MAKING PROGRESS LEGIBLE

Historicity and Materiality in *al-Muqtataf* (1876-1885)

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Det er med posten det vidunderlige må komme, det som setter en stopper for alt som er, vender opp og ned på tilværelsen, åpner fremtiden.

- Cora Sandel, *Alberte og Jakob*

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FORORD

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Arabic literary-scientific periodical *al-Muqtataf* during its formative years in Beirut, 1876-1885, focusing on its role in shaping a concept of progressive historical time. Historical time, the idea that the past progresses via the present and into the future, may seem like a stable configuration that frames the human experience, but it is an epistemic construct subjected to historical transformations. Therefore, it is also an object for empirical analysis. This thesis enters the ongoing debates on modern temporal configurations by investigating how time regimes can be assembled through concrete practices and material infrastructure.

The purpose of this thesis is to show how *al-Muqtataf* gave the vague notions on progress that permeated the late Ottoman-Arab discourse a legible form. It did this by way of its circulation and periodical issuing, which attuned its readership to a rhythm dictated by historical events rather than seasonal or natural cycles. Furthermore, its editors' methods for inscribing natural phenomena into graphs, diagrams, and tables made them into educational objects, creating an imperative for "the Arabs" to "enter the historical stage" as modern, scientifically minded individuals. The journal format, a result of the newly available printing press, created new visual preferences for collage-like layouts, spacious fonts, and naturalistic lithographs, which aligned *al-Muqtataf* to similar international publications. Moreover, the editors applied a simpler style of Arabic and rapidly introduced foreign terminology to ease the process of acquiring knowledge. This thesis concludes that the journal helped synchronize the late-nineteenth century Arab to a process-oriented temporal regime informed by notions of speed and forward-movement. Taking seriously the material circumstances of knowledge production assists the debunking of orientalist and Eurocentric myths by showing how knowledge is always locally situated and crafted.

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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

Arabic words are transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*' simplified system. This means omitting all diacritical marks except ' for *hamza* and ᶜ for *ᶜayn.* All names that have English counterparts are given in English (for example Cairo, not al-Qahira) unless they are part of a quote (for example Saida, not Sidon). Translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

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INTRODUCTION

> When we consider the conditions of the East, its people and languages, sorrow comes upon us. Especially when we compare ourselves to Europe and America who practically fly out of this world, while we are like a deaf, motionless stone.
>
> \- *Al-Muqtataf* 1882

The above is a quote from an article called "The Future of the East" in the Arabic literary-scientific journal *al-Muqtataf*. The article is unsigned, but most likely written by one of the editors, Yaqub Sarruf or Faris Nimr, two Christian Arabs who taught at the Syrian Protestant College (SPC) in Beirut.[1] The stone simile does not describe the two men in any way: they were partaking in the intellectually blossoming environment that was late-nineteenth century Levant, trailblazing vigorous debates on the Arabic language, literature, and identity as well as ideas on societal progress, nationhood, and civilization. The grievance suggested by the quote was, however, widespread in the region. According to the editors of *al-Muqtataf,* stagnation, being like a "deaf, motionless stone," was the somber diagnosis of the Eastern condition. The desire to modernize was in fact the desire to "find one's wings" in order to fly, just like they envisioned the Europeans and Americans to do.

Undoubtedly, things *were* moving. The enormous changes in technological infrastructure – especially in communication – spurred a sense of instability, mobility, and change. One thing was the telegraph, which greatly altered the perception of time and space across the globe. Another was the printing press, which when it became available to laymen in the Middle East in the second half of the nineteenth century brought people into conversation with one another at a scale and pace that had hitherto been unfathomable.[2] Suddenly, people who had not had access to the public sphere became journalists, critics, editors, and essayists, debating and negotiating the changes they were witness to in an ever-larger infrastructure for knowledge production made up of books, journals, and pamphlets. Nevertheless, the printing press also transmitted news from abroad, and

[1] There was a third editor, Shahin Makarius, who also functioned as the print technician. His role was less central than the other two, so I will focus less on him than on Sarruf and Nimr.
[2] Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

many from the emerging Arab literati felt like the important developments were happening elsewhere, in Europe, Japan, and America. Sarruf and Nimr founded *al-Muqtataf* with the aim to mold the changes they were faced with in the right direction by giving the latest updates on modern science and technology. They wanted to bring progress to the Arab world and, as this thesis argues, contributed to stabilizing the very concept of "progress" in their efforts to do so. The idea of a constantly progressing historical time may seem like a stable configuration that frames the human experience, but it is a historical construct subjected to negotiations and transformations like any other epistemic constructs. Therefore, it is also an object for empirical analysis. This thesis sets out to investigate what kinds of practices and configurations that helped assemble the idea historical time and progress in the late-nineteenth century Levant. Sarruf and Nimr's main goal was to equip their readers with the necessary know-how to contribute to the progress of the "Arab civilization" in a world that seemed to be changing at a drastically faster pace. Their tool for obtaining this was their journal *al-Muqtataf.*

Tool is a keyword here. When crafting their journal, Sarruf and Nimr had to consider several things. Their objective was quite clear from the beginning, they wanted to "pay service to the homeland" by accommodating to "the many who ask for lessons in science and who can benefit from industry."[3] But how should they present this to their readers? What would be the most convenient form in terms of layout, fonts, and style? How often should the journal be published, and what was their target audience? Lurking behind each of these considerations were strategic assessments of how to distribute as widely as possible, how to legitimize their oftentimes radical worldviews, and how to ensure that their message was thoroughly understood. Book scholar Roger Chartier reminds us that it is by "recognizing the strategies by which authors and publishers tr[y] to impose an orthodoxy or a prescribed reading on the text" that we can adequately understand how texts *work.*[4] These strategies are not confined to the level of discourse, but run all the way through the publication process, from choosing a font to deciding on its mode of circulation. Thus, *al-Muqtataf's* success – its capacity to "muster on the spot the largest number of well aligned and faithful allies"[5] – rested on its capacities as a *material object.*

[3] «Li-l-Matalᶜi al-Muqtataf al-Kiram» (For the Honorable Readers of *Al-Muqtataf*), *Al-Muqtataf* I (1876), 288.
[4] Chartier, "Texts, Printing, Readings" in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 157.
[5] Latour, «Visualization and Cognition» *Knowledge and Society.* JAI PRESS INC (1986), 5.

Recently, historians of the Middle East have turned to science and technology studies (STS). STS has for decades provided theoretical frameworks and methodologies for bridging the gap between nature and culture under the argument that the world cannot be understood through simple dualisms. The world is becoming increasingly complex, and the need to adequately understand the entanglements between technologies and humans is pressing. Thus, Middle East historians have applied STS methods to identify synergies between large-scale technological processes and questions pertaining to agency, politics, and governmentality.[6] These studies are extremely enlightening and help bring the field forward, but the focus on large-scale technologies overshadow equally interesting spheres of human and non-human entanglements. There is for example a lack of studies that that use STS methods on cultural outputs such as literary texts or popular-scientific journals.[7] Discourse always is *physically located somewhere* and made intelligible through the material logics of their medium. For instance, a speech by a politician or an activist is more monumental at a rally than when one reads it on an austere blog. However, it reaches infinitely more people in the latter form. The medium thus forms a message and gives it direction.[8] Taking materiality into account gives us a better grasp of the multifaceted realm of knowledge production. When *al-Muqtataf* presented modern scientific technologies and terminology, they were concurrently constructing a lens through which one could understand the world, increasingly oriented towards a notion of progress. That this was presented in a periodical journal – itself a pioneering format – and not in a book or manuscript, indeed framed the editors' world-making project in a quite specific way, the workings of which this thesis sets out to explore.

The dynamic movement Sarruf and Nimr were part of, later called the Arab *nahda* (the "re-awakening"), was the intellectual and cultural counterpart to the institutional and state-building projects of the Ottoman state.[9] The intellectual history of the *nahda* has for a long time struggled with

[6] See for example, Mitchell, *Rule of Experts* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002); Barak, *On Time* (University of California Press, 2013); Huber, *Channelling Mobilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For an overview of the field, see Jakes, «A New Materialism?» *Int. J. Middle East Stud* 47, nr. 2 (2015): 369–81 and Shafiee, «Science and Technology Studies (STS), Modern Middle East History, and the Infrastructural Turn». *History Compass* 17, nr. 12 (2019).

[7] There are some notable exceptions to this. For instance, Elizabeth M. Holt studied the connections between fiction and finance in the Arab *nahda*. See Holt, *Fictitious Capital* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017). See also Hala Auji's excellent material analysis of Butrus al-Bustani's nineteenth-century broadsides, "Implications of Media," *Visible Language* 53, no. 1 (2019).

[8] If these can be separated at all, cf. McLuhan's infamous claim that "the media *is* the message," McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[9] There is a vast and growing scholarship on the Arab *nahda*. Recent contributions include Hanssen and Weiss (eds). *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); El-Ariss. *Trials of Arab*

the legacy of orientalism and Eurocentrism. Previous research, such as that of Albert Hourani and George Antonius, posited that intellectuals, state officials, and commoners were only second-hand consumers of a hegemonic (Western) discourse that they subsequently molded into making sense in an Islamic, Arab, and Ottoman context.[10] The assumption that the Arab world carelessly adopted European discourse on progress and modernity continues to obstruct an understanding of the *nahda* as an "autogenetic enterprise," to use a phrase from historian Stephen Sheehi, in which modernity was formulated on the basis of, and in response to, local and regional economic, social, and political conditions.[11] Insights from science and technology studies can be a way to make visible how knowledge always is *locally* situated when we appraise the materiality – necessarily local – of its production. If we fail to look beyond Eurocentric narratives that streamline epistemological orientation, the complexity and richness of historical experience is impoverished. For example, ideas of progress and historical time were not merely invented in the West and then trickled eastwards in the form of an imperialist tool, although, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has shown, this is *one* part of the story.[12] Rather, they arose from first-hand experiences of burgeoning capitalist markets and new infrastructures for communication.

In this thesis, I investigate how the literary-scientific periodical *al-Muqtataf* channeled new ways of thinking about time, specifically in terms of "history" and "progress," in the late-nineteenth century Levant. Whereas much scholarship has focused on how temporal regimes are discursively constructed, this thesis argues that they can be studied as results of concrete practices and configurations. *Al-Muqtataf* had a pioneering role in the new media infrastructure, and its editors made deliberate choices for visual layout and linguistic style, aligning themselves to what they construed as modern standards for knowledge presentation. It is therefore an interesting empirical object to study enactments of the modern.[13] Sarruf and Nimr wanted to awaken the "deaf, immutable

Modernity (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Holt. *Fictitious Capital*; Zemmin. *Modernity in Islamic Tradition: The Concept of «Society» in the Journal al-Manar (Cairo, 1898-1940).* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018). Hill. *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Sheehi, «Towards a Critical Theory of Al-Nahḍah: Epistemology, Ideology and Capital», *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43, no. 2/3 (2012): 269–98, https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x-12341244 ; Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste for Home* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017).

[10] Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938).

[11] See, Sheehi, "Towards a Critical Theory of Al-Nahḍah."

[12] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 2000).

[13] For a treatment of enactments of the modern in literature, see El-Ariss, *Trials of Modernity,* which I also explicate on below.

stone" and induce in their readers a sense of movement and change, thereby provide an interface for the progress that they wanted to see in society. The seminal position that *al-Muqtataf* holds in Middle Eastern history can, as this thesis argues, be assessed by how it was successfully engineered as – literally – a "vehicle to the future." Thus, *al-Muqtataf's* importance lies just as much in its material logics as in the content that it produced. I argue that the idea of "progress," on which the editors so vehemently insisted and a weighty structuring device in the late-nineteenth century Middle East, was made *substantial, legible, and tangible* by function of the periodical. I trace this line of thought along three trajectories which make up the main chapters (chapters II, III, and IV) of this thesis.

First, in chapter II, I show how the journal's circulation, periodicity, and ephemerality contributed to the installment of a different tempo for knowledge production which was both faster and more flexible than in manuscript culture. This helped synchronize the emergent public sphere to a rhythm attuned to *historical events* rather than to religious festivities or seasonal change. Second, in chapter III, I show how the editors made conscious strategies for making scientific knowledge easily digestible through lithographs, spacious layout, and information tables. In doing so, they contributed to familiarize their readers to what was increasingly becoming internationally standardized ways of disseminating scientific knowledge, helping them acquire the necessary know-how for "entering the future." Third, in chapter IV, I argue that the journal's material approach to Arabic – moulding it to "fit the new times"– was an attempt to "perform progress" linguistically.

Throughout, I take *al-Muqtataf's* materiality at face value and treat its early years (1876-1885) as a case in how the late-nineteenth century periodical synchronized the emerging civil society to a process-oriented temporal regime in the Levant. Thus, I aim to contribute to "the necessity of adequately theorizing the relationship between discursive practices and the material world," as per the philosopher and physicist Karen Barad's invitation.[14] In a *nahda* perspective, this contributes to emphasize the ingenuity and strategic planning of the local actors.

[14] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 28.

al-Muqtataf

المقتطف

جريدة علمية صناعية

تصدر اول كل شهر

لمنشئيها يعقوب صرّوف وفارس نمر

قيمة الاشتراك في بيروت ولبنان سبعة فرنكات وفي الجهات ثمانية

السنة الاولى

طبعة ثانية

Figure 1: The front page of the first edition of al-Muqtataf, *"a journal for science and industry" (1876). The quill pen represents science while the hammer represents industry.*

Al-Muqtataf *as "vehicle to the future"*

Sarruf and Nimr had been born into rural surroundings and come into the city for education. The shift towards cosmopolitanism that 1870s Beirut offered must been drastically transformative for the two men, and the awareness of the outside world spurred a growing self-awareness as secular-minded, Arab literati. The revolutionary new forms of communication had brought "European civilization" to their doorstep, and they felt "forced to take part in its benefits and harms."[15] Shahin Makarius, the third editor and print technician, wrote in the journal:

> [The Europeans] have plunged into the deep seas and returned soundly; stormed the fires and returned safely; flown on a magic carpet driven by gas instead of wind. […] Whichever way we turn our gaze, we see traces of development [*taqaddum*] coming, the bacteria of progress [*irtiqa'*]

[15] «Al-Nadhar fi Hadirina wa-Mustaqbalina» (A View of our Present and Future), *Al-Muqtataf* VIII (1884), 471.

dormant, for not a week goes by without hearing about amazing discoveries or strange inventions.[16]

The future was out there, it was being actualized in Europe, or so went *al-Muqtataf*'s story. The editors felt, not without slight anxiety, that the tempo had accelerated and believed they needed to "catch up."[17] The editors founded *al-Muqtataf* with the intention of making it a kind of vehicle to the future by educating their readers in scientific matters, exposing them to the wonders of technology, and encouraging "those who love progress" to roll up their sleeves and contribute to "the good of this country."[18] They called on their readers not to despair, "for it is not impossible for us to keep up with [the Europeans] if we put our minds to it. All those who walk the path shall arrive."[19] But what did this "path" look like, and what would it mean to "walk" it?

History as a "form of thought and habit of mind," a temporal category independent of seasonal, "natural" time emerged in the Middle East in the nineteenth century.[20] As Hannah Arendt suggested, and scholars such as Reinhart Koselleck with her, the modern understanding of history can be understood as a process of temporalization, namely construing phenomena, human and non-human, in processual terms; conceptualizing historical time as the movement forward in time.[21] This, however, was not a Western construct, but a general experience of global interconnectedness in which entanglements between different parts of the world necessarily brought to the fore abstract ways of thinking about space and time.

The quotes above show that the self-awareness of *al-Muqtataf's* editors included temporal and spatial abstractions, and they frequently used temporally charged concepts such as "decline" and

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[16] "Al-'Irtiqa'" (Progress), *Al-Muqtataf* VI (1882), 599.
[17] The postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that the construction of a historicist paradigm legitimized imperialist domination in that the colonizers could point to their dominions' "belatedness" in development, and therefore mask their usurpation as benevolence. See Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8, and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
[18] "Al-Muqaddima" ("Introduction"), *al-Muqtataf* I, 1876, 1.
[19] "Mustaqbal al-Mashriq," ("The Future of the East") *al-Muqtataf* VI (1881), 144.
[20] Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 11. Di-Capua does not explicate on how he understands the difference between history as «a form of thought» and «a habit of mind.» However, I use them as a springboard to think about historical time as respectively an epistemological structure (form of thought) and mode of operation conditioned by rhythms, social constructs, and technologies (habit of mind).
[21] Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1977). Koselleck, *Futures Past,* transl. Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

"progress" to describe their ills and envisioned salvation. The editors discursively constructed "the Arab civilization" as something different from the "European civilization" and held that they existed in different times and actualized themselves at different speeds, thus interacting with a universal history narrative in which human societies were placed on a timeline according to their level of sophistication.[22] This nevertheless afforded a sense of historical contingency in which the Arab future was malleable and spurred an imperative to act in one's time: to make "the Arabs" significant actors on the grand timeline of universal history.

Notions of universal history helped stabilize a past-present-future nexus but the emergence of these notions in the first place was due to the restructuring of societal relations that the periodical media facilitated. Instead of merely focusing on how "expectations, hopes, or prognoses that are projected into the future become articulated into *language,*" I study how these future-trajectories arose through the material logics of the emerging printing press.[23] I focus less on history as a "form of thought" and more as a "habit of mind," a mediated rhythm to which the late-nineteenth century Arab could synchronize. Matter structures meaning, and a thorough study on how *al-Muqtataf* contributed to the formation of historical time in late-nineteenth century Beirut must include how it functioned as a material object in the larger infrastructure of knowledge production.

Scholars of the Arab *nahda* have rightly accredited *al-Muqtataf* for contributing to the introduction of secular, positivistic science to a large audience in the region, but the focus has largely been textual-discursive.[24] An important part of the picture is how the journal's materiality gave vague notions of "progress" a legible form. I argue that *al-Muqtataf* facilitated an emerging abstraction of time *as history,* process-oriented and forward moving, by creating spaces – both concrete and abstract – for imaginaries of a common Arab past, by serializing public discourse, and by systematizing and ordering information on the "future" – cast as scientific and technological development – in a simplistic layout that encircled the imperative to act. In doing so, they were mobilizing

[22] Barak. *On Time.*
[23] Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 3,
[24] See for example Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Stolz. *The Lighthouse and the Observatory.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Kenny, "East versus West in *al-Muqtataf*" in *Essays on Islamic Civilization*, ed. Little. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 140-154.

what they perceived to be stale structures in a way that expanded the present moment, saturating it with emancipatory potential.

Historiographical relevance

This thesis brings together three scholarly fields: temporality studies, STS studies, and *nahda* studies. These respectively frame the *what* (ideas of progress and historical time), *how* (through *al-Muqtataf's* material mediation) and *where* (in the Arab *nahda*) of this thesis. I am interested in uncovering the material underpinnings of such an epistemological rupture as the *nahda* represented.[25] This would entail not merely looking at political-economic changes in a macro-perspective, but also to inquire into the details of how cultural outputs such as *al-Muqtataf* represented and channeled possibilities for other ways of thinking about time. A handful of scholars have studied the discourse in the late-nineteenth century Middle East from a temporalities perspective, many with a focus on conceptual change towards "modernity."[26] I take these perspectives further by looking at how temporal imaginaries were materially mediated, thereby contributing further to the fruitful pairing of STS and *nahda* studies.

First, let us have a look at temporality studies. Since the "temporal turn" entered the humanities sometime in the early nineties, some pertinent questions have entered the field of history.[27] How is historical consciousness formed? What makes a group of people agree that one past is plausible – and one future possible – while another is not? What are the times and temporalities at play in the construction of historical consciousness, and why are they significant objects of study for the historian? A central insight from temporality scholars such as Koselleck is that times are always multiple, and that the various ways in which humans navigate through and assemble these times are what constitutes historical consciousness.[28] The insight that times come in the plural – and thus that any historical moment is temporally heterogeneous – opens several new trajectories in

[25] Khuri-Makdisi, "The Conceptualization of the Social" in *A Global Conceptual History of Asia. 1860-1940.* Ed. Hagen Schultz-Forberg. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), 97.
[26]Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition*; Abu-'Uksa, *Freedom in the Arab world.* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Bashkin, «Journeys between Civility and Wilderness», in *Civilizing Emotion. Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe,* eds. Margrit Pernau and Helge Jordheim. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
[27] Hassan, "Globalization and the 'Temporal Turn'" *Journal of Policy Studies* 25.2 (2010): 83-102.
[28] Koselleck, *Futures Past.* See also, Jordheim, "Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization," *History and Theory* 53 no.4 (2014): 498–518.

historical research. One is how the three modes of time, past, present and future, are imbued with different valences to give rise to what Francois Hartog calls "regimes of historicity."[29] Regimes of historicity, Hartog holds, are the ways in which a society understands itself as being *in* time, i.e. its relation to the past, the present and the future. As it happens, stable historical narratives are possible precisely because of the malleability of the historical categories themselves.

Historians generally agree that a sense of living in historical time was formulated with historicism in eighteenth century Europe, or more specifically with Georg Hegel and the other German romanticists.[30] In a Middle Eastern perspective, the historian Monica Ringer has argued that the discourse of the educated public in late nineteenth-century to a large extent resembled the historicism of eighteenth century Europe.[31] This emerged not merely as an adoption of European discourse, although an aspect of translation was involved, but from analogous experiences of living in "historical time." According to Ringer, ever more parts of society – language, religion, human reason, and nature – were seen as historically contingent phenomena. Inspired by positivist science and especially the theory of evolution, the nineteenth century Arab intellectuals viewed these through the lens of developmentalism in which all moments in history existed on different steps along a ladder reaching towards civilization. Scholars such as Yuav di-Capuo and Vanessa Ogle have also contributed to the study of how perceptions of time and history were formed in the nineteenth century Middle East, drawing on insights from temporality studies.[32] Moreover, scholars such as Florian Zemmin, Wael Abu-Uksa, and Orit Bashkin have contributed to the conceptual history of the *nahda,* showing how conceptual change in Arabic vocabulary are indicative of the emergence of new categories for time and temporality.[33]

However, there is still a need to understand how these experiences of time were materially mediated. For the experience of inhabiting in a unique moment in time depends, I argue, not merely on stable relations between past, present, and future (i.e. the main feature of historicist thinking),

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[29] Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity* (Columbia University Press, 2016).
[30] Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 26-42.
[31] Ringer, *Islamic Modernism.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).
[32] Di-Capuo, *Gatekeepers*; Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).
[33] Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition*; Abu-'Uksa, *Freedom in the Arab world*; Bashkin, "Journeys between Civility and Wilderness".

but also on implicit or explicit interaction with the overall temporal heterogeneity of the moment.[34] Scholars have conceptualized this temporal heterogeneity variously as temporal hierarchies, sediments or complexities.[35] If there are, indeed, innumerous coexisting times at work at any moment, why do we not live in constant confusion as to which time to synchronize to?[36] What are the mechanisms that make some temporalities – for example "historical time" – dominant?

