Islamic Knowledge and the Making of Modern Egypt

This historical study transforms our understanding of modern Egyptian national culture by applying social theory to the history of Egypt's first teacher training school. It focuses on Dar al-ʿUlum, which trained students from religious schools to teach in Egypt's new civil schools from 1872. During the first four decades of British occupation (1882–1922), Egyptian nationalists strove to emulate Europe yet insisted that Arabic and Islamic knowledge be reformed and integrated into Egyptian national culture despite opposition from British officials. This reinforced the authority of the alumni of the Dar al-ʿUlum, the darʿamiyya, as arbiters of how to be modern and authentic, a position that graduates Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood would use to resist westernisation and create new modes of Islamic leadership in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Establishing a 130-year history of tensions over the place of Islamic ideas and practices within modernised public spaces, tensions which became central to the outcomes of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, Hilary Kalmbach demonstrates the importance of Arabic and Islamic knowledge to notions of authority, belonging, and authenticity within a modernising Muslim-majority community.

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For my father John

Contents

Figures

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978-1-108-43759-2 — Islamic Knowledge and the Making of Modern Egypt
Hilary Kalmbach
Frontmatter
More Information

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I am also deeply indebted to colleagues in Egypt at numerous institutions, including Dar al-Wathaʾiq, Dar al-Kutub, Dar al-ʿUlum, and Cairo University. I had hoped that I would be able to thank them individually here, now that the project has made it into book form, but unfortunately the politics surrounding this topic have become more, not less, restrictive. I want to make it clear that I did not discuss the Islamic activities of Dar al-ʿUlum's graduates with *any* of my contacts in Egypt at any point in time, as it became evident during my fieldwork that this was an extremely controversial aspect of the institution's legacy. All responsibility for work on it rests on my shoulders alone.

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x

shared my discomfort with the narrow ways in which hybridity is defined within cultural studies *and* whose reading of Bakhtin presents such an elegant solution.

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Preface

This book is a history of people and institutions who do not fit neatly
into boxes or categories – either those drawn by their contemporaries
or by subsequent scholarship – that explains how they contribute to
social and cultural change. It uses the Dar al-ʿUlum teacher training
school and its graduates as a prism through which to view sociocultural
change in Egypt between 1890 and 1952. It demonstrates that in-
between positions are important to sociocultural change, but also
that the opportunities they can offer are often accompanied by
difficulties and challenges.

   In this case, these difficulties and challenges extended to obtaining
sources that would enable me to write a history of Dar al-ʿUlum in the
first place. As it turns out, that there had been little work on the school
since the early 1980s was no accident. It took five months, a decent
amount of work, and a measure of good fortune to receive permission
to access the Egyptian National Archives (Dar al-Wathaʾiq) for this
project. Once in the archives I found that the primary series of files on
the teacher training schools were sparse at best, and that many of the
other seemingly relevant series contained sufficiently little on the school
that I could not justify the large amount of time it would take to sift
through them. My search for official records in other places turned up
very little, especially as the library and archives at the Ministry of
Education was closed for renovations shortly after my arrival, and
regular follow-ups as they compiled an electronic catalogue did not
reveal sources relevant to Dar al-ʿUlum. Neither Dar al-ʿUlum's library
nor Cairo University's central archives contained institutional records
addressing the period 1872–1946. Dar al-ʿUlum did, however, very
generously offer me a copy of their two-volume reprint of *Taqwim Dar
al-ʿUlum* (the *Dar al-ʿUlum Almanac*) that includes the 1952 original
and its 1991 continuation, which many see as the definitive set of
historical documentation related to the school.

   Personal papers and autobiographies were also hard to locate in
sufficient quantity in venues such as the Azbakiyya book market and

xiii

the wide range of downtown bookstores. This makes sense when one considers that the graduates of Dar al-ʿUlum are a very small proportion of the wider body of civil school graduates who were active authors in this period – finding the little that was out there was like searching for a needle in a haystack. My focus on the period from 1872 to 1946 exacerbated this problem, as few individuals who graduated before 1946 were still alive to interview or ask about papers, and their families or heirs are apparently no longer in touch with the school or the alumni association.

As a result, this book relies primarily on a rich and plentiful cache of published sources related to the school, which have been underutilised or overlooked by most historians. The 900-page *Taqwim Dar al-ʿUlum*, Muhammad ʿAbd al-Jawad's 1952 yearbook-cum-institutional history of the school is a significant resource that I read critically, in part as a compendium of basic facts about the institution, and in part as a historiography revealing the perspectives of the late 1940s, a time of significant sociocultural and institutional change. The records available in the archives provided a crucial starting point for finding additional published sources, including printed school regulations and ministry decisions, as well as interesting secondary collections housed within the Egyptian National Library (Dar al-Kutub).

