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ARAB REFORM THOUGHT
AND THE EMERGENCE OF ARABISM
1876-1916

A Thesis Presented
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PREFACE

The stream of political and social thought of a small number of Arab thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which led to the genesis of Arabism is an important but neglected subject of study. This essay attempts an interpretive synthesis of the information and ideas on that topic contained in various distinguished works. The ideas of this Arab literate elite in urging a revival of social values and institutions were formulated primarily in reaction to the impact of the West. The Arabs under consideration were predominantly Syrian and Lebanese, who provided the most active intellectual and political ferment in behalf of Arabism. Egypt is not part of our discussion since it did not partake of the Arab movement during the period covered by this essay.

The main emphasis is on the inseparability of Arabism from Islam and on the successive phases of Arab reaction to Ottoman rule. Brief chapters on Ottoman revival and the Young Turk Revolution are included to provide the necessary background information for a full understanding of the transformation of Arab attitudes toward the Ottoman Empire, which shifted from loyalty to discontent to alienation.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my mentor, Professor George E. Kirk, who read the essay in draft form and made many helpful suggestions which are incorporated.

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BACKGROUND: OTTOMAN EFFORTS TO REFORM

The traditional self-view\(^1\) of the Ottoman Empire assumed the superiority of that civilization to all others. This feeling of self-assurance was an illusion from which the Ottoman Empire was slowly shaken by a series of humiliating defeats in the eighteenth century to the unbelieving West.\(^2\) The military system and the civil administration of the Empire were geared to the needs of a society organized for conquest and expansion. This state structure, which in a sense was a military machine, failed to adjust to the different demands of a society whose frontier was eroding.\(^3\) The Empire's inability to cope with the internal stresses and dislocation resulting from a contracting frontier manifested the utter exhaustion of its old patterns of government.

By the nineteenth century certain members of the Ottoman governing circles recognized the urgency for change; an urgency that originally resulted from the global problems of military defeat. They decided that, in order to defend the Empire against European, chiefly Russian, encroachments, and to restore central control over the provinces, measures must

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\(^1\)This term is used by G. E. von Grunebaum, *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity* (New York, 1962), passim.


be taken to revitalize the Empire's system of government and to modernize certain of its institutions. 4

To preserve the Empire's integrity, and to meet the needs of the time, the Ottoman reformers of the nineteenth century promulgated a long series of laws and regulations, known collectively as the Tanzimat (Reorganization). The most outstanding Tanzimat reforms were the Hatt-i Sherif of Gulhane (the Noble Rescript of the Rose Chamber), promulgated in 1839, the Hatt-i Humayun (the Imperial Rescript), promulgated in 1856, and the Constitution of 1876. 5

The Hatt-i Sherif, besides proposing reform in the administration of the provinces, proclaimed principles such as: the security of life, honor and property; the abolition of tax abuses; a fair system of military recruitment; fair and public trials of persons accused of crimes; and equality of persons of all religions before the law. The Hatt-i Humayun reaffirmed the principles of the edict of 1839, and it established, in specific and categorical terms, the full equality of non-Muslims. In addition, it promised popular representation in the provincial councils, as well as other legal and administrative reforms. The Constitution of 1876, the first in Ottoman history, provided a parliament to share certain legislative functions of the Sultan.

All three major reform documents often have been denounced by Western critics as deceptive instruments of diplomacy, intended to


5 For the texts of the Hatt-i Sherif and the Hatt-i Humayun, see J. C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record (Princeton, New Jersey, 1956), I, 113-16 and 149-53; for a discussion, see Roderick H. Davison, Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1875 (Princeton, 1963), 40-41 and 52-57; Lewis, Modern Turkey, 106-108, 115-16 and 164-66.
forestall Western intervention by erecting a facade of domestic reform. This criticism, in part, is valid, since each of the prominent reform edicts was produced at a time of international crisis, when the Ottoman Government was in need of conciliating Europe. The Hatt-i Sherif of 1839 was proclaimed when European support was needed to check Muhammad Ali, the rebellious Pasha of Egypt. The Hatt-i Humayun came immediately at the end of the Crimean War, when Britain and France had allied themselves with the Ottoman Empire against Russia. The Ottoman Constitution was promulgated at the time of the Balkan crisis, when European intervention seemed imminent.\(^6\)

To assert, however, that the sole objective of the reform proclamations was to appease Europe, is to miss the essential intention of the Tanzimat. While the reform decrees were precipitated and crystallized as a result of European pressure, they already had been considered by the Tanzimat statesmen, who were convinced of the necessity of modernization to preserve the Empire.\(^7\) The ultimate purpose of the Ottoman reform programs, notwithstanding their liberal phraseology and Western influence, was to restore the integrity of the Empire by strengthening the powers of the central government and by reintegrating the provinces. Promises of equality and administrative reorganization had different implications for Ottoman statesmen and non-Muslim subjects: while for the latter they meant greater rights and opportunities, for the former they


meant revival of imperial strength through the consolidation of the Empire's disparate social forces. All of the reform edicts were promulgated from above. Even the Constitution of 1876, like the Prussian constitutional edict of 1850 on which it was based, did not originate from a constituent assembly. In a sense, it was an authoritarian document, enumerating the Sultan's powers and guaranteeing the government wide jurisdiction in proclaiming martial law.

The trend toward autocratic reformism was substantially reinforced by Abdul Hamid (1876-1908), under whom the whole Tanzimat movement reached its culmination. The path toward autocratic rule was paved for him by the Tanzimat's elimination of many of the traditional legal and social checks that formerly had circumscribed the Sultan's power. Abdul Hamid extended the scope of the main Tanzimat programs; modernization of the systems of law, civil administration and education; centralization of authority, implemented with the help of Western techniques such as the telegraph and the railroad.

The Ottoman program of centralization, however, was unable to stay the erosion of the Empire's boundaries. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, all the Balkan provinces, with the exception of Albania, were either autonomous, or independent, or else occupied by Western Powers.

9 Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 172; Lewis, Modern Turkey, 164.
10 Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 172; Hourani, Arabic Thought.
Further contraction of the Empire's periphery occurred when Tunisia was occupied in 1881 by France, and Egypt in 1882 by Britain.

Many of the Tanzimat reforms had been designed with the objective of forestalling rebellion and keeping the provinces within the Empire. This was the purpose of programs such as: administrative reform in the provinces; equality of all subjects regardless of religion; and unification of all subjects on an equal basis with universal loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. These projects, however, were unable to counteract the centrifugal force of Balkan nationalism, which was fomented by the diplomatic maneuverings of the European Powers and by the influence of their political ideologies.  

12 Serbia and Bulgaria bluntly rejected a scheme proposed by the Grand Vezir Midhat Pasha in 1872 of converting the Ottoman Empire into a federal state along the lines of Bismarck's Germany.  

13 Promises of corporate equality and universal Ottoman nationality, however, had little appeal to the Balkan Christians who desired nothing less than complete separation from the Ottoman Empire.

Another main factor that militated against the integration of the various subject nationalities was the intransigence of the Empire's Muslim population. Arabic speaking Muslims, no less than their Turkish speaking coreligionists, opposed the program of equality for both religious and social reasons: some viewed it as an unforgiveable violation of a fundamental Islamic doctrine prescribing an inferior status to non-Muslims; and others, such as administrative officials, tax-farmers, moneychangers and the like, felt that it would lead to an encroachment on their economic

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13 Davison, "Turkish Attitudes," 853.
and political vested interests.  

Muslim Arabs, in contrast to the Christian peoples of the Balkans, considered the Ottoman Islamic Empire their cultural home. The Empire was, after all, a Muslim state; and moreover, as the most powerful of the existing Muslim states, it was the protector of Sunni Islam. The loyalty of Muslim Arabs to Islam, and thus to the Ottoman Empire, transcended any other feeling of allegiance. They remained uninfected by the virus of nationalism until the early part of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, they responded to the stimulus of the Tanzimat, in which they found the opportunity of reviving Muslim strength and ensuring Muslim ascendancy in the Empire.

14 Ibid., 861 n. 46.
II

DIVERGENCE OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN ARAB OUTLOOKS

The Ottoman Empire, after losses of territory in the Balkans and in North Africa, became predominantly an Asian state, in which the Arabs of the Fertile Crescent constituted a large proportion of the population.¹ According to some estimates, the inhabitants of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine numbered about three and a half million at mid-nineteenth century, and more than five and a half million at the beginning of the First World War.² Muslims, mostly Sunnis, comprised the vast majority of the total.

The various reform movements in the Arab provinces of the Empire during the last quarter of the nineteenth century arose in response to the Tanzimat reforms and to European influence. But to understand the nature and the objectives of these movements, we must first establish a distinction of fundamental importance, namely, the difference between Muslim Arab and Christian Arab outlooks vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire and the West. The divergent character of Muslim and Christian Arab political and social aspirations originated in their fundamentally different attitudes toward the Ottoman Empire.

A Muslim community (umma), joined by a common system of religious

¹ Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 173.

² Zeine N. Zeine, The Emergence of Arab Nationalism (Beirut, 1966), Appendices A and B.
principles and values, existed within the vast, culturally heterogeneous Ottoman Empire. It was the single most pervasive element of unity within the Empire.

To most Muslim Arabs the Ottoman Empire was more than a political structure; it was the heir of Islamic civilization, the successor of the great Islamic empires. Indeed, it was primarily a Sunni Muslim state, based essentially on those most sublime principles of Islam embodied in the Shari'a (the Sacred Law of Islam).

The overriding importance of the Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire to the Muslim essentially derived from the fact that the dominant feature of his individuality was his status as a believer. His first loyalty was to Islam, and, as a corollary, to the Ottoman Empire which was its political embodiment, and to the Sultan who ruled over it.

Sunni Muslims regarded the Ottoman sultanate as the lineal successor of the medieval caliphate. The theoretical justification for the legitimization of a secular authority over Islam had been formulated by the jurist al-Mawardi as early as the eleventh century, when he established the doctrine that a secular ruler, having established effective power, is to be obeyed in the public interest, as long as he upholds the principles of the Shari'a, protects Islam, and respects the rights and authority of the Muslim religious institution. Accordingly, the Ottoman

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3 The Shari'a comprises the Qur'an--divine revelation, and the Sunna--utterances and practices of the Prophet Muhammad.

4 Von Grunebaum, Modern Islam, 181.

5 Ibid., 283; Bernard Lewis, The Middle East and the West (London, 1964), 72.

Sultan, as the strongest and most competent defender of Sunni Islam, was esteemed by the Muslim faithful as the supreme head of the Ottoman Islamic Empire.⁷

Muslim Arab recognition of the Sultan as head of Islam implied acknowledgment of his authority in all aspects of individual and social life. Islam, like classical Judaism, claimed the complete allegiance of the faithful, uniting "religion" and "politics". It was more than a religion in the current interpretation of the word. It was a cultural unit, based on a comprehensive system of law and values.⁸

Muslim Arabs, besides formally adhering to the Empire on religious or philosophical grounds, were bound to it for material reasons. They benefited from the extension of state-operated educational institutions, railroads and other government-sponsored projects of modernization. Moreover, their political and social dominance was ensured by the existing governmental structure. They constituted the largest number of local administrative and judicial officials in the Arabic-speaking provinces, and some of them were among the closest advisers of the Sultan.⁹

Another factor that bound Muslim Arabs to the Ottoman Empire was their special position in Islam, which, to some extent, was officially recognized. It was based on facts such as, the Qur'an is in Arabic, the Prophet was an Arab, and the original Muslims were Arabs. Arabic maintained its privileged function as the official language of religion and law in the Empire. The descendants of the Prophet, the ashraf, were

⁷Hourani, Arabic Thought, 27.
⁹Hourani, Arabic Thought, 262; Ma'oz, Ottoman Reform, 247.
highly esteemed, and moreover, they possessed certain economic and legal privileges.

Renowned Arab families and religious leaders of the provincial cities fostered Arab pride in their language, cultural identity, historical memories, and unique role in Islam. Therefore, they preserved and, in a sense, encouraged Arab consciousness. However, it was strictly a cultural kind of "national" consciousness, lacking political overtones. The idea of nationalism, as a well-defined movement with political objectives, was incompatible with the overriding loyalty of Muslim Arabs to Islam and the Ottoman Empire--objects that transcended nationalism. Political allegiance to a country or nation was unknown: territorial loyalty was limited to one's city or quarter, and ethnic loyalty to one's family or tribe. "So alien was the idea of the territorial nation state," wrote Bernard Lewis, "that Arabic has no word for Arabia, while Turkish, until modern times, lacked a word for Turkey." Aspirations among Muslim Arabs for separate political existence from the Ottoman Empire were not crystallized until the First World War.

Muslim Arabs were, and consciously felt, very much a part of the Empire because, among other things, it was primarily a Sunni Muslim state, because it supported Muslim predominance, and because it esteemed their religious leaders and acknowledged their special status in Islam. The Empire, however, meant something quite different to Christian Arabs. Though the latter accepted the Arabic language and were part of Muslim culture in the broad sense, yet they were not fully incorporated in

10 Hourani, Arabic Thought, 33, 260-61.
11 Ibid.
12 Lewis, The Middle East, 72-73; Lewis, Modern Turkey, 329.
that culture.

Since the beginning of Islam, non-Muslims had been classified and treated as second-class subjects. This practice was perpetuated by the Ottoman Empire until the mid-nineteenth century, when it was formally abolished by the Tanzimat edicts. However, Muslim refusal to endorse the Tanzimat program of equality prolonged many of the traditional disabilities to which non-Muslims were subjected.

There were still cases of forced conversion and cases in which Christians were prohibited from building or repairing churches. After the discriminatory poll-tax (jizya) was eliminated by Ottoman reforms, it was replaced by another unequal tax, the badal, which was levied on all non-Muslims in lieu of military service, even though they were not permitted to serve in the army. Ottoman promises of more equitable representation in government and of legal equality were not fully carried out: Christians remained seriously under-represented in the provincial and state councils; evidence presented by a Christian against a Muslim was frequently discounted in Muslim courts of law. Courts often went as far as summarily condemning a Muslim in favor of a non-Muslim, rather than accepting the latter's evidence. In one particular case, for example, "the court endeavored to persuade the (Muslim) offender to plead guilty and to submit to a slight punishment, rather than to establish a precedent opposed...to their faith."

