Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age

What is the relationship between thought and practice in the domains of language, literature and politics? Is thought the only standard by which to measure intellectual history? How did Arab intellectuals change and affect political, social, cultural and economic developments from the late 18th- to the mid-20th centuries? This volume offers a fundamental overhaul and revival of modern Arab intellectual history. Using Albert Hourani's book *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Oxford University Press, 1962) as a starting point, it reassesses Arabic cultural production and political thought in the light of current scholarship and extends the analysis beyond Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and the outbreak of World War II. The chapters offer a mixture of broad-stroke history on the construction of 'the Muslim world,' and the emergence of the rule of law and constitutionalism in the Ottoman empire, as well as case studies on individual Arab intellectuals that illuminate the transformation of modern Arabic thought including in its North African and Asian contexts.

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Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age

Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda

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To
Christopher A. Bayly (1945–2015)
Thomas Philipp (1941–2015)
Colleagues, mentors, friends

"In the period with which we have dealt there grew up within the framework of nationalism a whole content of ideas about the nature of man and his life in society. We have seen how this content was formed by a combination of elements drawn from two sources[:] the liberal secularism of nineteenth-century France and England, directly assimilated and accepted; first expressed in Arabic by Bustani and his school, and passed on by them to Lutfi al-Sayyid and the school of Egyptian nationalists which he created. It was secularist in the sense that it believed that society and religion both prospered best when civil authority was separate from the religious. . . liberal in the sense that it thought the welfare of society to be constituted by that of individuals, and the duty of government to be the protection of freedom, above all the freedom of the individual to fulfill himself and so to create true civilization. The second source was the Islamic 'reformism' which was formulated by Muhammad ʿAbduh and Rashid Rida: Islamic because it stood for a reassertion of the unique and perfect truth of Islam, but reformist in that it aimed at reviving what it conceived to be certain neglected elements in the Islamic tradition. But this revival took place under the stimulus of European liberal thought and led to a gradual reinterpretation of Islamic concepts. . . : Ibn Khaldun's *ʿumran* gradually turned into Guizot's 'civilization', the *maslaha* of the Maliki jurists and Ibn Taymiyya into the 'utility' of John Stuart Mill, the *ijmaʿ* of Islamic jurisprudence into 'public opinion' of democratic theory, and those 'who bind and loose' into members of parliament. . . emphasis was laid on national independence or individual freedom than on social justice. The aim of nationalism was to release the national energy in economic life of the nation from foreign control and giving free scope to the forces of national enterprise which, it was generally believed, would bring about an increase of wealth and welfare." Hourani (1983: 343–44)

Contents

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C. A. Bayly (1945–2015) was the Vere Harmsworth Professor Emeritus of Imperial and Naval History at Cambridge and since his retirement a visiting professor at Queen Mary University of London. His publications include – among many others – *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (1989); *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India 1780–1870* (1996); and *The Birth of the Modern World: Global Connections and Comparisons 1780–1914* (2004). Most recently, he spearheaded the global intellectual history trend associated with the new journal of *Modern Intellectual History* and published *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (2012).

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Preface

In October 2011, the *New York Times* Middle East correspondent Robert F. Worth proclaimed in an op-ed piece entitled 'The Arab Intellectuals Who Didn't Roar', that the Arab uprisings lacked 'any intellectual standard bearer of the kind who shaped almost every modern revolution from 1776 onward'.[1] At a superficial level this was true. The dominant intellectual force of the Arab world in the preceding three decades had been the *wasatiyya* movement, a loosely self-identified group of centrist Muslim public intellectuals that has combined Islamic authenticity with acquiescence to the neo-liberal world order, accommodating itself to the authoritarian status quo in the Middle East in the process.[2] Indeed, this group managed to commandeer the ruins of the authoritarian age even after an alliance of tech-savvy students, the underemployed and organized labour seriously challenged the old regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and the wider Arab world.

