

*The*  
PRESS  
*in the*  
ARAB  
MIDDLE  
EAST

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*A History*

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AMI AYALON

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in the  
Arab Middle East

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Printed in the United States of America  
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*For my mother, Sara  
and to the memory of my father, Moshe*

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# Abbreviations

BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
EI <sup>2</sup>	Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
JA	Journal Asiatique
JQ	Journalism Quarterly
MEJ	Middle East Journal
MES	Middle Eastern Studies
MW	Muslim World
RMM	Revue du Monde Musulman
WI	Die Welt des Islams

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# Preface

This study is not a comprehensive history of the Arabic press. No single volume can tell the multifaceted story of the Arabic press and Arab journalism during the long period of their existence without leaving out far too many essential components. Broad as an ocean, the story invites explorers to wander and discover almost endlessly. What I have tried here is, more modestly, to chart the main phases in the evolution of the Arabic press and consider some of the major issues that shaped its role in state and society between 1800 and 1945. This work, then, is no more than an introduction to the history of that important institution in the Arab countries, leaving ample room for much further exploration, inquiry, and appraisal.

The undertaking, however, is somewhat ambitious in its span of time and geography. It examines developments in a sizable portion of the Arab region, the eastern Arab lands, including Egypt, the countries of the Fertile Crescent and the Arabian Peninsula, and to some extent the Ottoman capital—with whose history I am better familiar. Yet a glance would seem to indicate that quite a few of the findings discussed here—and their social, political, and cultural implications—largely typified the evolution of the press in the western Arab countries of the Maghrib as well. The story spans a long stretch of time, from the onset of the nineteenth century to the end of World War II—the formative era in the evolution of the medium, its infancy and adolescence, during which the political, social, and cultural roles of the Arab press were molded. The post-World War II period ushered in a new era when, under changed circumstances, the press began to play a different role, so different indeed as to justify another study altogether.

The term “Arab press” implies an all-embracing generalization, yet in different parts of the region, the press, like other institutions, developed in distinct ways and varying rhythms. Decades sometimes separated the starting point of press development in one locality from that of another; many years of journalistic trial and error elapsed in some places before the occupation emerged elsewhere for the first time.

Nor were the phases of evolution equal in length and intensity everywhere. Still, the generalization is not altogether invalid. As we shall see, despite broad variance, society in the region responded to the idea and assimilated it in so like a fashion as to render local differences secondary in importance.

Our inquiry focuses on the written Arabic political press, that is, newspapers and other periodicals of political reportage and discussion. The broadcast media were excluded from this study, for although radio did appear in certain places in the 1930s, it clearly belonged to a later era in the relationship between journalism and society (television was not introduced into the region until the late 1950s). A related subject, which remained outside this study as well, was the simultaneous emergence of the non-Arabic press in the Arab countries. Newspapers and periodicals in languages other than Arabic were read by a small sector of society whose needs and outlook were generally different from those of the writers and readers of the Arabic press; those publications merit treatment in a separate study. Arabic journals devoted primarily to nonpolitical matters—literary magazines, specialized professional journals, women's periodicals, juvenile publications, and so forth—although occasionally dealt with in the context of the journalistic scene generally, were not explored systematically in this study and are best treated separately as well. As will be amply evident, however, the line between political and other types of journalism was seldom clear-cut.

Within these confines, the study focuses on a relatively small number of leading periodicals, both because they represent the essence of the development of the Arabic press story and because they are the most fully extant. We know far less about the myriad "ephemeral" publications (a recurring adjective in any study of the Arabic press), which generally left little impact on the community and which often disappeared without leaving a trace. Since initiating a journal was far easier than sustaining it, the records of periodicals that appeared in the region indicate hundreds of publications that died out as swiftly as they emerged, about which we know practically nothing. These anonymous publications constituted a large proportion of the fabric of the Arabic press, but, for the most part, will have to remain unexplored.