Besides being denied rights specifically granted to them by the

13 Ma'oz, Ottoman Reform, 189-99.
14 Ibid., 197.
15 Quoted in Ma'oz, Ottoman Reform, 196, from the British Foreign Office Archives, dispatch from the series F. O. 78, from the consulate in Damascus.
terms of the Tanzimat. Christians also were subjected to occasional acts of oppression and violence. Their attempts to exploit their rights under the Tanzimat aroused bitter Muslim antagonism, since Muslims refused to recognize non-Muslim equality. Sometimes Christians, however were responsible for provoking Muslim hostility for reasons such as: their open defiance of traditional Islamic social regulations; their reluctance to pay the obligatory badal; their repeated violations of the consular treaties; their close ties to certain European Powers with which the Ottoman Empire was at odds; their economic ascendancy made possible through foreign trade and European support.  

Anti-Christian activities were the result of the traditionalist Muslim cultural reaction to the idea of non-Muslim equality. It must be emphasized that the division between Muslim and non-Muslim was the basic social framework in the Islamic world, transcending linguistic and ethnic differences. Conservative Muslims held that the Ottoman Empire, as an Islamic society animated by Islamic doctrines, was obligated by religious precept to maintain the supremacy of Islam, and therefore, to preserve the inferior status of non-Muslims. Moreover, they feared that their traditional position of political and social dominance would be subverted if Christians enjoyed equal rights. What it meant for a Muslim to give up his superior status is described by Bernard Lewis in the following terms:

To give up this principle of inequality and segregation required of the Muslim no less great an effort of renunciation than is required of those Westerners who are now called upon to forego the satisfactions of

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16 Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform*, 226-32.

17 Ibid., 227.
racial superiority. Of the two prejudices, that of the Muslim against the infidel had stronger roots both in tradition and in morality. The Muslim could claim that he assigned to his inferiors a position of reasonable comfort and security; he could moreover claim that his discrimination related not to an accident of birth but to a conscious choice on the most fundamental question of human existence. 18

The obstacles against the full incorporation of Christians in Ottoman society were too great to be overcome by Tanzimat aspirations of Ottomanism (Osmanlilik)--the objective of uniting all subjects on the basis of equality under Ottoman sovereignty. The Muslim mind, conditioned by a history of Muslim dominance within Islam, was not yet prepared to accept the absolute equality of non-Muslims. Muslim intransigence, however, was not the only barrier against achieving Ottomanism. Some sections of the Christian Arab population did not want to be integrated in the Ottoman system, but instead they desired autonomy under the protection of certain European countries. 19

Various impersonal forces perpetuated Muslim-Christian disparity. The effects of centuries-old Ottoman discriminatory administration in government, law, justice and taxation, compounded with the consequences of semi-autonomous existence in the millet, 20 had estranged Christians from the Ottoman Government. The millet system of self-administering communities, drawn along religious lines, accentuated Christian consciousness of their separate status, and it militated against intercommunal

18 Lewis, Modern Turkey, 107.
19 Davison, "Turkish Attitudes," 864; Ma'oz, Ottoman Reform, 199, 218.
contact and Ottoman "national" solidarity. Christians had attained a viable social existence within the limits of their own millets, in which they observed their own laws, practiced their own customs, and cherished their own traditions. For all these reasons they regarded the Empire as alien to their society. It was an attitude moulded by centuries, and as such, it was too firmly established to be substantially changed in the space of several decades of reform.

The tension between Muslim Arab and Christian Arab was revived by the Tanzimat ferment, and it was intensified by the impact of the West. Christian Arabs, connected to their European coreligionists through missionary schools and through commercial activity, were able to accept Western ideas and practices without that disquieted feeling which characterized Muslim borrowing from an unbelieving, inferior culture.

The work of Christian traders of Damascus, Aleppo, and the coastal towns of Lebanon brought them into frequent contact with European life. The predominance of Arabic-speaking Christians in the trade field is explained by a number of factors: the traditional Muslim view of trade was one of contempt; Christians, prior to the Tanzimat, could not legally acquire land in Syria; Christians had a knowledge of European languages and the advantage of consular protection. The range of the consular treaties was extended to give protection to Ottoman subjects, as well as

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22 Sari' al-Husari, Lectures on the Growth of Nationalist Thought (in Arabic), (Cairo, 1948), 178-180.


24 Ibid., 57.
European aliens. European consuls even supported attempts by Christian Arabs to improve their material conditions, and to achieve greater rights and privileges. Consequently, many Christian Arabs had closer ties with, and were more favorably disposed to the West than to the Ottoman Empire.

Another main channel of Western influence was missionary and educational activity. Whereas the European experience of merchants, travellers, and European-educated priests and scholars was limited to a relatively small number of people, missionary work, on the other hand, reached large and various sections of the Christian Arab population. France had been the traditional protector of Arabic-speaking Christians who were under the headship of the Papacy, namely, the Maronite, Melkite and Latin Catholics. Russia, by a dubious interpretation of the Treaty of Kutchuk Kainardja (1774), claimed the right around mid-nineteenth century of protecting the Orthodox Christians. France was the undisputed leader in the founding of schools among Arab Christians, particularly the Lebanese. During the second half of the nineteenth century various other Western countries, notably Britain and the United States, expanded into the missionary and education field in the Arab provinces. As will be shown, it was from an American college in Lebanon that a high level of intellectual ferment emerged and spread to various other regions of the Empire.

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25 Ma'oz, Ottoman Reform, 217.

26 For the text of the treaty, see Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East, vol. 1 (Princeton, N. J., 1956), 54-61.

27 Hourani, Arabic Thought, 39-40; Ma'oz, Ottoman Reform, 215-16.

Lebanon was the country whose cultural and geographical circumstances enabled it to receive the largest share of Western ideas and practices. The Maronites of Lebanon, its dominant Christian sect, had carried on relations with the West for centuries. Their union with Western Catholicism began at the time of the Crusades, and it was consolidated by their Concordat with Rome in 1736. In the seventeenth century they established direct relations with France, which, as the most powerful Catholic country of Europe, claimed the right to protect the Maronites and other Catholic communities. Lebanon's religious contact with Europe opened the door to European cultural ideas and to greater commercial exchange, which was abetted by Lebanon's favorable geographical location.

Western influence in Lebanon was accelerated following the Organic Regulation of 1861, which was drafted by an international commission at the end of the 1860 civil war. It established Mount Lebanon as an autonomous region under a Christian governor appointed by the Porte; thus it implicitly acknowledged and safeguarded the predominance of the Christian element. Subsequently, commercial and missionary activity increased. More schools were founded by the Western missions, and even the indigenous schools were organized along European lines. The crowning achievement of Western education was the establishment of the Syrian Protestant College by the Americans in 1866, later to become the American University of Beirut, and Saint Joseph's University in 1875 by the French. The Syrian Protestant College, in which Arabic was the language of

29 Hourani, Arabic Thought, 39-40, 55.

30 For the text of the Organic Regulation, see Hurewitz, Diplomacy, vol. 1, 165-68.

instruction, played a leading part in the revival of the Arabic language, history, and literature, and ultimately in the awakening of Arab national consciousness.32

Western currents of thought inspired the Lebanese literary revival of the second half of the nineteenth century. Certain Lebanese Christians, prominently Nasif al-Yaziji, Faris al-Shidyaq, and Butrus al-Bustani, cultivated an ardently intense love of Arabic language and literature. With their exceptional mastery of Arabic, they endeavored to make the necessary linguistic modifications so as to make it a suitable medium for the expression of modern ideas.

Both Shidyaq (1804-1887) and Bustani (1819-1883) formed close ties with the American Protestant missionaries and gained a knowledge of Western languages. Eventually, both men converted from the Maronite faith to Protestantism, at least partly because of the greater latitude Protestantism offered for the expression of secular ideas. In his writings Shidyaq admired the social cohesion and the technological progress of the European countries. He realized that religious affiliations had to be transcended in order to achieve national unity.

Like Shidyaq, Bustani was strongly influenced by European culture. He taught that selective borrowing of European ideas and techniques was essential for a revival of Arab civilization. According to him, the first objective of the Arabs should be to attain national unity on the basis of equality and religious freedom. His firm belief that national solidarity was a prerequisite for social progress was manifested in at least two of his actions: he named the school he founded the National

School, in which Arabic and the modern sciences were taught; the motto he selected for his best known periodical was the following statement attributed to the Prophet, "Love of country is an article of faith". Bustani's national idea, however, did not suggest the creation of an independent pan-Arab state. He accepted Ottoman sovereignty as necessary for the political stability needed by the Arab provinces for their social well-being. Bustani was primarily a cultural nationalist, appealing to common Arabic traditions, customs, language and literature, as an antidote to the social limitations of sectarian life. His life time objectives, as teacher, translator, author, journalist, lexicographer and encyclopedist, were to revive Arabic as the medium of enlightenment, to transcend sectarianism, and to encourage regional social solidarity within the framework of the Ottoman system.³³

Tendencies toward secular thought among Lebanese Christians received tremendous impetus as a result of the growth of the periodical press, which carried their ideas far beyond the borders of Lebanon. Until the 1860's, there had been virtually no Arabic newspapers; the only papers of importance had been those published by the Ottoman Government in Constantinople and Cairo. But during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the increase in the number of printing presses,³⁴ and of the Arabic reading public, provided Lebanese Christians with the opportunity of publicizing and disseminating modern thoughts. Down to


³⁴The printing press had been traditionally in the hands of Christians. Muslims hesitated to adopt its use out of objection to reproducing the Qur'an, the word of God, by movable type instead of calligraphy.
about 1900, Arabic periodicals, whether published in Beirut, Cairo, or Constantinople, were predominantly in the hands of Lebanese Christians, most of whom were educated at the Syrian Protestant College.\(^{35}\)

The theme of many of the major Arabic periodicals of the late nineteenth century was secularism. Indeed the first significant Arabic newspaper with wide circulation, Shidyaq's *al-Jawa'ib* (1860-1883), proclaimed fresh ideas and discussed the advantages of European society.\(^{36}\) Another pioneer newspaper, but one that advocated Westernized reforms in more explicit terms, was *al-Jinan*, founded by Butrus al-Bustani in 1870. It argued that the social and political institutions of the Arab lands must be regenerated through reforms in the systems of education and administrative government, and by the separation of religion from politics.\(^{37}\)

The two most influential and best known of these Lebanese periodicals were *al-Muqtataf* and *al-Hilal*. The former was founded in Beirut in 1876 by two teachers of the Syrian Protestant College, Ya'qub Sarruf and Faris Nimr. However in 1885, just one year before the Ottoman Government suppressed *al-Jinan*, *al-Muqtataf* moved to the comparative freedom of Cairo (under British control), where it was renamed *al-Mugattam*.\(^{38}\) *Al-Hilal* was founded in Cairo in 1892 by Jurji Zaydan, who also had studied at the American Protestant College. Both of these periodicals handled many of the same subjects already treated by Shidyaq and particularly

\(^{35}\) Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 97.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 98-99.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 263.

Bustani—topics such as: the importance of science or progress, and the role of law, morality, and religion in modern society. However, their value existed not so much in original observations as in educating a growing reading public in Western ideas, with the result that these ideas were steadily becoming commonplace. They prepared the ground from which other public advocates of Westernized reform were able to advance.

The debate between religion and science at the end of the nineteenth century was brought into sharper focus by other Christian Arabs such as Shibli Shumayyil and Farah Antun. Both men accepted the European idea that the general welfare should be the chief goal of society and the state, and that science is indispensable for achieving that end. Shumayyil had studied medicine at the Syrian Protestant College and in Paris before settling in Egypt, where he became a frequent contributor to *al-Muqattam* and other similar periodicals. In his writings he asserted that the Ottoman Empire lacked the basic components of a healthy society, namely, liberty, justice, and primarily scientific knowledge. For Shumayyil, who had translated a German commentary on Darwin in the 1880s, a viable social organization could be sustained only adapting itself to the changing circumstances. But since the society best fitted to survive was the one in which all of its members worked for the general good, therefore social solidarity must be achieved by shifting an individual’s loyalty from his particular religion to a single national entity.

Farah Antun, another Lebanese journalist, published a book on the philosophy of Ibn Rushd in Cairo in 1903. He contended that the modern

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40Ibid., 248-51.
age was one of science and secular philosophy, in which religious
dogmatism was medieval and timeworn. He advocated national unity and
the separation of religion from politics as the \textit{sine qua non} of freedom,
justice, equality, progress, and true civilization.\textsuperscript{41}

The Arabic periodical press played a decisive part in publicizing
the idea of secularism as an antidote to the decay of Ottoman social
institutions. The primary function of the Arabic press was to persuade
public opinion of the advantages and indeed the necessity of Westernized
reform. It did not advocate action, nor did it even propose a definite
program for social improvement. Its treatment of certain controversial
political and social issues remained general out of fear of precipitating
Hamidian repression.

The influence of the Arabic press, though relatively great, must
not be overexaggerated. The periodical writers were predominantly
Christians, whose ideas appealed primarily to Christians, especially
those who had imbibed secularist thought with their knowledge of English
and French. Since the Christians existed on the margin of Ottoman
society, they had a certain objective insight into the inadequacies of
that society, and they were more inclined than Muslims to accept external
ideas. Their frequent discussion of and deep interest in the idea of a
secular state was based on their aspirations for equal rights and a
greater share in government.\textsuperscript{42} Muslim Arabs, on the other hand, were
scarcely influenced by ideas seeking to change the \textit{status quo} that
supported the predominance of their social institutions. They rarely
sent their children to mission schools, still preferring traditional

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 253-58.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 259.
Muslim schools, or the new Ottoman state schools. 43

Nevertheless, the Arab literary revival did not leave all Muslim Arabs untouched. Arabic periodicals frequently featured articles celebrating the literature and culture of the Arabs, and thus they enlivened Arab consciousness. Some Muslim Arabs began to become aware of certain cultural distinctions between them and the Ottoman Turks. A few of them, dissatisfied with Ottoman misgovernment, also began to canvass certain notions of reform. They desired greater material improvements and more power in provincial affairs. However, they were not amenable to doctrines of secularism. The integrity of Islam was still the first principle of their allegiance. Moreover, prior to the Young Turk ascendency after 1908, the number, effectiveness, and influence of reform minded Muslim Arabs was extremely small. The vast majority of them continued to support the Ottoman Empire as the home and protector of Islam. They looked upon Europe, rather than the Empire, as an unwanted intruder.