Here, insights from science and technology studies (STS) can be of help. STS has equipped scholars with a methodological toolbox for bridging the age-old gap between human and nonhuman, mentalities and matter, culture and nature. According to Bruno Latour, humans' experience of time and space are conditioned by the material world. He argued that "space and time cannot be thought of as existing independently as an unshakeable frame of reference inside which events and places occur," but as mediated experiences resulting from actors' engagement with their material surroundings.[37] A personal or collective sense of time is therefore a negotiation between innumerous different standards of time, and the way they are assembled through concrete practices or technologies make some prevail over others. Stephen Kern famously linked new and abstract experiences of time to the dramatic technological developments of the modern age.[38] Kern is not alone in pointing out that altered societal rhythms brought about by technological change have fundamental impact on epistemological orientation. This is, in short, the argument of many modernity theorists.[39]

This insight has influenced the field of Middle Eastern history too. Timothy Mitchell's seminal *Rule of Experts* from 2002 marks STS' entrance into Middle East historiography. In his book, Mitchell placed non-human objects such as food-webs, dams, and fertilizers at the center of his

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[34] By temporal heterogeneity I mean the co-existence of different time standards at any given moment, for example social time, personal time, cosmological time, and historical time.
[35]For hierarchies, see Edelstein, Geroulanous, and Wheatley, eds. *Power and Time* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020); for layers or sediments, see Koselleck, *Sediments of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); for complexities, see Sewell Jr., *Logics of History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[36] For works on social synchronization, see for example: McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time* (Harvard University Press, 1995); Jordheim, "Introduction;" and Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis,* trans. Elden and More (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).
[37] Latour, *Science in Action* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), 228.
[38] Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).
[39] Among others, see Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*; Koselleck. *Futures Past*; Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (Yale University Press, 2020); Ogle, *The Global Transformation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015. For a Middle Eastern perspective, see Sheehi, "Towards a Critical Theory of Al-Nahḍah."

study on the colonial transformation of Egypt to show how human agency is constantly shaped by material-infrastructural surroundings.[40] Another interesting contribution is On Barak's *On Time. Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt.* By looking at communication infrastructure such as the telegraph and railway, Barak rejects the notion that modern technologies "flattened" time, making it homogenous and empty. Rather, he shows how complex interactions between technologies and humans rather resulted in heterochronicity and counter-tempos.[41] For all the valuable insights of these studies, they nevertheless focus on large-scale technologies, such as the construction of a dam, the Suez-Canal, or railways, not "mundane" objects like a periodical.[42]

However, a periodical is not merely a cultural product, it is a technology in its own right. By this, I mean that it channels intellectual output into a prearranged format, thereby materially encircling the performative aspect of discourse which assists its implementation in different contexts. It thus shapes the infrastructure that it circulates within. In this thesis, I supplement the growing STS scholarship on the Middle East by arguing that small-scale technologies such as a periodical journal, just like large-scale infrastructures, act as mediators and synchronizers between the human and non-human, giving rise to specific ways of seeing. This thesis therefore caters to the historian Stephen Sheehi's call for studies that take seriously the material side of culture production.[43] I treat, as per Sheehi's suggestion, the *nahdawis* (or intellectuals, teachers, bureaucrats, and activists involved in the *nahda*), as "*points de capiton*, or points of intersection, between material transformations and epistemological shifts".[44]

The literary scholar Tarek El-Ariss' powerful argument about *nahda* discourse as a series of performative actions has had wide recognition in the field. In his book *Trials of Modernity,* he traces several *nahda* literary works to argue that the protagonists enter into "violent and ongoing confrontations with and within modernity, decentering yet also redefining and producing it."[45] These experiences are "trials of modernity," El-Ariss writes. But these "trials" can be more than

[40] Mitchell, *Rule of Experts.*
[41] Barak, *On Time.*
[42] Latour makes an argument for studying "mundane" practices such as writing and image craftmanship to understand the entanglements of material and mental changes. See Latour, "Visualization and Cognition," 2-3.
[43] Sheehi, "Towards a Critical Theory of Al-Nahḍah."
[44] Ibid, 274.
[45] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2013), 3.

discursive, I would convene. The conscious strategies involved in materially crafting a journal are also performative attempts to encircle and enact modernity.

Historians have been interested in *al-Muqtataf* for decades: it is an extremely rich resource into how secularism and rational-scientific methods were negotiated in the Middle East, with archives stretching from 1876 to 1952. As *text*, it has been thoroughly investigated, with brilliant analyses done by among others Lorne M. Kenny, Dagmar Glass, and Marwa Elshakry.[46] Moreover, Hala Auji has provided an excellent studiy on the journal's format and contributions to a new visual culture.[47] However, the journal carries unresolved potential for scholarly input in its capacities for both absorbing historical tendencies and strategically enter into the historical process by way of its materiality. With my material reading of *al-Muqtataf,* I concurrently examine its role in the larger knowledge infrastructure, its visuality, and its efforts to "materially" mold the language.

Source material and method

This thesis is based on archival research. All editions of *al-Muqtataf*'s (1876-1952) have been digitized and made open-access.[48] I have therefore not had any problems accessing the journal, although only in digitized form. I have chosen a qualitative close reading of a few numbers (1876-1885) rather than a long study of the whole publication period. There are several reasons for this: first, since *al-Muqtataf* was one of the very first journals printed in Beirut and the first popular-scientific journal in the Middle East, these initial years mark the editors' ingenuity and pioneering activity. Second, 1885 is a natural year to close the study, seeing as that was the year in which the editors moved *al-Muqtataf* to Cairo where they became closer affiliated with the power center. Consequently, the years 1876-1885 make out a fixed period in the journal's life, a period in which the editors experimented with different styles and formats, more or less free from outside control or conditioning.

I split my analysis of the journal into three parts, and each demand a specific reading. I therefore classify the journal's content into three "spheres," each relevant to the respective analyses. For the

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[46] Kenny, "East versus West in *al-Muqtataf;*" Khuri-Makdisi, "Inscribing Socialism into the Nahḍa" in *The Making of the Arab Intellectual,* ed. Hamzah. (Routledge, 2012), 63-89; Elshakry, *Readin Darwin.*

[47] Auji, «Picturing Knowledge» in *Making Modernity in the Islamic Mediterranean.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022).

[48] I have accessed the editions through Hathitrust: [Catalog Record: al-Muqtaṭaf | HathiTrust Digital Library].

analysis in chapter II of how the editors historicized themselves, I make use of all articles that contain historical narratives as well as articles that speculate about the future. For the analysis in chapter III of how the editors visually presented their content to present science as "history's motor," I conduct a visual analysis of the journal's layout, font, and use of information tables and lithographs. For the analysis in chapter IV of how the editors' approached the Arabic language, I use all articles where they mention Arabic and Arabic's development and conduct an analysis of their style and their method for transliterating foreign scientific terminology.

I supplement the archives of *al-Muqtqtaf* with diaries, printed books, and documentation reports from the American missionaries at the SPC to provide some background for my analyses. The missionary archives have been extensively used in research on the *nahda* period, partially because they are more available and much more numerous that those of the Arabs they were working alongside. This has obvious methodological implications and may have resulted in a scholarship that overestimates the "Westerners'" impact on Arab thought. I therefore read these sources with a critical distance, focusing on their descriptive renderings of context (how the fonts for the printing press were crafted, the facilities of the Syrian Protestant College (SPC), the beginnings and ends of translation projects) rather than their more value-specific statements on the conditions of the "Arab world" or their own effect on "Arab development" except where these are contextualized to emphasize a point. I have also cross-checked English and American journals that were available to the editors through the SPC library, such as the English *Nature* and *Nineteenth Century,* and the American *Popular Science Monthly* to trace overlaps and translations from these.

Outline of thesis

This thesis is divided into three main analytical chapters but is introduced with a background chapter. Chapter I sets the scene and introduces the protagonists, Yaqub Sarruf and Faris Nimr, but also the American missionaries, as well as influential Arab literati at the time. Here, I situate *al-Muqtataf* in a wider intellectual and geographic context.

In chapter II, I consider *al-Muqtataf's* circulation as well as how it punctuated public discourse through periodic issuing. Discursively, *al-Muqtataf* was calling for a common Arab history and future, but this narrative rested on the increased interaction between Arabs that the printing press

itself enabled. The journal's wide circulation – to both rural areas and urban centers – brought "the Arabs" into the same orbit of knowledge transmission, thus facilitating the construction of their "imagined community" and common past.[49] Moreover, its periodicity – its predictable, monthly issuing – serialized and gave direction to the public conversation which could foster ideas of the "the Arabs'" future. My argument in chapter II is thus that *al-Muqtataf* contributed to the construction of a common Arab historical timeline by way of its capacities as a document "in motion."[50]

In chapter III, I argue that *al-Muqtataf's* visual content was carefully organized to cast the journal as "vehicle to the future." *Al-Muqtataf* was, although perhaps the most important, but one journal in the growing media landscape. Many of the arguments made in this thesis can be applied to the emerging printing culture in general. *Al-Muqtataf* nevertheless stands out in its efforts to provide the recipe for historical progress by inducing in their readers a visual literacy of science's "language of form."[51] They were essentially inscribing nature into their journal's pages through tables and diagrams, which then could circulate and claim universality. Science and technology provided a very concrete solution to the complex problem of "how to enter the future," and the editors domesticated this trope by naturalizing scientific tables, diagrams, and lithographs to its readership. I argue that the editors' methods for presenting the journal's content gave the aforementioned "Arab historical timeline" momentum and direction by installing "science" as its motor. Moreover, they deliberately moved away from traditional calligraphy and instead dressed their publication in a simpler style: with a spacious layout, punctuation marks, and standardized fonts. They attempted to make "progress" attainable by systematizing and ordering information on the "future" – cast as scientific and technological development – in a simplistic layout that made information easily digestible, underscoring their ambition to educate the public.

In chapter IV, I argue that the editors of *al-Muqtataf* consciously formed the Arabic language to be able to "contain the new times." There was a widespread concern at the time that Arabic was

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[49] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* (London: Verso, 1983).

[50] For a highly readable article on how texts enter and shape historical processes, see Asdal and Jordheim, "Texts on the Move" in *History and Theory* 57, nr. 1 (2018).

[51] "The phrase 'languages of form' suggests a systematic approach to graphic expression as a means as well as an object of study." See, Drucker, *Graphesis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

lexicographically inept to face the challenges of modernity. Arabic had traditionally absorbed foreign words through a method called *ishtiqaq* (derivation), where the semantic meaning of the word is correlated to an already existing Arabic root, thus masking its foreign origin. *Al-Muqtataf's* editors went away from the *ishtiqaq* method and merely transcribed foreign scientific terminology, thus radically intervening in the existing tradition. They insisted that Arabic's social function was more important than its possible divine origin and used this to legitimize their changes in style and innovations in lexicography. My argument in this chapter is that the editors' approach to language was like the ceramist to a piece of clay: highly material. They first-handedly molded the Arabic language as they saw fit to obtain *progressive simultaneity* with the rest of the world's knowledge production.

Rather than three separate analyses, these chapters are meant to be read in convergence with one another. Throughout the thesis, they interact and entangle. The overarching argument is that the editors of *al-Muqtataf* provided an interface on which time *as progress* could be imagined. The journal itself being a tangible product of the new technology, namely the printing press, their vision for a technologically advanced future carried a certain ethos. Moreover, by casting science as history's motor they afforded a keen sense of the present moment's contingency which in turn effectuated a feeling of historical agency. By giving "history" and "science" a form, *al-Muqtataf* were establishing boundaries for the scope of *action in time* and, in the process, spurred the notion of a "now-time," or *Jetztzeit,* ripe with potential for improvement.[52]

[52] Benjamin. "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations.* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988).

CHAPTER I – SITUATING *AL-MUQTATAF*

Faris Nimr and Yaqub Sarruf were somewhat personifications of the Beirut *nahdawis* in the 1870s: Christian Arabs, educated at the Syrian Protestant College, interested in questions of science, social progress, and civilization, and above all, enthusiastic pioneers in the bourgeoning printing press. Even though they were representative of the contemporary intellectual environment in Beirut, there were several other and parallel trends that would come to comprise what we today understand as the *nahda.* Situating Nimr and Sarruf's project in a wider context, both geographically and intellectually, grants us a better understanding of who they were speaking to and who or what they were speaking up against. Although many early contributors to the *nahda* were Christian Arabs, Muslims too made their voices heard.[53] Across the dividing lines of religion and sectarianism, the Arabs of 1870-80s Beirut were engaged in a local community-building project, creating platforms on which they could discuss matters of language, politics, literature, and Arab identity. Nimr and Sarruf's contribution was founding the journal *al-Muqtataf.* The importance of *al-Muqtataf* lies both in its novelty: it was one of the very first journals in the burgeoning knowledge production outside of the Islamic schools (*madrasas*) and paved the way for what was to become innumerous others, and in its popularity: it was one of the most widely read and long-lasting publications, with the last edition published as late as in 1952.

The nahda*: Awakening to a "new time"*

A group of people in the late-nineteenth century Beirut felt strongly that they were on the verge of a "new time." As the historian of Arab press Ami Ayalon contends, had an Arab individual from 1800 gone a hundred years back in time, he would have sufficiently grasped the society he encountered, its norms, values, and methods of communication and interaction. Had he travelled a hundred years forward in time, he would have had more trouble.[54] This was, of course, not exceptional to the Arab world. The nineteenth century was a period of drastic development in all parts of the world, at least in the urban centers. The age of imperialism and colonialism entangled different parts of the world together into a global web of technological and capitalist interchange, but also ideas, concepts, and ideologies became intertwined across cultural spheres. Now, the

[53] Their most notable mouthpiece was the biweekly newspaper *Thamarat al-Funun* (1875-1908).

[54] Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3.

region was increasingly becoming part of a wider global network, most prominently defined by capitalist forms of trade and transaction.

This had several biproducts of which I will mention the two most overarching: First, the information flow was revolutionized by new communication channels. The telegraph, entering Istanbul in 1855 and Egypt in 1866, connected social hubs across the Ottoman Empire to one another. Moreover, it drew the Ottoman lands closer to a wider global communications network. The printing press, established in the early 1800s with a steady growing publication rate until it literally boomed from the 1860s onwards, facilitated the distribution of knowledge in an intricate infrastructure that included coffee houses, libraries, schools, reading rooms, and literary salons. The new channels for communication became important tools of government for the Ottoman Sultan, who could maintain faster and more reliable contact across the wide territories.[55] But they were also crucial in opening the world up to the Ottoman subjects, who could understand themselves as part of a global, not merely a local or regional, space.[56] Whereas the Ottoman empire had had mainly two media for communicating with their subjects, the mosque's Friday prayers and public howlers,[57] the information available to the public was increasingly channeled through a diverse set of technologies, of which the literary-scientific journal was to become one of the most important.[58]

Second, there was a much higher frequency of Arabs going to Europe and vice versa which gradually increased the entanglements of quite different knowledge systems. From the growing interchange followed a process of reifying each other, a process that has been called "othering."[59] In Europe, the "Arabs" or "Muslims" was gradually becoming historical categories, essentialized and self-contained. Likewise, the "Europeans" or "Franks" were in the Middle East discursively constructed as the being something else than the "Arabs." This process effectuated incessant comparisons between the constructed categories. While they often cast the "Europeans" as being part of

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[55] Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains* (Tauris, 1999).

[56] Lewis, "Imagining the Telegraph in the Ottoman Empire" in *TRAFO – Blog for Transregional Research*, 19.08.2021.

[57] Ayalon, *The Press,* 4.

[58] According to Sheehi, the literary-scientific journal was *the* production site of modernity. See, Stephen Sheehi. «Arabic Literary-Scientific Journals» in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 25, nr. 2 (2005): 445.

[59] For the process of "othering", see Neumann, *Uses of the Other* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). For an Ottoman context, see Wigen, *State of Translation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

a corrupted civilization, the Ottomans and Arabs were nevertheless intrigued with what they perceived to be the enormous scientific and technological progress of European civilization and set out to uncover its inner workings to draw lessons that they could apply in their own lands. Both the Ottoman Sultan and the Egyptian ruler, Muhammad Ali, sent ambassadors to Europe to study its political, cultural, and economic systems, and they often came back with detailed descriptions as well as translations of important European works, such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Fenelon.[60] Conversely, Europeans and Americans became more interested in the "Orient," and scholars and missionaries alike flooded into the region. The American missionaries were important in the early workings of the *nahda* in the Levant, as Lebanon was a Christian center in a widely Muslim region and therefore served as a convenient center for their activity.[61] This growing interchange was not just a function of travel: the growing media landscape absorbed, channeled, and distributed knowledge on a large scale.

These factors – the revolutionizing means of communication and the expanding spheres of knowledge – combined and stimulated intellectual ferment in the nineteenth century Middle East. The global developments required political reorientation in Istanbul, the imperial center, and a wide array of governmental reforms on education, legislation, and civil representation were implemented across the vast territories that made up the Ottoman Empire. These governmental reforms, starting with the Gülhane edict of 1839 and continuing up to Abdülhamid's reign (1876-1908), are collectively known as the *Tanzimat.*[62] In Arab-speaking cities such as Beirut, Cairo, and Alexandria the *Tanzimat* reforms and the growing interchange with Western civilization pushed to the fore questions of identity. Who were the Arabs, and how did they fit into the Ottoman state and the world at large? The increasing growth in literary societies, educational institutes, and printed books and journals fostered lively debates that would continue for decades. The European countries were assessed with alternately disdain and admiration, but few disagreed that they were further evolved in matters of education and scientific development. Those who were most inclined to view the European civilization with admiration thus raised the call to educate the Arabs by European standards. Positivistic science was hailed as key to the future, and the society should be

[60] Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002).
[61] Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced* (Public Affairs, 2011).
[62] For an overview of the *Tanzimat,* see Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity.* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010).

reorganized for this goal to be sufficiently reached. In the 1870s, the momentum of this movement was in Beirut.

The printing press had already set its firm mark on other centra of the Ottoman Empire, most notably Istanbul and Cairo. In Istanbul, the state apparatus had since the early 1800s printed official bulletins and newspapers to coordinate its political efforts vis-à-vis its subjects. In Cairo, it was Muhammad Ali Pasha, the ruler of Egypt, who initiated and printed the first journals, also for governmental purposes. In both places, independent intellectuals took the new technology in use, and there was a growing civil expansion of the media landscape. However, the printing press in the Levant came about by different means, and this arguably affected the initial vigor of the state-independent part of the media.[63] The printing press in Lebanon was established as an extension of American missionary activity, who saw it as a fitting tool for "civilization".[64] The early contributors were often Christian Arabs who were educated in the sciences, mastered foreign languages, and were fascinated by Western ideas.

The first American Protestant missionaries had reached the Levant in the early 1820s and set up the first printing press in the region.[65] The process of recruiting and converting members to their church was not altogether straight-forward: there was no established Protestant community in the Levant, and the different Christian sects looked upon the missionaries with suspicion.[66] But the missionaries slowly made progress, and by mid-century, they had a steadier ground to tread. This was largely because of their efforts to found literary societies (the most important one was the Syrian Scientific Society, *Al-Jami^c^yya al-^c^Ilmiyya al-Suriyya*, founded in 1846) and schools. After an intense campaign to raise the necessary funds from America and England, the Syrian Protestant College (today, the American University of Beirut) was established in 1866, and this is where our protagonist, *al-Muqtataf* would first see the light of day ten years later.

[63] Ayalon, *The Press,* 31-39.
[64] Elshakry, *Reading Darwin,* 22.
[65] Ayalon, *The Press,* 29.
[66] The most influential and biggest Christian church in the Levant at the time was that of the Maronites, belonging to the Eastern Catholic church. Other important Christian confessions were the Greek Orthodox, the Melkite Greek Catholic, and the Armenian Apostolic.

The Syrian Protestant College, Sarruf, Nimr, and their offspring: al-Muqtataf

Around 1860, the missionaries found themselves at a crossroads. They had established several mission schools, but failed to gain the momentum they wished for. As it turned out, the Arabs were interested in Western progress, but less taken with their religion. They wanted education but were not particularly willing to convert in its service, although some did (notably, Nimr and Sarruf). In 1860, when civil war broke out in Lebanon between the Maronite and Druze communities, an increasing number of refugees flooded into Beirut and became dependent on already sparse mission funds. The missionary Isaac Bird wrote:

> The extent of the calamity is bewildering. Yesterday we had an appeal on behalf of three or four thousand refugees from Baalbec and adjacent regions who fled over Lebanon to Besherry, near the cedars, and are there naked and starving.[67]

News of the bloody conflict reached Europe and raised empathy for the Levantine Christians, and Prussian, English, and French missionaries travelled to Beirut to offer their assistance. The Americans soon realized that they may become obsolete amidst this unexpected competition and decided to accede to the Arabs' wish for an education that was less concerned with prospective proselytization and more on individual enlightenment. The Syrian Protestant College was to be the first mark of the new American missionary presence, one that was less focused on conversion and more focused on secular education.[68]

Among those who first enrolled were Yaqub Sarruf and Faris Nimr. Yaqub Sarruf was born in Hadath, a small village just south of Beirut. He was one of six men to first graduate from SPC in 1870. He was subsequently granted a teaching position at the SPC in Arabic and Physics. Faris Nimr was born in Hasbaya and graduated from the SPC in 1874. He was recruited by the American missionary and lecturer, Cornelius van Dyck on SPC grounds, to be his assistant in the observatory and granted a position as lecturer in Latin.[69] Sarruf and Nimr made each other's acquaintance and began what was to be a life-long companionship. They used the mission's printing press to realize their ambition: founding a literary-scientific journal that would present the

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[67] Bird, *Bible Work in Bible Lands* (Philadelphia, Pres. Bd. Of Pub, 1872), 426

[68] Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 50-53.

