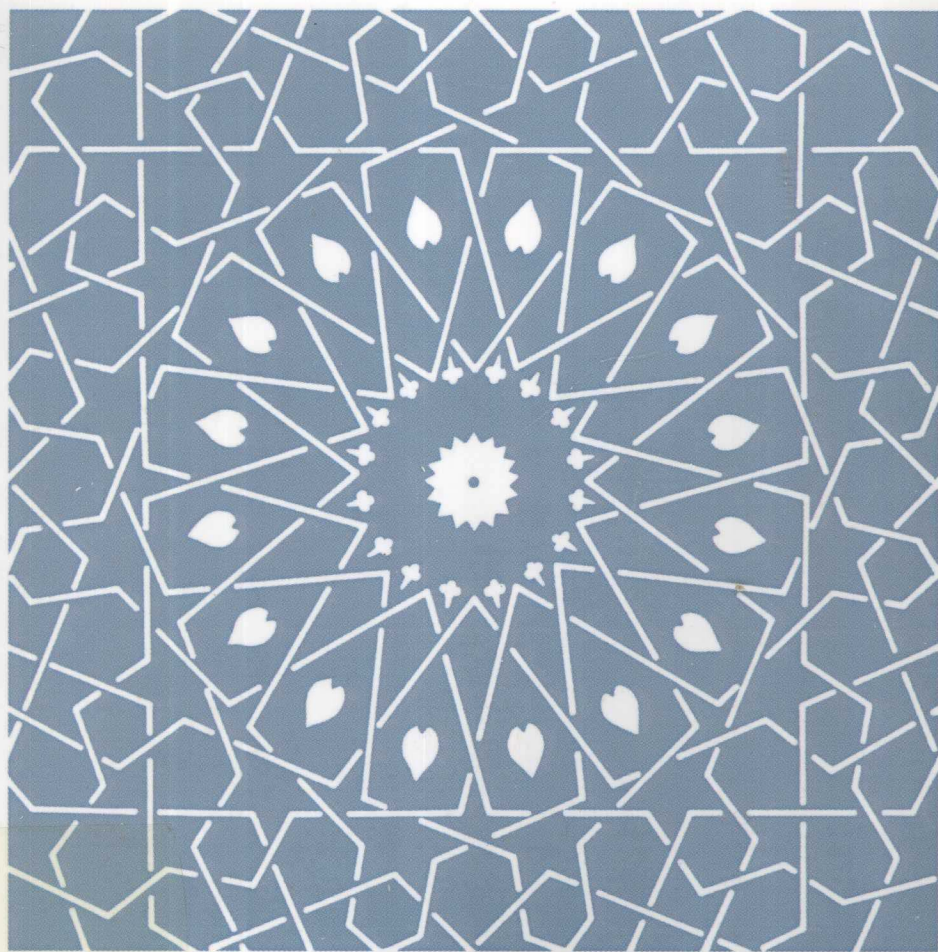


The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature

Modern Arabic literature

Edited by M.M. Badawi



MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

EDITED BY

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EDITORIAL NOTE

A consolidated bibliography for the whole of this volume would have been too cumbersome to handle and its usefulness would have been somewhat limited. It was decided therefore to have separate bibliographies for individual chapters even at the risk of some repetition. In conformity with the other volumes of the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* contributors have been asked, mainly for reasons of space, to reduce their footnotes as far as possible to the bare minimum and to confine their bibliographies to the more important works, although obviously some have found it easier to comply with this request than others and, indeed, in a number of chapters footnotes have been omitted altogether to make room for text. An exception to this rule has been made in the case of the last two chapters dealing with 'Poetry in the vernacular' and 'Arab women writers', respectively, as these are relatively unknown fields and it was felt that a fuller list of references might be of some help to scholars wishing to carry out further investigations in them. Because of the proliferation of studies of modern Arabic literature in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, and even Dutch and Polish, bibliographies have in general been confined to works in the English language. Since the Short Story has emerged as a major genre in modern Arabic literature, enjoying perhaps greater popularity with writers and readers alike than other genres, more space has been allotted to it in the bibliography to give the reader some idea of its size and scope.

