2

The revival

The conventions of classical Arabic literature outlined in the first chapter were fundamentally and irrevocably altered by the growing interrelationship between the Arab world and the West during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In literary terms, the main effect of this process was the progressive substitution of Western literary forms (drama, novel, short story) for the traditional Arabic ones as the main (though not the only) means of literary expression in prose, with a corresponding (though rather later) loosening of the classical forms in poetry. Though it is impossible to give firm dates for the process, the resulting *nahḍa* (a term probably first used by Jirjī Zaydān,[1] and usually translated as 'revival' or 'renewal' in English) may be said to have extended roughly from the middle of the nineteenth century to the end of the First World War. In describing this process, however, it is important to bear in mind that literary development did not proceed at the same pace in every part of the Arab world, and that many areas failed to feel the influence of developments in Egypt or Syria[2] (the leaders in the *nahḍa*'s early stages) for a considerable time. Moreover, as with most literary developments, stages of development overlapped – to the extent, indeed, that it is still possible to find poets, in particular, in some parts of the Arab world, still using forms of verse that would be regarded as 'classical' even today.

The conventional starting date usually given for the start of this process – 1798, the date of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt – prompts a number of questions, literary, political and economic. If some commentators are open to the charge of being over-eager to characterise the years following 1258 (or 1516–17) as a period of unremitting gloom (the 'Age of Depression', to use Haywood's term),[3] others (or, more frequently, the same ones) may with some justification be accused of attaching undue significance to 1798. Broad generalisations abound, often accompanied by a touch of hyperbole, as a substitute for rigorous analysis. Badawi, for example, observes simply that 'Out of this complacency [i.e., the complacency induced by Ottoman rule] Arabic culture was rudely awakened when Bonaparte invaded Egypt in 1798',[4] while Haywood takes it for granted that, left to its own devices, Arabic literature – and, by implication, the Arab

world more generally – had reached a point of no return and that, 'In this situ-
ation, only contact with another culture could arouse Arabic literature from its
torpor'.[5]

Whatever the significance of Napoleon's invasion for the socio-economic
development of the country, however,[6] its status as a turning-point in Egyptian
culture is difficult to ignore; as Muhammad Siddiq has noted, 'the postulation
of the French occupation ... as the original event that stirs modern Arabic
literature to life ... is heavily documented and cannot easily be gainsaid.'[7] But
we should beware of supposing that political events of immediate significance
to the development of culture in one Arab country were necessarily of equal
significance elsewhere. As already noted, literary developments did not occur at
the same pace throughout the Arab world. At least in its early stages, the *nahḍa*
was largely confined to Egypt and Greater Syria; but the cultural background
and consequent contribution even of these two areas to the development of the
movement were quite different; Napoleon's invasion of 1798 was of little or no
immediate significance for literary development in nineteenth-century Syria,
whose links both with the West and with the Ottoman Empire during this
period differed radically from those of Egypt.

These considerations imply, first, that any discussion of the *nahḍa* must have
a geographical dimension, and second (and more radically), that the concept
of the *nahḍa* as a unified movement is almost certainly illusory. Against this
background, the remainder of this chapter will therefore be divided largely on
a geographical basis – even though, as we shall see, cross-fertilisation between
the various areas is a decisive factor at certain crucial junctures.

Egypt

As already suggested, the picture presented by Haywood[8] and others of an 'Age
of Depression' devoid of culture extending for a period of some three hundred
years from the Ottoman conquest is almost certainly an exaggerated one. As
Nelly Hanna has shown,[9] the forms of literary expression in Egypt underwent
significant changes during the Ottoman period, reflecting both a change in
the political status of Egypt, and a redefinition of the different social groups
in the processes of cultural expression. One result was that popular art forms,
often including use of colloquial and dialectal Arabic (*'āmmiyya*), assumed a
greater importance than hitherto. From this perspective, Arabic literature of
the Ottoman period may well be judged inferior to the productions of the early
'Abbasid period. It is also arguable, however, that the popularisation of culture
in the eighteenth century and earlier had already (albeit to a limited extent)
laid the foundations for the growth of a modern, 'middle-class' reading public in
the nineteenth century under new Western influences. One possible theoretical

model for the development of modern Arabic literature would indeed see its development as the product of an underlying tension between three distinct strands of cultural activity: an Arabic-Islamic 'elite' tradition, primarily associated with literature in *fuṣḥā* (classical, or formal Arabic); a parallel, though less well documented, tradition of 'popular' literature, frequently involving the use of *'āmmiyya* (colloquial Arabic); and new influences and literary forms derived from the West. These tensions are of relevance not only to nineteenth-century Egypt, but will reappear at various points in the narrative that follows – the interplay between the 'popular' and Western traditions being of particular interest for the development of modern Arabic drama.[10]