When a Muslim Arab reform movement eventually developed (as will be seen in the next chapter), Islam, not secularism, played the dominant role. Muslim reformers advocated a rejuvenation of Islamic institutions and a return to the doctrines of early Islam as prerequisites for social rehabilitations.

Religious loyalty, with its broad social ramifications, was a fundamental issue dividing Muslim Arab and Christian Arab reformers. While both groups agreed on the necessity of social reform, they differed as to its ultimate purpose. Whatever the political objectives of Muslim Arab reformers were, and whatever feeling of Arab consciousness they had, 43

Zeine, Emergence, 47-48 n. 2.
they still remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire and that they entertained no notions of separatism.

National feeling among Christian Arabs, however, was becoming widespread in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Butrus al-Bustani's al-Jinan advocated Syrian autonomy in the form of a secular community, including Muslims, Christians and Jews, and embracing the vilayets of Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut, and the autonomous sanjaks of Mount Lebanon and Jerusalem. This idea was supported mainly by Orthodox and Protestant Christians educated at the American and European mission schools. Even though many of them were Lebanese, they favored an autonomous Greater Syria over an independent Lebanon, because a Lebanese state implied the domination of the French and their Maronite Catholic protégés. 44

Beyond their general aspiration for autonomy, few Christian Arabs had a plan for action or even a program of political objectives. The first Arab political program to be recorded was drafted by a secret society that had been founded in Beirut in 1875 by five Lebanese Christians from the Syrian Protestant College. In 1880 this secret society posted in Beirut, as well as other major towns of Syria, anonymous placards accusing the Ottoman Turks of injustice and misgovernment, and exhorting the Arabs to obtain, by force if necessary, the following objectives: the autonomy of Syria in union with Lebanon; the recognition of Arabic as an official language; the removal of censorship and other types of repression; peace-time military service only in one's local region. 45

While the leaders of the Beirut society sought above all the

44 Hourani, Arabic Thought, 274-76.

45 Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 79-84.
independence of Lebanon, they felt that they needed Muslim Arab support, and that therefore, they had to offer a broader program. They appealed to the idea of Arabism as the common bond uniting Muslim and Christian Arabs; they exploited the dissatisfaction of reform minded Muslim Arabs with Ottoman misrule; they included the autonomy of Syria in their political demands. Furthermore, as members of the Masonic Lodge of Beirut, the leaders of the Beirut society managed to persuade a few of their fellow Muslim members to join their activities. 46

The influence of the secret society, however, was slight. 47 Its membership remained very small, and it was confined predominantly to a few educated Lebanese Christians. It decided to dissolve itself in 1882 or 1883 out of fear of Hamidian repression. 48 Perhaps its greatest significance was that it foreshadowed the eventual development of better organized Arab separatist movements.

The attempts of the Lebanese Maronites to bring full independence to their autonomous region, and to create a Christian state oriented to the West, represent the only mature "nationalist" movement among Arabs during the last decades of the nineteenth century. 49 This movement, however, should not be misinterpreted as an Arab nationalist effort. It was the work of marginal Arabs, whose pro-French policies and exclusively regional patriotism precluded support either from Muslim Arabs or from the Christian Arabs who opposed a Lebanese state based on Maronite supremacy.

46 Zeine, Emergence, 60-61.
48 Ibid., 62; Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 81.
49 Hourani, Arabic Thought, 275.
To sum up, there were at least three divergent directions of an Arab movement at the turn of the century: Lebanese Maronite nationalists seeking to establish an independent state; groups of Lebanese and Syrian Christians favoring a secular, autonomous Arab community; Muslim Arab reformers contending that an Arab revival was necessary for the cultural rejuvenation of Islam. These movements, with the exception of the Lebanese nationalists, were embryonic, and it was not until the consequences of the Young Turk ascendancy were felt that they came to life. They comprised small groups of individuals whose main work centered on publicizing, rather than acting on their objectives. Moreover, they aimed above all to secure reform and possibly autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. Only a small minority, almost entirely Christian, sought independence. It must be emphasized that the vast majority of Muslim Arabs supported the Ottoman Empire as a Muslim state.


51 Zeine, *Emergence*, 52.
III
MUSLIM ARAB REFORM THOUGHT

Muslim reformers during the last quarter of the nineteenth century were aroused by the modernizing spirit of the Tanzimat and by the increasing rate of Western involvement in Ottoman affairs. Their pride and confidence in the integrity of the Empire were shattered by a number of setbacks at the hands of Europe, such as: the abuse of capitulatory privileges; increasing commercial and financial control of European creditors over certain Ottoman affairs as a result of the expanding Ottoman debt; insurrections of Christian elements in the Balkans, which were spurred by Russia's pan-Slav policies; Russian attacks on Muslim domains in Central Asia; and French and British encroachments in North Africa.1 Muslim reformers felt that the Empire's viability was threatened externally from Europe, and internally from the discontent among the very Christian subjects to whom the Tanzimat had made a number of concessions, in the hope of integrating them in the Ottoman system.2 Consequently, these reformers became disillusioned with the Westernizing program of the Tanzimat on account of its failure either to satisfy the


Christian minorities, or to mitigate European intrusions. Nevertheless, they were still affected by the reform mood, as they fully recognized the need for social change and improvement. They began, however, to speak of modernization along strictly Islamic lines, as opposed to Western.

Late nineteenth century notions of reform among Muslims revolved about the integrity of Islam. The problems of and projected solutions for Islamic decline were formulated in religious terms, rather than secular or national. In contrast to Christian Arab secularizers, Muslims were not conditioned to separate religion from social life. For them, Islam was the source and ideally the raison d'être of their civilization; it was inseparable from the various other manifestations of social activity. Therefore, whatever cultural changes they contemplated depended upon their willingness to reform the Islamic foundation of that culture. They felt that a revival of Islam was a necessary prerequisite for political and social change. Indeed, the question of the Islamic religion represented a thread linking virtually all of the modern Muslim thinkers, notwithstanding their differing notions on precisely how Islam should be reformed.

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani

Islamic reformism received a reverberating stimulus from the activity


of the redoubtable Jamal al-Din al-Afghānī (1838-1897). The political aspects of the reform campaign of al-Afghānī, who was originally a Persian, were often dissimilar to the political implications of Muslim Arab thought. But his ideas on Islamic revival had a direct and important influence on Muslim Arab reformers, especially the school of Muhammad Abduh.

Through his writings and teachings, al-Afghānī asserted that for Islam to regain its proper place in the world it needed to return to the original and genuine principles of early Islam, and to eschew the later corruptions responsible for its stagnation. The idealization of primitive Islam as a golden age, and as normative, was accepted by most of al-Afghānī's followers, and it played a central role in Muslim reform thought. Islam had been great in the past, argued al-Afghānī, because the faithful adhered to the basic principles of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet. When Muslims had firmly abided by the fundamental truths of their faith, their interpersonal and community relationships were truthful and trustworthy. Al-Afghānī held that the sublime qualities engendered by right religion formed the basis of social cohesion and a healthy community. He idealized the strength and unity of Islamic society in the age of the caliphs, and he ascribed its military successes and rapid growth to the force of social solidarity produced by the true believers. He concluded that Islamic civilization again could become united and could flourish, if the faithful would live


6Wilfred C. Smith, Islam in Modern History (New York, 1957), 56.
their religion as it ought to be lived.\(^7\)

In his "Refutation of the Materialists", published in Paris in 1881 as an outgrowth of his controversy with Ernest Renan, al-Afghani propounded the thesis that Islam contained the roots not only for social solidarity, but also for social amelioration and progress. The ideology of progress was a European product,\(^8\) which al-Afghani borrowed chiefly from Guizot, whose *History of Civilization in Europe* had been recently translated into Arabic.\(^9\) Following the Enlightenment theory that progress was based on reason, al-Afghani tried to show in his essay that Islam was a rational religion, and moreover, the only religion conducive to the law of progress.

The Islamic religion is the only religion that censures belief without proof and the following of conjectures; reproves blind submission; seeks to show proof of things to its followers; everywhere addresses itself to reason; considers all happiness the result of wisdom and clear-sightedness; attributes perdition to stupidity and lack of insight; and sets of proofs for each fundamental belief in such a way that it will be useful to all people. It even, when it mentions most of its rules, states their purposes and their benefits.\(^10\)

Al-Afghani's feverish attempts to portray Islam as a religion fully compatible with the demands of a modern society help to indicate the

\(^{7}\) Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 38 and 78.

\(^{8}\) The policy of reinterpreting certain Western ideas or practices as original Islamic products was used by al-Afghani and other Islamic modernists in order to fit them in their exclusive system of reconstruction from within, and also to make them more acceptable to conservative Muslims. On this point see G. E. von Grunebaum, *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity* (New York, 1962), 122.

\(^{9}\) Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 172n.

\(^{10}\) Quoted in Keddie, *Islamic Response*, 172.
central importance and indispensability of Islam to Muslim reform activity. His political activities in behalf of pan-Islam cannot be understood apart from his Islamic consciousness. Indeed, the overall appeal of his pan-Islamic campaign was, as the name suggests, basically religious in nature.

Al-afghani did not originate the doctrine of pan-Islam, although he did become its leading advocate in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Pan-Islam developed primarily in reaction to European imperialism. The first ideologists of pan-Islam apparently were a group of intellectuals called the Young Ottomans, who in the 1870s called for Islamic unity based on the sublime provisions of the Shari'a. Their reaction against European encroachments was accompanied by a domestic reaction against the "heretical" Westernizing programs of the Tanzimat, which seemed to aggravate Ottoman disunity by giving greater latitude to the separatist-minded Christian elements, and by acquiescing in the growing influence of Europe, particularly conspicuous in economic affairs. Their ideas may well have influenced al-Alfhani, who had knowledge of Osmanli and who had been in Constantinople from 1869 to 1871. He shared the conviction of the Young Ottomans that Islam declined because it abandoned the precepts of the Shari'a, and because it could not defend itself against Western military and cultural inroads.11

The need for strong Islamic unity was dramatized by the distress felt among Muslims over the Empire's inability to respond to the appeals

for help from their Central Asian brothers, who were subjugated by Russia in the 1860s and 1870s. The nascent pan-Islamic sentiment received an impetus from the examples of the successful Italian and German unification programs. However, it should be emphasized that pan-Islam was radically different from European nationalist movements, in that it was based on religious and not national loyalties. Pan-Islamism was an ideological response to European aggression which fully comported with existing Muslim loyalties, whereas the notions of pan-Turkism or pan-Arabism did not even exist as yet.  

The emphasis on Islamic solidarity sharpened the focus of Muslim loyalty on the Ottoman Sultan, as the most powerful ruler in the Islamic world. Sultan Abdul Hamid eagerly responded to the pan-Islamic climate as he increasingly put forward the claim to be Caliph of all Sunni Muslims. Pan-Islam gave him the desired opportunity of consolidating his own position as head of a more firmly united Ottoman Islamic Empire.  

The trend toward greater Islamic identification was moving in the direction of al-Afghani, who had been advocating defensive cultural solidarity against European incursions through a re-emphasis of genuine Islamic principles. Al-Afghani had developed a lifelong hatred of foreign encroachments, particularly British, since his stay in India at about the time of the Indian mutiny. He assailed British imperial activities

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12 Lewis, "The Ottoman Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," 293-94. The thesis of Keddie's "Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism" exaggerates the importance of pan-Islam in leading to local nationalisms, while on the other hand it minimizes the incompatibility of national loyalties with Islamic loyalties, which were supranational.


14 Keddie, Islamic Response, 11-12.
in Egypt while he was there in the 1870s, and later in Paris through al-Urwa al-Wuthqa (The Strongest Link), the newspaper that he and Muhammad Abduh published in 1884.\(^{15}\)

To illustrate al-Afghani's anxiety over Islamic weakness in the face of European imperialism, let us consider his exhortations for direct action. He appealed to the traditional Islamic right of removing rulers incapable of protecting the Islamic peoples against foreign incursions, when he proposed, while in Egypt, that the Khedive Ismail should be assassinated for misgovernment, and again when he actually encouraged the assassin of Nasir al-Din Shah to commit his deed in 1896.\(^{16}\)

In view of al-Afghani's attitude, we can imagine the burning enthusiasm with which he took advantage of the pan-Islamic mood, such that he became probably its greatest publicist. He labored by pen and speech to bring about a union of all Muslims under the Sultan-Caliph, in order to present a united and formidable front against Europe. Recognizing that the Islamic religion was the common, fundamental element binding Muslims, al-Afghani advocated the strengthening of this bond as the most effective force of producing social cohesion and imperial strength.\(^{17}\)

These objectives were reflected in the "Refutation of the Materialists" and in the articles of al-Urwa al-Wuthqa, both of which attempted to engender pride in the social virtues and glories of Islam. Al-Afghani implied that when religion was the focal point of Muslim life, the Islamic civilization flourished and excelled.\(^{18}\)

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 20 and 24.

\(^{16}\)Haim, Arab Nationalism, 8-9.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., 9.

\(^{18}\)Keddie, Islamic Response, 83.
Al-Afghani's ambition was to ingratiate himself with Sultan-Caliph Abdul Hamid, who was already predisposed against European interventions, and furthermore who had already accepted the leadership of the pan-Islamic cause. Al-Afghani hoped to influence Abdul Hamid to adopt the pan-Islamic proposals that he had drafted. In 1885, he suggested an alliance between Afghans, Persians, Turks, Egyptians and Arabs, with the help of his traditional foe Britain, to counter Russian expansion at the expense of the Muslims of Turkestan. In 1892, he presented a pan-Islamic project to Abdul Hamid, and consequently he was invited to Constantinople in that year. This project, in contrast to the earlier one, was directed mainly against the British. It proposed an alliance of all Muslims, including those of India, to expel the British from Muslim domains, and to block further Western encroachments against the Islamic world.\footnote{Nikki R. Keddie, "The Pan-Islamic Appeal: Afghani and Abdul-Hamid II," Middle Eastern Studies, III, 1 (October, 1966), 52-65; Jacob Landau, "al-Afghani's Pan-Islamic Project," Islamic Culture, XXVI, 3 (July, 1952), 51-52.}

Al-Afghani's pan-Islamic schemes never materialized, and the movement itself never got off the ground, as it remained more an expression of a striving than a systematic plan for action. Yet his significance is to be found not in concrete achievements, but rather in the tone he set for many subsequent Muslim reform thinkers. He brought Islamic cultural consciousness into focus, and he helped to accentuate Islamic resentment of European power. He advocated the feasibility of enlightened reform from within, as opposed to blind imitation either of accepted patterns or of European ways. His ideas on cultural revival and a renewed Islamic Empire appealed to the nascent spirit of Muslim defensive cultural
solidarity.  