We call into question the worth of the *Times*'s claim in at least two ways: by reexamining the intellectual undercurrents that preceded the Arab uprisings, and by returning to the origins of modern Arab intellectual history. This undertaking animated the conference we convened on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Albert Hourani's landmark book *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, an October 2012 event held at Princeton that brought together multiple generations of historians, literary scholars and cultural critics of modern Arab intellectual life.[3] While the second volume that comes out of the conference tracks modern Arab intellectual history from the 1940s to the present, the task of this book is to revisit the period of Hourani's 'Arabic liberal age' itself. Our contributors step outside the immediate intellectual influences

[1] www.nytimes.com/2011/10/30/sunday-review/the-arab-intellectuals-who-didnt-roar.html?_r=0
[2] Browers (2009). [3] Weiss and Hanssen (forthcoming).

on the present moment and instead, investigate the Nahda as a historical archive of the contemporary Arab intellectual.[4]

The late historian Jacques LeGoff has defined intellectuals broadly as individuals whose vocation is to think and to disseminate thought. He dates their origins to the twelfth century, when the first European intellectuals sought to retrieve the Greek classics from Arabic sources. His archetypal intellectual was therefore the translator of Arabic texts who could also draw on the philosophical synthesis and organization of knowledge that al-Farabi, the Second Teacher after Aristotle, had laid down in the tenth century.[5] This foundational encounter between medieval Europe and the Abbasid empire made the European university system conceivable and, ultimately, facilitated the European Renaissance. The eighteenth century produced new kinds of intellectuals; the French physiocrats introduced the agrarian raison d'état, the encyclopedists transformed the nature, scope and categories of human knowledge, Scottish empiricists led the scientific revolution, British utilitarians reinvented political economy and German idealists revolutionized human consciousness. By the nineteenth century, the growth of the educational system, the rise of literacy, the proliferation of newspapers and the reversal of the liberties gained during Hobsbawm's 'age of revolution', saw European scholars descend from their ivory towers and engage in politics for the purpose of improving the human condition.[6] The label for intellectuals as 'specialists of the universal' was deployed to revile them as trouble-makers – most notoriously by Napoleon – as well as to celebrate them – in Marx's dictum – as philosophers who not only interpret but also change the world. During the 1890s, especially following the Dreyfus Affair, 'the intellectuals' emerged as a globally recognizable social category – think of Zola, Lazare, Benda – to name thinkers who, for better or worse, acted publicly.[7]

The Enlightenment has come under attack in the West and the non-West alike but it has remained the touchstone of global intellectual history.[8] The European model of writing the history of ideas has had a profound impact on Anglophone Middle East Studies after World War II. Albert Hourani was a key figure in this regard. Born in 1915 to a Lebanese family in Manchester and educated at Oxford, he became an influential figure behind the scenes of British policy making towards the Arab world at the beginning of the end of 'Britain's moment in the

[4] The useful concept of the Nahda as archive has been formulated by Bou Ali (2012).
[5] LeGoff (1957: 22–27). See also Gutas (1998). [6] Charle (1996).
[7] Jennings and A. Kemp-Welch (1997).
[8] See, inter alia, Mehta (1999), Chakrabarty (2000), Muthu (2003), Pitts (2005); Conrad (2012), Moyn and Satori (2013).

Middle East'.[9] With the loss of Palestine in 1948 and the radicalization of Arab politics in the late 1950s, Hourani withdrew from political and public engagement. He poured his intellectual energies into building the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, Oxford, as a global hub of modern Middle East studies.[10]

Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age remains the work that defined his scholarly legacy. Since Cambridge University Press published the third edition in 1983, it has been reissued eighteen times and – at 21,000 copies sold – is one of Cambridge University Press's all-time best-selling titles in Middle East Studies. A recent survey by the American University of Cairo has ranked it the third most influential book in the field, just behind Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Hanna Batatu's *Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, both first published in 1978, but slightly ahead of Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* of 1988.[11] Hourani became the doyen of modern Middle East history in Anglo-American academia but his academic writings had less of an impact in the Middle East. Few of Hourani's writings were available in Arabic in his lifetime, and *Arabic Thought* was not translated until 1997.[12]

Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age was inspired by *To the Finland Station* (1940), Edmund Wilson's epic reenactment of the confluence of post-Enlightenment thinkers into the making of Lenin up to 1917.[13] Hourani decided to use a generational framework of analysis for *Arabic Thought* after rejecting other, much more common approaches to the history of ideas at the time.[14] He expressed worry that Toynbee's grand civilizational narrative, A. Lovejoy's 'unit ideas', or the divisions into 'schools of thought . . . may blur the differences between individual thinkers, and may impose a false unity upon their work'.[15] After *Arabic Thought* some class analyses and confessional typologies appeared.[16] Generally, however, biographies have come to define the parameters of Arab intellectual history in anglophone scholarship.[17] Hourani himself abandoned the

[9] Monroe (1963).
[10] For more on the life and thought of Hourani, see the chapters by Owen and Hanssen in this volume.
[11] www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/mesc/Documents/MESC%20November%202005%20Issue.pdf.
[12] Hourani (1997). [13] Naff (1993: 41–2).
[14] For a breakdown of Hourani's three-plus-one generations that make up the liberal age, see the Introduction to Part III.
[15] Hourani (1983: v). See also D. Reid (1982).
[16] For a Muslim-Christian-secular typology, see Sharabi (1970); for a Marxian analysis, Batatu (1978).
[17] Some fine biographies include: Gendzier (1966), Keddie (1968), Cleveland (1971), D. Reid (1975); Delanoue (1982), Smith (1983), Cleveland (1985); Sedgwick (2009), Cooke (2010). See also the contributions to Buhairy (1981) and Allen (2010).

history of ideas and turned to social history even as he pushed a younger generation of scholars to research the nineteenth-century origins of Arab nationalisms.[18]

Over fifty years after *Arabic Thought* first appeared, this volume assesses the state of modern Arab intellectual history and the place of Hourani's magisterial book in it. In the spirit of Husayn al-Marsafi's *Eight Words* of 1881 and Raymond Williams's *Keywords* of 1976, the Introduction takes the four words of Hourani's title – Arabic, thought, liberal and age – to reconsider modern Arab intellectual history since 1962. These words pose a series of interrelated questions pertaining to concepts of language, mind, time and freedom: What and who defines an epoch? Are there other nonchronological markers of rupture and continuity besides Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 or the outbreak of World War II to which historians of the modern Middle East should attend? How did the Arabic language change and affect political, social, cultural and economic developments during the long nineteenth century? What is the relation between thought and practice in the domains of language, literature and translation? Is thought the only standard by which to measure intellectual history? How might historians of the Arab world move beyond the apparently symbiotic relationship between intellectual history and European traditions of liberalism? Since Hourani attached the linguistic adjective 'Arab*ic*' and not the ethnonym 'Arab' to 'thought', what does this choice mean for the relationship between thought, language and community in the Nahda?

Since 1967, many Arab intellectuals have shifted from viewing the past as a socioeconomic stage to be overcome and contested, to adopting a pathological framework to Arab condition. They lamented the inability of Arab intellectuals to accept the realities of the modern world. 'Arab Malaise' and '*Malheur*' have become the catchwords for anglo- and francophone Arabs intellectuals alike.[19] Below the din of cultural and political pessimism, which exhibited a certain syncronicity with trends in European Critical Theory and the Global Left[20], a revival of interest in the origins of modern Arabic thought in general, and the Nahda in particular, has resurfaced among intellectuals in the Arab world since the end of the cold war coincided with the Lebanese Civil War around 1990.

[18] Revisionist studies of Arab nationalisms became the dominant probe into the nineteenth century since the early 1980s: 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Duri (1984), Gershoni and Jankowski (1986), Muslih (1988), Khalidi, Anderson, et. al. (1991), Gershoni and J. Jankowski (1997), K. Fahmy (1997), Gelvin (1998), Choueiri (2000), Troutt-Powell (2003), Gasper (2009), Hakim (2013).
[19] See for example, Ajami (1981, 1997); Ghalioun (1991); Kassir (2006).
[20] Keucheyan (2014).