[69] Farag, "The Lewis affair and the fortunes of al-Muqtataf," *Middle Eastern Studies* 8.1 (1972), 74.

wonders of science and technology to an Arab audience. Overseen by their American mentor and friend, van Dyck, *al-Muqtataf* was first published in 1876. The stated aim of the journal was to accommodate to "the many who ask for lessons in science and who can benefit from industry" with the higher goal of "paying service to the homeland (*watan*)."[70] In crafting their journal, they drew on the vast resources of the SPC library:

> Besides works on general literature and science, the Library contains valuable books of reference, such as the latest editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, and the American Encyclopaedia, Dictionaries of the English, French, German, Arabic, Turkish, Greek and Latin Language and [...] a number of costly books of plates such as Bourgery's Anatomy, Ricord on Syphilis, Maclise's and Morton's Surgical Anatomy, Ellis's Dissections, Diseases of the Skin, etc., etc. The botanical section has lately acquired the valuable work of Jaubert and Spach, entitled Illustrationes Plantarum Orientalium. [...] A portion of the room is furnished with a reading table, where are found some of the prominent magazines and scientific journals.[71]

Al-Muqtataf was the first of its kind in the region and is still considered one of the most important journals. The journal was intended to be neither political nor religious – although avoiding the subjects was easier said than done – but adhere to what they perceived to be the universalist dogma of positivistic, secular science.[72] By serving their readers explanations on phenomena ranging from the most miniscule (such as silkworms, headlice) to the most grandiose (stars, planets, Earths' climate system), *al-Muqtataf* placed itself at the center of the scientific debates of nineteenth century Beirut. However, interwoven with countless feature pieces on scientific phenomena, Q&A sections and columns on new inventions and discoveries were essayistic articles that conveyed the editors' ideas of the present state of the Arab region as well as the way into the future. Titles such as "The Future of the East," "A View on Our Present and Future," "The Progress of Knowledge," or simply "Progress" subtly (or perhaps not so subtly) added an ideological component to the more numerous expositional, matter-of-fact articles. The journal was not merely a conveyor of neutral scientific facts, it had an outspoken intention of guiding the Arab society on the path to progress, and this progress was highly informed by a secular, liberal worldview.

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[70] «Li-l-Matalᶜi al-Muqtataf al-Kiram» (For the Honorable Readers of *Al-Muqtataf*), *Al-Muqtataf* I (1876), 288.
[71] *Syrian Protestant College* (New York: WM. C. Martin Printing House, 1896), 35 and 37.
[72] Elshakry, *Reading Darwin,* 28.

It soon became clear that the SPC's turn from missionary-oriented to more secular-liberal education was not altogether definite. Some of the lecturers, such as van Dyck, firmly supported the ideals of fostering a secular and cross-sectarian space for the development of a pan-Arab subjectivity. However, not all members of the SPC board agreed. In retrospect, the American missionary Henry Harris Jessup wrote:

> American preachers and teachers who had founded the native evangelical church and trained a native ministry, planned, and proposed a literary institution which should control the higher education of the future in the Orient in the interests of religion and the Bible.[73]

This literary institution was the Syrian Protestant College, and Jessup's use of the word "control" sufficiently captures what senior members of the college held to be the foremost goal, not least the college's principle, dr. Daniel Bliss, and the secretary of the Board of Trustees, dr. D. Stuart Dodge. They were not granting the Arabs education and funds out of purely philanthropic intentions; the final aim was still to civilize the "natives". This civilization process meant first to rid them of their "Oriental backwardness" which they thought to be inherent trait of the Arab, and finally to bring them to conversion.[74] In the words of Jens Hanssen, "the difference from local schools was that the SPC did not intend to foster students' talents (…), but to crush existing personalities before recalibrating them from scratch."[75] Sarruf and Nimr were at first unaware of the intrinsic condescension they were met with by the American missionaries. They were indeed referred to as "native tutors" and excluded from faculty membership, but the glaring discrepancies in their ambitions would not become clear until 1882, when a landmark event took place at the college campus.[76]

In 1882, a newly appointed lecturer called Edwin Lewis gave his commencement speech called "Knowledge, Science, and Wisdom" in which he alluded to the Darwinian evolution theory. The college seniors and the mission Board of Trustees had for a long time watched with suspicion as

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[73] Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1910), 298.
[74] Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced.*
[75] Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 185.
[76] Farag, «The Lewis Affair», 74.

more and more of their faculty members flirted with "Darwinianism," as they called it, which in their view was ungodly. This speech, later published in *al-Mutataf,* served as the final straw. The aftermath of Lewis' speech illustrates the nature of the ideological differences of the faculty members. Bliss, together with conservative faculty members such as George Post and Jessup, called on Dodge at the Board of Trustees to rid the college of Lewis and others who were inclined to secularism. The debate unfolded on the debate pages of *al-Muqtataf.* Dennis wrote: "I am shocked and grieved that such a eulogy on Darwin should have come from such a professor before such an assembly."[77] That Darwin was an outspoken agnostic and that his theory of evolution could undermine the religious narrative of Creation made, in Dennis' view, the dissemination of his thoughts highly inappropriate. Lewis replied, also in *al-Muqtataf,* by stating that Darwin was no less of a scientist for his agnostic worldview.[78] The debacle had severe consequences. Lewis was forced to resign, and van Dyck followed suit. Student protests broke out and made the school year of 1882-83 a most turbulent one. After some back and forth, Sarruf and Nimr decided to leave the college and move *al-Muqtataf* to Cairo in 1884-85. Thus ended their Beirut years.

A wider view: Sarruf and Nimr in context

The Lewis debate revealed the schism in the Syrian Protestant College in which Sarruf and Nimr placed themselves in the secular rather than religious realm. Although not unbelieving, they held that science and religion were compatible and that the pressing times did not allow them to scrutinize sound and verifiable scientific evidence such as that of Darwinism. Much the opposite, they felt that theological questions were less important in an age that demanded vigorous action to cultivate and foster scientific and technological development. This sentiment was a common one and appeared not only in Christian circles. Muslim communities were likewise split in questions of secularist modernization.[79] The separating lines in the Beirut *nahda* were not drawn between the confessional communities, rather between those who witnessed the fast-changing circumstances with enthusiasm and those who were suspicious of it. Although one in retrospect can place the different actors into different boxes which seem quite homogenous, the reality was far from clearly defined either ideologically, politically, or in terms of "progressive" or "reactionary". The

[77] Ibid, 78.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut,* 169-178.

cultural producers of the time were engaging in discussions with one another, but they were also "trying out" different identities, converting to first one, then another religion, and changing perspective and sympathies throughout their lifetimes.

The frantic intellectual activity in the Beirut *nahda* took many forms, and Nimr and Sarruf were but two of many voices in the cacophony. Butrus al-Bustani, a tremendously learned and active figure in the early years of the *nahda,* fronted debates on secularism, nationalism, and the importance of education. In addition to publishing a large-volume encyclopedia and the first modern Arabic dictionary, he founded the National School in Beirut (*al-Madrasa al-Wataniyya*), the journal *al-Jinan* (the Garden), and published a political bulletin in the aftermath of the civil war called *Nafir Suriyya,* in which he called for all "fellow countrymen" (*wataniyyun*) to unite.[80] Other important characters include Faris al-Shidyaq, who wrote what has been called the first modernist work in the Arab world, *al-Saq 'ala al-Saq* (One Leg over the Other) and Jurji Zaydan, who started his career in *al-Muqtataf* and went on to publish several historical novels about Islamic civilization and his own journal, *al-Hilal* (The Crescent). In the Muslim circles, a group of young men gathered to create a literary society known as *Jamiyyat al-Funun,* and they published a journal called *Thamarat al-Funun.* They engaged with ideas on Islamic reforms as proponed by the Iranian Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and the Egyptian Muhammad 'Abduh. The latter came to Beirut and managed the Sultan's school (*al-Madrasa al-Sultaniyya*).[81] There were also critical voices. Some we have already dealt with, such as the conservative Protestant missionaries, but there were also certain members of the Muslim community. Among them was Yusuf al-Nabhani, chief judge at the Court of Justice in Beirut, who "repudiated vehemently ideas coming from Europe and indeed rejected Europe as a wholesale evil."[82]

This was the intellectual landscape that Nimr and Sarruf were intervening in. Since there were widely different views on how the "Arab world" should deal with what they perceived to be a new age, they were carefully self-conscious about the things they wrote. They were prepared to defend what they published; therefore, they legitimized their views all the while formulating them. *Al-*

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[80] Al-Bustani, *The Clarion of Syria*. Trans. Jens Hanssen (University of California Press, 2019).
[81] Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut,* 171-178.
[82] Ghazal, "Illiberal" Thought in the Liberal Age" in Hanssen and Weiss, eds. *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 215.

Muqtataf's first year of publication, 1876, was also the year when Abdülhamid II became Sultan in the Ottoman Empire, an age in Ottoman history linked to despotism, much due to his strict censorship.[83] Prior to 1876, Beirut newspapers and journals had had almost free reign due to slack regulations. Editors had to obtain a license for publication, but this was easily obtained. Moreover, each edition had to be presented to the local governor's office upon publication to make sure that it did not spread anything that might offend the Sublime Porte, but there was no *pre*publication censorship.[84] With the accession of Abdülhamid, censorship became a more pressing matter, but during *al-Muqtataf's* Beiruti years, it was still lax. Instilled to overview publication was Khalil al-Khuri, himself an accomplished journalist and poet, and the editor of one of the first newspapers in Beirut, *Hadiqat al-Akhbar* (The Garden of News). All publications now had to be approved before they were published to make sure that their contents were in accordance with official policy. Nevertheless, as Donald J. Cioeta remarks:

> Although the existence (…) of censorship would seem to have stifled free expression, in fact, journalists in Beirut continued to enjoy almost complete freedom for several years after al-Khuri had established systematic censorship.[85]

From 1882-1885, the regulations were more strictly coerced, when ruler of Beirut Midhat Pasha was replaced by Ahmad Hamdi Pasha. It was still al-Khuri who oversaw the publications, but the rate of warnings rose dramatically in these few years, sending a clear message that the Sublime Porte was surveilling the media landscape.[86] *Al-Muqtataf's* transfer to Cairo has been linked to this strict censorship because its implementation coincided with the turbulent years following the Lewis debate. Nadia Farag has, however, debunked this, and accredits their exile to the inner political strife of the SPC faculty following the Darwin controversy.[87] All in all, at least during *al-Muqtataf's* years in Beirut, Nimr and Sarruf were quite free to publish what they wanted.

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[83] Yosmaoğlu, "Chasing the Printed Word" *The Turkish Studies Association Journal* 27, no. 1/2 (2003): 15-49.
[84] Cioeta, "Ottoman Censorship" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10.2 (1979), 168-69.
[85] Ibid, 172
[86] Ibid.
[87] Farag, "The Lewis Affair."

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the context that *al-Muqtataf* was founded and operated in in the years relevant to this study. It has also shed light on why the publication was an important one. First, because it was one of the very first, and soon one of the most popular. Second, because it epitomized one of the most central aspects of *nahda* sentiments, namely that societal progress was intimately linked to educating the public in matters of science and technology. Whereas other figures of the time were engaged with outspoken politics, such as al-Bustani, or the experimentation with literary genres, such as al-Shidyaq and Zaydan, Nimr and Sarruf were representing the "modern scientific man". Their projects were, however, interlinked, as they all were testing out trajectories for how to create a vital, self-conscious, and cultivated Arab society which could contain the new "modern" experience.

CHAPTER II: PRODUCTING AN ARAB HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Introduction

As Benedict Anderson contends, one of the main arenas for the "imagined community" is the "mass ceremony" of reading newspapers.[88] After a newspaper is printed and circulated, individuals read the *same thing* at the *same time* on a predictable daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Print-capitalism, he holds, was essential in enabling ideas of "the nation" to arise, especially because it dislocated the authority in knowledge production from script-language to a mass-producing letterpress; from monarchs and high priests (or *ulama'*) to journalists and writers; and eschewed the cosmological world order for a historical one.[89] In other words, the printing press fostered secular, democratic, and historical ideas. Moreover, it tied together people that were living far from one another into the same orbit of knowledge circulation in which they could imagine themselves as part of a wider community that marched at the same pace. When newspapers reported on events and developments happening simultaneously all over the globe, they were essentially synchronizing their readers to a *historical* rhythm. They were linking individuals together in a common present which could extend to ideas of common pasts and futures as well. Importantly, the newspaper (or the periodical) materially mediated a sense of historical time, but it was also a space for writing historical narratives.

Following Anderson, this chapter explores how *al-Muqtataf* synchronized its readers to a specific historical understanding in the late-nineteenth century Middle East, with a joint focus on materiality and discourse. From essays in *al-Muqtataf,* I found that the editors were preoccupied notions of universal history and developmentalism. However, the circulation of the journal, its ephemeral quality, predictably periodicity, and serialization of public discourse are material features of the periodical media that helped produce such notions in the first place.

Al-Muqtataf was part of a regional trend of intellectual repositioning towards an imperialist West that claimed to hold the secrets of civilizational progress all to themselves. Obsessed with categories such as "civilization," "modernity," and "progress," the editors of *al-Muqtataf* discursively constructed a past-present-future nexus that strengthened a sense of historical contingency in

[88] Anderson. *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 35.
[89] Ibid, 36.

which the Syrian future was still malleable. They were, in fact, historicizing themselves, and this came with a normative dimension, a call to "act in one's time."

There are many examples in *al-Muqtataf* that bear witness to an increasingly global consciousness. The scale at which development happened was not confined to the Islamic or Arab world but encompassed humanity in total. Reading passages such as the following informs us that the conceptualizations of progress, although it may suffer local fluctuations, overall took a universal form:

> Indeed, those who come after [*al-khalaf*] inherit knowledge from those who came before [*al-salaf*], and they increase this knowledge with their own. Every generation in humanity exceed the previous one in terms of knowledge [*ᶜilm*] and progress [*taqaddum*] and there is no doubt about it.[90]

The progress described here is meant for the benefit of all humankind. This imagery presupposes – or perhaps imposes – a uniform temporal scale. I find that the conceptual capacity to place all of humanity onto the same scale strongly suggests the presence of a universal timeline – which an omnipresent force of progress could inhabit and therefore foster a historical consciousness. The *nahdawis* were preoccupied with formulating and understanding where they could place themselves on this grand timeline.

In the first part of this chapter, I show how the journal's methods for circulation and distribution connected the Arabs together in a way that gave room for imaginaries of a common *past*. In the second, I investigate how the journal's serialization of information (article series, serialized novels, monthly columns) and periodicity helped generate configurations of a common *future*. In conclusion, I will discuss how the stabilization of a past-present-future nexus allowed for a more intense *present*, a sense of the "now" as a surface area for action.

Universal history and historicism

First, what kind of "history" are we talking about? "The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning."[91] Thus was the view of Georg Hegel. For him, history evolved with a clear goal: man's liberation through reason. This

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[90] "Al-Irtiqa'" (Progress), *al-Muqtataf* VI (1881-82), 599-600.
[91] Hegel quoted in Hunt, Lynn. *History. Why It Matters.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 74.

process, he held, began in Asia, but its completion was destined for Europe. The past, present, and future were therefore in Hegel's view spatial as well as temporal categories, and history was the story of all humankind. Universal histories like Hegel's have been written since ancient times, but his version differs in one crucial way, namely in its emphasis on historical progress. In pre-modern historical scholarship, histories were written to shed light on the human condition, its variations and struggles, but it was thought that nothing fundamentally *new* would occur, at least not until Judgement Day.[92] Hegel, and the historians of the nineteenth century, introduced historical "progress" as the lens through which to understand human societies. This view opened for the idea that all things develop, in other words, that history is the tale of perpetual newness. If we add the spatial element, we have a universal history narrative in which human societies are placed according to their level of sophistication, and that this level of sophistication coincides with geographical location and cultural embeddedness.

Looking at changes in human societies as gradual processes of *realizations* meant also that the past was a place inherently different than the present. This view is called historicism. Many, among them influential scholars of post-colonialism such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Johannes Fabian, have claimed that nineteenth century European historicism is what legitimized – for Westerners – Western global dominance: "Historicism—and even the modern, European idea of history—one might say, came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody's way of saying "not yet" to somebody else."[93] It enabled imageries of the "rise" and "fall" of civilizations, and a frequently invoked theme was the idea of history as a civilizational ladder on which all the world's peoples could be placed according to how developed they were in science and industry. On this ladder, Europe ranged on the very top. Although treated with a certain ambivalence, such developmentalism efficiently framed the agency also of *al-Muqtataf.*[94]

However, the editors did not seamlessly reproduce European narratives of progress but crafted their own variant of it. In their version, human success was not located in a distant future, but

[92] Koselleck, *Futures Past,* 111.

[93] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe,* 8.

[94] An article on the concepts of *civilization* and *savagery* explicitly stated that these concepts were exploited for imperialist motives, and that true civilization was not so much a product of scientific excellence, but of high morals, which arguably the Europeans lacked. "Al-Tamaddun wa-l-Tawahhush" (Civilization and Savagery), *Al-Muqtataf*, IX (1885), 393.

existed as a potential in human collectives that could be – and had been – resolved at different points in human history. They held that the Arabs had reached their highest level of civilization in their "golden age" which was a period in Islamic history from around the tenth to thirteenth century.[95] Instead of placing history and scientific development as simultaneously unfolding in a progressive way, the *nahdawis* construed history and science as concurrent processes that were cyclical in nature. Periods of great civilization were the those that valued and cultivated science, such as the "golden age." In the same way, dynasties and khalifates that ignored or suppressed scientific development in society were seen as periods of "decline."

Within this epistemological frame, Islam and Arabs were re-cast as historical figures, and this provided a setting for comparison, between present and past, but also between Islamic and European civilization.[96] Thus, historicism structured how the Arabs understood themselves both temporally and spatially in the nineteenth century. It also provided the Arabs with a remedy for their "decline". By unveiling the secrets of a prosperous age long gone, or what they saw as the virtues of European societies, they could again progress and prosper themselves. They found the answer in two major things: science and its dissemination – in short, education of the self and of the population. As the story went, the Arab civilization, which had reached its height in the so-called "golden age," had played a key role in the historical evolvement of science. This placed the Arabs on the grand scale of universal progress and served as hope for the future of the Arab people. In this narrative, scientific knowledge had been translated from the Greeks to the Arabs, from the Arabs to the Europeans, and was now coming back to the Arabs. The editors of *al-Muqtataf* were therefore free to disseminate "Western" sciences without simultaneously importing the vices of "Western" civilization, because they argued that scientific development was universal rather than Western. The Arabs had contributed to its prospering at an earlier historical time, and thus they could do so again. In fact, it was their moral obligation.

[95] For a study on how the *nahdawis* construed the historical trope of the "golden age," see Elshakry, "The Invention of the Muslim Golden Age" in *Power and Time.* eds. Edelstein, Geroulanous, and Wheatley. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2020).
[96] Khuri-Makdisi, "The Conceptualization of the Social," 94.

Circulation: Encapsulating the "Arab"

Al-Muqtataf was circulated widely. Their circulation determined the geographic scope of the project, bringing the Arab urban centers – but also rural areas – into its orbit. As historian Marwa Elshakry informs us:

> Within a few years, [*al-Muqtataf*] had established a network of agents who distributed it in Greater Syria (in Tripoli, Damascus, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Homs, Aleppo, Sidon, and Hama) and throughout Upper and Lower Egypt (in Cairo, Alexandria, Damanhur, Tanta, Al-Fayyum, Al-Minya, Asyut, and Tahta), as well as abroad. Syrian émigrés purchased it in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Cuba, Canada, and the United States, and by 1892 its circulation (at an estimated three thousand) was one of the largest of any Arabic journal.[97]

After it was established in 1876, *al-Muqtataf* was published monthly with a circulation of 500 copies in the 1880s and about 3000 in the 1890s.[98] Subscribers were mostly representatives from the new, literate elite; it had limited outreach to the traditional elites or the mass population, at least in the beginning.[99] Although seemingly few, this group of educated, secular-minded Arabs was becoming increasingly important. Moreover, the number of subscribers may not accurately depict its influence. The high subscription price prompted salon-like structures to rise around the new magazine. Historian Ami Ayalon describes an example of this: "A group of young Sunnis in Baghdad in the late 1870s organized (…) to purchase a single subscription of *al-Muqtataf*."[100] Although printed in Beirut and later in Cairo, the journal reached as far as Baghdad, where eager young men would gather around to hear the latest. It was not uncommon for a single edition to be circulated to a large group of people or being the centerpiece of conversation in coffeehouses or reading rooms. Converging with the old tradition for public storytelling, a literate person could sit down in a public space and start reading aloud, thus including the illiterate part of the population into a "pattern of reading papers as a collective experience."[101]

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[97] Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic*, 31.
[98] Ayalon, *The Press* , 53.
[99] Marwa Elshakry. *Reading Darwin in Arabic,* 22.
[100] Ayalon, *The Press,* 158.
[101] Ibid, 156.

Al-Muqtataf was not merely distributed by the hands of the editors. Its popularity gained them foot soldiers who contributed to its wide circulation. Soon, literate (and illiterate) people in all major Arabic-speaking communities were reading and discussing Sarruf and Nimr' journal. The quite sudden enormous interest in their journal must have given Sarruf and Nimr a growing sense of who they were speaking *to*. There was obviously a great potential in the Arabic-speaking public for platforms that could disseminate modern science in their own tongue.