Sylvia Haim has aptly summarized al-Afghani's seminal role in the cause of Islamic reform:

What al-Afghani did was to make Islam into the mainspring of solidarity, and thus he placed it on the same footing as other solidarity-producing beliefs. His political activity and teaching combined to spread among the intellectual and official classes of Middle Eastern Islam a secularist, meliorist, and activist attitude toward politics, an attitude the presence of which was essential, before ideologies such as Aran nationalism could be accepted in any degree. It is this which makes al-Afghani so important a figure in modern Islamic politics.

Muhammad Abduh

Many of al-Afghani's ideas on Islamic cultural rejuvenation were taken up and disseminated by the more profound Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), who became probably the most influential modernist in Islam. A native of Egypt, Abduh had been a pupil of al-Afghani during the latter's years in Cairo in the 1870s, and he helped al-Afghani publish al-Urwa al-Wuthqa in Paris in 1884. While under al-Afghani's direct influence, Abduh had been politically active by way of writing anti-European articles, and of supporting by pen and word of mouth the al-Arabi revolt (1881-1882) against the Khedival Administration of Egypt and its ties with the British.

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20 Keddie, "The Pan-Islamic Appeal," 50; Smith, Islam in Modern History, 54-56.

21 Haim, Arab Nationalism, 15.


Abduh's predominant concerns, however, were eventually focused upon religious, ethical and social matters. His two most important works are basically religious: Risalat al-Tawhid (Treatise on the Unity of God), which is his major theological work, and Al-Islam wa al-Nasraniyya ma'al-Ilm wa al-Madaniyya (Islam and Christianity Compared with Respect to Science and Civilization), which is a defense of the greater compatibility of reason and revelation in Islam than in Christianity. In both works he argued that reason and the Islamic religion are mutually corroborative, non-contradictory paths to the truth, and moreover that Islam encourages the development of free inquiry and science.  

Abduh declared that Islam must adapt itself to the modern scientific outlook if it wished to preserve its viability and to enter into the spirit of social progress. But he opposed blind imitation of the ways of European life as a cure for the ills of Muslim society. Instead he idealized early Islam, as al-Afghani had done, and he advocated a restoration of its pristine truths as the preparatory phase for a general Islamic revival. Abduh contended that, since Islam had become vitiated partly as a result of the practice of taqlid—the blind acceptance of doctrines from generation to generation on the authority of the religious community, it was essential to re-introduce as a counter-measure the right of ijtihad--free and independent investigation. For justification of the right of ijtihad, he appealed to the most inviolable source in Islam, the Qur'an: "How far those who believe in taqlid are from the

25 Amin, Muhammad Abduh, 29.
26 Adams, Islam and Modernism, 130-32.
guidance of the Qur'an. It propounds its laws in a way that prepares us to use reason, and makes us people of insight... It forbids us to submit to taqlid."27

Abduh's objective of interpreting Islam, through the method of exclusive selection, as a religious system conducive to free investigation was to show that it contained the necessary formulas for religio-social modernization. What was needed to break contemporary Islamic inertia, and to once again set Islam on the path of progress, was a revitalization of the truths of the Qur'an.28

Abduh's focus on the incomparable value of the principles of primitive Islam led to this important development: emphasis on the unique role of the Arabs in Islam. Abduh came to stress the Arab character of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. He taught that a thorough and precise knowledge of the Arabic language, as well as of the history and practices of the Arabs, were prerequisites for understanding the intention of the Book. Accordingly, he went on to conclude that a revival of Arabic studies was essential to discover the truth of Islam, and thus to regenerate Muslim society.29

Abduh maintained that true Islam was the original product of the Arabs, who furthermore had proficiently preserved it. He connected the spread of the practice of taqlid and social obscurantism with the ascendancy of Turkish rule. He even dated the beginning of the decline of Islam to the time when the Abbasid Caliph, probably al-Mutasim

27Quoted from Abduh's Commentary on the Qur'an in Adams, Islam and Modernism, 130.

28Ibid., 142-43.

introduced the use of Turkish mercenaries who eventually seized power and established military despotism. He held that the Turks, lacking a full understanding of Arabic language and culture, could not grasp the true meaning of the Qur'an and the Sunna. They preserved their political autocracy by closing the door of ijtihad, and by making their subjects accept beliefs and doctrines that were often extraneous to the spirit of the Shari'a. He concluded that the Turkish tradition of despotic government and unintelligent theology have continued through Ottoman rule. Although supporting the Ottoman Empire as the most effective protector of Islam, nevertheless Abduh, arguing on similar grounds as al-Afghani, asserted that if the ruler's actions were unjust and contrary to the principles of the Shari'a, the people have a right to depose him in the interests of public welfare.

Abduh was the first influential Muslim Arab thinker to juxtapose Arabs and Turks, and to compare the former favorably against the latter. This policy was accepted and amplified by certain other important Muslim Arab reformers. It marked an early step in the emergence of Arab consciousness.

Abduh's preconceived case for the inviolability of strict Islamic doctrines was based, however, on a precarious foundation. He fallaciously projected on the Turks the responsibility for closing the door of ijtihad with its consequential negative ramifications, a responsibility that actually belonged to the orthodox Muslim religious leaders. In the eleventh century the scholastic theologians succeeded in establishing Ash'arism as the officially recognized theology of Sunni Islam. It is

30 Haim, Arab Nationalism, 21.

31 Hourani, Arabic Thought, 150, 151, 158; Kerr, Islamic Reform, 149.
an authoritarian system, demanding the passive, unquestioning acceptance of its interpretation of Divine Revelation. It marked the end of free inquiry and speculation in theology, as well as in philosophy and in the natural sciences.32

Rashid Rida

Muhammad Abduh's ideas on the necessity of a Muslim Arab revival for religio-social reform were adopted and elaborated by his devoted pupil, Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935).33 Rida was born near Tripoli, Lebanon, of a family that belonged to the ashraf class, that is, those believed to be descended from the Prophet. He was deeply influenced by al-Urwa al-Wuthqa, particularly in its emphasis on the social implications of the Islamic religion.34 Rida's cause, one that was becoming recurrent in the Islamic modernist movement, was the regeneration of Islamic culture. This furnished the underlying theme of his journal al-Manar, which he established in 1898 in Cairo, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Rashid Rida adopted the formula for reform already seen in al-Afghani and Abduh: the necessity of a return to the principles and the practices of the great ancestors or elders (salaf), as a remedy for the maladies of Islamic social institutions, and as a prerequisite for progress and amelioration. All three modernists used the past as the


33For the life and thought of Rida, see Adams, Islam and Modernism, ch. 8; Hourani, Arabic Thought, ch. 9; Kerr, Islamic Reform, chs. 5 and 6.

34von Grunebaum, Modern Islam, 279-80n.
authoritative and archetypal model for reform. It represented to them the quintessence of Muslim power and glory achieved under the pristine rulership of the Prophet and the first four caliphs, or the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. They ruled out modernization along Western lines as a possible alternative to emulation of the past for at least two reasons: much of the reform energy originally sprang from the Islamic cultural reaction to Western intrusions; Islamic principles enjoined on true Muslims the obligation to eschew the alien ways of unbelieving peoples. These thinkers also excluded as a basis for reform the beliefs and practices of the long intervening centuries between classical Islam and the present, since those centuries already had been indicted for the predicament of contemporary Islam. A passage from Professor G. E. von Grunebaum's Modern Islam illustrates the similarity between Islamic and Western views of the medieval ages:

The view of history which is implied in this attitude bears close resemblance to that of the West from the Renaissance onward, when the Middle Ages were depreciated as an interruption of the true growth of civilization and a direct connection was established between antiquity and the modern era, with the intervening period decried as a regrettable and shameful lapse.  

The salafiyya, the movement to return to the ways of classical Islam, can be interpreted as the reaction of a growing body of Muslim reformers to a feeling of inadequacy. In a sense, they replaced their receding

36 Ibid., 112.
37 This concept was not entirely new in Islam. The Wahhabi movement in Arabia in the eighteenth century urged a revival of the original truths of the first generation of Muslims, and the elimination of the later unorthodox innovations. See Hourani, Arabic Thought, 37-38.
feeling of cultural superiority, which was shaken by external encroachments and internal decay, with the dangerous illusion that contemporary needs and aspirations could be fulfilled by recapturing the exemplary past. Implicit in this attitude was a fundamental contradiction between the adherence to a law of progress and the belief that the first centuries of Islam marked the highest level of history.

Rashid Rida became the unrivaled intellectual leader of the salafiyya movement. He was a Hanbalite, the most conservative of the four schools of Muslim theology, and he was a stricter salafi than al-Afghani and Abduh. He put much sharper focus than they on the period of the first four caliphs, to the virtual exclusion of the medieval orthodox Muslim religious institution. The logical implication of this was that Rida's ideal Islam was unambiguously the Islam of the Arabs. For him, the essential, indeed the only truths of Islam were contained in the Qur'an and formulated in the doctrines of the Prophet and the Companions. The subsequent beliefs and rituals were superstitious, mystical and corrupt accretions deviating from genuine Islamic precepts.

Rida said that Muslims, to emerge from their stagnant situation, should return to the practices "of the early days of the first four caliphs, whose Sunna, together with his own Sunna, the Prophet commanded Muslims to hold fast to, and they should lay aside everything that has been introduced into Islam that is contrary to that practice."

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38 von Grunebaum, Modern Islam, 108 and 123.
39 Ibid., 118n.
40 Haim, Arab Nationalism, 20-21.
41 Adams, Islam and Modernism, 188-91; Hourani, Arabic Thought, 230.
42 Quoted in al-Manar from Adams, Islam and Modernism, 191.
Rida, like Abduh, supported the sultanate out of necessity as the most capable defender of Islam, but he denied its legitimacy as a caliphate, which, he asserted, belonged de jure to the Muslim religious institution. The Ottoman sultan could not interpret correctly the aims of the laws and traditions of Islam because he did not have knowledge of the Arabic language. Consequently, what was needed to restore right religion and to regain the spirit of early Islamic greatness was a regeneration of Arabic culture. In focusing on the necessity of an Arab renascence to rebuild Islamic society, Rida came to stress the priority of the Arabs over the Turks. In his article "The Turks and the Arabs", published in al-Manar in 1900, Rida stated:

It is in the countries which were conquered by the Arabs that Islam spread, became firmly established and prospered. Most of the lands which the Turks conquered were a burden on Islam and the Muslims, and are still a warning of clear catastrophe. I am not saying that those conquests are things for which the Turks must be blamed or criticized, but I want to say that the greatest glory in the Muslim conquests goes to the Arabs, and that religion grew, and became great through them; their foundation is the strongest, their light is the brightest, and they are indeed the best umma brought forth to the world.

It should be understood that Rida, in praising the Arabs at the expense of the Turks did not advocate or even envision an Arab national movement toward political separatism. He continued to reaffirm the traditional hierarchy of loyalties in which Islam held priority over Arabism, and in which all Muslims were brothers regardless of ethnic or

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43 Hourani, Arabic Thought, 240.
45 Quoted in Haim, Arab Nationalism, 22-23.
linguistic differences. For him, as for most Muslims, the Islamic world was a single cultural unit represented by the Ottoman Empire. When he criticized the Ottoman authorities and praised the Arabs, it was because he felt that the Arabs were better Muslims.

Nevertheless, Rida's juxtaposition of Arabs and Turks had repercussions not originally intended by him. It exposed to some minds that the Arab community was ethnically and historically different from the Turkish, that the original umma was Arab, and that perhaps the Arabs should be recognized as a separate nation.

Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi

Rashid Rida's theories on the pre-eminence of the Arabs in Islam were given fuller content in the words of Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1849-1902). Kawakibi, who was of the ashraf class, worked as a public official and a journalist in his native Aleppo until he was imprisoned for speaking out against the local Ottoman authorities. He found it expedient to move to Cairo in 1898, where he joined to the circle of Abduh and Rida, and contributed articles to al-Manar. His diagnosis of the ills afflicting Islam, which were generally those already expounded by Abduh and Rida, are incorporated in his Tabai' al-istibdad (The Characteristics of Tyranny), and Umm al-qura (another name for Mecca).

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46 von Grunebaum, Modern Islam, 280n, 297.

47 Haim, Arab Nationalism, 23.


49 These works are not original. Tabai' al-istibdad was virtually lifted from the Italian writer Alfieri's Della Tirannide (1777), and Umm al-qura was probably adapted from W. S. Blunt's The Future of Islam (1882). For a discussion of this matter, see Sylvia G. Haim, "Alfieri and al-Kawakibi," Oriente Moderno, XXXIV (1954), 321-34; idem., "Blunt and al-Kawakibi," Oriente Moderno, XXXV (1955), 132-43.
He found the chief causes of Islamic decay inherent in the introduction of alien and deviant beliefs. He followed the path of his predecessors in launching assaults on the Turkish experience in Islam, on which he placed much of the responsibility for the deplorable condition of Islamic culture.

However, Kawakibi attacked Turkish despotism much more severely and acrimoniously than Rida and certainly than Abduh. Moreover, he drew a sharper distinction between Arabs and Turks. He concluded that, since the whole history of Turkish rule down to the Ottomans was responsible for stifling Islamic progress, the task of regeneration must be assumed by the Arabs—the true, original Muslims. The reasons Kawakibi adduced for asserting that the Arabs, especially those of the Arabian Peninsula, are the only possible instrument to effect the restoration of right religion are the following: Islam originated with them and is deeply rooted among them; they are its foundation and its most zealous adherents; they have preserved its purity and eschewed alien corruptions brought in by foreign races; and their tongue is the language of the Sacred Qur’an.

Although Abduh and Rida had already assailed Ottoman religious and social obscurantism, and had called for an Arab revival, Kawakibi was the first writer, other than Ibn Abdul Wahhab in the eighteenth century, to deny outright the religious authority of the Ottoman Sultan. Kawakibi

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50 Kawakibi, like other Muslim Arab apologists, often passed over the distinctions between earlier Turkish Islamic dynasties and the Ottoman Empire.

