Nezib in 1838, after which the Ottoman fleet defected to him, but he was forced to relinquish Syria by a joint action of the Western powers in 1841, after giving Syria ten years of exemplary rule.

Reforms

To create the military machine needed to carry out his ambitions Muhammad Ali had to reorganize his army on modern lines, and to give it the necessary support, he further reorganized the whole society. He succeeded in establishing his *Nizam-i jedid* or new model army in 1820. The new techniques also required a large number of foreign experts to act as instructors. These were at first predominantly Italian, but after a French military mission arrived in 1824, they were drawn overwhelmingly from that country. It must be remembered that there were a great many unemployed French soldiers after the Napoleonic wars, and until the conquest of Algeria in 1830, they were without the colonial employment available to the British army.

A succession of schools was started in the 1820s for all branches of the armed services, both of the army and the navy. In addition to the purely military a number of peaceful branches of the arts and sciences were catered for, although they almost all had some military or administrative aspect or benefit. The largest was the medical school, set up at the suggestion of the French physician Clot, who arrived in Egypt in 1825 and who established the school in 1826. Schools of veterinary science, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, mineralogy, engineering, and other subjects followed in the 1820s and 1830s. He also reformed the primary and secondary school systems.

As well as importing experts, Muhammad Ali sent his subjects to study abroad, from 1809 as individuals to learn specific skills, and from 1829 in a series of education missions, nearly all to Paris. The students were sent on these missions to become experts in the French language and to acquire Western techniques and learning, so that on their return they could translate important texts into Turkish and Arabic and take part

in teaching in the new schools, translating what the foreign experts were teaching. In the course of time they came to form a new elite. Of particular importance was the Azhari shaikh who accompanied the first mission as imam, Rifa'ah Rafi al-Tahtawi. He was to become one of the great translators as well as the author of a famous account of his journey, and he was a figure of importance in the revival of the Arabic language and literature. In 1837 he became the second director of what began as the School of Translation and was subsequently called the School of Languages. Despite its title, however, this was more of a translation bureau than a language school.

Two things need to be stressed concerning all these educational establishments. First, they were all run on military lines, with strict military discipline extending as far as whipping with the Kurbaj, or horsewhip. Second, Muhammad Ali was in no sense an Egyptian nationalist. A very high percentage of the students and the new elite that evolved were what could only be characterized as Ottomans. This means that they were ethnically Turks, Circassians, Armenians, or from other nationalities considered suitable for military or bureaucratic positions. Rather few were Egyptians, although the insatiable demands for manpower meant that more and more Egyptians did get recruited. Even the private soldiers of the army were originally Sudanese, until it became clear that they could not stand the climate and were replaced by Egyptian peasants. However, practically all the students induced to take up the non-military or bureaucratic specialties, like medicine, veterinary science, and agriculture, were native Egyptians.

Bulaq Press

The organization and tactics of the new model army required large numbers of manuals and regulations, and the new schools required textbooks, which became a significant part of the output of the new government printing press set up in Bulaq, the port of Cairo, in 1822. This was the first press in Egypt, apart from the short-lived one brought by the French expedition and afterward taken away on its withdrawal. It was not the only press in existence in Egypt, and at least two of the books to be mentioned later were published in Alexandria, but the Bulaq Press was the only one with any significant output.

A vivid picture of the operations of the press is given in the report of A. Perron published in the *Journal asiatique* of Juillet/Aout 1843:

Tout individu peut faire imprimer un ouvrage a l'imprimerie de Boulac. Voici les conditions et les formalités à remplir: Le moultzem (celui qui fait l'entreprise) présente au divan ou ministère

de l'instruction publique le livre qu'il se propose de publier. On convient du format, qui est ordinairement grand in-80, ou petit in-40, et du nombre du lignes à la page . . . Lorsque les premières propositions sont consenties, on fait imprimer une page du livre, pour calculer la justification et fixer la nature du papier à employer. On compte des lors, approximativement, combien de feuilles doit avoir le livre, et on convient du prix du papier. Cela fait, le moultzem sait quelles seront ses autres dépenses.