Sarruf and Nimr founded their own scientific discussion group in 1882 called the Eastern Science Society (*al-Majma' al-'Ilm al-Sharq*), which although it was short lived, contributed to forming a new standard for socialization and public culture.[102] This was not only man's domain. One of the first literary societies was founded by two of the editors' wives, Maryam Nimr Makariyus and Yaqut Barakat Sarruf. The societies' lectures and essays were printed in the journal.[103] What was previously exclusive events, reserved for the members of the literary elite that happened to be present at that exact point in time, was now made public and a lasting part of a literary corpus. Printing the speeches in the journal was thus a kind of democratization of knowledge. This also had a geographic side: one did not necessarily have to live in a city to take part in the new knowledge infrastructure.

The salon-like structures emerging around *al-Muqtataf* had their counterpart within the journal itself. Each edition reserved space for letters from the readership, debate pages and a section for questions and answers. It was not rare for the editors to devote many pages to mathematical equations upon request. It communicated an egalitarian view of knowledge, simply showing that anyone could take part in the new and wondrous world of scientific inquiry. This ideal, referred to as *tarbiya* (education or *Bildung*), had the potential of breaking up hierarchies and realigning social bonds to a very different logic. The printing press reorganized the social constitution of the society because it provided a platform for conversation between people who, had they been born merely fifty years earlier, would not have had a voice in the public, nor even spoken to one another at all.

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[102] Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic,* 62.
[103] Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste for Home,* 120.

Inasmuch as the production of historical time and the circumscription of historical collectives are co-constitutive processes, *al-Muqtataf* was an arena for both. The concrete way that the journal contributed to shaping a public sphere arguably created a space in which one could agree on a common past. The formation and sustenance of a public discourse in constant movement – manifested as salons, debate pages, and conversations between leading intellectuals as essays in the journal – gave nourishment to the concept of a collective Arab project with roots stretched far back in time. Ideas of homeland (*watan*), the Syrian people, and the glorious Arab heritage that the journal proponed may have come about as a necessary result of the new forms of public social interaction that journals such as *al-Muqtataf* facilitated, not least the creation of an alternative public sphere to the traditional elites, and the demarcation of a private sphere to match.[104] When the social constitution of a given society changes, stories of genesis change accordingly. In the following, I trace how the editors discursively engaged with the idea of a historical Arab community.

A common Arab past

An individual in the late-nineteenth century Middle East could adhere to several identities: Syrian, Arab, Ottoman, or all at the same time.[105] Social identities were in flux, but the imperative to encircle them was undoubtable. In this landscape, *al-Muqtataf* published numerous articles on the "Arab past" with a particular focus on the Arabs' contribution to rational science and philosophy, especially in the so-called Arab golden age. This period, from the Arab expansion through the Abbasid years, which saw great accomplishments in algebra, astronomy, medicine, and chemistry, as well as in craftsmanship such as calligraphy, textiles, and ceramics, was particularly important for shaping the historical imaginary of the *nahdawi*s.[106] *Al-Muqtataf* reflected these ideas in numerous articles on Arab scientists and scholars, Arab philosophy, and Arab chemists.[107]

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[104] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989).

[105] In *al-Muqtataf,* they use "Syrian" and "Arab" interchangeably, evidence that these identities were under construction.

[106] Elshakry, "The Invention of the Muslim Golden Age."

[107] «'Ulum al-'Arab w-ba'd 'ulama'uhum» (The Sciences of the Arabs and some of their Scientists), al-Muqtataf I, 1876, 59; «Falsafa al-'Arab» (The Philosophy of Arabs), *al-Muqtataf* VII, 33; «Kimawiyun al-'Arab» (Arab Chemists), *al-Muqtataf* VII, 22.

In an essay series called *"Al-ᶜArab wa-baᶜd Mathirihim"* ("The Arabs and some of their achievements,") the editors trace the Arab expansion and dwell on how the early Abbasid caliphs created a flourishing environment for science and knowledge.

> In the year 754 AD, Caliph al-Mansur arose to power, and he established Baghdad as a port of science (*dar lil-ʿilm*) and centre for the knowledge and the arts. He brought the art of medicine to his people with the help of the Christian doctor Bakhtishu. Then, Harun al-Rashid assumed the khalifate, and he displayed great desire for knowledge […] He raised the house of knowledge in his lands […] and instilled in his people a mastery of civilization.

The khalifs' "great desire for knowledge" instilled a sense of "civilization" in their subjects, according to the essay. Civilization was a societal concern, not the individual responsibility of the subjects. Then, as now, held the editors, scientific cultivation depended on institution building.

> [Harun al-Rashid] was succeeded by his son, al-Ma'mun, and under him, the sciences flourished, and the gardens of knowledge blossomed, and he sent scholars to obtain and gather all the Greek books he could get a hold of.[108]

The khalifs established Baghdad as a centre not only for the cultivation of scientific development, but also for translating and passing on the ancient wisdom of the Greek. They presented a narrative of the Arabs as a stop-over for civilizational development, a crucial point on the universal timeline of progress, insisting on the Arabs' essential capability of providing a nurturing environment for civilization: "Is it impossible for the Syrians to [compete with the Europeans] when we were the first people to fight our neighbours and to excel in industry and knowledge? Is it impossible when we are the owners of Sour and Saida and Damascus?"[109]

At this glorious time in Arab history, the Europeans were ignorant, backward, and downright laughable, according to the editors:

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[108] "Al-ᶜArab wa-baᶜd Mathirihim" (The Arabs and some of their Achievements), *al-Muqtataf* III, 5.

[109] Al-Nadhar fi Hadirina wa-Mustaqbalina» (A View of our Present and Future), *Al-Muqtataf* VIII (1884), 469-475. Tyre and Sidon are the English names for Sour and Saida.

> If we turn only one page of [the European] history, the clouds of hopelessness clear before our eyes, a sun of hope and promise will appear, and we will see that our East in the present conditions is a paradise compared to what they [Europe and America] were only two or three centuries ago.

The article continues by making fun of the European medieval custom of trying rats and insects before the law, often dressing them up in human attire. This thoroughly backwards ritual should convince the readers that "even though one has reached the utmost degree of stupidity and ignorance, one must not always stay that way." Drawing on Japan as example, as they frequently did, the article stated that civilization was within reach for all humankind, never mind their current state.

The constant comparison to European culture is telling for the declension narrative they were struggling with. The beginning of decline is not attributed to any fault of the Arabs, but the coming of the crusaders.

> There was a time in which our science (*ᶜilm*) was radiating with suns of knowledge (*maᶜarif*) and gardens of art, schools proliferated, and students abounded, the status of scholars was high and the number of works manifold. (…) "[T]he history of Syria" keeps on sighing over what has passed of her sciences.[110]

The above quote comes from an article called "*Hajatuna al-Kubra: Islah ᶜIlmiyy*" ("Our Greatest Need: Scientific Reform"). The article attributed the loss of grandeur in scientific research directly to the crusaders. The Arab world suffered a severe blow when the crusaders burned hundreds of thousands – even millions, the author says – of Persian, Greek and Arab books:

> Then ignorance struck the country, and the homeland mourned the science and its companions until the tyranny of oblivion reigned. The first signs of knowledge [*tabashir al-ᶜilm*] reappeared with the coming of American missionaries, for they found the knowledge [*maᶜarif*] after its escape, returned it and raised its beacon. The first task of the American missionaries is to return our goods to us.[111]

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[110] «Hajatuna al-Kubra: Islah ᶜIlmiyy» ("Our Greatest Need: Scientific Reform") *al-Muqtataf* VIII, 577.
[111] Ibid.

The torch of civilization was on its way back to the Arab world, and the American missionaries were its carriers. The quote above fit well with the universal history narrative wherein civilization wandered to places of nurture and shunned places of neglect. The trope of the “golden age” proved that the Arabs were capable of providing a fruitful habitat, or a garden, for civilizational blossoming,[112] and hence that they could do so again. Insisting on the “Arabs” as a historical collective who suffered fluctuations between might and destitution, strength and weakness, engendered historical significance to the “Arab”, who owed it to “the future” to comprehensively interact with the contingency of the “now”.[113] Such imaginaries, however, were quite possibly the direct result of the new forms of public social interaction that the journal itself facilitated – such as salons and debate pages.[114] Foremost, narratives on the grandiose history of the Arabs arguably came about as a function of the editors’ awareness of their growing Arabic-speaking audience at home and abroad, and the collectivist sentiments that such an extended conversation could foster. Carving out a space for oneself in the social body went hand in hand with carving out a space for oneself in time, or rather, in history.

Periodicity: A steady rhythm of information

The periodicity created by the printing press technology was phenomenologically different from the periodicity created by prayer times, festivities, or seasonal cycles. Scholars such as John Sommersville have been interested in the periodical and its effect on public consciousness in a European context. He notes that:

> Around 1600 the notion of providing a constant flow of publications occurred to enterprising publishers in Germany. (…) [T]hese contained the features by which we define the newspaper—a standard and recognizable format and title, dates and serial numbers, variety of material, reports from various locations. *One might date the birth of the modern world from this development.* Serial and then periodical news was sufficiently different from books—even the "occasional" newsbooks — to suggest a new type of consciousness. What is important in periodical publication is not so much the information it contains, but the sense that regular customers have of being current with developments. Newspapers maintained contact with their audience, binding it together and giving it direction. Readers could be sure that hundreds of other people were reading exactly the same

[112] See Holt, *Fictitious Capital*, chapter 1 for more on the “garden” trope in the contemporary jargon.
[113] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity.* (Gainsville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004), 28.
[114] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation.*

> thing at exactly the same time. Such a "stream of perceptions and sentiments" created the stream of consciousness for a whole society.[115]

Sommerville holds form to be more important than content in terms of the effect on the public, even holding the periodical to be concurrent with the "birth of the modern world". This chimes in with Anderson's famous argument about how the media's simultaneity fostered an abstract social cohesion, namely nationalism.[116] The social and political potential of the printing press did not go unnoticed in late nineteenth century Syria either. The doctor and social reformer Shibli Shumayyil wrote in 1897 that "newspapers have the highest command in civilized states because they have a power over society which no other entity has."[117] Its potential for missionary activity is already mentioned above: the printing press turned out along with the universities to be the missionaries' most successful endeavor.

As dealt with in different settings by scholars such as Anderson and Stephen Kern, the public press imposed a sense of immediacy, of now-ness, that stimulated perceptions of simultaneity between oneself and the state of the world.[118] A journal with *al-Muqtataf*'s disposition was particularly apt for doing so because its aim was to broadcast and domesticate the wonders of science and industry as they progressed. It was no less than "the new world" they were launching in, and they did so in a repeated, monthly rhythm. In this sense, the journal itself was a manifestation of the world-to-come; an embodiment of the *nahda* they yearned for. In awe-invoking prose, *al-Muqtataf* conceptualized "the global" as one space, rapidly and constantly developing. The spatial expansion of the present moment helped foster a sense of the world as within reach, that one could take part in the futures concurrently arising on different parts of the globe. Although they may have located much of the material progress in Europe, Syrians could just as well take up the progressive path forward. As Shahin Makarius, the third editor, wrote in an essay on progress: "what one person can do, anyone can do."[119]

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[115] Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 20. Italics are mine.
[116] Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*
[117] Quoted in Elshakry, *Reading Darwin*, 75.
[118] Anderson, *Imagined Communities;* Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space.*
[119]"Al-'Irtiqa'" (Progress), *Al-Muqtataf* VI (1882), 599.

٣٨ الهواء

ومتى صمغت الاذرع العشرة تلفّ على الاسطوانة الثانية وتمد عشرة اخرى من الشقة ويجري بها ما جرى بالتي قبلها وهكذا حتى ينتهي العامل من الشقة كلها مهما كان طولها ٢٠ او ٣٠ او ٤٠ ذراعًا او اكثر . وبعد لفها مصمغة تكون خشنة يابسة تتكسّر كما تتكسّر الثياب المكوية منشاةً فتردّ الملاسة والليونة اليها بدولاب ذي اسطوانتين (هو كالدولاب المستعمل هنا في بعض البيوت لكيّ الثياب التي لم يوضع عليها النشا) احداهما تحمى بنار توقد داخلها والاخرى لا نار فيها فتُمرّ الشقة بينهما ست مرات او سبع او اكثر حسب الاقتضاء فتخرج لينة مصقولةً على الشكل البديع الذي تراهُ في المنسوجات الحريرية الافرنجية الجديدة

الهواء

كرة الارض والهواء حولها

مقدّمة

قد قصدنا ان نورد بعض الفصول في فن الهوائيات مقتصرين على ما يناسب المقام توطئةً لايضاح مسائل كثيرة عويصة في ظواهر تظهر في الجو او حوادث تحدث في الارض مما يتوق المطالع الى معرفته مع معرفة مبادئه. ولما كان لا بدّ لمعرفة كل علمٍ من معرفة مبادئه وكانت مبادئ الهوائيات قليلة العدد سهلة الادراك افردنا لها بعض الفصول الآتية لئلاّ تتلبّك افكار المطالع بكثرة تكرارها وادخالها غير مأنوسةٍ على موضوع غير مأنوس ايضًا

Figure 2. An illustration of the world and surrounding atmosphere in an article on air. The caption says: "The Globe and the Air around it". Al-Muqtataf I, *1876, 38.*

We may also say that the periodic press imposed a sensed directionality, as each journal edition was "one among many to come".[120] This was emphasized by the serialized feature articles and columns that filled *al-Muqtataf.* The journal also serialized novels (among them Yaqub Sarruf's own *Fatat Misr*).[121] Moreover, each edition came with a column called "News, Discoveries, and Inventions" (*akhbar w-iktishafat w-ikhtira*ᶜ*at*) that gave updates on the immediate progress of the science world. To give an example, a column from 1883 had short expositional pieces under headlines such as "electrical light during surgery," "fishing with electricity," "fake diamonds," and "the Strasbourg astronomical watch."[122] The air of to-be-continued helped stretch the present moment into the future, adding an anticipatory component to the reading experience. This molded the intellectual production into the shape of conversation, setting the standard both for which topics that should dominate the educated public, but also for what form such conversation should take.

[120] Mark W. Turner, "Periodical Time in the Nineteenth Century." *Media History* 8, no. 2 (2002).
[121] For an excellent analysis of *Fatat Misr* in relation to speculative capitalism, see Holt, *Fictitious Capital*, 119-135.
[122] Al-Muqtataf VII, 1883, 55-59.

The ideal that it should be open-ended and open for contestation came to affect the educated public's view of themselves and their relations to one another. The men of letters of late nineteenth century Beirut, to which group Nimr and Sarruf uncontestably belonged, saw their project as an endeavor for emancipation and education.[123] Emancipation meant creating one's own platform for conversation, and the serialization of public discourse brought the necessary pliancy to this project.

Establishing change as a constant

Not directly promising completion or fulfilment, the serial narrative brought in an element of instability – effectively establishing change as a constant. As Sommerville accurately remarks on periodicity, it "creates the impression that each day finds the world at a crossroads."[124] What information would the next day, the next week, the next month bring, and how would one go about realigning one's life accordingly? This mediated space of "the not-yet" arguably ushered in a dynamic that made time eventful and complex – above all unpredictable – and this unsettled the present as a stable ground on which the future would calmly enter, thereby laying the ground for visions of reform. Idealistic, reformist ideas of society demand destabilizing the traditional structures that it rests upon. In essence, therefore, the printing press was part of a radicalizing project because it brought rupture to the traditional platforms for knowledge production and contestation. It provided the material ground for imagining a "new time" that looked completely different from the "old."

In the time organized by periodicals, the gaps mattered as much as the content. The intervals between readings afforded time for imagination, hope and concern – in a word, for futurity.[125] Historian Elizabeth M. Holt links the fractured nature of serialized literary production to the speculative practices undergirding capitalism. Her argument in *Fictitious Capital* is that fiction and finance were two similar – and highly material – outcomes of the futuristic speculation in the late nineteenth-century Arab world.[126] To paraphrase the cultural theoretician Raymond Williams, it is by realizing that the cultural order is materially produced that we can begin to fully understand

[123] Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 6.
[124] Sommerville, *The News Revolution*, 21.
[125] Iser, *Prospecting* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
[126] Holt, *Fictitious Capital.*

the relations between capitalist logic and changes in, say, language or music.[127] *Al-Muqtataf* was established as part of an American missionary project that also poured money into infrastructure, founded important social institutions, and in other ways made their presence known through providing an alternative system of logic that was not just Christian or protestant but capitalist and imperialist, with a certain claim to universality that we can see reproduced on the pages of *al-Muqtataf*. That the editors themselves translated and printed articles from English or American science magazines was part of a wider project of knowledge exchange that saw concepts and their epistemological frameworks travel until they became intelligible across geographical and cultural spheres.[128]

Thus far, I have made the argument that the periodicity of the print media allowed the Arabs to experience the world as moving forward, and that they were themselves part of this movement. The periodicity and serialization of information afforded a sense of futurity. I now turn to how this "futurity" was discursively treated in the journal.

A common Arab future

The many articles on the Arabs' future with titles such as "The Future of the East," and "The Progress of Knowledge" established the future as a key trope, sometimes with a utopian air, other times as a potentially corrupting force. They were markedly different from the more matter-of-fact technical articles, and as I read them, functioned as ideological mouthpiece for the editors. Below is an excerpt from one such article, which originally Yaqub Sarruf gave as a speech at a college for girls in Beirut but later published in the magazine. The speech is called *Al-Nadhar fi Hadirina wa-Mustaqbalina* (A View on our Present and Future).

> First, I must explain to you some of what I know about European civilization, then I will say a few words on our present conditions and the future. Indeed, the European and American people compete in exploring and inventing as if it was a horse race. Not a month goes by without them inventing thousands of new machines and methods as well as technologies to extract and use metals. And not a year goes by without new scientific discoveries that make their jobs easier, increase their spirit

[127] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 92-94.
[128] For an analogous argument on a similar Turkish publication, see Kolland, *Making and Universalizing New Time,* PhD Dissertation (Freie Universität Berlin, 2021), 100.

> and their understanding, widen their knowledge, and help raise the veil of mysteries. Their products are well crafted and mindboggling.[129]

Interestingly, Sarruf saw it fit to start a speech on the current and future state of the Syrian people by referring to the current state of the *European* world. In fact, he uses Europe as a continuous example, effectively making it the reference point for comparison.[130] He continues the exposé of European conditions with the apparent aim of inducing awe in the listeners. ("They have ships that are as much as eight hundred feet long, and eighty feet wide!" "Their printing press can do all the work autonomously and produces seventeen thousand copies in a single hour!") There is clear emphasis on size, capacity, and speed in Sarruf's tale of European civilization, already established when he compares European and American development in technology to a "horse race."

He goes on to praise the Westerners inquisitiveness, listing phenomena that the Europeans find worthy of study: "They do not leave any topic beneath the heaven – spiritual or material – unworked with or unscrutinized for oddities". He then pauses with the following sigh:

> So, this is the image of Europe, scientifically and morally. This is the image of the European civilization. Oh, I wish my pen had broken and my tongue had been tied when we came thus far, but even though my pen had broken, the pen of time will not break. And even though my tongue had been tied, the tongue of history would not.[131]

The above is interesting precisely because Sarruf positioned himself as the unlucky messenger of history. Thus far, the speech is filled with metaphors of movement, Sarruf clearly highlighting the speed at which Western civilization is moving. The above passage renders a sense that time's passing is inevitable, and the Syrians as unable to fight what is, ultimately, the wheel of time turning away from them. This feeling of history's inevitability is further emphasized in the quote: "the European civilization has reached us, and we are forced to partake in its benefits and harms."

Importantly, Sarruf's admiration for Europe was thoroughly interspersed with suspicion and outright condemnation: "Anyone who fails to see the drunkenness, cheating and blasphemy mixed

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[129] «Al-Nadhar fi Hadirina wa-Mustaqbalina» (A View of our Present and Future), *Al-Muqtataf* VIII (1884), 469.
[130] There are many examples of creating an East vs. West discourse on the pages of *al-Muqtqtaf.* For example, they had a recurring series on "the management of the West and the wastefulness of the East" ("*Tabdhir al-Gharb wa-l-Tadbir al-Sharq*"). For a scholarly treatment of this dialectic, see Kenny, L.M. "East Versus West in *Al-Muqtataf.*"
[131] "Al-Nadhar fi Hadirina wa-Mustaqbalina,» 470.

into the European civilization is clearly confused (…) The Christians have not yet entered a country without polluting it with tobacco, opium and intoxicants spreading vice and evil." European civilization was not only polluted itself, it threatened to pollute whoever came into contact with it. Sarruf explicitly stated that European civilization was a "suit" fitting only to "those who weaved it", i.e. that Syria must find its own way into the future. His narrative did not urge the Syrians to walk on a simple linear path into a European future. Rather, the present risk was to imitate or appropriate a "false" future for Syria. He continued:

> So do not fear that we will be swallowed by the stream of European civilization. Fear instead that we will weaken if we lean on them and that we will be more harmed by their disadvantages than benefit from their advantages.[132]

From first seemingly asserting that the future was located in Europe, he then went on to create tensions in this model. If the European *present* would be a dangerous *future* for Syria, how does one go about interacting with it? In the grand scale of universal development, Europe had come the furthest, and they were therefore located farther into "the future" than any other people. Although they held the *means* to attain progress to be the same – scientific development and education – that did not mean that the end station would be the same. A Syrian future should look different to the European one, and the editors of *al-Muqtataf* were careful to communicate that thoughtless adoption of European culture would harm more than it would benefit.

A sound way into the future for the Arab civilization thus required careful scrutiny of the vices of other civilizations in order to preserve authenticity. The notion of authenticity is fundamental:

> I will not hide from you, ladies and gentlemen, that the European civilization is not of our making, and is not ours. We will not truly benefit from it unless we move it and plant it in our own soil, raise it with our own diligence and water it with the sweat from our own brows. […] There will be no future for Syria, nor any true civilization [*tamaddun haqiqiyy*], unless she spins it from the strings of her own civilization and weaves it in her loom. […] These are the goals to seek.
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> […]

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[132] Ibid.