A considerable body of literature exists on various aspects of the Arabic press, most of it by Arab authors. This includes both studies of the history of the press in specific Arab countries and surveys covering the entire region. Countries in which the press had a relatively long history, primarily Egypt and Lebanon, are covered in detail by scores of works dealing with particular periods, specific newspapers, and the careers of individual journalists. A great many of these studies, often inspired by Philip di Tarrazi's pioneering *Ta'rikh al-sihafa al-'Arabiyya* (1913, 1914, 1933, in four volumes), follow a somewhat mechanical pattern of chronological enumeration of the appearance and disappearance of the many periodicals in one place or another. Seldom do they

conceptualize the press as being a novel social institution whose evolution reflected complex political and cultural developments. A few works, however, are more analytical — notably Juzif Iliyas' study of the Syrian press; several of Ibrahim 'Abduh's, and Ramzi Mikha'il Jayyid's work on the Egyptian press; and 'Imad al-Sulh's biography of the writer and journalist Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq. The sociopolitical and cultural roles of the Arabic press have only begun to be explored by Arab as well as Western scholars in recent years, most typically in studies devoted to individual newspapers or journalists (a favorite topic for doctoral dissertations). Notable among such studies are Tom McFadden's work on daily journalism in several Arab countries (by now over four decades old, yet still highly illuminating); the collection of essays on Arab journalists and writers edited by Marwan Buheiry; William Rugh's general survey that focuses on the post-World War II Arab press; and Beth Baron's study of the women's press in Egypt. In all that has been published so far there is no paucity of information and detail. Indeed, the abundance of detail is sometimes so overwhelming as to blur the story's main contours. The first part of the present study, therefore, is devoted to portraying the overall picture, followed by an examination of social, political, economic, and cultural aspects in the second part.

A few technical points should be noted. The terms "Arab" and "Arabic" ("Arab society," "the Arabic press," etc.) are used to denote the entire community that spoke, read and wrote in Arabic, including Egyptians. Although admittedly somewhat problematic, especially in the pre-World War I context, the terms are preferable to more cumbersome, if more accurate, alternatives. The terms "journal," "paper," and "newspaper" are similarly inaccurate, as they are applicable to periodicals that are diverse in nature and frequency. Here, the first two are used loosely and interchangeably to denote any publication issued periodically, while the third is employed more specifically to depict periodicals devoted primarily to news and political opinion, often, though not always, dailies. Every publication title is translated in parentheses, whenever translatable, the first time it is cited in the text. These, and all other renditions of names and passages quoted from Arabic, are the author's own translation. Sources in the footnotes are given in an abbreviated form, with full bibliographical references appearing in the References. Arabic is transliterated according to accepted practice in the field of Middle Eastern studies, but simplified by the omission of diacritical marks so as not to scare away the nonprofessional reader.

There remains the pleasant duty of thanking the many friends and colleagues who assisted me in so many ways during the various stages of this project. Much of the research and almost all of the writing was accomplished while I was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., between August 1991 and June 1992. The extraordinary scholarly atmosphere of this splendid institution and the superb cooperation of the entire staff constituted an

inestimable contribution to this study. The staff of the Center's library, under Dr. Zdenek V. David's leadership, deserve special thanks for their devoted efforts on my behalf. Of the other fellows at the Center that year, the late Professor Elie Kedourie (whose premature death in June 1992 was a painful blow), Dr. Sylvia Kedourie, and Professor Pierre Cachia availed themselves for frequent discussions on matters presented in this book and offered invaluable suggestions and inducement. I am profoundly grateful to them.

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*Tel Aviv*  
*May 1994*

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# Introduction

Communication is the cement that holds a community together. The community's viability as a whole, as well as that of its individual components, depends for its functioning on the ability to transmit and receive messages. Vital in the normal course of events, effective communication is even more crucial in times of crisis or rapid change, when a society is subject to unusual pressures and the threat of disruption. In such exigencies, normal communication modes may have to be modified, supplemented, or supplanted by other means so as to meet new needs, if the community is to retain its cohesion. Effective communication, while in itself not sufficient to guarantee a society's proper functioning, is undoubtedly indispensable in achieving that goal.

In the pre-twentieth century Muslim Middle East, an effective communications system existed that was in harmony with society's needs and facilitated the existence of a cohesive political, social, and cultural order. Two basic factors contributed to this harmony. One was the prevalence of the Islamic ethos, which dominated every sphere of the society's life. Rulers and subjects, the educated and the illiterate, townspeople, villagers, and nomads alike all subscribed to this ethos, so that there was a collective acceptance of the same values and a common approach to all major issues. The prescribed precepts of the faith dominated the principles of government, the fundamentals of law, social relations, moral conduct, and rules of personal behavior and family relationships, as well as the community's view of the world beyond Islam. A related unifying component was the recognition of one language, Arabic, as the medium in which activities related to the faith were performed, even in those parts of the region where other vernaculars were in use. The second factor facilitating communication was the dominance over the region by a single state during extensive periods in Islamic history, including the four centuries preceding World War I. The Ottoman Empire, which held sway over the Arabic-speaking provinces beginning in the early sixteenth century, was governed by a sophisticated hierarchical network of institutions ultimately subservient

to the will of one sovereign. This long dominance produced institutionalized modes of dialogue between rulers and subjects that enabled the latter to be aware of what to expect from their potentates. The Islamic principles underlying the work of government further eased its communication with the subjects.