He goes on to explain that the job is then designated to be performed within a fixed time, which is as short as possible for the length of the book. This is important for fixing the cost of paying the *nadhir* or inspector of the press, the shaikh who corrects the proofs, the shaikh who checks the language, and all the operatives of the press as well as the cost of the ink, paper, and so on. If the work takes longer than the agreed time, the increase in cost is born by the moultzem.

The role of these muharrirs and musahhihs, who were frequently Azhari Shaikhs, was very important in relation to the Arabic translations. According to the Egyptian historian Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal, they wrote the introductions and the postscripts and chose the Arabic titles, as well as checking the language of the translations. He explains the need for their grammatical skills in the following terms:

The first group that undertook translation in the reign of Muhammad Ali was the Syrians, and the individuals of this group did not have a firm and broad knowledge of the languages they were translating from nor of the Arabic language. This was because they had a working knowledge of this language rather than a studied grasp of it, and because they were all Christians, and their language and style was not based on the language of the Qur'an.¹

On the profitability of publishing, Perron adds the following:

Quelque considérables que puissent paraître les frais d'une entreprise d'impression, le moultzem a toujours des profits qui arrivent à la moitié de ses avances, si le livre qu'il a publié se vend convenablement. Pour en faciliter le placement, il en expédie à Constantinople, à Smyrne même, au Gharb, etc.

At the time of writing, he reports, the quantity of these kinds of productions had trailed off. They had been reduced to short runs of school textbooks, and the demand even for these had greatly decreased since

the withdrawal from Syria in 1841 and the subsequent reduction of students in the schools.

He also offers as another reason for the rarity of publications in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian in Egypt the fact that there were by then three printing establishments operating in Istanbul which produced books more cheaply than at Bulaq. Consequently, instead of exporting books to Turkey as had previously been the case, Egypt was now importing them. One other detail is of importance to us here. As he explains:

Jusqu'à ce jour, il n'a existé dans toute l'Égypte qu'un seul dépôt des livres imprimés, et c'est encore, à l'imprimerie de Boulac même, que ces livres se conservent amoncelés en pyramides, sans que le directeur lui-même les connaisse, et sans qu'il soit jamais venu à l'idée de personne d'en dresser et publier une simple liste.

Muhammad Ali died in Alexandria in 1849, but two years before he had become mentally incapacitated and had been gently removed from actual power. He was succeeded in 1848, after the four-month interlude of the short reign of Ibrahim, by his grandson Abbas Hilmi I. He was to rule until 1854 and immediately put all his grandfather's policies into reverse, closing down his schools, factories, and sanitary institutions. His one major achievement was to acquire, with British help, recognition by the Ottoman Government of vice-regal or Khedival status for Muhammad Ali's descendants.

The Great Exhibition of 1851

The year before the great ruler was quietly deposed, the Royal Society of Arts of Great Britain had begun a series of exhibitions of manufactures, motivated by concern for the declining quality of British design. The French had been mounting such exhibitions on a national scale regularly since 1798, but the idea of an international exhibition had occurred to Henry Cole following the success of the British national exhibitions, and the idea was enthusiastically taken up by Prince Albert, the German-born husband of Queen Victoria, since 1843 president of the Royal Society of Arts.

Despite being entirely privately funded, the idea met with a lot of public opposition, encouraged by the *Times* and other newspapers, especially when it was proposed that the exhibition be held in Hyde Park in a large brick structure, which it was feared would become permanent.

The public was won over largely by the brilliant scheme of Joseph Paxton, who had begun life as a gardener and achieved fame as the

builder of the conservatory and the Lily House at Chatsworth. He proposed what was in effect a vast glass house, built of prefabricated parts, which could be assembled and taken apart again in the space of a few months. The humorous magazine *Punch* coined the name "the Crystal Palace," by which it has been known ever since.