> [The missionaries] did not come to dress us up in the suit of European civilization, but to help us plant civilization in our own countries and accustom it to our climate. […] Indeed, the suit of the European civilization fits those who weaved it. As for us, our hands are not tired from weaving clothes, for we are satisfied with wearing clothes that we borrowed. But borrowed clothes does not warm, as the saying goes, and the warmth does not last.[133]

The recurrent references to European civilization were tools for conveying the editors' worldview. They were fashioning both Europe and Syria as comparable chronotopes which then functioned as rhetorical instruments in the local discourse that strove to make sense of the world temporally and spatially.[134] The editors of *al-Muqtataf* held that scientific and technological mastery was key to understanding the success of some civilizations and the failure of others, but developments in science did not have to progress on a linear scale. Its progress depended very much on the receptiveness of a given time and community to embrace and cultivate it. Thus, the conditions had been superb in the Arab "golden age", but they were not ideal at the present time.[135] Civilization was in that sense timeless, a currency that a society could hold or not. Neither spatially nor temporally conditioned it nevertheless presupposed a distinction between high and low, civilized, and barbarous, rural and urban. *Al-Muqtataf*'s role as one of the very first literary-scientific journals in the region was crucial in naturalizing such imageries. Importantly, however, the idea that the "Arabs" were essentially different from the "Europeans", and that they figuratively existed in different times were arguably products of the new infrastructural logics of distribution and periodicity ushered in by the printing press.

Conclusion: What about the present?

As this chapter has shown, the editors of *al-Muqtataf* were contributing to a historicization of "the Arabs," and their stated goal was to be guides in the wary process of their civilizational revival. Their focus on forward-movement and speed conveyed a heightened sensitivity – including

[133] «Al-Nadhr fi Hadirina wa-Mustaqbalina,» 472.
[134] "Chronotope" is a term coined by the Russian literary scholar Mikhael Bakhtin referring to how time and space are bound together in narratives: Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Emerson and Holquist. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). Recently, a special issue was published on chronotopes in the Levant, see Issa, Rana and Wigen, Einar. "Levantine Chronotopes: Prisms for Entangled Histories." *Contemporary Levant,* 5:1, 1-12 (2020).
[135] Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the eccentric Islamic modernist, wrote in 1883: "It is permissible … to ask oneself why Arab civilization, after having thrown such a live light on the world, suddenly became extinguished; why this torch has not been relit since; and why the Arab world still remains buried in profound darkness" in response to the French Orientalist Ernest Renan who claimed that Muslims and science were incommensurable. Quote found in Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 88.

anxiety – for time's passing. This heightened sensitivity can partly be understood as an effect of their position as avant-gardists in the rapidly developing information infrastructure. The tempo had changed, and it spilled over into discourse. As historian Peter Hill has claimed in his book *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda*, the early protagonists of the *nahda* were not so much involved with abstracting a vision on the West vs. the East, but firmly located within local state and nation-building processes.[136] Although the protagonists I am dealing with in this thesis come slightly later than those that Hill deals with in his book, we should understand them in much the same way. The references to Europe should therefore be viewed instrumentally – formulating Europe as chronotope, which added rhetorical potency to the grand narrative of historical and civilizational change that served to enhance the sense of agency in the Syrian nation-building process.

What I have outlined above serves to nuance the assumption that the Arab intellectuals adopted a teleological temporality issued in the West that neatly lined up past, present and future. Human perfection lay as much in the past as in the future, and neither scientific progress nor civilizational progress was construed in linear terms. They did not, in other words, seamlessly appropriate the progress narrative. Rather, the complexity of societal development adhered to variables other than universally progressing time. These variables were, among others, levels of scientific cultivation and degree of moral stature in society. As I read it, the past-present-future nexus in *al-Muqtataf* placed the past and future as utopian ideals and the present as the transitional phase between the two, as if the present were the lower part of a horseshoe flanked by the past and future on either side. This brought with it a sense of optimism, but also anxiety. The present moment held the ominous potential of breaking out of a "natural cycle" of civilizational revival – either by staying put in the lower part of the horseshoe, determined for perpetual decline due to intellectual and spiritual laziness, or by over-eagerly Europeanizing, thereby effecting an inauthentic future that may only bring them half-way up the horseshoe. In any case, the weight of the present moment paired with the idea of science as its variable of success or failure engendered not only a sense of historical opportunity: it provided a recipe for *how* to be an historical agent.

The very tangible way that *al-Muqtataf* disseminated the importance of science to their readers functioned, I argue, on two levels. Making knowledge available to a wide public was ideological on a practical level: self-education was a concrete contribution to the welfare of the nation, a way

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[136] Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, see the introduction.

of saying that conquering the future lay in the details. On a more abstract level, however, making science play the heroic protagonist in a drama of civilizational rise and fall may have contributed greatly to the feeling of historical agency itself. Science's claim to universality was crucial in bringing about a sense of historical universalism, a feeling that the various examples of the human condition had its rightful place at a grand timeline of human development. If civilizations arose and fell according to the degree to which they provided fertile grounds for scientific and technological cultivation, then the recipe for historical progress was clear. It was just a matter of grabbing the steering wheel. The air of utopic potential vested in the discourse on science, I argue, thereby spurred a *sense* of history itself, inasmuch as the consequences of one's actions made a mark on history. Such marked awareness of the contingency of the moment, engendered by the palpable materiality that lay implicit in the science discourse, bestowed the contemporary Arab with historical significance.

CHAPTER II: SCIENCE AS HISTORY'S MOTOR

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I focused on how *al-Muqtataf* contributed to ordering a stable past-present-future nexus through its external infrastructure: its wide distribution and serialization of public discourse. Now I turn to how the journal's inside, how its worldview was mediated by how it organized and presented its content. Informed by book scholars such as Roger Chartier and Elisabeth Eisenstein, STS scholar Bruno Latour and visual theorist Johanna Drucker, I argue that a medium's graphical interface is a crucial part of its knowledge production which means that its visual appearance must be considered a meaning-making structure in its own right.[137] The underlying principle for my analysis is that visual representations of knowledge are not neutral but mediate and shape epistemological orientation. Analyzing how journal is structured is therefore to study what it makes us see, and how it makes us see it.

Al-Muqtataf's methods for ordering their content relied on forms that were quite foreign to the nascent readership such as information tables, collage-like structures, lithographic illustrations, and simple, undecorated fonts. In addition to inducing a new visual literacy in the readers, these forms afforded a sense of legitimacy to the journal. There was power in numbers, tables, and illustrations, and they neatly circumscribed what the journal presented discursively: that science was "key to progress". Hailing science as the world's salvation gave a very concrete solution to the complex problem of "how to enter the future." This image rang double considering that the journal itself was a product of the new printing press technology. Moreover, by presenting their scientific content through graphs and information tables, they were aligning to increasingly international standards of knowledge transmission. They accessed these standards through English and American scientific journals and re-printed them in their own. In that way, they were contributing to the formation of science's "language of form."[138]

Although a recurring and insisting trope in several *nahda* journals such as *al-Jinan, Hadiqat al-Akhbar* and *al-Manar,* science as "key to progress" is perhaps best exemplified on the pages of *al-*

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[137] Chartier, "The Printing Revolution: A Reappraisal." In *Agent of Change,* eds Baron, Lindquist, and Shevlin. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 397–408; "Texts, Printing, Readings"; Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Drucker, *Graphesis.*
[138] Drucker, *Graphesis.*

Muqtataf. The articles on technical and scientific phenomena were accompanied by do-it-yourself manuals, columns on house management, applied agricultural techniques as well as shorter sections on inventions and "science news" from abroad, which emphasized the editors' claim that science should take a center place both in society and in each individual's life. The guiding strategies consciously or subconsciously employed by the editors of *al-Muqtataf* left the impression that the journal was a kind of "vehicle to the future."

The overall visual presentation of the journal was markedly more miscellaneous than in scribal culture. This messier form, I argue, helped bring about a sense of movement and change, an ephemeral quality to public discussion guised as flexibility to the rapidly changing circumstances. Paradoxically, then, the disorder contributed to the journal's authority in that it displayed a more "truthful" rendering of the state of the ever-evolving world. Although the overall presentation was collage-like, the information was neatly structured in tables and columns – ordering the disorderly. It was as if the editors, steadily marching towards the future, ordered and systematized the information needed for others to join them.

The new print media had several overlaps with the manuscript scribal culture, especially since the two traditions existed side by side for years.[139] However, the letterpress caused certain ruptures in the way that knowledge was organized and therefore altered the readers relationship vis-à-vis the texts. First, the sheer volume of text available to the public helped make knowledge a commodity. Second, the standardization of fonts and graphics eased the digesting of knowledge, a feature book historian George Roper links to "the emergence of new modes of thought and patterns of consciousness in the modern Middle East."[140] Even illiterate members of society could access the information through engravings and illustrations. Finally, the more durable format of paper (over manuscripts) helped preserve the knowledge for later generations.[141]

This chapter deals with how the editors' efforts to systematize the knowledge they disseminated installed "science" as a key trope which could be separated from theological, "divine" knowledge. This chapter will show how the journal's methods for systematizing knowledge rested on – but

[139] Auji, *Printing Arab Modernity* (Leiden: BRILL, 2016).
[140] Roper, "The Transition from Scribal to Print Culture," 221
[141] Ibid, 215. Roper follows Eisenstein who speak of three "clusters of change" in the emerging print culture in a European context.

also enhanced – a sense that positivistic and secular science was indisputable and universally valid. The editors adhered to an increasingly standardized way of presenting scientific knowledge, thus positioning themselves as part of a simultaneous, global infrastructure for knowledge transmission. In the following, I discuss the internal organization of the journal's content – articles and debate pages, its wide use of illustrations and information tables, and the *al-amrikani* (the American) font – and argue that this careful curation of "how the world works" contributed to cast science as a solution for the ills of Arab society, and therefore as the motor for driving history forward. The knowledge it presented was cast as universal, not Western, and could therefore offer a sound way into a prosperous, yet authentic future. During the journal's early years, which is the period under study, the editors were experimenting with the format, struggling to find a sound form that would gain them legitimacy and authority in a media landscape that was under construction.

The Authority of Order

Nimr and Sarruf were certainly not alone in pushing science's agenda. *Al-Muqtataf* was one of the very first journals to popularize science, but the imperative of education and scientific development pervaded the region. The *Tanzimat* period included several educational reforms which strongly suggested that education was a state priority from the Sublime Port. Facing military and economic challenges, the Ottoman government founded schools in order to educate the elite to perform civil and military duties. But as the historian Carter Findley writes, the "new ideas these men learned in school led them to shift their loyalties from the person of the sultan to their own ideal of what the state should be".[142] Likewise, in Egypt, schooling was initially implemented in order to foster a functioning army to strengthen the state but eventually evolved to "produce the individual citizen."[143] Once the imperative for secular knowledge was articulated and institutionalized the leeway for individual epistemic reorientation was difficult to curtail. *Al-Muqtataf*, with its easily digestible systematization techniques, helped this process along. The journal represented an interface for the "gospel of science" that permeated nineteenth century Middle East.[144] However, *al-Muqtataf* – at least during its Beirut years – was not institutionally dependent, although

[142] Findley, *Turkey,* 91.
[143] Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (University of California Press, 1991), 69.
[144] Elshakry: "The Gospel of Science and American Evangelism in Late Ottoman Beirut." *Past and present* 196.1 (2007): 173-214.

they drew on SPC's resources. Their views on education were therefore markedly democratic as they did not have to answer to anyone but themselves, while of course staying inside of the censorship restrictions.

The pages of *al-Muqtataf* were interspersed with illustrations, mathematical formulae, and information tables. Articles on technological artefacts were often accompanied by technical drawings. The journal's twelve yearly editions were bound together with an alphabetically arranged table of contents. For the collector, then, *al-Muqtataf* functioned as an encyclopedia that could be used for educational purposes or at leisure. Information tables neatly lined up information on for example different types of soil, the number of inhabitants in different parts of the Levant, or the decrease in Hawai'ian population. These new forms of presenting information are indicative of an emergent visual culture that differed from that of scribal culture. The information tables listed up different phenomena and their characteristics in a way that resembled how a scientist would take notes of his findings, which contributed to a sense of indisputability for the subsequent discussions of these phenomena. It prescribed a certain ethos to the text itself, fixating the fundament for the arguments that followed. Numbers and mathematics hold a claim to universality, and the quantification of natural objects helped stabilize these objects vis-à-vis the onlooker.

Elizabeth Eisenstein, a towering figure in the study of print culture, speaks about early print capitalism as introducing a new "esprit de système":

> The decisions made by early printers (…) directly affected both tool-making and symbol-making. Their products reshaped powers to manipulate objects, to perceive and think about varied phenomena. Scholars concerned with 'modernization' or 'rationalization' might profitably think more about the new kind of brainwork fostered by the silent scanning of maps, tables, charts, diagrams, dictionaries, and grammars. They also need to look more closely at the routines pursued by those who compiled and produced such reference guides. These routines were conducive to a new *esprit de système*.[145]

One such scholar concerned with "modernization" or "rationalization" is the influential STS theorist Bruno Latour. At the forefront of making and sustaining an *esprit de système*, according to

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[145] Eisenstein, *The Press as an Agent of Change*, 88.

Latour, are scientists in the laboratories. They conduct a variety of experiments in different fields, using a wide range of instruments and machines. Yet, their results are always strangely similar – they all fit in diagrams, graphs, tables, or columns. This, says Latour, is the method of *inscribing* nature into documents, deflating complex phenomena into something that can be measured, compared, and copied.[146] Once inscribed, nature becomes something else, a visual point of reference whose value is foremost instrumental. It becomes information that can be used for other means, such as building a house or developing a medicine. Importantly, inscription facilitates science's mobility in that the documents are easily transferable. Latour goes into conversation with Eisenstein when he claims that the printing press was – and is – a great *mobilization device*, or more precisely: "a device that makes both mobilization and immutability possible at the same time."[147] This last part is interesting: what does Latour mean when he says that the printing press both makes something move and makes something stand still?

Immutability, says Latour, is "ensured by the process of printing many identical copies; *mobility* by the number of copies, the paper, and the movable type."[148] As Eisenstein shows, and Latour echoes, the foundational principles of science were established pre-print, as well as great achievements in every discipline. Before the advent of the printing press, however, most accomplishments stayed local. The printing press facilitated both mass production and wide circulation of knowledge, or a constant transferal of "immutable mobiles," and therefore became instrumental for the enormous developments in science and technology that followed.

Latour and Eisenstein's work on the printing press' role in transferring "immutable mobiles" are helpful tools to understand *al-Muqtataf's* role in the late-nineteenth century Middle Eastern knowledge production. They were at the center of translating and transferring science's "language of form" from English and American journals and making them relevant in their own environment. Through the SPC library, *al-Muqtataf's* editors could access not only innumerous Arabic and European books on medicine, astronomy, botany, physics, and others, but also state-of-the-art journals from abroad. The journals that they were engaging most with were the English *Nature* and *Nineteenth Century* and the American *Popular Science Monthly*. When they copied and

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146 Latour, "Visualization and Cognition."
147 Ibid, 10.
148 Ibid.

translated from these, they were contributing to an information flow across the globe that saw nature inscribed in a way that was becoming increasingly standardized. They did not uncritically adopt a "Western" worldview but went into dialogue with knowledge produced elsewhere and mediated it to their own audience. For example, other than being inspired by format and structure of the journals, they would not copy culture-specific essays (such as a colonialist essay on the domination of Egypt, printed in *Nineteenth Century*), but mostly "neutral" lithographic depictions of natural phenomena or information tables that rendered "objective" information. Sarruf and Nimr, always the advocates of the *universality* of science, held the view that the geographic origins of scientific development were less important than accurately understanding science's principles. In the "golden age" of Islamic civilization, the meaningful knowledge production had happened in Arab lands and then been transferred to Europe. Now, it was the other way around, a point which Sarruf and Nimr often emphasized.

The editors of *al-Muqtataf* were aware of the power of numbers and tables and used them extensively in assisting their intended message. Using information tables, they removed themselves from their role as messengers and instead let the numbers speak for them. Their message thus bore the mark of rational, indisputable knowledge. This certainly granted the journal a sense of authority, but – more interestingly – it offered authority also to the readers. The information presented was not the property of the editors. Rather, it was presented as existing information *out in the world* for all to consume and apply to their own wishes. The neat ordering of numerical information thus underscored the democratic ideals of their editors. Moreover, it bore witness to an idea of a cultivated *individual* who could autonomously venture into the realm of science and technology. Their project was thus one of cultivation, enabling others to partake in the international developments in science. They introduced science's "language of form" to naturalize this to their audience with the aim that the Arabs could, again, play a decisive role in its further development.

مشورات . ٢٠٧

بزر الخشخاش نقصت في هذه المدة اربعة ونصفًا في المئة من وزنها وكسرت فلم توجد فاسدة ولا ناقصة. والمدهونة بزيت بزر الكتان نقصت في هذه المدة ٣ في المئة من وزنها فقط وكسرت فاذا بها ملآنة وجيدة الطعم كانها من بيض امس

حفظ البطاطا * قالت جريدة سن فرنسيسكو التجارية انهُ قد اختُرِعت في تلك البلاد آلة لضغط البطاطا وحفظها من الفساد بحيث يمكن الذهاب بها الى كل الاقاليم وبقاؤها مدة طويلة بدون ان يعتريها الفساد او تخسر طعمها الطبيعي . وقد أُرسل من البطاطا المعالجة كذلك الى بلاد الانكليز فراجت سوقها وكانت ارباحها كثيرة

تحليل الشعير والارزّ والذرة

هذا تركيب الشعير والارزّ والذرة حسب تحليل الدكتور پلزّ بعد تجفيف حبوبها على درجة حرارة الهواء الاعتيادية وعلى درجة ٢٥٧° ف

		الشعير		الارزّ		الذرة	
		درجة الهوا الاعتيادية	درجة ٢٥٧ ف	درجة الهوا الاعتيادية	درجة ٢٥٧ ف	درجة الهوا الاعتيادية	درجة ٢٥٧ ف
رطوبة		١٢٫٨٨	٠	١٢٫٥١	٠	١٢٫٨٩	٠
نشا		٥٤٫٠٧	٦٣٫٦٥	٧٤٫٨٨	٨٥٫٤١	٦٣٫٦٩	٧٣٫٣٧
رماد غير قابل الذوبان		١٫٠٧	١٫٣٣	٠٫٣٩	٠٫٤٥	٠٫٣٣	٠٫٣٨
مواد دهنية		٢٫٦٦	٣٫٠٨	٠٫٧٨	٠٫٩٠	٤٫٣٦	٥٫٠٣
سليلوس		٧٫٧٦	٨٫٨٨	٠٫٧٦	٠٫٨٧	٤٫١٩	٤٫٨٣
البومن غير قابل الذوبان		١٢٫٤٣	١٤٫٣٨	٨٫٧٨	١٠٫٠١	٨٫٦٣	٩٫٩٥
دكسترين	تذوب في الماء	١٫٧٠	١٫٩٦	١٫١١	١٫٣٧	٠٫٦٧	٠٫٨٣
سكّر		٢٫٤٣	٢٫٧١	آثار	آثار	١٫٣٨	١٫٥٩
البومن قابل الذوبان		١٫٧٧	٢٫٠٥	٠٫٤١	٠٫٤٦	١٫٨٧	٢٫١٦
رماد قابل الذوبان		١٫٣٦	١٫٤٥	٠٫٤٥	٠٫٥١	١٫١٥	١٫٣٣
مواد مستخرجة		١٫٥٠	١٫٧١	٠٫١١	٠٫١٣	١٫٤٣	١٫٦٥
		١٠٠٫٥٣	١٠٠٫٠٠	١٠٠٫١٨	١٠٠٫٠٠	١٠٠٫٦٨	١٠٠٫٠٠

Figure 3: An information table on how the composition of barley, rice, and maize changes at different temperatures. Al-Muqtataf *V (1880), 207.*

Each edition followed the same layout: a table of contents followed by a handful of feature articles over several pages (sometimes to be continued), then questions and answers and finally the various columns: on new inventions and discoveries (*akhbar w-iktishafat w-ikhtiraᶜat*), housekeeping (*bab tadbir al-manzil*), agriculture (*bab al-ziraᶜa*) and mathematics (*bab al-riyadiat*). This format looks very much like the format of the American *Popular Science Monthly,* although *al-Muqtataf* had more specific names for their different columns. In the editions of *Popular Science Monthly* published around the same time, the columns and questions and answers sections were presented under the title "Miscellany".[149] This significant difference, while they otherwise look very similar, shows the editors' marked ambition to directly educate their readers. They were guiding them

[149] *Popular Science Monthly.* D. Appleton and Company. For an example, see volume IV (1874), 22.

towards the rightful place of each action. The journal was thus not simply a conveyor of abstract visions on how science would propel the Arab world into a prosperous future but took matters into their own hands by educating their readers in a day-to-day, practical fashion.[150] Oftentimes, they would have small sections on how to take care of one's teeth, how to combat head lice, or how to dye textiles.

Al-Muqtataf's clear separation between factual articles and do-it-yourself manuals demarcated what was objects for public debate and what was useful information in the private life – especially in the section on housekeeping. Dividing the magazine into two, one purely expositional and the other oriented towards reader engagement and practical use of the knowledge, operationalized the information for the readers. The production of knowledge thus happened on two levels: on the level of dissemination and on the level of appropriation, the readers incorporating what they read into their day-to-day practice. The aim was precisely that: to ground the ideal of progress in everyday minutiae.[151]

Self-education was crucial for the higher goal: the good of the nation. In return for their own "service to the country [*khidmat al-watan*]" and to "the many who love progress [*taqaddum*] and the spread of benefits", the editors urged the readers to themselves roll up their sleeves and contribute to "obtaining knowledge and mastering the crafts to revive them from decay and restore them from distress, for we lack all of it."[152] In an essay meant as a reader, the editors stressed that readers should make sure they truly understood the techniques and methods by taking notes, drawing pictures, and engaging in conversation with friends.[153] This dynamic vision of how "the children of the homeland" should educate themselves in interaction with others in order to bring the nation as a whole *forward* is telling for the *nahda* ethos, which Nimr and Sarruf duly contributed to. The message was that mastering the sciences demanded hard work, and that success was only attainable through vigor, diligence, and self-assertion. *Al-Muqtataf* were to guide the readers in this process by making the information easily digestible and properly illustrated. Cultivating the sciences was in that sense also a moral obligation on the citizens of the nation (*watan*) and

[150]Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste for Home*, 119-120; see also Holt, *Fictitious Capital,* 64-68.
[151] For more on *al-Muqtataf's* contribution to encapsulate the private sphere, see Abou-Hodeib, 2017.
[152] "Al-Muqaddima" ("Introduction"), *al-Muqtataf* I, 1876, 1.
[153] "Mutuliᶜat al-Muqtataf" (Reading al-Muqtataf), *al-Muqtqtaf* I (1876): 206.

could even be done within the confinements of the home. In total, "[t]he sciences (the benefits of which many in these countries deny) can bring man to sublime levels of wellbeing and goodness of life. Particularly in our day and age when they have become the source of morals and the laws of management and economical increase."[154] The focus is on both *material* and *spiritual* progress, and mastering science was seemingly key to both.