The government had a variety of means at its disposal for announcing its positions and demands, both to its own subjects and to the governments of other states. Major events, such as the transfer of power, victories in battle, or the extension of state rule to new territories were most commonly proclaimed through coins and stone inscriptions on public buildings, city gates, public fountains, and the like. Military triumph was, in addition, declared through a *fathnameh*, literally a "victory announcement," a written document dispatched to state officials throughout the empire and to other rulers beyond its borders.<sup>1</sup> These were special devices whose solemn nature befitted the importance of the events they made known.

But there were myriad other matters, less dramatic in nature, whose communication required means to convey messages effectively to the state's subjects on a routine basis. This need was met largely through two channels. One was the mosque, where prayer leaders (*imam*, pl. *a'imma*) and preachers (*khatib*, pl. *khutaba*), who were under government control, transmitted official notices to all males gathered for the weekly Friday prayer. The sermon preceding the prayers (*khutba*) was normally devoted wholly or in part to conveying political information emanating from or associated with the sovereign. This was the accepted method of announcing accession to power, the deposition of rulers, or rebellion by local potentates. A similar role was also played by roving preachers who were likewise in the employ of the government.<sup>2</sup> The other channel was a network of public criers or announcers (*munadi*) employed by the authorities to deliver official notifications of the imposition of new taxes, the anticipated arrival of a new governor, dates of religious holidays, the demise of important personalities, the arrival and departure of caravans and ships, and more common matters such as lost and found items and the names of escaped convicts. Such criers were employed in every town during the Ottoman period. They used to position themselves prominently on highways, in the marketplace, or near public buildings, calling for attention of the public and, after making an announcement, enjoining those present to inform the rest of the neighborhood. "On that day," ran a typical account of this practice in 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti's chronicle of Egypt for the Islamic year 1200 (1785 A.D.), "Salim Agha Mustahfizan rode [his horse] and announced (*nada*) in the markets that the Greeks, galleonmen (*qalyunjiyya*), and Turks should go back to their country. Those of them who failed to do so within three days would be put to death."<sup>3</sup> Anti-government rebels often used the same means for publicizing their positions.

News and opinion of unofficial nature circulated within society through a variety of channels. Again, the mosque, with its daily prayer sessions and weekly public gathering on Friday, was a major conduit for the regular communication of information, rumors, and ideas. So were the city bazaar, the cafe, the neighborhood barbershop, and similar traditional gathering places in the towns and villages. The caravan-sary—the merchant convoy inn—was a key source of foreign news, as was the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, when international information was exchanged and then transmitted to fellow countrymen back home.<sup>4</sup> All of this communication was oral, having roots in a period when reading and writing were uncommon and printing unknown. Not only official announcements and news were thus conveyed, but literary works, stories, and poetry as well. People were accustomed to conveying and receiving messages of any kind, even very long ones, orally rather than visually, a tradition that reflected the high rate of illiteracy in most of Arab society until the twentieth century. This tradition, of course, was not unique to the Middle East; it was paralleled in many other societies. In Europe and the European colonies abroad the cultural scene was quite similar until the late eighteenth century.

The general political stability under Ottoman rule and the prevalence of age-old sociocultural conventions guaranteed that these channels of communication sufficed for society's needs. Both the state and its subjects were satisfied that they received all the intelligence they required. Such, too, had been the case in premodern Europe, but with the close of the Middle Ages, vast changes in every sphere of life there affected communications as well. Growing individualism and the emergence of capitalism, the gradual pluralization of political systems, private economic enterprise and, consequently, the emergence of new sociopolitical ideas created a new hunger for information. The individual's subordination to the state and to rigid sociocultural conventions began to give way to free competition in commerce as well as in politics, and those who took part in this new movement needed the compass of reliable news to help them navigate in unfamiliar and often dangerous waters. The invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century was the major breakthrough in the quest for the means to meet these needs, eventually leading to the emergence of periodicals of news and opinion—in Venice in the sixteenth century, in England, France, Germany, and various other European countries in the seventeenth century, and in North America in the early eighteenth century—all devoted primarily to satisfying the hunger for intelligence.