Invitations were sent to all parts of the world to exhibit their best products in what was intended to be a showcase of the world's industry. As stated in the *First report of the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851* presented to both Houses of Parliament in 1852,

the Commissioners . . . at their first meeting . . . ordered letters to be addressed to the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Colonial Affairs, requesting them to notify the issue of the Royal Commission to foreign powers, and to the colonies, and to request that the Commissioners might be put in communication with such persons or bodies in each country as might best represent those who were likely to be interested in the Exhibition.

Having established contact through the diplomatic service, the Commissioners were able to inform the potential exhibitors of the kind of exhibits they were seeking. They had divided the exhibition into thirty separate categories, which fell under the major divisions of (1) raw materials; (2) machinery; (3) manufactures: textile fabrics; (4) manufactures: metallic, vitreous, and ceramic; (5) miscellaneous; and (6) fine arts. Among the countries that took up the invitation to exhibit their achievements was Egypt. As might be expected, a large proportion of the Egyptian exhibits fell into the category of raw materials. These ranged from minerals to agricultural products, including cotton. But there was also a good proportion of manufactured goods, including cotton cloth for military uniforms and for ships' sails as well as luxury goods ranging from items like "silk and gold fringe for divans" to "saddle of Cairo, worked in gold thread." Of particular interest here is the item numbered 248: "one hundred and sixty-five volumes of works in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, published at Boulac."

The exhibition was an immense success, attracting vast crowds and establishing a pattern that was to be copied many times later in the century. Like the Paris Exhibition of 1889 that left the Eiffel Tower as a permanent memorial, the Great Exhibition of 1851 left to London a major legacy of buildings and institutions. The very large profit for that time of some £186,000 went into a fund which, among other things, "bought some 87 acres of land at South Kensington," on which were raised the Victoria and Albert Museum (originally the South Kensington

Museum), the Natural History, Geological, and Science Museums, and a number of teaching institutions, including the Imperial College of Science and Technology.

Two other items of information in the Commissioners' report relate to the Egyptian exhibits. In connection with the Trade collection, which became the property of the Royal Commissioners, there is the observation "Egypt: almost the whole of the articles which they exhibited at the late Exhibition; a most valuable collection."

From the summary of awards given to the different countries by class, we learn that Egypt gained Prize medals and honorable mentions in five classes: seven in class III (Substances used as food), five in class IV (Vegetable and animal substances), one in class XVII (Paper and stationery, printing and bookbinding), and two others.

SOAS Library

The School of Oriental and African Studies first opened its doors to students in January 1917. The desirability of such an institution in the capital city of an empire that ruled vast tracts of the world, most of which were in Asia and Africa, had been under discussion since the time of a memorandum recommending it, written by the then governor-general of India, Richard Wellesley, in 1798.

When University College was founded in London in 1826, "among the first of its professorships were those devoted to Oriental literature."² Similarly Oriental literatures were taught at King's College in the Strand when it was founded a few years later. When the new School of Oriental Studies, as it was then known, was founded, twenty-six of the twenty-eight teachers concerned with Oriental and African studies transferred to it from University and King's Colleges.³

The library was formed out of books previously belonging to the London Institution, whose building the school took over, with the addition of books transferred from the libraries of University and King's Colleges, and donations from the libraries of the India Office and the British Museum as well as private donations. Like many other great collections, it has continued to obtain many of its most valuable items through donations and deposits.