Systematizing the natural world

The feature articles were the at the beginning of each edition, and they were arranged after discipline, with exposés on astronomy, botany, history, geology, anthropology and meteorology (among others). *Al-Muqtataf's* popularized and curated version of "how the world works" was not just an ordering of meaning. Systematizing the natural world, compartmentalizing phenomena into distinct sections, was in effect mediating it into an operable sphere, undergirding the implicit imperative to act in one's time, but also structuring how and where such action could take place. Although we take scientific disciplines for granted today, they are historical constructs that came to be at a specific time and place. In the words of Clifford Siskin: "we need to engage system as not just an abstract concept or idea but as something materially in the world."[155] The systems presented in the journal were presented as objective renderings of the inner workings of the world, thereby contributing to the secularization of knowledge. In the late-nineteenth century Beirut, *al-Muqtataf* was one of the first to naturalize this classification of the natural world. Sarruf and Nimr intimate knowledge with and concern with disciplinal delineations was arguably due to their enrolment in the SPC, where the education had been separated on the basis of disciplines, ranging from engineering to astronomy and botany. Furthermore, the library provided them with literature strictly pertaining to each discipline.[156]

Of course, this was also a process of exclusion: the relative lack of references to religion is one, the outright condemnation of magic and superstition another. For instance, the editors took personal issue with belief in astrology, calling it "fraudulent" and warning their readers against its lure.[157]

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[154] "Tabdhir al-Gharb wa-l-Tadbir al-Sharq" (The Management of the West and the Wastefulness of the East), *al-Muqtqtaf* 1 (1876/77), 110-112.
[155] Siskin, *System* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2016), 3.
[156] Elshakry, *Reading Darwin*, 53.
[157] Stolz, *the Lighthouse and the Observatory*, 47.

Astrology was firmly set as something other than astronomy, and the latter had a scientific weight that the former lacked. The editors took their pride in presenting knowledge that was verifiable according to methods for scientific inquiry. Although they were not anti-religion per se, their project took place outside of the theological realm. Effectively, they therefore contributed to a fundamental bifurcation of the world into secular versus religious spheres of knowing.[158]

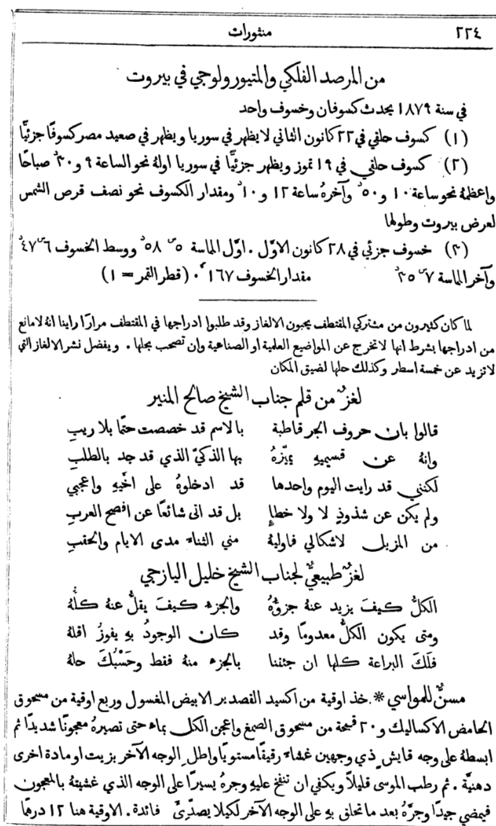
The presentation of knowledge in newspapers, journals, and magazines differ from books in one important way. Whereas books typically present one aspect of a topic – seeing the world from one perspective – periodical media juxtapose several snippets of information on a wide range of topics. The collage structure has the effect of making the readers mistake its wide range and scattered focus as an objective rendering of the world as it is *right now.* As media theorist Marshall McLuhan claims, the mosaic structure of the periodical resembles the complexity of the world itself, therefore we accept its representation of it as more truthful.[159] It is appropriate here to dwell on the meaning of *al-Muqtataf,* which literally translates to "selections". The name stems from Cornelius Van Dyck who suggested that the journal should contain extracts and translations from popular science magazines in the West.[160] The "now-time" offered by the mosaic structure brought the reader into the journal's immediate orbit in a quite literal way: It was up to the readers to orient themselves in the material, choosing what to read, skim, or skip; in effect position themselves towards and negotiate the miscellaneous perspectives they were presented with.

In addition to articles and pieces written by Sarruf, Nimr, Makarius, and Van Dyck – as well as invited contributors – the journal printed summaries of important European works and translations of popular science articles found in the archives at the university library. Often, they would print short biographies of Western scientists. The biographies became a staple item of the journal, but interestingly, they never placed any Arab scientists in these columns. While they would often evoke old Arab scientists in other texts, they never appeared in the biography columns. This peculiarity probably stems from the fact that the biographies seem to have been translated from *Popular Science Monthly,* including lithographs of the scientists. Moreover, the scientists that were granted biographies were contemporary, or of recent importance. Their function was arguably to

[158] Ibid. See also Elshakry, *Reading Darwin.*
[159] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 204-7.
[160] Elshakry, *Readin Darwin,* 60.

familiarize their public with the state-of-the-art developments, a way of showing "who's who" in the contemporary world of scientific and technological development.

As miscellaneous it may have been, the journal appeared comprehensive in its worldview. This was exactly the vision, that only by challenging what they conceived of as stale structures of the past could Syria see a new and more prosperous era. Although we may not recognize the journal format as particularly chaotic with modern eyes, what the journal presented was a kind of orderly disorder. The briefs and columns were new genres that made information easily digestible. Images and illustrations broke up the mass of text here and there. The mixture of essays from outside contributors, editors' notes, unsigned exposés and short scraps of news from different parts of the globe introduced a new aesthetics and literary sensibility to the region that clashed with the old. Its effect was that of mobility, movement and change.



٢٢٤ منشورات

من المرصد الفلكي والمتيورولوجي في بيروت

في سنة ١٨٧٩ يحدث كسوفان وخسوف واحد

(١) كسوف حلقي في ٢٢ كانون الثاني لا يظهر في سوريا ويظهر في صعيد مصر كسوفًا جزئيًا

(٢) كسوف حلقي في ١٩ تموز ويظهر جزئيًا في سوريا اوله نحو الساعة ٩ و٤٠ د صباحًا واعظمه نحو ساعة ١٠ و٥٠ د وآخرهُ ساعة ١٢ و١٠ د ومقدار الكسوف نحو نصف قرص الشمس لعرض بيروت وطولها

(٣) خسوف جزئي في ٢٨ كانون الاوّل . اوّل المماسة ٥ س ٥٨ د ووسط الخسوف ٦ س ٤٧ د وآخر المماسة ٧ س ٣٥ د مقدار الخسوف ١٦٧ ٠ (قطر القمر = ١)

لما كان كثيرون من مشتركي المقتطف يحبون الالغاز وقد طلبوا ادراجها في المقتطف مرارًا راينا انهُ لا مانع من ادراجها بشرط انها لا تخرج عن المواضيع العلمية او الصناعية وان تصحب بحلها . ويفضل نشر الالغاز التي لا تزيد عن خمسة اسطر وكذلك حلها لضيق المكان

لغزٌ من قلم جناب الشيخ صالح المنير

قالوا بان حروف الجر قاطبة ... بالاسم قد خصصت حتمًا بلا ريبِ
وانهُ عن قسيمهِ يميّزهُ ... بها الذكيّ الذي قد جد بالطلبِ
لكنني قد رايت اليوم واحدها ... قد ادخلوهُ على اخيهِ واعجبي
ولم يكن عن شذوذٍ لا ولا خطاٍ ... بل قد اتى شائعًا عن افصح العربِ
من المزيل لاشكالي فاولية ... مني الثناء مدى الايام والحقبِ

لغزٌ طبيعيٌّ لجناب الشيخ خليل اليازجي

الكلُّ كيفَ يزيد عنهُ جزؤهُ ... والجزء كيفَ يقلُّ عنهُ كلُّهُ
ومتى يكون الكلُّ معدومًا وقد ... كان الوجودُ بهِ يفوزُ اقلهُ
فلَكَ البراعة كلها ان جئتنا ... بالجزء منهُ فقط وحَسْبُكَ حلهُ

مسنٌّ للمواسي * خذ اوقية من اكسيد القصدير الابيض المغسول وربع اوقية من مسحوق الحامض الاكساليك و٣٠ قمحة من مسحوق الصمغ واعجن الكل بماء حتى تصيرهُ معجونًا شديدًا ثم ابسطهُ على وجه قايش ذي وجهين غشاء رقيقًا مستويًا واطلِ الوجه الآخر بزيت او مادة اخرى دهنية . ثم رطب الموسى قليلاً ويكفي ان تنفخ عليهِ وجرهُ يسيرًا على الوجه الذي غشيتهُ بالمعجون فيمضي جيدًا وجرّهُ بعد ما تحلق بهِ على الوجه الآخر لكيلا يصدَى فائدة . الاوقية هنا ١٢ درهمًا

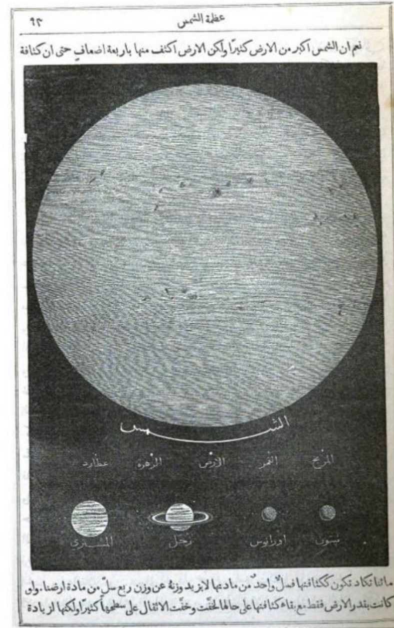
Figure 4: A typical page from the journal shows its collage structure. On the top, information from the Astronomical and Meteorological Observatory in Beirut on eclipses. At the bottom, two riddles presented by sheikhs in the traditional parallel form. Al-Muqtataf *III, 224.*

Photographic accuracy and the ideal of precision

The Iraqi poet Jamal Sidqi al-Zahawi said that he "owned all the treasures of earth" when he got ahold of an exemplar of *al-Muqtataf*.[161] The analogue to a treasure box may be fitting due to the assemblage of lithographic illustrations of ancient castles, city landscapes, old Tibetian tribeswomen, lunar eclipses, animals from all parts of the globe and state of the art technical objects that drew the reader's attention in. The lithographs origins are not quite clear: in an editorial note from 1882, the editors' say that they had obtained a contract with "one of Europe's most prominent publishing societies, which will furnish us with all our [visual] needs," but judging from their Arabic inscriptions they were sometimes locally produced, or in any case locally amended.[162]

Uncovering how the lithographic illustrations affected the readership's aesthetic preferences is not a straight-forward task, and one that I will not undertake here. But as far as "basic changes in book format might well lead to changes in thought patterns," we can make certain assumptions as to what the intentions of the editors were.[163] As an introductory to how to read the journal, the editors emphasized that the pictures could "help the reader remember" the subject matters that he or she encountered: "[M]any of the matters are hard to remember, unless one remembers their image, and therefore it is better for him to pay his full attention to the images."[164] The images were not just there for entertainment, but came with their own educational imperative. The lithographic illustrations of miniscule phenomena such as insects and the inside of a human vein appeared in the same edition as those of large machines and solar systems. Again, I would argue, we are witnessing a deliberate systematization for the sake of operability. The various phenomena were fitted to a human scale, and this mediation ontologically altered these objects' place vis-à-vis the human, bringing them into the same sphere of being (and becoming). The intention was arguably to induce in the readers a visual literacy of the world, embedded in secular and rational ideals, in which all phenomena could be dissected and systematized.

[161] Ayalon, *The Press,* 53.
[162] Auji, "Picturing Knowledge," 87. The quote is from Auji, as well as the observation that the lithographs were locally amended.
[163] Eisenstein, *The Press as an Agent of Change,* 89.
[164] *Al-Muqtataf* I, 1876, 207.



Figures 5 and 6: To the left, illustration of headlice, al-Muqtataf *III (1878), 43. To the right, the solar system,* al-Muqtataf *III (1878), 93.*

The lithographs offered a naturalistic quality in that they resembled photographic accuracy. They were not works of art but attempted to truthfully render the phenomena as they existed in the world. The lithographs above, showing a headlice to the left and the solar system to the right, depict things that are invisible to the human eye. In printing them, the editors transport them from the realm of the unseen to the realm of the seen. What can be seen can be understood, and thus their emergence in graphic form facilitates their emergence in cognition. To again evoke Latour, the process of inscribing nature into documents rests on the power of sight. "Worldview," he writes, is not a merely a synonym for ideology, but literally "how a culture *sees* the *world,* and makes it visible."[165] Part of what makes "immutable mobiles" powerful, is that they ensure optical consistency across different cultural spheres.[166]

While I must be careful not to give *al-Muqtataf* the sole credit in expanding their readers comprehension of invisible natural phenomena, I do argue that their contribution is a highly important one. There was no popular-scientific journal prior to *al-Muqtataf,* and its extensive use

[165] Latour, "Visualization and Cognition," 9.
[166] Optical consistency is Latour's wording.

of visual representations of the natural world was an important part of their appeal. Many of their readers were not likely to be accustomed to naturalistic images of scientific phenomena, and we can assume that they studied these images with equal parts enthusiasm and awe, as indicated by the al-Zahawi quote above.

In an enlightening article that goes into detail on how journals such as *al-Muqtataf* graphically presented their vision of the modern world, historian Hala Auji emphasizes that the engravings and illustrations were meant also for the illiterate part of the population.[167] Around 1870, the literacy rate of Greater Syria was estimated around 5 percent.[168] However, as explicated in the last chapter, the low literacy rate gives the wrong impression of the journal's impact. There was a long-standing tradition for oral transmission of knowledge, and the nineteenth century periodicals were absorbed into this tradition, with journals being read aloud in public spaces. The illiterate part of the population therefore partook in the "reading" of these journals. Moreover, the didactical form of the graphs and lithographs were, according to Auji, meant to ease the process of knowledge consumption. Scientific knowledge was presented in a diagrammatic form with extended use of annotations that instructed the readers on how to rightly navigate the information. Although older manuscripts had also used diagrams and illustrations for educational purposes, they had presupposed some familiarity with the material presented. The visuals in *al-Muqtataf* were sufficiently didactical to appeal to non-specialist readers.[169]

In his PhD Dissertation on the weekly Turkish popular science magazine, *Servet-i Fünûn*, which had several overlaps with *al-Muqtataf* in format and content, historian Daniel Kolland writes that "the visual linkages with the civilized world and illustrations, in general, were the main characteristic and selling point of the weekly."[170] Kolland's argument on *Servet-i Fünûn* rings true for *al-Muqtataf* as well: that the illustrations served to depict "the seemingly whole spectrum of human existence, expressed in the concept of *civilization.*"[171] The efforts to obtain the necessary technology – and technological know-how – to print illustrations on a weekly basis made *Servet-i Fünûn*

[167] Auji, "Picturing Knowledge," 80.
[168] Elshakry, *Reading Darwin,* 31.
[169] Auji, "Picturing Knowledge," 87.
[170] Kolland, *Making and Universalizing New Time,* 91.
[171] Ibid. 117. Italics in original.

the most expensive weekly in Istanbul.[172] In the period of study for this thesis, 1876-1885, there are variances in the number of illustrations in the journal. Some editions would have plenty, while some barely a few. Considering the price of acquiring and printing illustrations, we can assume that this has to do with the varying financial conditions of the editors. The printing press in the Levant was privately funded, in contrast to Cairo and Istanbul where the state patroned several publications. The financial situation of Beirut journals thus rested on whether they were able to get patronage. After the printing of the bible in 1864, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) terminated their funding of the mission press, although the press continued to run.[173] Sarruf and Nimr reportedly funded the whole enterprise out of their own pockets during the first few years.

Stylistic development and the "Protestant aesthetic"

In stark contrast to the older manuscripts printed in the Middle East, *al-Muqtataf* was stripped of any calligraphy or ornaments. The pages were framed with a simple border, and the only ornaments that appeared were on the front cover. Scholars have debated whether this aligned to a kind of "protestant aesthetics" that sprung from its place of origin, the American Protestant missionaries press.[174] Perhaps more than just an aesthetic preference, the simplistic layout of the journal was also a result of the limitations of the letterpress versus the lithographic press. Whereas the lithographic press was apt for rendering calligraphy and ornaments, the letterpress was both faster, simpler to use, and cheaper. According to Auji, the journals published in Cairo were more ornamented than those in the Levant because they were funded by the Egyptian state which provided them with more stable finances.[175]

The lack of ornaments made the text itself the visual focus. The margins were wide and devoid of the scribbles that had been a regular feature of scribal culture. The letterpress offered more space between the words, and the overall effect was a more spacious layout that was "easier on the eye."[176] Just as the collage structure invited the readers to take a more active role in picking and choosing what to read, so did the spaciousness of the page grant a simpler way into its message.

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[172] Ibid.
[173] Abufares, *The Modern Arabic Book Design* (Leiden, 2017), 37.
[174] Auji, *Printing Arab Modernity,* 65-67.
[175] Ibid, 111.
[176] Roper, "The Transition from Scribal to Print Culture," 220.

The imperative was to free the reading experience, as far as possible, for hindrances. By the same token, the editors used punctuation marks far more than what had been customary in traditional manuscripts, which were almost free of them.[177] Traditional Arabic has ascribed words to indicate when one sentence stops, and another begins. The punctuation marks enhanced readability, but it also underscored the intention of individual education. The journal was not necessarily meant to be read in one sitting, but to be used for educational and encyclopedic purposes in which punctuation marks offered useful pauses.

During the nineteenth century there had been several attempts at constructing the right font to be used in the letterpress. In 1841, the ABCFM provided their own version when Eli Smith went to Germany to obtain the necessary technological know-how in order to find a more "complete and elegant font of Arabic type" to cater to the "native taste".[178] Getting all the technology ready was a meticulous affair:

> There has been much necessary delay, first in procuring new types from home, and then in casting them here. It is now three months since the first portions of the translation [of the Bible] were given to the printer, and nearly all that time has been consumed in preparing the types for the references and notes. Matrices for four letters are still to be received from the United States; but we have notice that they have been shipped and are expecting them in a few days.[179]

Originally made in the process of translating the bible into Arabic, the visual characteristics of the American Arabic typescript was carefully fashioned to attend to the particularities of the Arabic language such as its connected characters and vocalization marks.[180] It should be accessible enough to have a wide outreach and facilitate easy reading without unnecessary stops.[181] The result was the "*al-amrikani*" (the American) font, which can be seen on the pages of *al-Muqtataf,* and which eventually dominated not only the Middle Eastern media landscape, but was transported to other countries that printed books in Arabic type:

> The type of the Beirut Press is becoming more and more widely regarded as the best Arabic type in the world. The distinguished Arabic scholars in Germany who have hitherto printed the Koran

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177 Ibid.
178 Bird, *Bible Work in Bible Lands,* 319-20.
179 Thompson, *The Major Arabic Bibles.* (American Bible Society, 1956), 13.
180 Auji, *Printing Arab Modernity,* 112-13.
181 Abufares, *The Modern Arabic Book Design,* 34, footnote 44.

> and many other Arabic books in the type made In Germany, have recently written to Dr. Van Dyck asking for specifications as to the price of the various fonts of type, as they have decided to use only the Beirut type hereafter.[182]

Interestingly, the standardization process in knowledge production even went down to the level of which font to use. Obviously, the *al-amrikani* font was considered a wide success, probably for its simple elegance and readability. Moreover, its "left-slanted vertical strokes gave the font a forward movement that helped guide the eyes along the reading direction, thus facilitating a faster reading pace."[183] Even the reading process was mediated for the sake of efficiency and fast absorption of knowledge.

Conclusion: Secularization as performance

In this chapter, I have shown how the editors understood the significance of aligning their visual organization of content to a more international standard. To a certain extent, graphical depictions constitute a language of its own, a "language of form." The rich calligraphic traditions of the Middle East dominated the visual culture for centuries, and its capacities for organizing ideas of divinity and ways of knowing are phenomenologically very different from the naturalistic illustrations and austere information tables that can be seen in *al-Muqtataf.* Framed by a spacious page-layout, simple font, and collage-like form, these graphics make an interesting case for how the editors envisioned the process of secularization. Moreover, by analysing how the editors' organized their content, we come closer to understand what they were trying to achieve. They were interested in aligning themselves to the international infrastructure of knowledge production and adopted and further developed what was becoming the universal science visual format.

Graphics are arguments in disguise. Although they may seem like neutral depictions of what *is,* they are really interpretations. *Al-Muqtataf's* extensive use of illustrations and information tables was effectively underscoring their belief that secular, positivistic science was a universal way of knowing, thereby masking that their version of science – of course – also was a construction. Mechanically reproduced and widely distributed, their visual presentation nevertheless helped standardize the ways in which its readers thought about the world. The fact that many of their

[182] Jessup, 362

[183] Ibid, 56.

illustrations were reproductions of images the editors had found in similar European publications indicates a that they were part of a synchronization process across cultural spheres which created common reference points on how to visually comprehend and orient oneself in the world. *Al-Muqtataf* can therefore rightly be accredited with contributing to the formation of a new visual culture that helped connect local and regional traditions to a more global space.