The early evolution of these publications in Europe and America was arduous, beset by technological, economic and, above all, political difficulties, for governments were not prone to allow such potentially dangerous tools to be wielded by their subjects uncontrolled. Struggling and paying a price that was sometimes painful, the press in the Western countries nevertheless made significant strides, establishing itself as a

vital medium of popular enlightenment and public political debate and acquiring recognition as an indispensable guide to the rapidly changing landscape. By 1800, the press in Britain, the United States and, to a large extent, France had succeeded in freeing itself from governmental control and attaining nearly complete freedom of expression, which enabled it to become a growing enterprise with an expanding constituency of consumers. By then it had come to serve as a major vehicle for commercial advertising, which, in turn, became the economic mainstay of many newspapers. Although the press in the West still had a long distance to traverse before acquiring the power and prestige it would enjoy in the twentieth century—newspapers were still a luxury commodity in 1800, and journalism a less than respectable vocation—by the turn of the nineteenth century, after two centuries of evolution, the direction of the Western press was clear.

John Walter, founder of *The Daily Universal Register* (later to become *The Times* of London), characteristically laid out the paper's objectives in its opening edition in January 1785:

Such, it is intended, shall be the UNIVERSAL REGISTER, the great objects of which will be to facilitate the *commercial* intercourse between the different parts of the community, through the channels of *Advertisement*; to record the principal occurrences of the times; and to abridge the account of debates during the sitting of Parliament.

In a lengthy discussion in several densely printed columns, Walter examined the benefits and flaws of other newspapers, then described his intention to produce a "paper that should blend all these advantages, and by steering clear of extremes, hit the happy medium" so as to offer "something suited to every palate."<sup>5</sup> Had a copy of the *Register* reached an Arab land, the reader there would have found it odd and probably quite unintelligible. The systematic coverage of major domestic and international events, records of the proceedings of parliamentary debates, and organized commercial advertisement, which were the *raison d'être* of the rapidly proliferating journals of the West, were for the most part alien to Arab society of that time. While business promotion was familiar and events of state and in society were recorded in chronicles, neither of these, let alone the work of government, had much to do with organized communications or the public's "palate." To the extent that the public was interested in such matters, it did not require channels of transmission other than the available traditional ones. In the year 1785, the Middle Eastern counterpart of *The Daily Universal Register* was a combination of the official *munadi* (as seen in Jabarti's account of that year, quoted above), the mosque preacher, and the exchange of intelligence in public gatherings. Newspapers did not appear in the Arab countries prior to the nineteenth century; they were unnecessary.

Nor was Arab society particularly interested in events in Europe, which for the most part remained beyond the horizon. This disinterest

applied to the European press as well; the existence of newspapers in Europe is hardly ever referred to in Arabic sources prior to the nineteenth century. One rare exception is a report in 1690 by a royal Moroccan emissary to Madrid which contains a brief remark about Spanish journals, dismissing them as “full of exaggerations and lies.”<sup>6</sup> In the empire’s capital, Istanbul, there was considerable curiosity about events abroad, which was translated into informed foreign policy during the second half of the eighteenth century; the ruling leadership, aware of the European press, began to monitor a portion of it fairly systematically by the last quarter of that century. It is, however, quite unlikely that such knowledge by Ottoman officials was conveyed, or was of interest, to their Arab subjects. European newspapers might have occasionally reached the Arab provinces via foreign merchants and travelers, but if they did they left no noticeable impact. As late as 1831, the Egyptian writer and educator Shaykh Rifa’a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi, relating his impressions of a five-year sojourn in Paris, dealt with French newspapers — “the daily sheets (*waraqat*) known as ‘journals’ and ‘gazettes’ (*al-jurnalat wal-kazitat*)” — as a novelty and deemed it necessary to explain their purpose and functioning. He too found them “full of countless lies.”<sup>7</sup> As far as awareness of the institution of the press is concerned, then, Arab society at the onset of the nineteenth century started from *tabula rasa*. Large parts of the region remained ignorant of it for many decades thereafter as well.