I should like to thank all the staff at the Cambridge University Press who have helped in the production of this volume, especially Dr Katharina Brett. I am also grateful to Mrs Barbara Hird for compiling the index.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF EVENTS

1787	Death of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of the Wahhabi Movement in Arabia.
1798	Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt.
1801	French troops evacuate Egypt.
1805	Muhammad Ali becomes effective ruler of Egypt.
1806	Wahhabi forces led by Muhammad al-Saud occupy Mecca, in rebellion against the Ottoman Sultan.
1811	Muhammad Ali wipes out the Mamelukes.
1818	Ibrahim, son of Muhammad Ali, defeats the Wahhabis in Hijaz on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan.
1820s	British pacts with the Gulf Arab Sheiks.
1822	Muhammad Ali's Arabic printing press.
1830	French occupy Algeria.
1831-40	Egyptian occupation of Syria.
1832	Ibrahim defeats the Turks near Konya.
1833	Peace of Kutahya.
1839	British occupation of Aden. Turko-Egyptian war.
1840	London conference to settle Egyptian-Turkish relations.
1848	Muhammad Ali dies and is succeeded by Abbas (-1854).
1851-67	Alexandria-Cairo-Suez Railway built.
1860	Construction of the Suez Canal begun. Egyptians occupy Sudan. Civil war in Lebanon. Persecution of Christians in Damascus.
1861	Creation of autonomous Lebanon.
1863-80	Ismail Pasha of Egypt; in 1866 assumes the title Khedive.
1869	Suez Canal opened.
1875	Mixed Courts introduced in Egypt. Ismail sells his Suez shares to Britain.
1880-92	Tawfiq, Khedive of Egypt.
1881	French occupy Tunisia.
1882	Urabi rebellion against Khedive Tawfiq.

- British occupy Egypt, after defeating Urabi at Tall al-Kabir.
- 1883 Mahdi drives Egyptians out of Sudan.
- 1885 Khartoum attacked; Gordon killed. Mahdi dies and is succeeded by his Khalifah Abdullahi Abu Bakr.
- 1896 Kitchener defeats Mahdists at Umm Durman. Khalifah slain.
- 1901– Ibn Saud begins reconquest of Najd.
- 1906 The Dinshaway affair. Cromer's resignation.
- 1908 Revolution of the Young Turks.
- 1911–12 Italy captures Libya.
- 1914 Turkey in World War I. Abbas II deposed and Husayn Kamil made Sultan of Egypt by the British. Egypt declared a British Protectorate.
- 1916 Arab revolt in Hijaz.
- 1917 Balfour Declaration issued promising a Jewish National Home in Palestine.
- British take Baghdad. Conquest of Palestine. Fuad Sultan of Egypt.
- 1918 Arab Hashemite forces occupy Damascus.
- End of Ottoman rule in Arab lands.
- 1919 Egyptian revolution against the British, led by Saad Zaghlul, head of the Wafd.
- 1920 French mandates established for Syria and Lebanon, and British for Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq.
- Nationalist revolt in Iraq.
- Arab rising in Palestine.
- 1924 Abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate by Atatürk.
- 1924–25 Ibn Saud conquers Hijaz.
- 1925 Nationalist revolt in Syria.
- 1932 Saudi Arabian Kingdom proclaimed by Ibn Saud.
- End of British Mandate in Iraq.
- 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty, recognizing independence of Egypt.
- 1945 League of Arab States created.
- 1946 Britain recognizes independence of Transjordan, which becomes a monarchy.
- Syria and Lebanon become independent republics after the end of the Mandate.
- 1948 End of mandate for Palestine, establishment of State of Israel.
- Arab–Jewish war.
- 1949 First of various *coups d'état* in Syria.
- Assassination of Hasan al-Banna (b. 1906), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (1928).
- 1951 Libya becomes an independent Kingdom.