51 Haim, Arab Nationalism, 26; Hourani, Arabic Thought, 272.


53 On the Wahhabis see footnote 37 above.
demanded that the caliphate rightly belonged to an Arab of the line of Quraish (the tribe of Muhammad) to be installed at Mecca. The Arab caliph would have religious authority over all Muslims, but, contrary to early caliphal rule, his political authority would be limited to the Hijaz. Each regional entity of the Ottoman Empire would have administrative and political autonomy.\(^\text{54}\)

The "national" suggestions of Kawakibi's ideas on the pre-eminence of the Arabs have been exaggerated by two prominent writers on Arab nationalism, namely, George Antonius and Sylvia Haim.\(^\text{55}\) Kawakibi's assertions that the Ottoman sultans were not legitimate caliphs, and that the caliphate belonged to the Arabs and ought to be returned to them, were absolutely not intended as Arab nationalist appeals, nor were they received as such.\(^\text{56}\) His explicit statement that the caliph would have only religious authority over a multinational Islamic world precluded the notion of a pan-Arab state. The caliph would be a kind of Islamic pope rather than an Arab Islamic emperor.

Moreover, Kawakibi's reasons for assailing the Ottoman Empire stemmed more from self-interested than ideological motives. Kawakibi belonged to the class of the ashraf, which, by virtue of its descent from the Prophet, historically had enjoyed privileged economic and social

\(^{54}\)Haim, "Blunt and al-Kawakibi," 132; Hourani, Arabic Thought, 272-73.

\(^{55}\)Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 95-98; Haim, Arab Nationalism, 27 and 29.

\(^{56}\)Sati' al-Husri, Lectures on the Growth of Nationalist Thought (Cairo, 1948), passim. Likewise the Wahhabis, though rejecting the authority of the Ottoman sultan, appealed to Islamic and not Arab solidarity; see Hourani, Arabic Thought, 38.
advantages. However, the elevated position of the ashraf gradually was being eroded by the effects of Ottoman centralization during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whereby "the Ottoman sultans began attracting to themselves all the elements of power hitherto diffused among a crowd of landed families, tribal shaikhs, and privileged corporate orders." Opposition of ashraf elements to the Ottoman government was particularly acute during the reign of Abdul Hamid, who resolutely pursued centralization by extending the network of railroads and the system of state-supported schools in the Arabic speaking provinces, and by demanding that Osmanli Turkish replace Classical Arabic in the government schools and administrative offices.

More particularly, Kawakibi had first hand experience of the loss of familial privilege when the family of Abdul Hamid's court astrologer and religious adviser, Abu'l-Huda al-Sayyadi, successfully challenged the Kawakibis for the post of naqib al-ashraf (head of the ashraf) of Aleppo. This, in spite of the fact that the religious families of Aleppo doubted Abu'l-Huda's claim to be of the ashraf. This event as well as Kawakibi's prison term indicate that one of his principal reasons for rejecting the authority of the Ottoman caliphate lay in his personal antipathy toward the Hamidian regime.


58 Batutu, op. cit., 53.

59 Ibid., 53-54.

60 Peter Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516-1922 (New York, 1966), 257; Hourani, Arabic Thought, 271.
It had been Ottoman encroachments upon the traditional prerogatives of the ashraf class that constituted the underlying cause not only of Kawakibi's dissent, but moreover the dissent of many other important Arab figures of that class. Significantly, many of the prominent anti-Ottoman radical dissidents, including Rashid Rida, Sayyid Talib of Basra, and Sharif Husain of Mecca, were from the ashraf class. They were not pan-Arabists in the political sense suggested by Antonius and Haim, but rather they were devotees of the old order seeking to preserve above all the local autonomy of the Arabic speaking towns, in order to maintain their own privileged interests. Nevertheless, they as well as certain other Arab reformers gave air to certain ideas which came to be acted upon in the early part of the twentieth century: ideas such as the incompetent and illegitimate rule of the Ottoman sultans, the priority of the Arabs in Islam, and the justness of an Arab caliphate and local Arab autonomy.

Nineteenth century Muslim Arab reformers were not political activists. The fundamental character of their reform thought was religio-social. Their quasi-national ideas, advanced at the close of the nineteenth century, fell largely on unresponsive ears, as the vast majority of Muslim Arabs still passively acquiesced in Ottoman authority. Their emphasis on Arabism was still intimately connected with the religious faith, and as such it lacked nationalist overtones. An Arab nationalist movement of well-defined political aims did not maturely develop until the second decade of the twentieth century, as a reaction to the Turkification policies of the Young Turks, and as a result of the stimulus it

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61. Batutu, op. cit., 52.
received from World War I and the post-war settlements. Actually, the most vehement political opposition to the Ottoman Government at the end of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth came not from the Arabs, but rather from the Turks themselves. 62

62 Zeine N. Zeine, The Emergence of Arab Nationalism (Beirut, 1966), 73.
IV

THE YOUNG TURK REVOLUTION AND THE FIRST ARAB SOCIETIES

Domestic and foreign events of the last quarter of the nineteenth century stimulated disenchantedment toward the Ottoman Government among elements of the Turkish military colleges and the Westernized bureaucracy. Turkish reformers of the Western tradition became estranged from the ruling dynasty after Abdul Hamid in 1877 had prorogued Parliament and scrapped the Constitution of 1876. Fear of the regime's incapacity to hold the Empire together mounted in the wake of recurrent Balkan insurrections, the disastrous consequences of the Russian-Turkish War, the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881, and the establishment of the British protectorate over Egypt in 1882.

The first organized opposition to Abdul Hamid was formed in 1889 by a group of students at the Imperial Military Medical School in Constantinople. The express purpose of their association was to overthrow Abdul Hamid. They were inspired by Western ideas of modernism, emanating largely from Paris. This opposition movement spread rapidly from the Military Medical School to other government higher schools in Constantinople, among them the Military Academy, the Naval Academy, the Civil College, and the Engineering School. But before long, certain conspirators fell under the watchful eye of the Hamidian espionage system. As a consequence, some of them found it expedient to leave the country,
and by 1894-95 a steadily growing number escaped to Europe, chiefly Paris.

In Paris these refugees established contact with an already assembled small group of Ottoman anti-Hamidians. Chief among them were Khalil Ghanem and Ahmet Riza. Ghanem was a Lebanese Maronite from Beirut who had been a delegate to the first Turkish Parliament in 1878, but had fled to Paris after Abdul Hamid had prorogued the Parliament. In Paris he founded the journal La Jeune Turque. Ahmet Riza's amenability to Westernized reform was rooted in his social background. His mother was Austrian and his father was a man of Western tastes, and he himself had received part of his education in France. Together with Ghanem and a number of other exiles, Ahmet Riza published the paper Mashwara (Consultation), which first appeared in 1895, and which became the organ of these "Young Turks." Their program called for the overthrow of Abdul Hamid, social and political reforms for the entire Empire, the Ottomanization of the disparate social forces of the Empire, and the preservation of Imperial integrity.1

Meanwhile in Constantinople, discontent with the Hamidian government was increasing. The British ambassador in Constantinople reported in November 1895 that placards assailing Abdul Hamid's rule were posted on the chief mosques of the capital.2 A series of arrests were made on suspected seditious elements. Finally, the malcontents decided to attempt a coup d'état on August, 1896. However, the projected coup was uncovered before it was able to materialize, and exile to the remote

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2 Zeine N. Zeine, The Emergence of Arab Nationalism (Beirut, 1966), 74.
parts of the Empire became the fate of the conspirators.  

Paradoxically, it was not the failure or the consequences of the projected coup of 1896 that immobilized the activities of the Young Turks; rather it was their own decision to abandon the struggle against the Sultan. The defection of the very popular Young Turk leader Murat Bey and his followers in 1897 paralyzed the anti-Hamidian movement for several years. They exchanged their revolutionary aims for Hamidian promises of reform from above and of a guarantee of complete amnesty for all political prisoners and exiles. Furthermore, Murat Bey believed that his aspirations for a new Islamic Empire might be realized by attaching himself to the Sultan.

When the Young Turk movement began to regain its strength after 1900, its activities were concentrated outside of the Ottoman Empire, since internal agitation was precluded by the inhospitable political climate of Constantinople. And after 1900, the Young Turk reformers were forced to give more and more attention to the vociferous grievances of the subject nationalities, particularly the nationalist-inspired Armenian and Balkan peoples.

Among the Arabs, nationalistic feeling was scarce, since the vast majority of Muslim Arabs remained loyal to the sultan-caliph as a matter of religious principle. Nevertheless, there were a few Arab opposition societies existing prior to the Young Turk Revolution that are worthy of mention. There was the "Turko-Syrian Reform Committee," whose objectives,  

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3 Ramsaur, The Young Turks, 26, 30-33.

4 Ibid., 45-50; Ahmed Amin, The Development of Modern Turkey as Measured by its Press (New York, 1914), 68.

5 Ramsaur, The Young Turks, 61-62.
as its name implies, were for reform and greater harmony between the Syrian provinces and the central government.\(^6\)

In 1903 a young group of Muslim Arabs of Damascus founded the Halaqat Dimashq al-Saghira (the Damascus Circle). While this society had been established primarily to promote the study of Arabic language and literature, it increasingly came to concern itself with political issues, such as decentralized government and the recognition of Arabic as an official language in the law courts and in the government schools and offices of the Arab provinces. Some of these young men went on to study in Constantinople, where in 1906 a few of them founded the secret society Jam'iyyat al-Nahda al-Arabiyya (the Society of the Arab Awakening), and then helped to establish a branch in Damascus. In fact, Damascus remained the center of the activities of the Jam'iyya's young Damascene intellectuals, in spite of its foundation at Constantinople. The Jam'iyya disseminated knowledge of Arab history and literature, and it covertly discussed political problems and aspirations of the Arab provinces.\(^7\) The importance of these first Arab societies lies less in their actual influence, than in their indication of emerging tendencies toward greater Arab consciousness.

Another Arab group of pre-Young Turk Revolution years, but one with clear and well-defined nationalist aims, was the Ligue de la patrie arabe, founded by Najib Azouri, a Syrian Christian who had studied in Paris. The Ligue's program was conspicuously contained in Azoury's Le Reveil de la Nation Arabe, published in French at Paris in 1905. It advocated the

\(^6\) Ibid., 63-64.

\(^7\) Elie Kedourie, "Hizb," Encyclopedia of Islam (2nd ed.), III, 519; Al-Amir Mustafa al-Shihabi, Al-Qawmiyatu'l Arabiya (Cairo, 1958-59), 52 and 55.
creation of a new Arab Empire extending from the Tigris and the Euphrates to the Suez, and from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea. It called for the division of spiritual and temporal power, by urging the creation of an Arab constitutional monarchy based on religious freedom and political equality, as well as the creation of a "spiritual" caliphate with religious authority over the Islamic world. Egypt lay outside the boundaries of Azoury's Arab nation, since, as he maintained, it belonged not to the Arab but to the Berber family, and also since they were separated from the Arab Empire by a natural frontier.  

It appears that the Ligue had little direct influence among the Arabs, and its short-lived monthly periodical, L'Independence Arabe, ceased publication in about 1907. Reasons for the meager influence of the Ligue seem apparent. For one thing, Azoury wrote in French, at Paris, not in Arabic or in his native land. His political views were representative of some Christian Arabs, but hardly any Muslim Arabs. His bid for the separation of civil from religious sovereignty was anathema to the Muslim system of law. His clamor for complete Arab independence fell largely on deaf ears, even among Christian Arabs. Although small groups of the latter, mostly Lebanese, wanted regional independence, almost none of them shared the idea of a centralized pan-Arab state. As for the Muslim Arabs, the bulk of them still acquiesced in Ottoman rule, while small numbers who agitated, did so for reform and improvement within the Ottoman Empire, and not independence.

8 English translation of the nationalist manifesto contained in Le Reveil is found in Sylvia G. Haim, Arab Nationalism: An Anthology (Los Angeles, 1962), 81-82.

The initiative for radical political change came not from the Arabs or from any of the other subject nationalities, but from the Turks. A new feature of the Young Turk movement after 1900 was the program espoused by Prince Sabaheddin, a relative of the Sultan who had emigrated to Europe with his father and brother in 1899. Sabaheddin contended that the interests of the Ottoman Empire could best be served by compromising with the national aspirations of the subject nationalities.

To Ahmet Riza's policies of centralization and Ottomanization, Sabaheddin opposed a program for an Ottoman federation in which the provinces would have a great measure of autonomy. In their quest for reaching some sort of an agreement and unity on the question of action against Abdul Hamid, and on the problem of the nationalities, the Young Turks arranged two conventions, both in Paris, one in 1902 and the other in 1907. Representatives of the Riza and Sabaheddin factions, as well as Arabs, Kurds, Greeks, Armenians, Albanians, Circassians, and Jews attended both conventions. There was agreement on the deposition of Abdul Hamid and the need for a constitution. But there was no unanimity on the question of the place of the various nationalities in the Empire.  

Ottoman attempts at compromise and conciliation were almost bound to fail. The Christian nationalities, especially the Armenians, felt no attachment to a Muslim state headed by a Turkish sultan. They would not be conciliated by Sabaheddin's proposals for an Ottoman federation, as they sought complete independence from the Empire.  

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The Turks, for their part, were becoming increasingly intransigent. The opposing forces advocating Ottomanization on the one hand, and decentralized government on the other, became polarized after the Paris Convention of 1902. During the next few years the Riza faction became predominant, for its program of centralized government and the amalgamation of the various races was attuned to the nascent spirit of Turkish nationalism which was then emerging within the Empire.\(^{12}\) The nationalistic activities among the Armenians and among the Balkan peoples, the recurring Russian encroachments in the Balkans, the rumors of dismemberment at the hands of the European powers, had embittered many Turks,\(^ {13}\) who now distrusted notions of decentralization, preferring to guard the Empire's integrity through consolidation. The increasing participation of the military in the Young Turk movement meant greater support for centralism.\(^ {14}\)

It was among Turkish military elements, rather than the Young Turk exiles or the almost defunct opposition in Constantinople, that the anti-Hamidian movement became most active by 1906-1907. In 1906 revolutionary cells were established among Turkish officers serving in provincial regions. A group of disaffected officers formed in 1906 in Damascus the secret group "Fatherland and Freedom Society." From Damascus the society expanded to Jaffa and Jerusalem, and thence to Salonika in Macedonia which became the society's center of activity. By 1907 new groups were organized in various other regions of Macedonia and Anatolia.\(^ {15}\)

\(^{12}\) Ramsaur, The Young Turks, 93.