One part of the collection consists of 93 titles in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian, in 105 volumes, all published in Bulaq, except for two that were published in Alexandria, dating from the first half of the nineteenth century. Each volume has a sticker on the cover which states, "Presented to Her Majesty's Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851 at its close." The SOAS Library accessions registers give the dates of the accessioning

of these volumes as 1941, and they are recorded as coming from an "Anonymous donor." However, they also bear the legend, embossed from a stamp, "Presented to the Educational Museum."⁴

The fifth edition of the *Catalogue of the Educational Division of the South Kensington Museum*, published in 1860, includes under the section "Oriental" 114 titles in 128 volumes, which include all the books that were transferred to the SOAS Library. This is already 37 volumes fewer than the figure of 165 given in the catalogue of the Great Exhibition as the number of volumes on display, though it is not possible to know how many titles these represented. There are 21 titles listed as being in the Educational Division that have not surfaced in the SOAS Library. There is no way of knowing for sure if all the books in the Educational Division Collection had been exhibited in 1851, or if some had been acquired later for the 1854 Education Exhibition. One of the titles which does not seem to be in the SOAS is dated 1855, and if this is correct it could not have been exhibited in either exhibition. But doubt is cast on the accuracy of this date by the date given for a translation of a work on veterinary anatomy which is in the SOAS collection. The Educational Division's date of 1813 for this work is impossible. The correct date is 1839.

Except for a half-dozen, the books that had reached SOAS had never been incorporated into the library's catalogue nor placed among the main collection, and they had been kept among other uncatalogued items in a closed area until 1994. They have now been added to the main catalogue where they are entered entirely in transliteration. It is hoped that a list of them will be published in their original scripts in the near future.

What happened to the missing sixty-five volumes mentioned in the catalogue as being in the Egyptian stand that did not get to the SOAS Library? At least twenty-one titles went astray between leaving the Educational Section Collection and reaching their present home. Presumably these found their way into other libraries or private hands, and it would be interesting to know of any other collections with books bearing the distinctive stickers on their covers. Another possibility is that they were sold during the exhibition. Each volume bears a description in French written in a copperplate hand, along with a price, and this may indicate their availability for purchase.

According to the calculations of James Heyworth-Dunne based on the list of Perron, the Bulaq Press published at least 243 titles up to 1843, so that the 165 volumes exhibited constituted only a fraction of its output, probably around two-thirds. It is not clear what criteria, if any, were used to select the titles to be sent to the exhibition and to ignore the other third. The books in the SOAS range in date from 1830 to 1850,

and they are evenly distributed between them, so it is not a question of the most recent volumes being chosen. Moreover, some of the works are beautifully bound in leather, while others are bound in cheap board, and it would appear that they were exhibited primarily for their bindings, which may be what gained them their honorable mention. But while some of the well-bound titles are historical and literary, others are military and technical works. From the remarks of Perron quoted above, about the haphazard nature of storing the books and his suggestion that many titles had been exported, it can perhaps be inferred that the titles that were sent to the exhibition were all that remained available by 1851.

The titles break down into the following categories by subject. Twenty-five concern military matters, twenty-one cover science, mathematics, and crafts, while another nineteen are medical, and fourteen are veterinary. Far fewer are concerned with what might loosely be called the humanities. There are five historical and five geographical works, and four concerned with literature, languages, and ethics. Heyworth-Dunne's figures for the subject breakdown of the 243 titles that appear in Perron's list are roughly as follows (his categories differ slightly from the above): forty-eight military, twenty-eight science, mathematics, and crafts, fifteen medical, twelve veterinary, sixteen history, five geography, and 102 literature, language, ethics, etc.

It can be seen, therefore, that the SOAS collection contains roughly half the military works, two-thirds of the scientific, mathematical, and craft works, nearly all the medical works, and actually more veterinary works than are mentioned in Perron's list. The major shortages occur in the humanities, where there are only fourteen out of 123 titles. It seems fairly safe to conclude that the sixty-five missing volumes were on literature, grammar, and religion. These could be expected to be the topics of most interest to scholars at that time, to other libraries that might have acquired them, and to individuals who might have bought them.