- 1952 Egyptian army revolution, abdication of King Farouk.
 1953 Egypt becomes a Republic.
 Husayn ibn Talal becomes King of Jordan.
- 1954 Colonel Gamal Abd al-Nasser becomes President of Egypt.
 1955 British evacuation of Suez Canal zone. Baghdad Pact signed with Iraq and Jordan.
- 1956 Sudan, Tunisia and Morocco become independent.
 Nasser nationalizes Suez Canal. Israeli invasion of Sinai and Anglo-French expedition in Suez. British/French forces withdrawn in 1956, and Israeli in 1957.
- 1957 Tunisia becomes a Republic, with Bourguiba as President.
 1958 Egypt and Syria form United Arab Republic.
 Revolution in Iraq, which becomes a Republic with Abdul Karim Kassem as President.
- 1960 Mauritania becomes independent.
 1961 Kuwait becomes independent.
 Syria secedes from the United Arab Republic. Egypt adopts Arab socialism.
- 1962 Algeria becomes independent after a prolonged and bloody war of independence.
 Republican revolution in Yemen. Royalist-Republican civil war.
- 1962-67 Egyptian forces fight on the side of the revolutionaries.
 1963 Baathist revolution in Syria.
 1967 Arab-Israeli war (June War). Israeli occupation of West Bank and Gaza.
- 1968 Republic of South Yemen.
 1969 King Idris of Libya ousted by young army officers, led by Colonel Muammar Qaddafi.
 Yasser Arafat becomes Chairman of Palestine Liberation Organization.
- 1970 Nasser dies and is succeeded by Anwar Sadat.
 1971 General Hafez Asad becomes President of Syrian Arab Republic.
 Qatar and Bahrain become independent.
 Formation of Union of Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujaira, Ras al-Khaima, Sharja and Umm al-Quwain).
- 1973 Arab-Israeli war (October War). Egyptian forces storm the Bar-lev line and cross the Suez canal.
 Emergence of oil as powerful weapon used by the Arab oil states.

- 1975- Lebanese civil war.
- 1977 President Sadat visits Jerusalem and addresses the Israeli Knesset.
- 1978-79 Iranian revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini, overthrow of Shah.
- 1978 Sadat signs the Camp David accord with Israel.
- 1979 Sadat signs the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty. Egypt isolated and expelled from the Arab League.
Saddam Husayn takes over as President of Iraq.
- 1979-88 Iraq-Iran war.
- 1981 President Sadat assassinated by Muslim fundamentalists and is succeeded by Husni Mubarak.
- 1982-84 Israeli invasion of Lebanon to crush the Palestinian Liberation Organisation led by Yasser Arafat.
- 1987- Palestinian *intifada*: uprising of Palestinian Arabs in territories occupied by Israel.
- 1989 (May) Egypt readmitted to the Arab League.
(December) Syria restores diplomatic relations with Egypt.
- 1990 (May) Republic of Yemen formed by the union of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen).
- 1990 (August) occupation and annexation of Kuwait by Saddam Husayn's Iraqi troops.
- 1991 (March) expulsion of Iraqi soldiers from Kuwait by Allied forces of the United Nations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I THE BACKGROUND

The Nahḍah

Compared with earlier periods of Arabic literature the Modern period, often referred to in Arabic as *al-Nahḍah* (= renaissance), requires an approach that is at once simpler and more complicated. While Classical Arabic literature can safely be regarded as fundamentally a continuum, Modern literature constitutes in certain important respects an entirely new departure, even though its break with the Classical has sometimes been exaggerated, for despite its borrowing of European forms such as drama and the novel, Modern literature never really completely severed its link with its past. The *Nahḍah* was in fact a product of a fruitful meeting of two forces: the indigenous tradition, and the imported western forms. Moreover, the change from the past was an extremely slow and gradual process. However, because of the profound influence exercised by western literature on the *Nahḍah*, it seems more natural to divide its treatment into chapters on poetry, the novel, short story, drama and literary criticism, much as one might do in a traditional survey of a western literature. But it would be wrong to be blind to the continuities in Arabic literature, Classical and Modern: continuities that have determined the manner of the Arabs' apprehension and hence adaptation of the imported genres. Equally, we would be guilty of distortion if we ignored the various important issues that seem to be peculiar to Modern Arabic literature, or at least to distinguish it from the literature of the west. By modern Arabic literature, it must be pointed out, is meant literature written exclusively in the Arabic language. The peculiarly modern phenomenon of Arab authors expressing themselves in their creative writing in a European language, be it in French or English, is no doubt both fascinating and important, and merits serious study for literary and extra-literary considerations, but strictly speaking it does not belong to *Arabic* literature and as such it had to be excluded from this survey. There is so much that has been and is being written in Arabic throughout the Arab world, which stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the

(Persian) Gulf and from the Northern Mediterranean to the heart of Africa, that in such a vast and fast-growing field the following treatment must perforce be rigorously selective.