The paradigmatic shift that first occurred among Arab scholars in the early 1990s, and which has been picked up in Anglophone scholarship since 2001, has expanded the social and analytical horizons of Arab intellectual history. They now include women and subalterns[21]; Jews,[22] Kurds,[23] Armenians,[24] Shiʿa,[25] Ibadis[26] and North Africans;[27] diasporic and rural figures;[28] urbanity, temporality and translation;[29] theatre, photography, painting and music;[30] desire and affect;[31] neo-classical and vernacular literatures;[32] as well as Turkish-Arabic literary cross-fertilization.[33] After decades of neglect, the Nahda has emerged – reenergized – in the popular Arab imagination, academic research and Arab states' discourse, all of which contest claims about Arab history and modernity. While we cannot do justice to the proliferation of recent research trends, our book takes stock and tries to give shape to them.

Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age is molded into five parts that are framed by an introduction and an epilogue. Part I on Albert Hourani's legacy and Part V on the meaning of the Nahda in comparison with South Asian intellectual history and in light of the 'Arab Spring' contain two stand-alone chapters each. Parts II to IV each hold three chapters and are preceded by short introductions. These connect the chapters and the parts to wider historiographical debates, historical contexts and the chapters' protagonists to other key figures of the Nahda. Part II offers three broad thematical narratives of Ottoman political transformations from the eighteenth century to World War I; Part III analyses individual Nahda intellectuals and texts from the mid-nineteenth century to the early Mandate period; and Part IV explores three instances of Arabs grappling with liberalism from the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 to World War II.

These essays originated in a conference on 'Beyond *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*: New Directions in Middle East Intellectual History' that we co-convened at Princeton University in October 2012. We are particularly grateful to those sponsors who made the conference possible in

[21] Booth (1995, 2001, 2006, 2013, 2015), Fleischman (2003), Bräckelmann (2004), Baron (2005); Khuri-Makdisi (2010), Gorman (2010).
[22] Gendzier (1966), Bashkin (2012), Levy (2009, 2013a, 2013), Behar and Ben-Dror Benite (2013), Gribetz (2014), J. Cohen (2014).
[23] Winter (2006). [24] Der Matossian (2014).
[25] T. Khalidi (1983), Naef (1996), Mervin (2000). [26] Ghazal (2010b).
[27] Omri (2006), McDougall (2006, 2011), Ghazal (2010a, 2013, 2015).
[28] Dakhli (2009), Gasper (2009). [29] Hanssen (2005); Barak (2013); Tageldin (2009).
[30] Sadgrove (1996), Mestyan (2011, 2014); Sheehi (2012); Scheid (2010); Zubaida (2002), Shannon (2006), S. Tamari (2008), Willson (2013).
[31] Massad (2006); El-Ariss (2013). [32] Noorani (2010); Z. Fahmy (2011).
[33] Guth (2003).

the first place: the David A. Gardner '69 Magic Fund, the Council of the Humanities, the Program on International and Regional Studies (PIIRS) and its director Mark Beissenger. Patricia Zimmer ensured that the conference went off without a hitch; Joy Scharfstein produced beautiful posters and promotional materials; Barb Leavey in the History Department contributed invaluable logistical support.

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Our joy of seeing this book published is laced with deep sadness. Between the conference and the publication, we have lost two of our beloved colleagues, mentors and friends. Professor C. A. Bayly, author of Chapter 12 and Britain's most highly decorated historian of India, suffered a fatal cardiac arrest in Chicago on April 18, 2015.[34] Professor Thomas Philipp, author of two chapters in this book and Germany's most eminent modern Middle East historian, passed away after his final treatment cycle failed to stem his cancer on June 11, 2015.[35] Both had just turned in their final edits and were keen to see the final version of their and our labour of love. We dedicate this book to their memory.