From the editors' point of view, the Arabs' way into a new global culture went through science. They thought about science not as an essentially Western, but a universal way of knowing. When they stripped their publication for cultural markers such as calligraphy and lack of punctuation marks and replaced them with the science's "language of form", they effectively realigned themselves to an idea of a global space in which science was the lingua franca. It was an effort to make themselves relevant and partake in global developments. We can therefore view *al-Muqtataf* as a performative agent, meaning that its editors dressed their publication in the attire of their conviction and thus performed the change they wanted to be part of.

CHAPTER IV: A NEW LANGUAGE FOR A NEW TIME

Introduction

"What is eloquent in one age is not eloquent in another," wrote a contributor to *al-Muqtataf* who called himself "al-Mumkin", ("the Possible", "the Maybe"), echoing the views of the editors themselves.[184] With the society being in flux – no more what it "had been", and not yet what it "could be" – the Arab literati struggled with finding the right language to contain their experiences of the "new time." There were several challenges to deal with: the introduction of new technologies revealed the need to adopt appropriate terminology, new ideas on society and the political spurred conceptual change, and the very style of Arabic – poetic and ornate, with extensive use of similes and analogies – was considered somewhat out-of-date for conveying modern sentiments. How should they be eloquent in this new age?

The increasing output of journals and magazines helped establish journalistic writing as a genre in the region, and the periodicals were spaces in which new forms of writing could be tested. According to the editors of *al-Muqtataf,* the language should be clear and comprehensible and facilitate easy reading. This bears witness of the editors' ambitions for democratic enlightenment and their commitment to helping the readers understand complicated scientific subjects. Like the *amrikani*-font eschewed the old calligraphic ideals, so too should the "newspaper language" replace the more traditional, "flowery" Arabic prose – or they should at least co-exist. *Al-Muqtataf* was a pioneer in writing simple Arabic that focused on precision rather than poetry.[185] Salama Musa, the Egyptian writer and political theorist accredited his "telegraphic style of writing" to *al-Muqtataf.*[186] The metaphor of the telegraph is striking, as the intention was precisely smooth and wide-reaching communication.

As I have shown in chapter III, the editors attempted to give form to what they perceived to be "progress". This, I argue, also happened at the level of language. The linguistic representation of "the future" contained markers of efficiency, objectivity, and scientific neutrality. Much like the mosaic structure of the journal had an air of objective authority, so too did the simple and precise Arabic convey objectivity and truthfulness.[187] And much like the *"al-amrikani"* font enabled

[184]*Mustaqbal al-Lugha al-Arabiyya*" (The Future of the Arabic Language). *Al-Muqtataf* VII, p. 43
[185] Elshakry, *Reading Darwin.*
[186] Ayalon, *The Press,* 53
[187] Sheehi. *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity,* 109.

quick and comprehensive reading, so too was Sarruf and Nimr's "telegraphic style" meant to assist their readers in the process of acquiring knowledge. In other words, their intention was to have minimal friction between medium and message.

This was, however, on the level of intention. The Arabic that the editors strived for was not institutionalized anywhere, and there was no blueprint that they could follow. The idea of Arabic's "modernization" in the nineteenth century has become somewhat of a truism in the scholarship on the Arab *nahda.* However, what scholars mean by modernization in terms of syntax, lexicality, and style is less clear. In a recent book on bible translations, literary scholar and historian Rana Issa exposes paradoxes in the discourse on Arabic's modernization in the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, Arabic was increasingly *standardized* with the increased output of literary works and translations, especially in the process of translating the bible. However, in terms of morphology and grammar, it remained more or less identical to classical Arabic, a conscious decision which reveals that the Arab literati considered Arabic and its "purity" as constitutive of the Arab identity.[188] The innovation happened on the level of lexicality, as Issa shows, when words deemed archaic or too closely associated with "Qur'anic" Arabic was eschewed in favor of neologisms and synonyms that were still in use. The vibrant and constant discussions on the Arabic language in the *nahda* have perhaps been taken as sufficient evidence for its modernization, when these rather indicate the existence of a linguistic "problem-space" densely inhabited with inclinations and ambitions that pointed in all directions.[189] In other words, scholars should separate between emic and etic ideas of "modern language" and treat the Arab literati's impetus towards linguistic change as an ideology rather than a set of concrete outcomes. The 1870s and 80s were more of a testing ground than a scene for Arabic's unidirectional modernization. There was no clear rupture between the "old" scribal language and the "new" printing press language but overlaps and entanglements between them.

Thus, the simple prose that the editors strived for was a way to insist on their relevance in the development of a new genre, journalism. Their aim was clear: they wished to "write in simple language, accessible to everyone."[190] In reality, however, *al-Muqtataf* was a mosaic of different

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[188] Issa, *The Modern Arabic Bible* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).
[189] For the concept of "problem-space" see Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.
[190] Rendered in Elshakry, *Reading Darwin,* 32.

styles. At one moment they wrote straight-forwardly, stripping their discourse of metaphors and similes, in the next, they were leaping into poetic parallelisms. Thus, rather than judge their success in achieving a "simple language," this chapter deals with what the editors meant by it. What would it entail to write in a simple language, and why did the editors deem it so important? In the following, I study *al-Muqtataf*'s linguistic strategies and discuss in what way a "modern language," just like "science", became a vessel for their convictions, a way of performing progress. Language is the most elemental form of media, and the simplification of language thus created a more expansive space for intellectual production and interaction. The editors' vision of being a vehicle for the future was thus most rudimentally executed on the level of language.

Language as text and texture

As in the previous chapters I apply a materialistic method, approaching language as more than a container of meaning – as in discourse analysis – but as a dynamic material system: texture as well as text. There is a long tradition in the humanities for thinking about language as a self-contained structure that is something other than "reality", beginning when Ferdinand de Saussure made the distinction between *langue* and *parole.* Saussure made the argument that *langue* was an abstract, self-referential, and closed system while *parole* was specific utterances located in historical processes and events.[191] This distinction was taken up by scholars such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, who with their "linguistic turn" of the 1970s contributed to create deep wedge between texts and their historical contexts. However, scholars such as J.L Austin objected to the distinction between a texts' "inside" and "outside" and developed his theory of "speech acts" which was a method for understanding how humans *do things* with words.[192] Michel Foucault, perhaps the scholar most associated with the "linguistic turn," did himself emphasize the historical-practical side to language. In his *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he writes that one can no longer treat "discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak."[193]

The long-standing gap between discourse and practice is in the process of being abridged. This is especially thanks to STS methods such as Actor-Network Theory, developed by Bruno Latour and

[191] Saussure, Ferdinand De. *Course in General Linguistics.* Rev. ed. (London: Owen, 1974).
[192] Austin, *How to do Things with Words.* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press).
[193] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* (London: Routledge, 1989), 49.

others, which treat semiotics and their material mediation as co-constitutive practices.[194] I am interested in how *al-Muqtataf's* editors approached language, especially in terms of what they perceived language could and could not *do*. They were self-proclaimed modernizers of the Arabic language, at once eager to conduct changes and wary of the criticism that they might face in doing so. They alternately presented Arabic as a straitjacket in which the "new world" could not enter and as a malleable form that could make the world "move forward." Moreover, they were pioneers in a new genre, journalism, which conditioned their style and lexicography in specific ways. Their style was "telegraphic," intended to convey information as precisely as they could, and they supplemented the Arabic vocabulary with international scientific terminology that would help them realize a *processual simultaneity* with the knowledge production happening elsewhere. The editors legitimized their linguistic frivolity by arguing that Arabic was a human construct in constant development as opposed to the widely held view that Arabic was a divinely perfect, synchronic entity.

The significance of Arabic

"Muslims in general and Arabs in particular have long regarded Arabic as a God-given language, unique in beauty and majesty, and the most eloquent of all languages for expressing thought and emotions," according to Anwar G. Chejne, historian of the Arabic language.[195] There is no dispute regarding Arabic's status in the long history of Muslims and Arabs. The founding myth of the Arabs is deeply connected to their language – the Prophet Muhammad had received the Qur'an, complete and divine, in Arabic, and this event prompted the Arabs' long period of conquest as well as their "golden age". There was believed to be a direct link between the sacrality of their language and their success as a civilization, and this belief was accentuated by Arabic's seemingly perfect form which suggests:

> an idea of almost mathematical abstraction. The perfect system of the three radical consonants, the derived verbal forms with their basic meaning, the precise formation of the verbal noun, of the participles – everything is clarity, logic, system, and abstraction.[196]

[194] Asdal and Reinertsen, *Doing Document Analysis* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022), 212-13.
[195] Chejne, *The Arabic Language* (Minneapolis, 1969), 6.
[196] Stetkevych, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2.

The relative stability in grammar and form throughout the centuries was further proof of its sacred nature. Increasingly, however, this view was being challenged. Already in the decades after the revelation, debate spurred on whether or not Arabic was a God-given, perfect language when non-Arabic words were found in the Qur'an. In the *nahda,* this debate was revived with new strength.[197] The preoccupation with developmentalist ideologies soon affected the views on language as well. Coupled with the need to find a vocabulary for the political and scientific impulses, the ground was laid for linguistic reform.

Arabic's "revival" in the nineteenth century was, however, no straightforward endeavour but spurred fervent discussions: there was no general agreement among the *nahdawis* what a "new Arabic" should look like. Indeed, one of the most contested topics of the era was the current state and future trajectory of the Arabic language. An essential part of the Arabs' founding myth, Arabic represented the proof that the Arabs were a historical community, irrelevant of sectarian belonging, thus providing a foundation for ideas of "the nation" (*watan*). In the words of Nadia Bou Ali:

> The project of Arab national thinking (as a strictly modern phenomenon) shapes itself not only according to its claim of reason and rationality (embodied in natural sciences), but also based on a linguistic project that ultimately emerges as a social imaginary which in turn becomes the basis or grounds for institution of the notion of 'Arab society'.[198]

The very identity of the "Arab community" was stake – or rather, it was forming, and the common language was the seen to be the combining link, the structure underscoring their common history and future. Language is essential for identity-making in all eras but becomes especially pertinent in periods of great upheaval. In choosing which concepts to use (and refrain from using) and what style to write in, the *nahdawis* positioned themselves in the changing cultural, social, economic, and political environment – a kind of linguistic battle ground where the weapons were under construction. The periodicals published at this time thus varied in style and vocabulary, and their editors chose their language with a certain degree of self-consciousness, often reflecting on their linguistic choices as they wrote. Studying the linguistic choices thus reveal political inclinations and imaginaries of what "future" to effectuate. *Al-Muqtataf's* editors were rather pragmatic when

[197] Ibid, 4-6.
[198] Bou Ali, *In the Hall of Mirrors* (University of Oxford, 2012), 19.

it came to language reform, welcoming and naturalizing of foreign terms and simplifying the style. They focused on the *functional* aspect of language, underscoring the need for precise communication. They were less concerned with what Arabic might lose from modernization than with what it might gain.

As students and educators at the Syrian Protestant College, Sarruf and Nimr owed certain parts of their linguistic inclinations to the developments in Arabic that had taken place among the American missionaries. In the decades preceding *al-Muqtataf's* publication, the editors' trusted mentor Cornelius Van Dyck had contributed to the ambitious and time-consuming project of translating the Bible into Arabic. The process demanded serious scrutiny of Arabic style, lexicality, and semiotics, and when the Bible was published, it was considered a success for its clarity and uniformity while still being loyal to classical Arabic. The resulting language was later dubbed Modern Standard Arabic, even today the form of Arabic that is used in literary works and journalistic media. A pivotal event, the translation of the Bible immediately preceded Sarruf and Nimr's work on *al-Muqtataf,* and they were closely affiliated with the translators. Undoubtedly, they were influenced by it. A study on *al-Muqtataf's* contribution to linguistic change must therefore start with a look at the Bible translation.

Arabic in the missionary encounter

When the American missionaries arrived in Syria early in the century, there had already been several translations of the bible into Arabic. These were not in circulation but existed as scribal manuscripts within the confinements of individual churches, and the average Arab Christians could not afford to secure themselves an exemplar. A central goal with the introduction of the printing press was to spread the word of God, and a first step would be to translate the Bible anew, and to print and circulate it widely. Issa has called the process of making the Bible available to a mass audience its "commoditization:"

> The transformation of the Bible into a commodity facilitated its temporal alignment with modernity by dressing it in newness through a process of translation and publication that depended on industrial technologies and on an economic sphere that was being globalised and made fit for the circulation of capital.[199]

[199] Issa, *The Modern Arabic Bible,* 11.

Issa here argues that the Bible was "dressed in newness" to temporally resonate in the new time. The Bible was not seen to be an unchanging entity, an a-historic rendering of God's eternal words, but a text whose linguistic attire should be modified to be thoroughly understood by its recipients. Translating the Bible was thus not only a holy act, meant foremost to honor the divine, but an undertaking done with a certain audience in mind – a paying audience – to help the Christian mission to grow and reach new members. From not being accessible outside of church ceremonies and masses, it could now be read in the confinements of an individual's home. The missionary Edward Calhoun exclaimed:

> Just as Syria, once lighted up with the oil made from her own olives, is now illuminated by oil transported from America, so the light of revelation that once burned brightly there, lighting up the whole earth with its radiance long suffered to go out in darkness, has been rekindled by missionaries from America, in the translation of her own Scriptures into the spoken language of her present inhabitants.[200]

His tale of the holy scriptures being "rekindled" by the hands of the American missionaries reveals the inclination towards viewing the scriptures as temporal objects, threatening to disappear into oblivion if they are not amended to the needs of their day and age. The traditional engagement with the scriptures in ceremonial and liturgical settings was evidently not enough to keep Christianity alive, seen through the eyes of the missionaries from America, where the printing technology had for decades secured the layman's access to them. The conception that there should be a direct line of communication between God and his servants had roots stretching back to the Protestant revolution in Europe several centuries earlier.[201] This alteration of the relationship between God and the individual was materially executed by making the scriptures practically accessible and linguistically comprehensible.

There was a long tradition for translating the Bible into Arabic dialects: the bibles that already existed in the Ottoman-Arab lands had been written in an Arabic that was closer to the vernacular tongue, in stark contrast to the Qur'an which was the prime text in classical Arabic. Hence, the linguistic differences in the holy scriptures served to uphold differences between the sects, demarcating them from one another. "Our aim is to bring about uniformity," wrote Eli Smith, the

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[200] Calhoun quoted in Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria,* 78.
[201] Issa, *The Modern Arabic Bible,* 14.

American missionary who first undertook the translation project.[202] The different parts of the existing Arabic bibles had been translated by different people, and there were great discrepancies in style and phraseology. Smith wanted to standardize the scripture into coherent whole, and he undertook the task with the intention to personally tend to the entire process. He did, however, need help from native Arabs in order to give "the work a native coloring which a foreigner could not so easily accomplish," and bring "into it the terms and phrases in common and good use."[203] Smith thus appointed Butrus al-Bustani and Nasif al-Yaziji, two of the foremost men of letters in Beirut at the time, to assist him. The texts went back and forth between the three, each adding or subtracting from them. On the one hand, they wanted to streamline and standardize the language. On the other, they did not want to strain from eloquent Arabic which to a certain extent defied streamlining. Finally, they landed on a kind of middle ground:

> It was agreed to adopt a simple, pure Arabic, free from foreign idioms, but never to sacrifice the sense to a grammatical quirk or a rhetorical quibble or a fanciful tinkling of words. As a matter of fact, it will be seen that in the historical and didactic parts the style is pure and simple, but in the poetical parts the style necessarily takes on the higher standard of the original.[204]

A merged form of Arabic was under construction. It ardently followed the grammar and morphology of the Qur'anic language but eschewed its rhymed prose and archaic wordings. Seeking to impact the society, the missionaries realized that their style had to tend to the likings of the established elite, such as the educated Muslims, and level with the standards for eloquent language, of which the Qur'an was the foremost example.[205] Although a cultural marker of the Christian identity, vernacular language was also a characteristic of rural or less educated groups, thus outside of their targeted audience. A vernacular Bible was therefore no longer an option.[206] This marks a break in the tradition of Arabic Bible translations, and bears witness to a social constitution in flux: there was greater intersectional engagement between Muslim and Christian groups, and marking oneself in the social body meant catering to both.

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[202] Van Dyck, and Smith, *Brief Documentary History* (Beirut: Syria Mission Press, 1900), 8.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid, 28-29.
[205] Issa, *The Modern Arabic Bible,* 69.
[206] Ibid, 127.

When Eli Smith died, Cornelius Van Dyck took over. He was respected among the Arabs for his thorough, intimate familiarity with the Arabic language. He had "no peer among foreigners in his knowledge of the Arabic language and literature," his "taste of language" was a "divine gift," according to the missionary Henry Jessup who said he was told so by the Arabs literati themselves.[207] Van Dyck prepared and published Arabic school books on geography, algebra, geometry and natural philosophy prior to his position at the SPC, and published volumes of pathology, astronomy, and chemistry during his stay there.[208]

The final version went into print in 1860, twelve years after the process was initiated. It was a definite success, issued in six thousand copies by 1864, and hailed by the Christian communities: "Dr. EH Smith and Dr. Van Dyck […] have given us a translation so pure, so exact, so clear, and so classical, as to be acceptable to all classes and all sects", as one learned Greek ecclesiastic proclaimed in a 1865 public lecture.[209] Pure, exact, clear, and classical – exactly as the translators had aimed for.

Divine or human?

The legacy of Bible translation was paradoxically that of Arabic's desacralization, decentring its status as first and foremost a Qur'anic language. Bringing Arabic down from its apotheotic status brought with it opportunities for development and change, a challenge to which several of the *nahdawis* enthusiastically rose, among them Yaqub Sarruf and Faris Nimr. But although the translation process had shown that Arabic could be used in other settings than the Islamicate one, the discussions on whether Arabic was God-given or historical was by no means settled, and there were different opinions also within Christian circles. Discussing Arabic's origin was essential for establishing its ontological capacities in the present. To what extent was Arabic's form, style, and vocabulary open for debate? Considering its status in Middle Eastern societies, anyone who wished to modernize or change Arabic had to thoroughly legitimize their actions.

There were different views on the origin of Arabic: Butrus al-Bustani wrote that Arabic was "the language that descended upon the heart of our father Adam on the heavenly earth" and that it, along with Syriac and Hebrew, were the "dividing-out branches or leftover remains of that divine

[207] Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, 107.
[208] Ibid, 107-08.
[209] Ibid, 78.

Adamic language"[210] Al-Bustani, translator, lexicographer, and pedagogue, nurtured a deep love and respect for classical Arabic, and ardently emphasized the importance of the Arabic language to revive the "Arab civilization" albeit in a new dressing. Al-Bustani was one of the first to formulate a specific Syrian-secular nationalism, calling on his "countrymen" to "arise" to the new times.[211] For al-Bustani, the dispute as to whether Arabic was a holy and eternal language or a social, historical one made little difference: the two could be combined in that the social function of Arabic gained an eternal dimension – its object merely shifting from the *umma* (Muslim community) to the *watan* (nation).

Faris al-Shidyaq, a deeply original novelist and journalist, spoke on the other hand of language as something that takes form gradually: "Nothing comes from language, or from other human arts and objects, complete and whole from the first moment but gradually."[212] Still oriented towards the *origin* (*'asl*) of language, al-Shidyaq locates it elsewhere: "Even someone who knows *nothing* about the Arabic language, if he were to hear, for example, the words *tantana*, *dandana*, *jaljala* or *rannama* [to ring, hum, rattle, sing], and if he had sound judgment, it would have to occur to him that what is involved is the imitation of sounds."[213]

This discussion also took place within *al-Muqtataf*. Jirjis Butrus al-Tibishrali, an outside contributor, wrote in the journal that "it is not unlikely that Adam was created with complete knowledge of language, just as he was created with a complete human body."[214] This view was, according to the author, not contradictory to language's historical contingency: "the people arranged and organized [the language] in tandem with their progress in civilization, just as they arranged and organized their politics, and the evidence for this is the simplicity of the barbarian languages compared to the languages of civilized peoples."[215]

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[210] Sacks, *Iterations of Loss* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 87.
[211] Al-Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*.
[212] Sacks, *Iterations of Loss*, 97.
[213] Ibid.
[214] "Fi Tafarru^c al-Lughat wa-l-Tafarruq al-Bashar" ("On the Branches of Languages and the Scattering of People," *Al-Muqtataf* VI (1881), 154.
[215] Ibid.

The editors too took an historicist stance in their discussions on language. Pre-occupied with the concept of development, they argued for Arabic's evolution already in the very first edition, in an article that traced the development of the Arabic language from ancient South Arabian language to its modern Semitic form: "Those who have studied it, agree that Arabic is a branch from an old West-Asian language, stretching from the Arab lands to Abyssinia and Phoenicia, but which since has disappeared."[216] They proclaimed that Arabic was the strongest of the Semitic languages, eventually conquering the older languages in the region, but made no argument that this was because of some divine quality. In several articles, from the origins of writing (from hieroglyphs to alphabet) to the origin of phonetics (from animal sounds to human sounds), they traced the development of human communication as first and foremost a tool for communication, changing and adapting as humans change and adapt. The journalistic style they were part of developing demanded a certain degree of frivolousness towards the linguistic conventions of Arabic, and I read the editors' focus on language's *functionality* as a legitimizing strategy for the changes they themselves introduced. Arabic was, according to them, in a state of unnatural stagnation. Emphasizing that the evolution of language was a natural occurrence, there was seemingly no reason not to embrace any development that might bring Arabic to further fruition.