Modern Arabic literature is obviously the literature of the modern Arab world, and this is generally assumed to begin with the French campaign in Egypt in 1798. The date is significant, for it marks the dramatic opening of the Arab world, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire, to the west, ultimately with momentous consequences for its political, economic, social and cultural development. For various reasons the modern renaissance of Arabic literature began to make itself felt in Egypt and Syria (which then included Lebanon), from which it spread slowly to the rest of the Arab world.

The Ottoman period

The Arabs had started their steady decline early in the sixteenth century with the rise to power of the Ottoman Turks who imposed their rule over virtually the whole of the Arab world: the Turks conquered Syria in 1516, Egypt in 1517, Algiers in 1516, Tripoli in 1555, Tunis in 1574, and established their rule in Iraq in 1639 and subsequently in Yemen and Hejaz. Only Central Arabia (Nejd) and Morocco remained independent of the Ottomans. Apart from North Africa, the conquered Arab territories continued to be governed, albeit in some cases nominally, by the Ottomans until early in the twentieth century.

The Arab territories were divided into provinces, each governed by an Ottoman pacha, a ruler responsible directly to the Sultan in Constantinople, with the help of officials, tax collectors and *Shari'ah* judges, all appointed by the central government, officially for one year only in order to ensure their obedience. Local elements such as ulema or notables were also made use of and gradually these often assumed considerable power, as in the case of Egypt where the Mamelukes regained effective control, with the Ottoman Pacha acting as the nominal governor. The vast majority of the Arabs were illiterate peasants bound to their village communities and families and engaged in a subsistence type of agriculture, though of course they had to pay the heavy taxes imposed upon them by the tax farmers. The rest of the Arabs, who lived in urban centres and enjoyed greater prestige and privileges, were largely craftsmen loosely organized and often affiliated to mystical orders of brotherhood together with merchants and ulema. Alike in town and in country an Arab then belonged to a cohesive body from which he seemed to derive some security. The phenomena of the landless

peasant and the urban lumpen proletariat, which provide the themes of much twentieth-century Arabic literature, were clearly not known prior to modern times.

With the weakening of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, the subject peoples suffered from an increasingly heavy burden of taxation, oppression by corrupt officials and tax farmers, insecurity caused by the local rulers' bloody struggles for power as well as periodic raids by Beduin tribesmen. Yet they continued to form an integrated society with commonly held views and assumptions about this world and the hereafter. They may have resented much of the ill-treatment they received at the hands of their Turkish rulers and the rapacious and bloodthirsty warring Mameluke Beys. Nevertheless, in the days prior to nationalism the Arabs felt strongly that they all constituted the Muslim *Ummah*, the Community of Believers, and that as defenders of the sacred law of *Sharī'ah* the Ottoman rulers had the right to be obeyed. Moreover, they lived in seemingly total cultural isolation from the west, smugly convinced of the superiority of the Muslim civilization.

The ulema, the guardians of the faith, were held in respect by the Ottoman rulers, yet because Turkish was the official language of the Empire, Arabic culture generally suffered for lack of sufficient patronage. In fact, the Ottoman period marks the nadir of Arabic literature. Although historians of literature may have exaggerated the decline, there is no doubt that the period is characterized by the absence of creativity and loss of vigour. It is usually described as the age of commentaries and compendia because a considerable portion of the output of writers and scholars consisted of commentaries on texts, and even commentaries on commentaries. By the time we reach the eighteenth century we find that prose writers and poets had become equally enamoured of an excessively ornate, artificial type of style in which more attention is given to manner than to matter. Their work generally lacked seriousness, while those who cared for the content of their writing tended to employ an undistinguished prose which was devoid of literary merit. In creative writing the themes were conventional: *maqāmah* – like prose epistles, pious verses in praise of the Prophet, popular sufi or ascetic poems, empty panegyrics addressed to local notables, celebrations of trivial social occasions and numerous lifeless and passionless love poems. With very few exceptions, such as the Egyptian Ḥasan Badrī al-Ḥijāzī (d. 1718) and the Syrian ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī (d. 1731), the imagery poets used was stock in trade and the language cliché-ridden: in short, it was a literature of an exhausted, inward-looking culture, albeit a complacent and perfectly self-satisfied one.