This study, however, is not designed as a comparison between the Arabic press and the European prototype. While the institution of the press and the vocation of journalism were undeniably imported, the process of borrowing and the degree to which the Arab press replicated the foreign model are not the focus of this exploration. Rather, its aim is to shed light on the evolution of the Arab press in itself as a modern institution shaped by the region’s political, social, economic, and cultural realities and exerting an influence on these realities in turn. The study examines the Arabic press during its formative first hundred years, a period of great change in Arab society materially, culturally, and in relations with other societies. The press will be seen as both reflecting and contributing to those changes, a mirror and a beacon at once.

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I

HISTORICAL  
PHASES



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# 1

## State Bulletins: Pronouncing the Official Truth

As with so many modern innovations in the Middle East, launching newspapers was, at first, the exclusive prerogative of governments. In the Ottoman capital, in Egypt, and in several other provinces, official bulletins were the only indigenous periodicals for several decades. Only governments had the motivation and the resources to adopt this foreign idea and employ it for their specific ends. Rudimentary sheets with limited objectives, the early newspapers were never in popular demand, nor did they play significant social or cultural roles, as would the private press at a later period. Yet, because they were the first, and for a while the only, enterprise of this kind, their role was vital in laying the conceptual and practical foundations for the assimilation of the idea in the region.

The dramatic landing of French troops on the beach of Alexandria in the scorching summer of 1798, and the swift conquest of Egypt that followed, had an impact on the Egyptians more dramatic than that which the gradual exposure to Europe had had on the Ottomans during the entire preceding century. Bonaparte's troops had reached the area in order to open a new front in their battle against England, but the effect on the front itself proved more far-reaching. Like the other Arabic-speaking provinces of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt had been isolated from events in Europe, complacently unmindful of the rapid pace of technological, political, and cultural developments there. The French invasion thus came as a shock potentially powerful enough to trigger a profound change. That change did not come immediately, but only some time after the French left, when the country was blessed with a

gifted ruler, Muhammad 'Ali, who had the vision and vigor to turn the shock into a source of inspiration.

The trauma of the encounter with the might of modern Europe, Muhammad 'Ali's talent, and Egypt's convenient sociopolitical cohesion all combined to put Egypt on a course of change more rapid than in any other part of the Ottoman Empire, including its Turkish-speaking center. This was evident in myriad ways, not least in the development of modern communications: Egypt had an official printed bulletin several years before the Ottoman capital did, despite Istanbul's earlier awareness of that useful medium. The implications of Bonaparte's modern, skillfully directed propaganda machine were not lost on Muhammad 'Ali. Some time later, he would make Egypt apparently the birthplace of the first Arab paper.

Why "apparently"? The infancy of the Arab press is murky. One of the questions typically open to controversy is, which was the first Arabic-language paper? Everyone agrees that the first periodical to appear in an Arabic-speaking land was in French: *Le Courier [sic.] de L'Egypte*, first published by Bonaparte in August 1798, a mere two weeks after the conquest of Cairo. Designed for circulation among the French military and administrative personnel, it was printed every five days and carried official notices, local news, and other reports. Two months later, another French paper appeared, *La Décade Egyptienne*, a quarterly published by the French scientific expedition in Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Both publications were in a language that the native Egyptians could not read, printed with a non-Egyptian audience in mind.

But what of a paper for the Arabic-speaking public? Testimonies by Egyptian contemporaries of the French occupation contain vague references to a bulletin printed in Arabic at that time. The French, historian 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti related, "were eager to record daily developments in their various departments and courts." They ordered Isma'il al-Khashshab, secretary of the *diwan* (council) convened by Bonaparte, to prepare such accounts, which were entitled *al-Hawadith al-Yawmiyya* ("Daily Events"), then had them translated into French for circulation among the troops in the capital and the countryside. Jabarti neglected to mention what was done with the original Arabic texts of these accounts. Based on this somewhat ambiguous report, Philip di Tarrazi, the celebrated historian of the Arabic press, concluded that *al-Hawadith al-Yawmiyya* was "undoubtedly . . . the mother of all Arab newspapers."<sup>2</sup> Other contemporary reports in Arabic and French make similarly obscure references to a periodical sheet called *al-Tanbih* ("Notification"), published by order of General Menou, the French governor of Egypt from June 1800.<sup>3</sup> There is no evidence to show that such a paper did in fact appear, or to support other accounts about Arabic-language periodicals at that time, all of which seem to be based on erroneous readings of the mostly nebulous sources.<sup>4</sup> Nor can French proclamations in Arabic, which were issued from time to time,

be regarded as periodical publications, although since they were printed frequently and widely circulated, they were a novelty. In the final account, however, whether or not an Arabic periodical was actually published in Egypt under the French is of little import. More significant is the fact that the French did publish printed notices in Arabic, even if irregularly, providing a model for the organized circulation of announcements. It was an appealing example of a control mechanism that would soon be emulated.