The linguistic breakdown of the SOAS books is in some respects as would be expected. Twenty-one military titles are in Turkish as against four in Arabic. In mathematics, science, and crafts sixteen are in Arabic and five in Turkish. In medicine there is only one in Turkish (on military hospitals), and none in veterinary medicine. All the historical works are in Turkish, but only one of the geographical works. Finally, one title on ethics is in Turkish, while the linguistic works are in various mixtures of Arabic, Turkish and Persian. What is unexpected is that overall there are more works in Arabic, with fifty-six titles, than in Turkish, with thirty-four, which is the reverse of Perron's list, where Turkish works, with 125 titles, exceed Arabic works, with 111. No obvious explanation for this offers itself. The two topics on which by far the most Turkish titles were published were military, with forty titles, and poetry, with

twenty-two. It may be that the noncommercial military manuals would all have been issued to service personnel, while there could well have been a ready market for Turkish poetry, much of which was contemporary, all over the Ottoman Empire. Poetry at that time was the most popular of literary genres, and it forms the most significant of the few categories of works without a clear didactic intent printed at Bulaq. It says something about the composition of the leisured classes in Egypt at that time that only two volumes of Arabic poetry were published at Bulaq up to 1842.

Significance of Muhammad Ali's Heritage

The Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 had changed Cairo from being the capital of a powerful independent state into a provincial city of an empire whose nerve center was Istanbul, whose dynamic heartlands were in the European provinces of Rumeli, and whose official language was not Arabic. A similar fate had befallen the other ancient centers of Arab culture like Damascus and Baghdad. Egypt attained a semi-autonomous status within the Ottoman Empire under the Mamluks, and the Arabic language and the Azhar University retained tremendous religious prestige. "The ulema, the guardians of the faith, were held in respect by the Ottoman rulers, yet because Turkish was the official language of the Empire, Arabic culture generally suffered for lack of sufficient patronage."⁵

It was from Rumeli that Muhammad Ali Pasha arrived at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He turned Egypt into the base for his military power, and as that grew so did his ambitions, to the point that he made his attempt to take over the whole of the Ottoman Empire. It is, of course, not possible to know what would have ensued if he had succeeded nor whether he would have established himself and his dynasty in Istanbul. The effect of the thwarting of his plans was to turn Cairo into the capital of the largest independent Arab country and the capital of an African Empire.

The pressing needs of military and administrative reform and the introduction of new technology led to a demand for manuals and textbooks which was met by the introduction of a press and a state-directed translation movement. Whereas the Turkish language had been developed in the Ottoman Empire in the previous century to cope with modernizing reforms, the Arabic language had to be developed to deal with the new technical subjects.

It is a matter of great good fortune to the SOAS Library that it acquired the Bulaq books exhibited in the Great Exhibition, as they consist of technical translations and manuals that were not of much interest to

traditional Orientalism. Those that were, the library acquired through other channels.

The Bulaq Press and its early output represent the most significant part of Muhammad Ali Pasha's bequest to Egypt and the modern Middle East. His reign had turned Cairo into the publishing and intellectual center of the Arab World. Under his successors it consolidated this position, and it has survived the challenge mounted by Beirut in the period between the end of the Second World War and 1982 to retain its central position to the present day.

Notes

1. Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal, *Tarikh al-tarjamah wa-al-harakah al-thaqafiyah fi 'asr Muhammad 'Ali* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1951), 172 (translation by Peter Colvin).
2. C. H. Philips, *The School of Oriental and African Studies*, 10.
3. *Ibid.*, 17.
4. The introduction to the *Catalogue of the Education Library in the South Kensington Museum*, London, 1893, states that this collection of educational equipment of all sorts had been formed initially from the exhibits of an exhibition held in London in 1854, and from 1857 on had been housed in the South Kensington Museum. It included a collection of books, among them textbooks, in English and foreign languages, for which there was a reading room provided.
5. M. M. Badawi, ed., in the introduction to *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1992).

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