The French Campaign

Out of this complacency Arabic culture was rudely awakened when Bonaparte invaded Egypt in 1798. The extent of the shock suffered by the inhabitants can be gauged from the way the distinguished Egyptian historian 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Jabartī (1756–1825) opened his account of the year of the invasion, which he witnessed, in his chronicle *'Ajā'ib al-āthār fī l-tarājim wa'l-akhbār*: he regarded it as the year of the ultimate catastrophe, of the disastrous reversal of the natural order of things. Bonaparte, whose expedition in this strategically important country was an episode in the history of Anglo-French rivalry in imperial expansion which was designed to cut off Britain's route to India, made an announcement to the Egyptian people in which he posed as a champion of Islam and a liberator of Egypt from the tyrannical rule of the Mamelukes. Whatever they thought about this specious claim, the easy victory achieved by the French forces over the Mameluke army shocked Muslims out of their complacency, bringing home to them the enormous superiority, efficiency and military might of the west.

Bonaparte brought with him a team of French experts, scientists and scholars who undertook a thorough and systematic survey of Egypt and its resources: they conducted scientific experiments in the *Institut d'Egypte*, founded for that purpose, and published their findings in a newly established French language periodical. Bonaparte invited the chief ulema and notables, whom he regarded as leaders of the Egyptian people, to form an Administrative Council to participate in the French-controlled government of Egypt and in the promulgation of the legislation necessary for his proposed reforms in landownership and taxation, amongst other things. He had brought with him from the Vatican an Arabic language press, the very first Arabic printing press to enter Egypt, for the publication of French proclamations in Arabic.

The response of the Egyptians to the French was understandably a mixed one. They obviously admired their efficiency and organization, and their diligence in the construction of roads and factories. The educated among them, such as al-Jabartī and Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār, the teacher of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, who had the chance to visit the *Institut*, were impressed by its library and by some of the scientific experiments which they watched in something like uncomprehending wonder, and they were intrigued by the manners and ways of the French such as their dramatic entertainments. No doubt Egyptians were relieved to be rid of the Mamelukes who had been thoroughly discredited by their ignominious defeat at the hands of the French. On the other hand, despite being given the chance of the experience

of limited representative government, the Egyptians felt humiliated at being ruled by the infidel French whose revolutionary doctrines the Ottoman government had thoroughly condemned. They were critical of the behaviour of the French forces and what they regarded as the immorality of French women, and were alarmed at the dangerous example they had set to some of their own Muslim women. Moreover, when in response to the blockade imposed upon them by the Anglo-Ottoman fleets in the Mediterranean the French forces of occupation had to resort to harsh measures of taxation, the Egyptian people, led by the Azhar, rebelled and the rebellion was ruthlessly put down by the French troops some of whom committed scandalous atrocities.

Although the French expedition is generally judged as a military failure for the French, its significance for Egypt (and the Arab world) cannot be exaggerated, and that is in spite of claims made by some revisionist historians. True, the occupation lasted only three years, the Egyptians' exposure to western learning and science, as well as representative self-government, was too brief to be meaningful, but the campaign brought to an end the isolation of the Arab world from the west. It signalled the beginning of a process of western expansion and colonization, which in the course of time resulted in practically the entire Arab world falling under the domination of western powers, notably France and Britain. France invaded Algeria in 1830, Britain occupied Aden in 1839, France occupied Tunisia in 1881, Britain Egypt in 1882, Italy seized Libya in 1911-12, and in 1920 France acquired mandates over Syria and Lebanon, while the mandates for Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq went to Britain. Even Morocco, which had retained its independence for a long time, fell prey to the ambitions of France and Spain which in 1904 concluded a secret agreement that divided Morocco into two spheres of influence between them, and in 1912 Morocco was declared a French protectorate. Britain imposed her authority upon the Arab rulers of the small Persian Gulf states by means of treaties which go as far back as the 1820s. The bloody and unequal encounter with the west which varied in ferocity and violence from one Arab country to another and according to whether the colonizer was France, Britain or Italy, had such a profound and traumatic effect upon the Arab imagination, even though it was sometimes latent and slow to reveal itself, that to this day the East/West opposition has remained one of the leading motifs in Arabic literature. In their search for identity, Arab writers have for many generations often tried to define themselves in relation to the other, the other being in most cases the European.