[34] Drayton (2015). [35] Hanssen (2015).

Notes on Transliteration and Translation

We have translated the titles of Arabic texts into English where they appear in the body text, and kept the original in the bibliography. We have kept some key Arabic technical terms, sociological categories and geographical locations in Arabic where adequate one-to-one translation is not available or misleading; e.g. ʿulamaʾ for Muslim clerics, 'ijtihad' for the legal practice of independent reasoning, 'takfir' which approximates excommunication; or 'Tanzimat' for the nineteenth-century Ottoman reform period, and 'Bilad al-Sham', the common referent for geographical Syria including Lebanon and Palestine before World War I. But we have stripped these terms of the requisite diacritics (except ʿ for the letter ʿayn, and ʾ for the hamza) and followed the simplified *IJMES* transliteration system. The uninitiated and the native speaker might be put off by the pedantry of full diacritics and the specialist will know what is meant. Hourani himself expressed his exasperation at an Orientalist's fussy diacritization of Arab proper names by signing a review with 'Albirt l-Ḥawrānī'.[1] If, like Salman Rushdie after him, he did not feel lost in translation, he certainly took exception to being turned into a 'transcribed man'.[2]

The issue of transliteration versus translation of Arabic terms addresses serious questions of positionality and method, as we would like to demonstrate briefly with regard to the central term of this volume, the Nahda.[3] Whether to adopt Hourani's translation 'liberal age', or follow recent trends to deploy 'the Nahda' for nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Arab intellectual history, affects not only the framing of the subject of study, but also the relationship between our text and our readers. The former encourages comparisons with – and recognition of – similar intellectual processes elsewhere, but comes at the cost of relegating non-Western intellectuals to the waiting room of history, to modularity or to conceptual piracy.[4] Conversely, to transliterate

[1] Owen (1997). [2] Rushdie (1991: 17).
[3] For a brief history of transcription anxiety in Middle East Studies, see Messick (2003).
[4] Chakrabarty (2000), Anderson (1983).

Hourani's 'liberal age' as 'Nahda' may disaffect readers unfamiliar with Arabic, isolate and exoticise its history or discourage comparisons with contemporaneous cultural formations elsewhere.

The Arabic translation of Hourani's book into *al-Fikr al-ʿarabi fi ʿasr al-nahda* in 1997 marked the wider resignification of the long nineteenth century in the Arab world. Interest in the Nahda has also proliferated in scholarship in English between September 2001 and the uprisings of 2011. Our decision to 're-gloss' 'the liberal age' as the Nahda is an acknowledgement of these trends. If we introduce the term Nahda to the English lexicon despite the above historical inscrutability, it is not because we consider it more authentic. Rather, we aim to engage the modern Arab intellectual tradition on its own, globally situated and contested terms. As the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* has demonstrated, it is precisely the subtle shifts in meaning that revitalize the humanities when untranslatable terms migrate across language-bound communities of discourse.[5] Retaining the Nahda also avoids liberal overdetermination and captures, we believe, precisely the epoch's productive tension between the chimera of authenticity and the anxiety of cultural infiltration of the West. Finally, if one day the Nahda enters the Oxford English Dictionary, it would be a belated acknowledgement that the Nahda introduced many of today's neologisms and transliterated European words into the modern Arabic lexicon.

[5] Cassin (2014).

Abbreviations

AHR	American Historical Review
BRIJMES	British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
CSSAAME	Comparatives Studies of South Asian, African and Middle East
CSSH	Comparative Studies in Society History
IJMES	International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
JAL	Journal of Arabic Literature
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JIS	Journal of Islamic Studies
JPS	Journal of Palestine Studies
MEL	Middle Eastern Literatures
MES	Middle Eastern Studies
MIH	Modern Intellectual History
OUP	Oxford University Press
PUP	Princeton University Press
WI	Die Welt des Islams