\(^{13}\) Zeine, The Emergence, 77.

\(^{14}\) Lewis, Modern Turkey, 204-205.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 205-206; Ramsaur, The Young Turks, 95-99.
The causes of disenchantment in the Turkish officer ranks stemmed from both patriotic and personal motives. The twin fear of particularism and imperialism cried for a refashioned government and a rejuvenated army. The dishonest system of promotion, the intolerable espionage network, the shabby uniforms and obsolete weapons, and the fact that pay was constantly in arrears, were some of the causes of grievance on the part of the officer corps.  

In 1907 the Salonika group joined the Paris group in a society known as the Committee of Union and Progress. Their fundamental purpose was to depose Abdul Hamid and to restore the constitution. However, there was very little coordination between the groups. Organizational work and plans for action in Salonika moved far ahead and independently of the Paris group.

However, it was not premeditated plans but rather spontaneous military strikes for adjustment of grievances that ultimately produced the Young Turk Revolution. In 1907 a wave of mutinies had erupted in Anatolia, and by 1908 they were spreading in Macedonia. After the Sultan's delegate entrusted with the task of putting down the mutiny in Macedonia had been killed, the mutiny spread rapidly from one unit of the Third Army Corps to the next. The Sultan's attempts to turn back the incipient revolution through military repression, espionage, and bribery failed. The Committee of Union and Progress came out and supported the mutineers' bid for the restoration of the constitution. Yielding to the Young Turk pressure, Abdul Hamid re-proclaimed the 1876 Constitution.

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16 Lewis, Modern Turkey, 205-206, 115-17.
17 Ramsaur, The Young Turks, 122-29.
18 For a survey of the events culminating in the Young Turk Revolution, see Lewis, Modern Turkey, 205-209; Ramsaur, The Young Turks, 94-139.
of speech, press, and assembly, the abolition of the espionage system, and full amnesty of all political exiles were promised. The joyous and hopeful reaction among the Empire's minorities is illuminated in the oft-quoted words of Henry H. Jessup: "The whole empire burst forth in universal rejoicing. The press spoke out. Public meetings were held, cities and towns decorated, Moslems were seen embracing Christians and Jews, and inviting one another to receptions and feasts."\(^{19}\) Publications of the time in the Arabic-speaking provinces expressed praise and confidence about the new order of things.\(^{20}\)

The new Parliament comprised 288 deputies, of which 147 were Turks and 60 were Arabs.\(^{21}\) However, from the start Abdul Hamid had been plotting to dissolve the Parliament and revoke the Constitution. He was supported by former government officials dismissed by the Committee of Union and Progress, and also conservative Muslims, some of whom called the Committee an association of atheists, Jews and Freemasons.\(^{22}\) In April 1909, Abdul Hamid made an unsuccessful attempt at a counter-revolution. The Parliament and the Senate deposed him in favor of his brother, who became Sultan Muhammad V.\(^{23}\)

The Young Turk Revolution was in a sense a nationalist movement of

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\(^{19}\)Henry H. Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria* (New York, 1910), vol. 2, 786.

\(^{20}\)Zeine, *The Emergence*, 79.


\(^{23}\)For an account of the counter-revolution of 1909 and of the deposition of Abdul Hamid, see Pears, *Forty Years in Constantinople*, chs. 18 and 19.
Muslim Turks, whose aim was to overthrow the incompetent regime of Abdul Hamid, and to replace it by a reform government which would better cope with foreign and domestic troubles. Arabs, as well as the other subject nationalities, played a very small role in the 1908 Revolution. The ascendancy of the nationalist wing of the Young Turks over the "liberal," pro-decentralization faction dictated that the fate of the minorities would be Ottomanization, rather than regional autonomy. Furthermore, the nationalists, whose instrument was the Committee of Union and Progress, supported centralism and Turkish predominance, and did so all the more vigorously in reaction to Austria's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, and to Bulgaria's declaration of independence in 1908.24

24 Lewis, Modern Turkey, 212-14; Ramsaur, The Young Turks, 147.
V

THE EMERGENCE OF ARABISM

The Young Turk promises of constitutional government, of more liberal institutions, and of equal rights for the subject nationalities could not check the separatist tendencies within the Empire. The Balkan nationalities were not amenable to Ottoman reform, no matter how judicious, for they sought complete separation from Ottoman rule. On the other hand, the Arabs desired sincere and equitable reform within the Ottoman system. Yet they gradually became disaffected with the Young Turks after the latter failed to make good the promises of the 1908 Revolution and, more significantly, after they adopted a policy of centralization.

The primary aim of the Young Turks was to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. This had been their principal reason in overthrowing the incompetent regime of Abdul Hamid, and it became their most important concern as Ottoman rulers. They were basically conservative in outlook with little inclination to bring about social change.¹

Once in power the Young Turks were divided into the same opposing camps that had characterized their pre-Revolution dissension. Those supporting a greater measure of local autonomy and following Prince Sabaheddin's program of decentralization were opposed by the

nationalist wing (mostly military) which advocated greater centralization and Turkish domination. The failure of the 1909 counter-revolution made the nationalists, whose instrument was the Committee of Union and Progress, the real rulers of Turkey and, at the same time, it helped to discredit the pro-decentralization faction because of its support of the counter-revolution. The power of the Committee of Union and Progress and the case for centralization were strengthened in reaction to both internal and external events, which are summarized by George Antonius:

The separatist forces at work in the Balkan provinces were in the ascendant, the covetousness of two European Powers lurked menacingly behind a thin diplomatic veil, and a series of disasters occurred before the Young Turks had had time to prove their worth: the annexation by Austria-Hungary of Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 1908, the simultaneous secession of Bulgaria, Italy's aggression on Libya in the autumn of 1911 and the Balkan War of 1912. In those few years, the Ottoman Empire lost all of its provinces in Europe (except for eastern Thrace); that part of Libya which comprised the provinces of Tripoli and Benghazi; Crete and the islands of the Dodecanese. In addition to the territorial losses, a burden of military expenditure had to be incurred which made serious inroads on Turkey's budgetary resources.

These humiliating setbacks consolidated the trend toward centralization, and moreover they made the idea of Turkification "practical politics." Turkification was a movement to rely primarily on the loyalty of the Turkish element within the Ottoman Empire and to convert the Empire into a Turkish state. This idea, promoted by a group of Turkish intellectuals since 1909, was adopted by the Committee of Union and Progress as state

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policy during and after the Balkan Wars. \(^4\) The evolution of Ottomanism into Turkism is described by Albert Hourani as follows:

The starting-point of the process was the idea that the only way to resolve the inherent dilemma of the empire was to impose a single national sentiment on it; but it gradually grew clearer that Ottoman national sentiment could not play this role, for it was too fragile and artificial, and rested ultimately on nothing except loyalty to the ruling family. The only effective nationalism was that which was rooted in some objective unity such as language or race, and thus Ottoman nationalism gradually turned into Turkish nationalism. \(^5\)

The rising Turkish nationalism strained Arab-Turkish relations. Arab hopes for equal rights had been disappointed when the Committee of Union and Progress rigged the first parliamentary election in 1908 so as to ensure the election of a majority of its supporters, and also when it seized control of the central government, restricting it to Turkish elements. Arab grievances against the Young Turks mounted when they dismissed the Arab officials connected with the Hamidian regime, and when they purged the decentralization elements that supported the 1909 counter-revolution. \(^6\)

Moreover, the policy of Turkification severely aggravated Arab disenchantment with Young Turk rule. The attempt by the Young Turks to impose the use of the Turkish language in the schools, in the courts of law, and in the government positions of the Arabic-speaking regions met with determined opposition. To the Arabs, Arabic was a special and

\(^4\)Great Britain, Foreign Office, Historical Section, The Rise of the Turks and the Pan-Turanian Movement (London, 1920), 80, 81, 84.


\(^6\)Hassan Sa'ab, The Arab Federalists of the Ottoman Empire (Amsterdam, 1958), 219-21.
sacred language used as the medium for God's Revelation in the Sacred Qur'an.  

In 1913, after troubled years of domestic and foreign conflicts, the Committee of Union and Progress had firmly seized power, marking the decisive triumph of nationalism over constitutionalism. From then until the Ottoman collapse in 1918, the Empire was governed by a Turkish military dictatorship, which suppressed parliamentary opposition and applied Hamidian-like controls against dissent.  

Turkish nationalism helped to consolidate the development of Arab national consciousness. The Arabs had not constituted a national entity since the collapse of Umayyad rule in the middle of the eighth century. But now in reaction to Turkification, Arabs grew jealous of the special place which their language and ethnicity had given them in Islam. In the Ottoman Parliament, Arab representatives formed a close group to protest the threat imposed on their language and political rights.  

We have already seen how Arab pride in their culture was stimulated by the works of Abduh, Rida, and Kawakibi, as well as by the activities of Arab cultural and literary fraternities. But we must emphasize that the programs of the abovementioned (with the exception of Kawakibi), while stimulating Arab consciousness, were intended primarily to promote reform within the Ottoman system. The only program of pre-Young Turk years that advocated the establishment of an independent, political Arab state was the one proposed by Azoury. We have already noted how slight its impact was on Muslim Arabs.

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7Ibid., 220; Zeine N. Zeine, The Emergence of Arab Nationalism (Beirut, 1966), 98-99.

8Lewis, Modern Turkey, 225.

9Sa'ab, Arab Federalists, 219.
Likewise, the Arab literary and political societies that developed in opposition to the Young Turks' programs of centralization and Turkification were geared, for the most part, toward reform, not separatism.\(^{10}\) However, the post-1908 Arab societies differed from the earlier literary clubs and from the Islamic reformers in that they espoused well-defined political objectives. These Arab societies became the leading spokesmen for Arab rights, calling for the preservation of the use of Arabic in the schools, lawcourts, and public offices of the Arab provinces, for autonomy and administrative decentralization, and, in certain cases, for dual government with the Turks.\(^{11}\) The Arab nationalist movement, however, was not fully consolidated until after the Arab Revolt of 1916 and the establishment of the Syrian National Congress at Damascus in 1919.

The Arab organizations were small bodies which predominantly comprised Muslims of the upper classes, such as public officials, Islamic reformers, university students, and military officers. Because of Ottoman governmental repression, some of these organizations had to function underground, and hence were unable to publicize their views, thus reducing their potential for popular support.\(^{12}\)

The first of these Arab societies\(^{13}\) was al-Ikha al-Arabi al-Uthmani

\(^{10}\)Zeine, *The Emergence*, 83.


\(^{13}\)For information on these societies, their founders, and their objectives, see Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, 102-119; Richard Hartmann, "Arabische Politische Gesellschaften bis 1914" in Richard Hartmann and Helmuth Scheel (eds.), *Beiträge zur Arabistik, Semitistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1944), 439-67; *La Verite sur la Question Syrienne* (Constantinople, 1916).
(The Ottoman Arab Brotherhood), which was founded in Constantinople in 1908 mainly by Syrian officials and notables. This society, as its name implies, sought to create cooperation and harmony between the Arab provinces and the Ottoman Government. It supported the Constitution and it professed its loyalty to the sultan. Nevertheless, it did focus a good deal of its attention on Arab aspirations. It not only promoted cultural interests of the Arabs, but moreover, it advocated the guarantee of Arab rights, the improvement of conditions in the Arab provinces, and the preservation of the use of the Arabic language. Al-Ikha lasted for only a few months before it was dissolved as a result of the Young Turks' prohibition of the formation of political associations.14

In 1909, al-Muntada al-Adabi (The Literary Club), another Arab association, was founded in Constantinople by a group of officials and students. It established branches in various towns of Syria and Iraq, gaining a relatively large membership. It was tolerated by the Committee of Union and Progress because it was ostensibly a non-political society, although many of its activities and programs had political overtones. It was ordered dissolved by the Ottoman authorities in March 1915.15

Of greater importance was Hizb al-Lamarkaziyyah al-Idariyyah al-Uthmani (the Ottoman Party of Administrative Decentralization), which was established in Cairo in 1912 by a number of prominent Syrian and Lebanese emigres; chief among them were Rashid Rida and Rafiq al-Azm, its president and a member of a well-known Muslim family of Damascus. This


party established branches in many Syrian towns and, according to Antonius, it "had become the best organized and most authoritative spokesman of Arab aspirations." Its objectives, as its name implies, called for the decentralization of authority and for self-government in the Arab provinces. These aspirations, however, were dashed as a result of the triumph of centralized rule under the Committee of Union and Progress.

A group with similar aims as those of Hizb al-Lamarkaziyyah, and one that acted in close contact with it was founded in Beirut in 1913. It was called the Committee for Reform, and it was composed of 86 members, who were almost evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. The Beirut Committee, like Hizb al-Lamarkaziyyah, principally demanded administrative decentralization in the Arab provinces, equal rights and opportunities for Arabs, recognition of Arabic as an official language in government and in schools, and the prohibition of conscripting soldiers to serve outside of their native provinces in peace time.

However, there was a unique aspect about the Beirut Committee's program, namely, the proposal to appoint European counselors to the various departments in the Beirut province. This proposal was introduced in the program by Maronite and other Christian members of the Committee. It is particularly significant because it demonstrates that some Lebanese Christians were more hospitable to the prospect of French protection than they were to the idea of Ottomanism, and moreover that they were


not Arab nationalists. This proposal was attacked by Muslim members of the Beirut Committee, most of whom had greater fear of foreign than Turkish domination.18

The Beirut Committee for Reform was ordered dissolved by the government in April 1913. Many shops in Beirut closed in protest, and newspapers appeared with a copy of the order of dissolution framed in borders of black as their sole contents.19 Though severely hampered, the Beirut Committee continued to function, and it sent representatives to the Arab Congress held in Paris in June 1913.