Similarly enigmatic reports tell us about the appearance in Baghdad of a paper called *Jurnal al-Iraq*, presumably issued in 1816 at the initiative of the local vali. Certain Western travelers to the Iraqi province mentioned a bulletin by that name printed in Arabic and Turkish, carrying reports on local and other affairs alongside official announcements. It was distributed, they reported, among army commanders, senior officials and notables, and was affixed to the walls and fences of the governor's residence for public notice. If such a *jurnal* was indeed printed and distributed, it might well have been the first Arabic newspaper. Iraqi scholars, although eager to identify the oldest paper in the annals of their country's press, have, nevertheless, found these reports highly dubious.<sup>5</sup> Still, once again, whether or not such a paper did exist is of lesser importance than the evidence that by the first quarter of the nineteenth century a venture of this kind was possible: Paper and the technique of printing existed both in the Ottoman capital and in the provinces, along with the European example of using such a medium as an effective means of communication. Furthermore, the government's target audience included people who could read, making the idea of a newspaper beneficial not only to the population but also to the state. All that was needed was a perceptive leader who would recognize the great potential inherent in this medium, adopt it, and develop it.

### "Egyptian Events"

The French, who had brought with them the modern device of printing, demonstrated its capabilities in Egypt for over three years. If the two French journals were in a strange tongue, their proclamations to the public were issued in Arabic, which some Egyptians could read. When they left the country, in the fall of 1801, the invaders took their equipment with them, leaving the province without a printing press or many of the other innovations they had brought. But the demonstration had made an impression. Muhammad 'Ali, the Ottoman officer of Albanian extraction who soon afterward became Egypt's ruler for over four decades (1805–1848), fully appreciated the promise of this novelty. In 1809 he dispatched a close aide, 'Uthman Nur al-Din, to Europe with instructions to procure books on every conceivable subject. In 1815, having taken a few years to consolidate his rule, he sent another emissary, the fifteen-year-old Syrian-born Niqula Musabiki, to Milan

to study the craft of printing and acquire printing equipment. Upon Musabiki's return in 1819, the cornerstone was laid for the first printing house, in the Cairo neighborhood of Bulaq, which was inaugurated apparently two years later. Other printing shops were soon built elsewhere in Muhammad 'Ali's capital. Shortly thereafter, the country began to produce its own ink, a commodity hitherto imported from Leghorn and Trieste. By 1835, Egypt, the cradle of papyrus, was producing its own modern paper. At that stage the state's printing presses had a near-complete monopoly over the new trade<sup>6</sup>—in Muhammad 'Ali's Egypt it could hardly have been otherwise. By the end of his reign, these presses had produced hundreds of printed books, mostly translations of European texts but also original works, in hundreds of thousands of copies (over 400,000 copies had been verified by 1846),<sup>7</sup> as well as innumerable public notices, administrative circulars, diplomatic documents, and the first official newspapers.<sup>8</sup>

Shrewd and ambitious, Muhammad 'Ali was quick to realize that traditional methods of communication were unsatisfactory in running his rapidly evolving government apparatus. Handwritten circulars and verbal commands were inadequate to instill the new standards of performance he sought for his state. A key component of the new administrative network he devised was a bureau (*diwan*) that regularly screened reports arriving from the country's different departments and the provinces and abstracted them into a single document. This document was submitted to the pasha and was then returned to the relevant offices with his comments—a procedure that seems to have begun as early as 1813. The document was known as *jurnal*, at that stage not yet a “journal,” as it would later come to mean, but rather a register or report, and the office handling it was called, accordingly, *diwan al-jurnal*—“register bureau.” Printing the register and circulating it in multiple copies could attain far better results than the old, inefficient methods: It would be speedier and clearer, and the texts would be available for repeated consultation. In 1821 or 1822, upon establishing a press in the Cairo Citadel, Muhammad 'Ali ordered the register to be printed under the title *Jurnal al-Khidiw*, a name whose two parts accurately reflected the foreign, Euro-Ottoman roots of the idea. “The Khedive's *Jurnal*” thus became the first printed Arabic periodical.<sup>9</sup>