> [The English], as other civilized nations, do not hesitate to adapt their language to their conditions, sometimes by adding grammar and words, and other times by changing the terminology and getting rid of superfluous elements.[217]

If the Englishmen should perish off the face of the earth, they claimed, future scientists would have more difficulty understanding their language than they would hieroglyphs, but the Englishmen were aware of this "imbalance" and seeking to fix it. In closing, they come with the following plea:

> Does Arabic not need someone to look at it in this way, when hundreds of years have passed and it remains as it was, and the names of the discoveries, inventions, artifact, and the requirements of the society are increasing?[218]

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[216] "Fi al-Lugha al-Himyrariyya wa-l-Qalam al-Musnad" ("On the Himyaritic Language and the Ancient South Arabian Script," *Al-Muqtataf* I (1876), 19.
[217] *Al-Muqtataf* III (1878), 83.
[218] Ibid.

This sentiment is interesting in how it exposes the editors' conception of language and agency. Strongly contesting Arabic's immutability, they argued that language was man's domain, a sociological and historical phenomenon. They conveyed a view of language that enhanced its materiality and inviting others to take part in moulding it to match the needs of the era.

The importance of clarity

With the Bible translation looming large in their immediate past, Sarruf and Nimr continued the translators' ambitions for clarity in the Arabic language, and their "telegraphic style" was certainly influenced by their proximity to the translation process, especially Van Dyck. But translating holy scriptures is one thing, effective journalism quite another. The genre they were establishing was characteristically short and precise – for the sake of easy reading, but also by way of the journal format, with its short columns, footnotes, and questions and answers sections. More than just a didactic strategy, their to-the-point style was an effect of the journal format's restrictions. Especially in the questions and answers sections, the editors refrained from long elaborative replies: in some of their answers to questions from the readers, they even found it sufficient to write a simple "yes" or "no." Following Carolyn Miller, "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish."[219] She calls genre "a social action," meaning that it is a rhetoric intervention in actual processes more than merely a category of texts. In *al-Muqtataf's* case, the style they were developing were conditioned by journalism's genre specific mode of action, namely to quickly respond to and mediate current events, in this case scientific and technological developments.

This brings me to my second point: The journal's objective naturally removed them from a more classical style – when explaining the workings of an engine or the telephone, there was no room for "flowery" prose. Their programmatic stance for preciseness can thus be seen as a function of their focus. They did, however, hold that the society as a whole would benefit from adopting a simpler style. Their quest for a simplified Arabic was ideological, and they called for new schoolbooks to be written in a language that would not intimidate pupils, estranging them from the objects they were studying.[220] George Roper writes that:

[219] Miller, "Genre as Social Action" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70.2 (1984), 151.
[220] *Al-Muqtataf* V (1881), 329.

> Especially towards the end of the scribal era, "knowledge" often tended to be regarded as a mystical and secret entity, and writers tended accordingly to prefer an obscure style of expression; this in turn encouraged what has been called a "magic garden" mentality, promoting esotericism at the expense of both lucidity and rationality.[221]

It was with this "magic garden" mentality that Sarruf and Nimr intervened. *Al-Muqtataf* pioneered a democratic view of science and education and realized that their reformulation of science's ethos went hand in hand with finding a language that could ease its mediation. An article on the benefits of education opened thus:

> I have seen people who believe that eloquent speech equals difficult speech. When encountering obscure, ambiguous speech, they described it as eloquent, although the opposite is true: eloquence is manifestation and clarity, not ambiguity and concealment.[222]

This quote belongs to a commentary on a grammar book, written by Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi, a Persian polymath and poet from the 13th century. By evoking an old master of Arabic, the editors showed that their position regarding linguistic style was not radical. On the contrary, it was a legitimate position with historical roots. The "magic garden" mentality, according to them, was not an inherent part of the Arabs' scientific mode of operation, but rather a historical side-track.

They were, however, firmly oriented towards the Arabic language's future, not past. They believed linguistic reform was a decisive factor for the Arabs' success in the "new time" and plunged into a debate on whether or not the written Arabic should adhere to the classical or colloquial form. In a series of articles on "*al-Lugha al-ᶜArabiyya wa al-Najah*" ("The Arabic Language and Success") published from 1881, Sarruf and Nimr claimed that the friction between the written and spoken language (*fusha* vs. *ᶜammiyya*) was an obstruction to success. In the West, they wrote, books on science were available to all classes of society, whereas in the East, such treasures were reserved for the educated only. Societal stagnation was in part a linguistic problem, they held, which must be resolved so that everyone could enjoy equal access to information.

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[221] Roper, "The Transition from Scribal to Print Culture."
[222] "Husn al-Sinaᶜ a al-Nashar," *Al-Muqtataf,* IV (1879), 76.

They proposed three trajectories to solve the problem: the first was to replace Arabic with another language, which they immediately declared to be undesirable. The second was to establish spoken Arabic as standard instead of the written. This, they said, resembled the natural way of development, as Arabic would "[follow] the laws of nature that make languages change with the change of time".[223] It was the third option, to replace the spoken Arabic with written Arabic, that gained most praise from the readers. The debaters stressed the importance of having a standard language comprehensible across linguistic and geographical barriers in order to interact with the Arab common past, as most of the historical manuscripts and books were written in *al-fusha*. Only one of the debaters, who signed with the pseudonym Al-Mumkin ("the possible"), thought that it would be a good idea to merge the colloquial dialects into one and instate it as the written standard. Sarruf and Nimr, as we saw, were not un-sympathetic to the idea of standardizing colloquial Arabic, stating that it might be the inevitable result of historical change anyway, but considered the third option to be the "the noblest, safest and most beneficial solution".[224]

Arabicizing foreign terminology

Of course, Arabic's vocabulary had always been developing. Arabic has a rarely dynamic method for expansion thanks to its root-system. In Arabic, the basic verb is a triliteral root which can be derived into fourteen different verb forms, each with a particular mode of action. To give an example, consider the word for "decline", *inhitat,* which was often used in *al-Muqtataf. Inhitat* comes from the root *h-t-t,* which connotes downward movement. In its simplest form, verb form I, *hatta* means to put something down or to reduce something. *Inhitat* is the verbal noun of the passive verb form VII, meaning to descend, decrease or decline, albeit passively. The triliteral root system offers an almost unlimited range of noun derivations, making the Arabic language extremely flexible for conceptual expansion. Each root contains a multitude of possibilities to convey nuances and particularities.

[223] "al-Lugha al-ᶜArabiyya wa al-Najah" ("The Arabic Language and Success"), *Al-Muqtataf* VI (1881), 352. See also, Daniëls, Helge. "Linguistic Conservatism as the Basis for Political Revolution?" *Antwerp Papers in Linguistics* 106 (2004): 86. The quote is Daniëls' translation.
[224] Ibid, 86.

Historically, imported words had been absorbed into the Arabic language so that its foreign origin was concealed, since "according to classical rules, derivations should be made from verbal roots only."[225] This process is called *ishtiqaq* (lit. derivation). The other strategy for implementing words was called *ta^c^rib,* or arabicizing, which meant purely transliterating foreign words. As al-Bustani wrote, in a defence of Arabic in the face of foreign "contamination:"

> Those who claim it is not possible to advance on the ladder of civilization using the Arabic language may not realize the merits of this language. Its reform is more feasible and effective than the attempt to civilize Arabs using various foreign languages.[226]

Al-Bustani, scared that Syria was bound to become "the Babel of languages" in addition to being the "Babel of religions," watched the influx of foreign terms effectuated by the rapid technology of the press with discontent.[227] He did, however, agree to the overall challenge: "The Arabic idiom," he said, "while abundantly rich in expressing old ideas is in dire want of terms to suit modern needs."[228]

When the Middle East increasingly became acquainted with foreign concepts in the nineteenth century, the Arabic Academies preferred the method of analogical derivation, or *ishtiqaq,* but there was no official policy of guidelines apart from the general influence of the classical legacy. In most cases, it was up to the writers and journalists themselves to choose the right word, through *ishtiqaq* or *ta^c^rib.* This spurred intensive lexicographic experimentation, and there is a growing corpus on conceptual change in the Arab *nahda.*[229] The objective of conceptual history is to find semantic traces of cognitive change; how epistemological re-orientation manifests itself in language. As Reinhardt Koselleck has contended, a central feature of conceptual change in what he calls the threshold era of modernity (the "Saddle period" which he takes to be roughly 1750-1850), is the advent of "moving concepts", concepts that contain a temporal dimension in that they connotate movement forward into a future.[230] Florian Zemmin and Henning Sievert has proposed to

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[225] Stetkevych, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language,* 9.
[226] Al-Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya.* 120.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Glaß, "Popularizing Sciences through Arabic Journals in the Late 19th Century," in *Changing Identities,* ed. Heindrich. (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag 1994): 346.
[229] Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition;* Abu-Uksa, *Freedom in the Arab world*; Khuri-Makdisi, "The Conceptualization of the Social."
[230] Koselleck and Richter, "Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6 (2011).

look at the *nahda* through the concept of "Saddle period," calling the new media landscape a "productive problem space" for the production of specifically modern concepts, which through contestation and repetition added a temporal dimension to ideas of the social and political.[231]

Viewing the *nahda* through a temporality lens is fruitful precisely because of all the temporal metaphors invoked at that time. Notwithstanding the decline/progress-dialectic, the discourse abounded with tropes that conveyed temporal change or intensity. The concept of *nahda* itself (renaissance, awakening, lit. rising/getting up) is arguably the most important one. It was made popular by Jurji Zaydan, who incidentally was a contributing editor of *al-Muqtqtaf* for some time before founding his own *al-Hilal*. I cannot find the term "*nahda*" anywhere in my source material, i.e. in *al-Muqtqtaf's* Beirut years (1876-1885), but the imagery of rising up, elevating and shedding the "darkness" is everywhere to be found. As are calls to "the countrymen" (*abna' al-watan*) to take matters into their own hands and participate in the progress of the nation. Especially the word *irtiqa'* (ascendance) conveys this idea. Being "in decline" essentially means being between two civilizational highs. *Irtiqa'* – and eventually *nahda* – signaled the progressive path away from the decline.

Here, it is useful to separate the analysis of abstract concepts from that of concrete objects. Several Western abstract concepts were assimilated into the Arabic language by way of analogical derivation (*ishtiqaq*) or by finding Arabic words that roughly connoted the same ideas. Concepts such as *tamaddun* (civilization), *taqaddum* (progress), and *tatawwur* (evolution) are examples of this. For most of these concepts, *al-Muqtataf* played a secondary role, not coining them, but frequently invoking them and thus assisting the process of making them familiar to a growing audience, although the popularization of the concept for evolution (*tatawwur*) was first and foremost *al-Muqtataf's* credit.[232] *Al-Muqtataf's* primary contribution to linguistic change in the late nineteenth-century is, however, its introduction of foreign terminology into Arabic's lexicography.

The editors faced a linguistic challenge: how could they disseminate modern ideas of science and technology when the appropriate terminology was non-existent? There was certainly a long tradition in Arabic for scientific terminology, and there was a vast lexicon in use for specific terms

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[231] Zemmin and Sievert, "Conceptual History of the Near East," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 16, no. 2 (2021), 16.
[232] Elshakry, *Reading Arabic,* 32.

in chemistry, for example, but new inventions such as the microscope and the telephone, and a variety of new scientific disciplines had yet no Arabic equivalents. Consequently, the editors' goal to be advocates of science dissemination demanded that they acted as translators as well.

Many of the terms that first appeared in the journal "shaped the subsequent lexicon of science writings in Arabic."[233] The editors intended for the terminology to be as precise as possible and therefore often transliterated terms instead of translating them. "Analogies [*isthiqaq*], by definition, are of limited designative capacity; they are useful for general orientation, but are not designed for precise identification," as Ayalon contends.[234] Sarruf and Nimr instead chose the method of *ta^crib,* "arabifying" words. This was not without controversy. Most notably, Ibrahim al-Yaziji, the son of bible translator Nasif al-Yaziji, was an outspoken critic of the journal's tendency for loan words. To his critics, Sarruf replied: "The mode of *al-Muqtataf* is to adhere to the rules of the Arabic language, but its rules comprise that any topic is worth being described by its own mode."[235] According to Sarruf, they were well within what was deemed acceptable in terms of the rules of Arabic.

In other words, their strategy was deliberate. They introduced new concepts rapidly, and mostly in an arabicized, transliterated form, such as microscope (*mikruskub),* spectroscope (*sbiktruskub*), syphilis (*sifilis*) and battery (*battariyya*). Even where there existed an Arabic word, such as for thermometer (*mizan al-harara*), they opted for the transliterated *tirmumitir*.[236] In terms of visuals, this "break" with lexicographical norms must have been somewhat disruptive in the reading experience. For a literate Arab who is used to a standard format for Arabic's visual appearance – the strict organization of triliteral roots in their various forms – a foreign, transliterated word must have stood out as exotic additions, which arguably enhanced the feeling of awe that the editors' wished to induce in their readers. In terms of the materiality of language, its visible form on a page produces certain effects, and in *al-Muqtataf's* case, the strangeness of the foreign terminology partially helped their intended message in that it drew the readers' focus nearer.

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[233] Ibid.
[234] Ayalon, *Language and Change,* 128.
[235] Glaß, "Popularizing Sciences," 346. The translation is Glaß'.
[236] *Al-Muqtataf* I (1876), 34. Badger's dictionary from 1881 shows that *mizan al-harara* was in use: Badger, *An English-Arabic lexicon,* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881).

As mentioned in the last chapter, *al-Muqtataf* largely contributed to the familiarization of different scientific disciplines, which themselves were under construction, both in Europe and in the Middle East. The editors used transliterations when addressing the different disciplines almost without exception. For instance, paleantology became *pilintulujia,* physiology *fisiulujia* and biology *biulujia*. For the latter, Badger's dictionary from 1881 show that there was an Arabic equivalent to biology, namely ᶜ*ilm al-haiyah,* in use at the time. In an article on biology, they editors opted for the Greek term but nevertheless added the appendage: (i.e. the science of life [ᶜ*ilm al-haiyah*] from the Greek words Bios and Logos)."[237]

Indeed, they were not without sympathy for their readers who might find the influx of foreign words confusing. They often added explanations in Arabic after introducing their neologisms. They also used illustrations in articles on technological artifacts, so that their readers immediately formed visual representations of the object they were presented with. From 1883 onwards, they provided a glossary, or *mu*ᶜ*aribat* (lit. arabicized words) with definitions to the transliterated terms they were using. In the introduction to the first glossary, they legitimized their choice to transliterate:

> There is no secret that the sciences are progressing, and that new machines are invented, and new materials discovered. Those who create these new machines or invent the new materials, must give them new names. Then, when these innovations or discoveries travel from country to country, they keep the names they were given, just like what happened when the Arabs transferred knowledge from the Greeks and Persians, and when the Franks transferred knowledge from the Arabs. […] We need to arabicize [*ta'rib*] the words because the innovation in science and industry continues.[238]

If abstract concepts, as we saw above, gained a temporal dimension – became "moving objects" – what kind of temporalities were made possible through *al-Muqtataf's* direct transfer of technological vocabulary? I would argue that the editors were facilitating the emergence of a *progressive simultaneity* in which knowledge produced at any part of the globe was directly useful and applicable in their own region. Quotes such as the one above show that the editors of *al-Muqtataf* understood themselves as being part of a global tradition of knowledge production, not simply a

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[237] *Al-Muqtataf* I (1876), 79.
[238] *Al-Muqtataf* VIII, (1883), 107-08.

Western one. Their use of the Greek terminologies rather than making efforts to translate them by the *ishtiqaq* method further emphasize this. The editors believed that they were a part of a continuous knowledge production in which the origin of knowledge was less important than accurately understanding and implementing it. Just like the translators of the Bible had opted for words without Islamicate associations to linguistically demarcate a Christian identity, as Issa has argued, so did *al-Muqtataf*'s editors choose words that emphasized their ambition for a cosmopolitan identity.

Furthermore, their objects of inquiry – scientific and technological development – moved at a pace that did not afford time for "slow, natural processes of assimilations."[239] The editors' mission was to equip their readers with the right tools to "keep up" with the civilizational progress that they saw elsewhere. There was also a practical reason for this. The short intervals between publications did not necessarily afford time for excessive lexicographic consideration, and as in the case of *al-Muqtataf,* a large corpus of new words was introduced as transliterations which only later were up for discussions in the wider community.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced how the journal's editors approached language as a structure that could realize certain epistemologies and curtail others. Their frequent articles on language's malleability and historicity show that they were entering into a discussion on the Arabic language with a certain self-consciousness. Since the language was fundamental in the Arab's heritage, they could not modify it without at the same time legitimizing why they did so. However, the meticulous process of the Bible translation had opened spaces for linguistic alteration, and the editors followed the ideal of the translators to offer an Arabic that was clear, precise, and elegant at the same time. Issa's argument about the commoditization of the Bible can very well be repeated for the case of *al-Muqtataf.* They were entering into a media landscape which was increasingly being conditioned by a modern capitalist system for supply and demand. Since the editors wanted their message to travel as widely as possible, the style they used had to be transparent, not elusive. Moreover, the genre they were developing, journalism, provided new possibilities for developing a "telegraphic" style.

[239] Stetkevych, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language,* 12.

The linguistic frivolity of *al-Muqtataf's* editors was a series of speech acts that challenged the structural capacities of the language itself. The editors were consciously strategizing how to convey their message in the most efficient way and molded the language to fit this aim. In so doing, they "performed progress" linguistically by aligning themselves to an international community for knowledge production, while actively legitimizing their choices each step of the way. *Al-Muqtataf's* contribution to stylistic and lexicographic innovations in Arabic was thus not a historical by-product, but a contingent historical event resulting from the editors' intentions, trials, and strategies to mediate change.

CONCLUSION

Several studies on the Arab *nahda* show how large-scale changes such as the adjustment to a globalized, capitalist market became apparent in discourse and culture, but few have shown the minute details of how these come together and get intimately entangled on one and the same level, as they did in *al-Muqtataf*. In this thesis, I have argued for the necessity of understanding epistemologies as results of intricate synergies between materials and mentalities. If we are to understand the *nahdawis* as partaking in an "autogenetic enterprise" and not as latecomers to an already established Western modernity, we need to understand the locality and particularity of their cultural production. The material underpinnings of certain concepts, such as "progress," reveal their cultural and geographic specificities in such a way that it becomes impossible to speak about them as adopted or appropriated.

All historical concepts are assemblages, co-constituted by a variety of different trends, impulses, and materials. So too with *al-Muqtataf*'s idea of progress. The editors drew on a mixture of local impulses: both the liberal tendencies of their American missionary sponsors and the rich archives of Arab history, as well as their first-hand experience with modern technologies such as the printing press. They were trying to – literally – mobilize a time within which they could meaningfully act. In doing so, they stabilized a historical timeline and staked out the path for what they believed to be a sound and prosperous future.

Their editors' discourse cannot be discerned from their position as avant-gardists in a rapidly changing environment for knowledge transmission. This thesis has argued that their fascination with movement, history, and progress was, in part, an *effect* of this position. The journal's contribution to create a notion of "progress" was in part a result of its infrastructure – its periodicity, distribution, serialization of public discourse; the collage-like structure of knowledge dissemination, standardization of the Arabic language, and visual changes such as the eschewing of calligraphy and ornaments. In fact, one can hardly envision a discourse such as *al-Muqtataf's* on the pages of traditional, ornamented manuscripts. The process-oriented temporal regime presented by the journal was arguably crafted as much by the galleys of the printing press houses as through the words that they printed. Just as maps produce spatial orders, temporal orders are established by watches, calendars, or – as it were – periodical journals.

The editors' vision firmly rested on the conviction that scientific progress was not the doings of Europeans, but a collective human endeavor, to which the Arabs had duly contributed at a previous historical time. There was therefore no harm in entering into conversations about science and development because it did not imply that they surrendered to the "Western way," indeed, they warned against doing so. Rather, their focus on positivistic science, systematization, and rationalization of natural phenomena was meant to help resolve the inherent potential in the "Arab civilization." Their concept of progress was therefore not a derivative of the European, although they certainly overlapped. As I have shown in chapter II, the imagined progress of the "Arab civilization" was not a unilinear movement forward but stood in a dialectical relationship to the Arab past. It was construed as "revival" just as much "progress." Furthermore, as explicated in chapter III, the underlying logic of inscribing natural phenomena into information tables and lithographs was to organize a stable system in which the Arabs could enter the world stage of historical developments. The same conviction led the editors to introduce a vast glossary of international scientific terminology, meaning to realign the Arab world to global scientific developments, as I showed in chapter IV.

The structural and technological changes in the *nahda* went hand in hand with a re-organization of social, cultural, and political relations. Sarruf and Nimr's efforts were symptomatic of a wider restructuring of society. Hence, we should understand *al-Muqtataf* as a cultural producer in a reflexive sense, due to the way the editors navigated the changing landscape, responding to and reproducing – in effect representing – the material changes that marked the late nineteenth century Arab world. The *nahdawis* sensed that they were on the threshold to a different time, but it is difficult for the historian to study what this felt like. Discourse analysis only brings us half-way close to an answer; the rhythm of everyday life can never be fully encapsulated in words. This thesis has combined an STS reading with the insights of temporality studies and argued that any object has its own embodied temporality that comes into view when interacting with other objects. This reminds us that time is not pre-given, but emergent. A personal or collective sense of time is therefore a negotiation between innumerous different time-standards, and ultimately synchronizing to some over others.

The editors of *al-Muqtataf* sought precisely to set out a new tempo for the "Arab civilization," and by paying attention to the tangible products of their efforts we may catch a glimpse of the

hopes, prospects, anxieties, and frustrations they were addressing. There were, of course, many other temporal schemes in the late-nineteenth century Beirut than the one provided by *al-Muqtataf*. I am not claiming that the periodical reshaped the temporal organization of the Syrian society as a whole, seeing as it was a highly heterogeneous society, and it was only a small part of the literate elite that subscribed to the journal. I am suggesting, however, that it provided an alternative rhythm in the polyrhythmic whole, and that both its message and mediation became increasingly important in the dynamic social, cultural, and political landscape that was late nineteenth century Levant. It helped shape an infrastructure and itself represented an interface that could channel new experiences of time. The simultaneity established by the press was part of creating the present as a surface area for historically salient action. This came with a considerable normative dimension for the individual, precisely as the editors wished for in their aim to cultivate a historically conscious and scientifically minded Arab.

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