Meanwhile in Iraq, Arab anti-Ottoman activity gradually was gaining momentum. The Turkification program of the Ottoman Government caused severe discontent in Iraq, as it had in the other Arabic speaking provinces. Arab pride was shaken as a result of the policy of replacing Arabic with Osmanli in schools and in government. The improvement and extension of the Ottoman system of transportation and communication meant firmer central control, depriving local Arab notables of many traditional prerogatives. The secularization reforms of the Young Turks upset the power and influence of many religious leaders.20

As it happened one of the most potent stimuli for the Arab nationalist movement in Iraq was provided by Sayyid Talib, the son of the naqib al-ashraf of Basra. Sayyid Talib, like Kawakibi and numerous other ashraf elements, was moved by personal and not ideological motives to hostility towards the Ottoman Government. Its centralization program

18Ibid.
19Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 113; Zeine, The Emergence, 103-104.
imposed a threat on his family's hereditary status of privilege and power. Moreover, it rejected his scheme to establish himself as the ruler of al-Hasa and of a large portion of Central Arabia.\textsuperscript{21} In view of these circumstances, it may be concluded that Sayyid Talib used the cause of Arab nationalism largely as an instrument to express his frustrations against the Ottoman Government, and to pursue his ambition of carving out a region of the Empire for himself.

Sayyid Talib organized a meeting of leading Arabs in February 1913 to draft a demand for autonomous government for Basra. One month later he attended an Arab Conference which resolved to work for the self-government or the independence of Iraq. Members of Hizb al-Lamarkaziyyah in Syria and Egypt, with whom Sayyid Talib already had been in contact, were informed of the Conference's decision.\textsuperscript{22}

Constantinople's response to the demands of the nationalists of Iraq was to tighten the espionage system and to arrest a number of Arab leaders.\textsuperscript{23} In reaction Sayyid Talib increased his anti-Ottoman activity by organizing the Basra Reform Society, to which an adjunct was formed in Baghdad led by Muzahim Amin al-Pachaji. The membership of the Reform Society comprised mostly Arab army officers and local notables, embittered by the challenge imposed on their positions by Turkish personnel. It issued proclamations bitterly attacking the Ottoman Government, and exhorting the Arabs to arise against Ottoman tyranny and to create an independent Iraq.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 232.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 233.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 235-36.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 236; Kedourie, "Hizb," 520; Zeine, \textit{The Emergence}, 108-109.
On the whole, however, the Arab movement in Iraq lagged behind nationalist activity in Syria and Lebanon. Iraq did not possess comparable educational facilities and stimulus of new ideas introduced through trading and missionary activities, for its geographical position and poor communications separated it from the West. Its minorities did not attract in significant measure European protection. In social composition, Iraq was a semi-feudal rural domain with a small educated urban elite, such as teachers, writers, lawyers and doctors, elements which constituted the foundation of Arab nationalism in the Western Fertile Crescent. However, the lack of an influential literate elite in the Arab movement of Iraq was somewhat compensated by the important role in the movement of the Iraqi Arab army officers in the Ottoman army. They were the largest group in Iraq exposed to Western thought as a result of Westernized military education, and as such they were capable of communicating on the political level of the various Arab organization.  

A number of secret societies with clearly avowed nationalist aims, in contrast to the public Arab organizations already discussed, were founded by Arab nationalists in the years between the Young Turk Revolution and the outbreak of the First World War. The most important ones were al-Qahtaniyya, al-Jam'iyyat al-Arabiyya al-Fatat (The Young Arab Society), and al-Ahd (The Covenant). Al-Qahtaniyya and al-Ahd were founded successively by Arab military officers serving in the Ottoman army and were led by Aziz al-Misri, 


26For data on these Arab secret societies, see Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 110ff; Hartmann, Arabische Politische Gesellschaften," 451-67; Kedouri, "Hizb," 519-20; La Verite sur la Questions Syrienne, 23-28.

27Named after Qahtan, a legendary ancestor of the Arabs.
an army officer of Egyptian birth who had participated as a member of the Committee of Union and Progress in the 1908 Revolution. Whereas Al-Qahtaniyya had a large proportion of civilians, Al-Ahd was composed almost entirely of army officers, who were predominantly Iraqis, the most numerous Arab element in the Ottoman army. Both associations advocated the same program: the division of the Ottoman Empire into a Turko-Arab Empire on the Austro-Hungarian model. Al-Qahtaniyya, started in Constantinople in 1909, broke up about one year later because of the fear that it had been betrayed to the Turks. Al-Ahd also was established in Constantinople in 1913 or 1914. Since it functioned in absolute secrecy, information is lacking on the action it may have taken to attain its objective of a dual monarchy. However, we do know more about its activity at the time of the outbreak of the First World War, and we shall discuss its political aims vis-à-vis the war together with those of Al-Fatat.

Like Al-Ahd, Al-Fatat played a significant part in the Arab movement. It was started in Paris in 1909 by seven Muslim students, mainly Syrian. After several years, its center of activity was shifted to Beirut and later to Damascus. As George Antonius observed, Al-Fatat was to the Arab intellectual what Al-Ahd was to the Arab army officer; yet neither group knew of the existence of the other until they established contact early in 1915. The political objective of Al-Fatat was Arab independence. But other than that we know very little of its transactions until the war years. Once again, it is difficult to have knowledge of the scope and the effectiveness of a secret association. However, we have reports that Al-Fatat took the initiative in calling the Arab Congress which
The Arab Congress of 1913 was attended by 24 delegates who represented a number of the various Arab societies. The delegates were predominantly Syrian, and roughly half were Muslims and half Christians. They formulated a general platform of Arab demands in which they re-stated the principles of decentralization, calling for administrative autonomy for the provinces, equal rights for Arabs, and the recognition of Arabic as an official language in Parliament, as well as in local government and local schools. There was no discussion of separatism; emphasis was placed on the need for reform within the Empire. In fact, the Congress reaffirmed its loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, and it cautioned vigilance not against the Empire, but against foreign intervention. The essential aims of the Congress are summarized in the following excerpt from the address of the delegate Iskandar Ammun:

The Arab Ummah (nation) does not want to separate itself from the Ottoman Empire... All that it desires is to replace the present form of government by one more compatible with the needs of all the diverse elements which compose that Empire, in such wise that the inhabitants of any Province (vilayet) will have the final word in the internal administration of their own affairs...

At first it seemed that the Ottoman Government would come to terms with the demands of the Arab Congress. It sent a delegate to negotiate with the Arabs in Paris, and an agreement was reached whereby a number of important concessions were made to the Arabs. The gains achieved by


29 Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 114-15; Hourani, Arabic Thought, 283-84; Sa'ab, Arab Federalists, 233; Zeine, The Emergence, 104-105.

30 Quoted in Zeine, The Emergence, 105, from al-Mu'tamar al-Arabi al-Awwal, 103-104.
the Arabs, however, were illusory. "The concessions had been scaled down considerably," states Antonius, "and most of what was left was hedged with reservations and ambiguity." 31

Ottoman refusal to compromise with Arab demands, compounded with the negative effects of Turkification, caused the rift between Arab leaders and Constantinople to become hopelessly wide. Nevertheless, with the exception of a small number of Arab army officers and intellectuals, Muslim Arabs generally did not aspire for independence. For most of them, traditional Islamic loyalties still transcended national sentiments; they supported in all conscience the Sultan and the Empire as lineal successors of the caliphate and as protectors of Sunni Islam.

Moreover, some of the most vociferous groups seeking independence from the Turks did so not as Arab nationalists, but as regional nationalists. This was the case with the Lebanese nationalists, mostly Maronite Christians, who sought to make their autonomous sanjak an enlarged independent nation backed by French support. We already have mentioned that the Beirut Committee for Reform was more of a Lebanese than an Arab nationalist association. Also, there was a small but important group of Syrian nationalists, mainly Christian, who advocated the creation of a secular national Syrian state. The chief exponents of the "Syria idea" were Shukri Ghanim and Georges Samne, both located in Paris where their idea received the support of the Quai d'Orsay. 32

Egypt, which was pursuing its own nationalist course, did not share in the incipient Arab cause. Egyptians often considered the Arabs of Asia foreigners, and Egyptian nationalist spokesmen like Abdullah al-Nadim

32 Hourani, Arabic Thought, 285-87.
and Mustafa Kamil sometimes attacked the Syrian intruders settled in Egypt.  

Egyptian national aspirations emerged in reaction to British domination, and were primarily concerned with preserving Egypt for the Egyptians. Whereas Arab nationalists sought independence from the Ottoman Empire, Egyptian nationalists looked upon the Empire as their natural ally against the British protectorate. Egypt did not participate in the cause of Arab nationalism until 1938/39.

The limited scope of Arab nationalism at the outbreak of World War I is brought into clearer focus once we have considered that Egypt and Lebanon followed separate nationalist roads, as well as the fact that a good number of Arab groups did not seek independence from the Turks, but rather autonomy, or administrative decentralization, or dual government as the ideal solution. Furthermore, the total number of Arab nationalist leaders was small. The Arab cause had hardly any support from the masses, for, as we have reiterated, they remained passively acquiescent, if not loyal to Ottoman authority. Professor C. Ernest Dawn has undertaken a statistical study of the size of the Arab movement before October 1914. The results of his investigations are as follows:

Only 126 men are known to have been public advocates of Arab nationalism or members of Arab nationalist societies before October 1914... Of the 126 Arab nationalists, 51 can be identified as Syrian; one was Egyptian, 21 Lebanese, 18 Iraqi, 22 Palentinian and 13 unidentifiable as to place of origin or residence...


The 126 Arabs who were members of the Arab societies or prominent spokesmen for the Arab cause we may regard as the leadership of Arab nationalism. They also make up a significant percentage of the total number of known active partisans of Arabism before 1914. An indication of the spread of Arabism is provided by the signatures to the telegrams of support which were sent to the Arab Congress in Paris in June 1913. A total of 387 names appear on these telegrams. 35

A closer look at the social status of these Arab nationalists will reveal some of the principal factors motivating their political aspirations. The nationalist advocates were predominantly upper class Muslims, chiefly army officers and intellectuals. The role of the Christian Arabs in this particular period of the Arab movement was relatively small. 36 The nationalist aims of this privileged Muslim minority originally derived more from personal interests than from theories on Arabism. Their resentment of Hamidian and especially Young Turk encroachments on their traditional power and influence took the form of a nationalist reaction which was converted into an effective vehicle for pursuing their self-interested political objectives. That the cause of Arab nationalism among its very exponents had not yet superseded personal ambitions at the time of the First World War is well stated in the following passage taken from Philip W. Ireland's *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*:

In spite of the correspondence and interchange of views between the various sections of the Arab world, in spite of the manifestos and literature issued in the name of the Arab peoples, in spite of the essential unity of the aims and purposes of Arab Nationalism, the movement tended to break into sectionalism, limited by the horizons of immediate locality. The rank and file of the Movement, no less than the sectional leaders, regarded with

36 Ibid., 153-54, 159.
mistrust any leaders whose ascendency seemed to overshadow their own interests and to detract from their own importance. Personal rivalries, religious differences and sectional animosities thus hampered the progress of the Movement, stultifying its efforts and nullifying its effectiveness.\(^{37}\)

Arab nationalism was a force of only moderate importance during the First World War, and it had relatively little influence on the origin of the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Al-Fatat and al-Ahd, the two most important Arab nationalist societies during the war, followed a "wait and see" course after the Ottoman Empire had entered the war on the side of the Central Powers. While they sought to exploit the wartime opportunities to achieve the independence of the Arab countries, still they hesitated to break away from the Empire. They feared that their chances for independence would be destroyed in the event of a German victory, which seemed probable in 1915.\(^{38}\) On the other hand, they feared that by abandoning Ottoman protection they would leave themselves open to the possibility of Allied encroachments. The nationalist desire to revolt, held in check by the fear of European imperialist designs, is summarized in the following resolution passed by al-Fatat in late 1914:

> In consequence of Turkey's entry into the War, the fate of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire is seriously imperilled and every effort is to be made to secure their liberation and independence; it being also resolved that, in the event of European designs appearing to materialise, the society shall be bound to work on the side of Turkey in order to resist foreign penetration of whatever kind or form.\(^{39}\)

\(^{37}\)Ireland, Iraq, 237.


\(^{39}\)Quoted in Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 153.
Similarly, Aziz Ali al-Misri told the leadership of al-Ahd not to consider a revolt against the Ottoman Empire without first obtaining an effective guarantee against European ambitions on Arab territories.\(^{40}\)

The preponderating fear of foreign intervention on the part of the Arab nationalists helps to illustrate, once again, the divergence between Muslim and Christian Arab national aspirations. While a good number of Arab Christians, particularly the Maronites of Lebanon, sought French protection, the spokesmen for the greater part of the rest of the population, namely the Muslim Arabs who constituted the vast majority, strictly opposed European interference.\(^{41}\)

The Arab nationalists, thinking to wait until the course of the war decisively went against the Turks before breaking with them, lost the initiative and opportunity of leading a national war of independence.\(^{42}\)

Once the nationalists had temporized, they were never able to regain the opportunity of spearheading an anti-Ottoman mutiny. They were effectively stifled both by the "witchhunt" conducted by Jamal Pasha, the Turkish military governor of Syria, and by the transfer from Syria of Arab military units, which comprised most of the members of the nationalist society al-Ahd.\(^{43}\) Jamal Pasha, besides ordering the arrest or deportation of hundreds of suspected nationalists, had 11 prominent Arabs hanged after a summary trial in August 1915, and 21 more without

\(^{40}\)Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 155.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., 153 and 155.


a formal trial in May 1916. His own words bear testimony to the effectiveness of his repressive measures in suffocating a potential Arab rising: "I am certain that to the executions in April 1916 alone do we owe the fact that there was no rising in Syria during the two-and-a-half years following Sherif Hussein's declaration of independence." Yet the most effective security device probably was the transfer of Arab troops, for the success of an anti-Ottoman mutiny depended ultimately on the military.

The comparative insignificance of the nationalist leaders to the Arab Revolt of June 1916 was matched by the minimal popular support that the Revolt attracted. This was due only partly to the proficiency of Turkish repression. An at least equally important reason for the failure of the Revolt to win massive support is that the nationalist idea, aspiring to an independent pan-Arab state, had not as yet attached the allegiance of a considerable body of Arabs.