The *Jurnal*, a bilingual Turkish-Arabic bulletin, was little more than a domestic circular intended for official consumption. With a run as small as 100 copies, it was designed for no other purpose than to keep the vali himself and his chief aides informed of state affairs. Handwritten at first, it was subsequently printed lithographically, appearing irregularly for a while before it became a weekly and later a daily publication. The paper included official notices, reports on developments in the capital and in the provinces, and, to alleviate the rigor of official business, stories from the *Thousand and One Nights*, a

charming measure that would later become a feature of many Arabic papers. It was undoubtedly a success, for before long the vali ordered a larger print run and a streamlined format, so that it became a still more effective tool under a different name.

The first issue of *Waqāʾiʿ Misriyya* (later *al-Waqāʾiʿ al-Misriyya*, “Egyptian Events”) was published on 25 Jumada al-Ula 1244, that is, 3 December 1828, succeeding *Jurnal al-Khidiw*. It was a small-format, 36 × 24 cm. paper in four austere-looking pages. Save for a rather low-key masthead composed of the paper’s name, date (properly, according to the Islamic calendar only), and an unpretentious design of a vase of flowers, it contained nothing that would attract the eye, not even headlines or titles for the various news items. Immediately below the modest masthead came the text, running in two columns throughout the four pages, with Turkish on the right side and an approximate Arabic rendition on the left. The print, it has been observed, was characterized by “total disregard of the Oriental idea of beautiful calligraphy.”<sup>10</sup> Later issues would continue to adhere to this simple format, with small modifications.

The paper’s spartan appearance, no doubt a result of technological limitations, befitted its objectives as well. *Al-Waqāʾiʿ al-Misriyya* did not aim to entertain. Rather, it was conceived as a serviceable tool in the governmental machinery of the efficiency-hungry pasha. Its main objective was “to improve the performance of the honorable governors and other distinguished officials in charge of [public] affairs and interests.”<sup>11</sup> Beyond the small circle of high executives and army officers (for whom the paper’s Turkish segment would have sufficed), the pasha also wanted to inform local notables, senior ‘ulama’, and the teachers and students of the new schools he had established, all of whom he hoped to integrate into his ambitious plans for state-building, which accounted for the paper’s Arabic section. A total of 600 copies of each issue of *al-Waqāʾiʿ* were printed during Muhammad ‘Ali’s reign. The paper was not sold on the street, nor was it produced for the man in the street; the public at large—the pasha’s simple subjects—had no need to be informed on such matters.<sup>12</sup>

The contents of the paper also reflected this strictly utilitarian concept. It included mostly practical information, primarily state news and other details that could be of use to those effectively or potentially involved in the pasha’s development plans. First came the vali’s orders, notices of personnel changes, reports on the launching and progress of state projects, commendations of devoted officials, and reports on the punishment of those who deviated. Proceedings from the Consultative Council (*majlis mashwara*), formed in September 1829, became a regular item in the *Waqāʾiʿ* from then on, as were routine reports from the other departments of government. This information was followed by news of events in the Ottoman capital and of the empire’s international relations insofar as there was relevance to Egypt, which was included,

however, only when Muhammad 'Ali was on good terms with Istanbul. News from other places—the empire's other provinces, Europe, even America—was sparse, haphazard, and generally incidental; it was considered largely irrelevant.<sup>13</sup> Only rarely did the paper deal with matters other than government-related reports. According to one count, "impractical" items occupied less than 2 percent of the space between 1828 and 1841.<sup>14</sup> These included amusing curiosities apparently designed to ease the paper's sober tone somewhat, such as a story about a Bulaq man who, slaughtering his mad cow, was shocked to find a live calf with two heads, four eyes, and four ears in her womb.<sup>15</sup>