I purchased hundreds of books related to Dar al-ʿUlum as well as Egyptian education, teacher training, and sociocultural developments in the first half of the twentieth century. I also gathered tens of thousands of photographs and photocopies of periodicals, books, pamphlets, and government regulations that could not be bought due to age or scarcity from libraries, archives, and private collections in Egypt, North America, and the United Kingdom. To give a sense of scale, a full set of the second run (1934–48) of *Sahifat Dar al-ʿUlum* provided me with between 3,000 and 4,000 pages of articles, poetry, and opinion pieces addressing the interests and concerns of Dar al-ʿUlum's graduates.

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In the end, it made sense – in terms of both the themes I wanted to discuss and the sources that were available – to focus the second half of the book on the activities of the school's graduates. I was able to make this decision confidently at a relatively early stage thanks to Lois

Aroian's 1978 dissertation on Dar al-ʿUlum. We each found the same number – though a slightly different distribution – of school regulation documents. Furthermore, neither she nor I, using the Ministry of Education archives and the Egyptian National Archives, respectively, were able to find the sorts of sources – rosters of teachers, lists of entrants, copies of examinations, administrative records – that would have made it possible to write a book focused entirely on the school itself.

At some point in the future – perhaps as a result of changes in the political climate, or the conclusion of renovation, reorganisation, and recataloguing projects – further details may come to light about Dar al-ʿUlum's history that will enable historians to fill in the gaps left by accounts of the school's history to date, or even to write a different sort of institutional history of the school. In the meantime, I present this work as a re-evaluation of the school that places it in a wider context of education, religion, and culture, and uses it as a window through which to view processes of sociocultural change. As a result, this book not only transforms our understanding of a pivotal but misunderstood institution, but also presents a new perspective on the cultural history of Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century.

Notes on Transliteration and Use of Arabic

With the goal of making the book accessible to a wider audience of historians, I have removed almost all of the Arabic terminology from the text of this book, as well as all diacritics except *hamza* and *ʿayn* from the Arabic words that remain in the text. Arabic speakers who are curious to see the original terminology transliterated in IJMES format can peruse the glossary at the end of the book where many of the terms from the original manuscript are presented in full transliteration alongside the English translations used in the text.

Several Arabic terms are too important to remove. First and foremost is **Dar al-ʿUlum** (known as Madrasat Dār al-ʿUlūm 1872–1946, and Kulliyyat Dār al-ʿUlūm from 1946), the Egyptian higher school or *grande école* founded to train Arabic and primary school teachers. It is central to the narrative; plus, as its name translates to the nondescript 'House of Knowledge', it is usually kept untranslated in non-Arabic texts.

The remaining exceptions are three sets of terms referring to people and corresponding social groups. I use the singular *efendi* and plural *efendiyya* (*afandī*, pl. *afandiyya*; also transliterated *effendi* and *effendiyya*) to refer to the emerging middle-strata group centred around graduates of the civil school system. I use the singular *shaykh* and the Anglicised plural *shaykh*s to refer to graduates of religious schools. Here I eschew the Arabic broken plural (*shuyūkh*) because of the confusion it is likely to cause English speakers already familiar with the term via its alternative spelling *sheikh*.

Finally, I use the singular *darʿami* and plural *darʿamiyya* (*darʿamī*, pl. *darʿamiyya*) to refer to graduates of Dar al-ʿUlum, whose status – formally and in practice – overlapped with the categories *shaykh* and *efendi* in different ways over the ninety years discussed in this book.

While the phrase 'sons of Dar al-ʿUlum' (*abnāʾ Dār al-ʿUlūm*) is used more frequently in the *Dar al-ʿUlum Almanac*, *darʿami* is used by the president of the alumni association to describe graduates of the school

in a piece at the start of the *Almanac*.[1] 'Sons of Dar al-ʿUlum' is comparable to 'the sons of the schools', a term used to refer to civil school graduates more generally,[2] while the term *al-darʿama*, defined as 'belonging to Dar al-ʿUlum', was presented at the Arabic Language Academy (Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya) as an example of a compound derivation.[3]

Numerous names are used for the government department responsible for education in Egypt during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, some of which appear in the bibliography. While some of the shifts in terminology reflect changes in status, such as its independence from other ministries, it is common practice for historians to translate the name of this department into English in ways that do not match the original terminology. As this work looks at Egyptian education over such a long period of time, and the shifts in its status are not of primary importance to the themes under discussion, I will use the term 'Ministry of Education' throughout. Similarly, I will refer to the person in control of this department as the 'minister of education', even though his title and rank varied during the period under study.

Finally, the Egyptian University that was founded in 1908 as a private institution and in 1925 as a public university has gone through several name changes in the period discussed here. It was renamed Fuʾād I University in honour of the first rector of the private university, Prince – later King – Fuʾād, after his death in 1936, and then Cairo University after the 1952 Free Officer Revolution. To avoid confusion, I refer to it as the 'Egyptian University' or simply 'the University' throughout.

[1] ʿAbd al-Jawād, *Taqwīm*, pp. u, n–q.   [2] Hussein, *The Days*, p. 196.
[3] Stetkevych, *Modern Arabic Literary Language*, p. 48.