The Arab Revolt, far from being the nationalist struggle that it has been sometimes considered, actually affected just a small number of Arab nationalists. Only some 20 to 30 nationalists in Syria, according to Professor Dawn, took part in Arab political or military activity during the war. Moreover, some elements in the nationalist societies continued to advocate Arab-Turkish cooperation. The most prominent case of a

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45 *Djemal Pasha, Memories of a Turkish Statesman, 1913-1919* (New York, 1922), 219.


member of an Arab organization who continued to strive for the pre-war objective of Arab autonomy within the Ottoman Empire was that of Aziz Ali al-Misri, the founder of al-Ahd and the appointee as Chief of Staff of the Arab army in September 1916. In a revealing interview with Majid Khadduri in April 1958, al-Misri stated that "he was unaware of Sharif Husain's objectives," and that "he had intimated to Sharif Husain that he was not in favor of full separation from the Ottoman Empire and that he was of the opinion that the Arabs should be satisfied with an autonomous status within the Empire." Al-Misri eventually withdrew from the Arab Revolt and escaped to Germany, after he had learned that Husain intended to make a complete break with the Ottoman Empire.

The Arab Revolt had even less effect in the other Arab countries than it had in Syria, which, after all, was the center of the Arab movement. In Iraq, as in Syria, Turkish military repression caused the arrest, deportation, or execution of nationalist leaders, as well as the transfer of most of the members of al-Ahd to "safe" districts in the Empire. Furthermore, the British, particularly after they had occupied Baghdad, blocked news of the Revolt in order to smother nationalist aspirations in Iraq, and to work instead at consolidating their own position for their eventual annexation of Lower Iraq.

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49 Ibid., 154-55.

50 Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 204; Ireland, Iraq, 239-40.

51 Ireland, Iraq, 240.
The Egyptian nationalists of course did not support the Arab Revolt, for, as we have stated above, their prime enemy was not the Ottoman Empire, but Britain. Therefore, they naturally backed the Ottoman Empire and Germany in the war in their hope of ridding Egypt of the British protectorate.  

Probably the most significant contribution of the Arab nationalist groups to the June 1916 Revolt was their proposals advocating an Arab uprising which they sent to Sharif Husain, the Amir of Mecca. A similar plan had been unsuccessfully advanced in 1911, when 35 Arab representatives of the Ottoman Parliament sent a letter with Sayyid Talib to Sharif Husain, in which they declared that they would revolt under his leadership against the Turks and recognize him as caliph. In January 1915, the leaders of al-Fatat and al-Ahd sent Fauzi al-Bakri, a member of a prominent Syrian family, to Mecca to propose that Husain assume the leadership of an anti-Turkish mutiny of Arab troops in Syria led by officers who were members of al-Ahd. A few months later al-Fatat and al-Ahd jointly sent Husain, through his son Faisal, a protocol in which they stated their war-time political objectives. The Damascus Protocol called for an Arab revolt in alliance with Britain on the condition that the latter would recognize the independence of the Arab countries.

52 For an account of Egyptian nationalism in the first decades of the twentieth century, see references in footnote 34 above.

53 Hartmann, "Arabische Politische Gesellschaften," 457; Hourani, Arabic Thought, 284.


However, neither the activities of the Arab nationalists nor their projected ideal of an independent Arab state brought about the Arab Revolt. The catalyst for the Revolt was provided by Sharif Husain, who, however, in leading the anti-Turkish uprising, acted not from Arab nationalist motives, but instead out of family interests. Husain, a descendant of the Prophet and a hereditary ruler of the Holy Places, bitterly opposed Turkish attempts to extend stronger control over the Hijaz. He was supported by the Arab bedouin who assailed the construction of the Hijaz Railway as disastrous to the livelihood they derived from the pilgrimage caravans.  

Husain's central political objective was to secure Ottoman recognition of his house as the hereditary autonomous Amirate in the Hijaz. The ideal of a pan-Arab state was at best a secondary concern. Husain assured the Ottoman Government of his loyalty on several occasions, and he even promised to send volunteers in support of its war effort if Constantinople would guarantee his political aspirations in the Hijaz. In fact, Husain accepted 50,000 to 60,000 pounds in gold from the Ottoman Government in order to equip the volunteers that he was expected to send.  

But as it became clear to Husain that Constantinople would not support his political aims, he decided to come to a definite agreement with the British about mid-March 1916 on the basis of the ambiguous and controversial terms of the Husain-MacMahon Correspondence, which had been

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57Ibid., 28.
58Djemal Pasha, Memories, 201-202, 213.
59Ibid., 220-21.
conducted over a period from July 1915 to January 1916. Yet even as Husain was discussing the details with the British over the eventual Revolt, he continued to carry out negotiations with the Ottoman authorities. As late as April 1916, just two months before the Revolt was proclaimed, Husain submitted to the Ottoman Government the demands that would first have to be met before he cooperated with its war cause by sending volunteers. These most recent demands, however, asked not just for the Ottoman guarantee of the hereditary autonomous Amirate in the Hijaz, but also for a general amnesty for the Arab political prisoners and for decentralized rule in Syria and in Iraq. The apparent reasons for these expanded demands were: Husain already had been assured (though in ambiguous terms) of British support in working for the independence of the Arab countries; and he had ambitions, which were assiduously cultivated by the British, of emerging as the leading spokesman and possibly the king of the Arabs.

Ultimately, Husain's decision to lead the Revolt was arrived at only after his proposals were completely rejected by the Ottoman authorities. The proximate cause that triggered the Revolt in the Hijaz was the sending of a Turkish force of some 3500 men toward the end of April to Medina. Although the new Turkish force held up in Medina

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60 For the texts of the Husain-MacMahon Correspondence, see Antonius, The Arab Awakening, Appendix A.
62 Ibid., 26; Djemal Pasha, Memories, 215.
63 Peter Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516-1922 (Ithaca, N. Y), 264; Kedourie, England and the Middle East, 52-57.
was destined for the Yemen to reinforce the Turkish offensive against the British Protectorate in Aden, Husain and his sons felt certain that it was intended to suppress them. In May, the Hashimites made hasty preparations to launch the uprising, and the date for the Revolt was pushed forward from June 16 to June 10.65

The historical facts inform us that the Arab Revolt was not the culmination of the infant Arab movement. Revolt was decided upon without direct nationalist influence or without even the consultation of the nationalists, but only after the possibility of reaching an agreement with Constantinople had been removed by the latter's flat refusal to meet Husain's demands, particularly the one seeking Ottoman guarantee of his Amirate in the Hijaz.66 The political realities of self-interest, not the idea of Arab nationalism, motivated Husain's course of action.67

However, the ideology that did affect Husain as a Sharif and the one with which he was sufficiently comfortable to use in order to appeal to popular support was Islamism. He justified the Revolt to the Muslim people not on the basis of the right of national self-determination, but on the basis of the accepted Islamic doctrine sanctioning the right of rebellion against a ruler who has failed to uphold the Shari'a and thus to satisfy the essential conditions of the caliphate.68 In this

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65 Dawn, "The Amir of Mecca," 27-28; Djemal Pasha, Memories, 223. For the story of the Arab Revolt, see Antonius, The Arab Awakening, ch. 10; T. E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom (New York, 1935).


67 Ibid., 34.

sense, Husain was closely related to the school of Islamic reformers, such as Abduh, Rida and Kawakibi, who attacked the Turks on religious and not national grounds, and who called for a rejuvenated Islamic state and not a secular national state. Also, Husain's son Abdullah approved of the necessity of an Arab rising against the Turks on account of their failure to execute the Shari'a. Abdullah, unlike his father, was an avowed advocate of Arabism, but more in the religious than ethnic sense. Like Rashid Rida by whom he was influenced, Abdullah extolled the pre-eminence of the Arabs in Islam because they were more genuine and faithful Muslims than the Turks. Thus he followed the line of the Islamic reformers in subordinating Arabism to Islam. 69

The four proclamations issued by Husain between June 10, 1916 and March 5, 1917 reveal that his mind was centered on "the independence and integrity of Islam and of its fundamental institutions, the Shari'a and the caliphate." 70 It is noteworthy that in his first proclamation, made on the day the Revolt was declared, Husain appealed to traditional Islamic sentiments and not to nationalist interests. The substance of the proclamation, striking in its omission of "Arab" and its repeated mention of "Muslim", is reported by Antonius as follows:

The proclamation denounced the anti-Muslim practices of the C.U.P. ... It represented the Revolt as a religious and national duty, and as a God-given opportunity for the attainment of independence. It ended by calling upon all Muslims throughout the world to follow his example, in discharge of their obligations to him, as Sharif of Mecca, and to the cause of Islamic solidarity. 71

69 Ibid., 234-238, 245-248.
70 Ibid., 248.
71 Antonius, The Arab Awakening, 207.
The ideology animating the Arab Revolt had its source in the doctrines enunciated in behalf of the defense of Islam by Islamic reformers such as al-Afghani, Abduh, Rida and Kawakibi. It was an ideology shaped by the general Muslim cultural reaction to European domination and by the Muslim counter-hope for a renewed Islamic state headed by a universal caliphate.  

However, although the theory of Arabism and the Arab nationalists played a small and rather insignificant part in the origin of the Arab Revolt, nevertheless the Revolt had substantial influence on the development of Arab nationalism. It brought together an Arab army, officered in part by members of al-Ahd, notably the Iraqis Ja'far al-Askari, Nuri al-Sa'id, and Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi. Al-Ahd participated in the Allied victory and, with the help of the British, was able to occupy Syria. After the war the Arab military administration became a government and it adopted a program of Arab nationalism. 

The crystallization of Arab nationalism, however, as well as the heated controversy over the war-time negotiations, the post-war settlements, the Zionist claims, and the division of Arab lands into British and French spheres of influence under the mandate system, fall outside the scope of this essay. They mark the end of four hundred years of Ottoman rule and the beginning of a new phase of Arab confrontation with the Western states.

VI

CONCLUSION

For centuries Islam had moulded the social outlooks and actions of the vast majority of Muslim Arabs. Characteristically, the most influential Muslim Arab reform thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries formulated their ideas on social change in terms of Islam. Modernists such as al-Afghani, Abduh, Rida and Kawakibi, as well as their numerous intellectual successors, advocated a revival of the pristine truths of classical Islam as the solution to contemporary social and political problems. They warned that imitation of Western patterns of culture must be eschewed because they were founded on "heretical", materialist principles. Religious solidarity was the basis of pan-Islam, the first major nineteenth century Islamic movement of thought aimed at the preservation of Islamic integrity against European domination.

The modern reinterpretation of Islam by writers such as Rida and Kawakibi gave birth to a theory of Arabism at the turn of the century. Their zeal in justifying Islam led them to emphasize the pre-eminent status of the Arabs, which was derived from their historical role in creating Islam and developing it to its most exemplary state. The Arab consciousness of these writers then was closely interwoven with their Muslim consciousness.
The bond between Arabism and Islam was not broken even after the emergence of Arab nationalism in the years following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. The idea of a secular Arab state, which was advocated by a few Christian Arabs, received virtually no support from Muslim Arabs. The most extreme Muslim Arab nationalists dreamed of a pan-Arab state based on Islamic precepts and headed by a revived Arab caliphate. This idea began to gain support from a few Arab leaders only in reaction to Turkification and Turkish intransigence in dealing with Arab demands for local rights and a greater share in government authority. Most of the spokesmen for the Arab cause before the outbreak of the First World War argued that a decentralized form of government or regional autonomy would be the best solution to the problems of the multi-national Ottoman Empire. Perhaps the Arab leaders would not have sought complete independence or would not have revolted from the Turks, if the latter had not pursued a chauvinist course buttressed during the war-time stress by a policy of cruel repression. Muslim Arabs generally were reluctant to sever their ties with the Ottoman Empire. It had been sanctioned by their religion since the early sixteenth century as the cultural home of the Muslim community. The fact that the Empire was ruled by a Turkish dynasty did not pose a problem for Muslim Arabs, since ethnic distinctions between Arabs and Turks were transcended by their supranational allegiance to Islam.

The overwhelming majority of Arabs were not nationalists and did not take part in the Arab Revolt of June 1916. The nationalist movement was limited mainly to a small minority of the Arab elite. The dominant faction of the Arab elite remained Ottomanists until the collapse of the Empire at the end of the First World War. Arab nationalists and Arab
Ottomanists differed only in the means proposed to attain the same goal, that is, the maintenance of the integrity of Islamic culture in the face of Western incursions. The Arab Ottomanists asserted that Islam could best be supported by strengthening the Ottoman Empire, whereas the Arabists argued the necessity of restoring the pre-eminence of the Arabs as the answer to the predicament of Islam.\(^1\)

The development of the opposing ideologies of Arabism and Ottomanism, however, derived not from broad cultural interests but from the traditional rivalry between members of the Arab elite. Those elements of the Arab elite whose self-interests were accommodated by the Ottoman Empire were Ottomanists; those who were without a vested interest in the Empire became Arabists. "Thus was a traditional intra-elite conflict," states Professor Dawn, "defined in terms of a new ideology."\(^2\)

The nucleus of the incipient Arab nationalist movement originally comprised a dissident minority of the Arab elite whose activities centered, for the most part, in a few major cities of Syria. The Arab cause was propelled when the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 left the Arab Ottomanists and the indifferent Arab masses with no alternative to Arabism.\(^3\) The post-war growth of Arab nationalism was accelerated and consolidated in reaction to European imperialism, which was disguised in the form of the mandates system. The Arab movement had remained embryonic while it had sought independence from the Ottoman Empire, because the Arab masses and a majority of the Arab elite had been unwilling to separate themselves from their traditional Islamic state. In contrast,


\(^2\)Ibid., 163.

\(^3\)Ibid., 164.
Arab nationalism realized its potent force when it gained extensive support for its ideal of uniting all the Arab peoples in opposition to their traditional enemy, the Christian West.

Arab nationalism has become the most popular political ideology in the contemporary Arab world. It is the principal political manifestation of social change in Arab society. Yet the ultimate dream of the Arab nationalist leaders for the creation of a pan-Arab state has been shattered by the consolidation of regional nationalisms in the decades following the Second World War. Furthermore, the question still remains unanswered whether Arab nationalism can or should be divorced from Islam. The particularism of the various Arab states, a product of the bitter rivalry among the different governments, exacerbates the problem of the compatibility of nationalism and Islam. Many Arabs would like to believe that their religion and civilization are intertwined. But only pan-Arabism, which presupposes the unity of the Muslim Arab community, can give credence to this aspiration. Several attempts made at Arab unification, however, have been unsuccessful. The Arab League failed to establish an Arab federation, and the United Arab Republic proved to be a short-lived experiment in Arab unification.
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