Muhammad 'Ali never ceased to be fascinated by the immense possibilities of printing. Even before he issued his own publication, he received newspapers from Europe and ordered them read to him. This practice was important enough to warrant a note to Boghus Bey, the pasha's chief translator, warning that a delay in the dispatch of the newspapers to the palace would result in severe punishment "and no excuse will help."<sup>16</sup> Having invested in training personnel, acquiring equipment, and developing the basis for the extensive use of printing, he became directly concerned with every detail of the operation of the presses in Cairo once they began to roll. Foreign visitors to Egypt were taken by the proud pasha on a tour of the various presses and presented with copies of every book published there as a gift.<sup>17</sup> He regarded printing as a mark of progress and, more important, as a vehicle for advancing other projects. The official bulletin was a major component of this enterprise, and Muhammad 'Ali took it under his close personal care: He allocated ample resources to it, chose the best of his men to run it, involved himself in molding its format and style, and supervised its reporting policy directly, often demanding that the paper be read to him prior to its distribution. "It is not to be issued before we see it," he warned. Whoever was negligent in following his guidelines risked the awesome punishment of 300 blows of the cudgel. The pasha required all high officials who could afford it—those paid the substantial sum of over 1,000 qurush monthly—to subscribe to the *Waqai'* at their own expense, while others were allowed to receive it free of charge. The paper, he stated, should be distributed not by coercion but gently, "for it is a graceful and delicate product."<sup>18</sup>

An imported item transplanted to alien ground, the Egyptian official bulletin was at first afflicted with all kinds of maladies. It appeared irregularly, sometimes twice a week, at other times fortnightly. There were longer intervals as well: For about two years, between May 1834 and March 1836, no issue of the paper was published, and during the following five years, only 58 issues were printed, an average of one issue per month. Publication was often interrupted when Muhammad 'Ali was preoccupied with wars, revolts or urgent diplomatic matters. Eventually, like many of his other projects, the paper came to an almost complete halt under his successors, 'Abbas (1848-1854) and Sa'id (1854-1863).<sup>19</sup>

Another mark of initial difficulty was the rather unorganized and tardy reporting of events. News traveled slowly from the various administrative departments to the bulletin office and from the provinces to the capital, as it was brought by messengers on foot or by camel-riders. This, coupled with a cumbersome editorial process and the irregular appearance of the paper, often resulted in domestic news being published weeks or months after the event. While it should have been relatively easy to obtain up-to-date reports from the *majlis*, especially since the bulletin's editor was a member of it,<sup>20</sup> a report on the completion, in August 1828, of works to expand the army's artillery depot appeared in the bulletin a full year later, in August 1829.<sup>21</sup> If this was the case for domestic information, foreign news inevitably fared worse. Almost the only source of foreign intelligence was European newspapers arriving by sea—in 1830 about a week's voyage by sailing vessel from Cyprus or Antioch to Alexandria, and 49 days from England; in the mid-1840s about a week by steamship from Marseille.<sup>22</sup> Reports on events abroad always took months to be printed in *al-Waqā'i'*. The freshest foreign item that the paper published during this period appears to have been a decision by France, on 24 July 1847, to grant Egypt a loan, published in the issue of 2 September of the same year, that is, 40 days later.<sup>23</sup>

There were other difficulties. No one in Muhammad 'Ali's Egypt had prior knowledge or experience in editing an informative, widely circulated periodical of this kind, nor were there standards or even a sense of need for organizing and presenting the material according to rules. From the vantage point of the twentieth century, *al-Waqā'i'* issues during the early years of the nineteenth century look like raw drafts of unprocessed material, with administrative, economic, and personal items, as well as home and foreign reports, hopelessly intermixed without any categorization and often without headings. To pick a random example, the first two pages of issue no. 130 (March 1830) carried the following items, in this order: a detailed report by the *majlis* on the state of public food reserves on the eve of Ramadan; a brief extract from an Izmir newspaper dealing with Ottoman-Russian relations; a brief report from a French newspaper on the purchase of European uniforms for the Ottoman troops; a report from another French journal on the appointment of King Leopold of Belgium as ruler of Greece; two detailed reports on civilian cases tried by the Khedivial court; and a lengthy translation of a French article discussing Franco-Russian relations. The language, never before used for this kind of writing, was badly deficient, and the unavoidable resort to Turkish, European, and colloquial Arabic terminologies produced awkward texts that were not always readily comprehensible. An absence of punctuation, frequent typographical errors, and poor printing quality added to the amateurish nature of *al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyya* during this period.

These limitations characterized the official bulletin throughout