Likewise, the nationalist struggle for independence became a permanent, indeed at times obsessive preoccupation for writers for many years: the end

of the mandate in Iraq came only in 1932, the Anglo-Egyptian treaty which gave Egypt her relative independence was concluded in 1936, the mandate for Syria and Lebanon came to an end in 1941. In 1946 Transjordan attained her independence, Libya in 1951, Sudan, Tunisia and Morocco in 1956, Kuwait in 1961, while Algeria achieved hers after a prolonged and bloody struggle as late as 1962. In 1948 the mandate for Palestine came to an end, and the state of Israel was established. Even after the Arab states formally attained their independence, they remained within the spheres of influence of western powers for a long time, in fact until Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir appeared on the scene after the Egyptian Army Revolution of 1952, which in its turn helped to push Arabic literature in other directions.

The rise of Muhammad Ali

The whole course of modern Arabic literature might have been entirely different if it had not been for one indirect result of the French campaign. This was the emergence of Muhammad Ali, the Albanian officer who came to Egypt with the Ottoman forces to help drive out the French and who, in the confusion that followed the departure of the French, managed, through sheer genius, machiavellian intrigues and utter ruthlessness to fill the void and become, in 1805, the ruler of Egypt (1805-1848). He created a dynasty which ruled Egypt until its last descendant, King Farouk, was forced to abdicate by the revolutionary junta led by Nāṣir. Inspired by the example of the Ottoman Sultan Selim III, the ambitious Muhammad Ali launched a more successful and comprehensive programme of military reform along the lines of the superior and well-organized western armies of which he had first-hand experience. To this end he employed all the available resources in Egypt, and in so doing he altered the economic, political and social structure of the country. After he had got rid of the Mameluke adversaries in a notorious massacre, he destroyed the forces that had helped him to attain power, including the class of Azhār ulema, who were shorn of their economic and political influence. He imposed state ownership of land, abolished the old system of tax farming and had the monopoly of trade. By introducing intensive cotton cultivation in the 1820s and improving irrigation, transport and marketing, he laid the foundation of modern Egyptian economy: through the export of cotton Egyptian agriculture became integrated into the international economy. This he achieved with the help of European experts, technicians and officers, who enabled him to create an army and a navy strong enough to wage successful wars in other Arab countries and even to pose a threat to the authority of the Ottoman Sultan himself. When the Sultan refused his request to grant the

governorship of Syria to his son Ibrahim as a reward for his assistance during the Greek rebellion, the armies of Muhammad Ali occupied Syria and threatened Istanbul. The threat was ultimately averted through the interference of the allied European powers whose policy it was to try to protect the weak Ottoman Empire from total collapse. As a result of the 1841 Treaty of London, signed by England, Austria, Prussia and Russia, Muhammad Ali was forced to return Syria to the Sultan and to limit his army to 18,000 men in return for hereditary right to the rule of Egypt under the suzerainty of the Sultan. Muhammad Ali recompensed his functionaries and members of his own family by giving them land to develop, thus gradually creating a new feudal structure, which was to replace the old landed class of Mamelukes and others and which in the course of time and under his successors increased immeasurably the gap between the rich and the poor.

Modernization of education

Muhammad Ali imported not only western technicians and military advisors, but also western forms of education, and sent local Arabs on educational missions to the west (mainly to France), to learn the secret of its military supremacy. In 1816 he started a process of superimposing upon the country a western type of educational system which had very little in common with the traditional religious Azhar system. He set up a number of modern technological and military schools in which modern sciences and European languages were taught and in which some of the teachers were Italian, French and later English. Despite his shrewdness and practical intelligence, Muhammad Ali was not an educated man with any interest in European culture: his aim was strictly limited to what was conducive to the building up of a powerful régime with a strong army. The members of his educational missions in Europe were all technically army officers, with specific ranks; they had to follow an army discipline and were not even allowed to make a tour of the countries in which they were studying. Nevertheless, it was impossible for these young men to keep interest in western technology in the long run entirely separate from interest in some of the cultural values underlying that technology. Furthermore, the setting up of a new secular system of education, different from the traditional theocentric one, a system which produced men who were to occupy important posts in the government, was bound to result eventually in the weakening of the authority of traditional values. Arab Muslim society therefore ceased to be the 'closed' culture it had been for so long. After the frustration of his military ambitions, Muhammad Ali lost interest in his