Be that as it may, the brief French occupation of Egypt that followed Napoleon's invasion saw developments that were radically to alter the cultural and educational development of the country. Although primarily a military adventure, heavily grounded in Anglo-French imperialist rivalry,[11] the invasion was also in part an intellectual adventure: teams of scholars and scientists accompanied the French military, and a comprehensive survey of the country was undertaken, subsequently published as *Description de l'Egypte*.[12] The French also founded a scientific institute in Cairo, and set up a series of provincial councils, thus introducing the Egyptians to Western representative institutions for the first time; most significantly, perhaps, for a history of literary development, they also introduced a printing press, used not only for printing proclamations for the local public but also for the production of a newspaper, *Le courier de l'Egypte*, and a scientific and educational journal, *La décade égyptienne*, both of which publications contained occasional literary material.[13]

As one recent commentator has observed, the three years of the French occupation of Egypt 1798–1801 have received more scholarly and popular attention than any comparable period in the country's history.[14] This attention has not been confined to Western commentators: unsurprisingly, the invasion quickly evinced reaction not only from Egyptian observers but also from others in the Middle East – including, among others, the Lebanese historian and poet Niqūlā al-Turk, who was sent by the Druze Amir Bashīr to report on the French occupation.[15] The reaction of the Egyptian scholar and historian al-Jabartī, however, is of particular interest, as it exemplifies the ambivalent reaction of educated Egyptians to this first encounter with Western culture – an ambivalence that pervades much of the subsequent development of modern Arabic literature, and indeed, of modern Arab culture more generally. Writing of the year of the invasion, he first describes it in almost apocalyptic terms as 'the beginning of a reversal of the natural order and the corruption and destruction of all things', and accuses the French of being materialists 'who deny all God's attributes, the Hereafter and Resurrection and who reject Prophethood'.[16] Later, however, his attitude appears to have changed, as he makes clear his admiration for the scien-

tific and cultural achievements of the French, contrasting their sense of justice with that of the Ottomans and commenting that 'all the transactions of the Muslims are fraud while all of the transactions of the Europeans are honest'. In the judgement of Shmuel Moreh, 'This awareness of the shortcomings of Islam heralds the demands of the later generations of Muslim reformers for moral, social, religious and scientific revival in the Arab world. It confirms the French occupation of Egypt as the true starting-point of the *nahḍa*.'[17] One may add that, in its explicit and implicit comparisons between Arab and Western civilisation, it also heralds one of the most enduring motifs of modern Arabic literature, as Arab writers have striven to define themselves, and their culture, in relation to European values.

Although technically still a part of the Ottoman Empire, from the departure of the French in 1801 until the British occupation beginning in 1882, Egypt was effectively an independent country. If Napoleon's invasion had given the Egyptians a first glimpse of an alternative civilisation, credit for much of the country's development during the nineteenth century (and, in consequence, for much of the development of modern Arab culture) must belong to an ambitious soldier of Albanian descent, Muḥammad 'Alī, who had come to Egypt with the Ottoman troops sent to expel the French. Taking advantage of the chaos following the departure of Napoleon's men, he was able to establish himself as ruler of Egypt in 1805 and put into place a range of policies which, while primarily designed to further his political and military ambitions, had important cultural side-effects.[18] The principal cultural innovations of his reign were in the sphere of education. This was a two-way process. Foreign teachers, at first Italian but later mainly French, were imported to train the officers, administrators and other skilled professionals needed to run the new Egypt. About fifty primary schools were set up, together with some higher educational institutions. At the same time, Egyptians were dispatched to study in Italy and France. On return from abroad, these students were required to translate the books from which they had studied, and Western Orientalists and Syrian Christians were also co-opted to assist in the task of providing texts for the new schools. In 1822, the Būlāqiyya printing press was founded, and in 1828 the first issue of the official Egyptian gazette, *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya*, appeared, at first in both Turkish and Arabic, then (from c. 1847) in Arabic only.[19]

These developments had a number of important implications for the development of modern Arabic literature in Egypt, and indeed in the Arab world generally. The opening of the Būlāq press marks the first stage in the shift from a manuscript-based readership (largely confined to the *'ulamā'*, or traditional Islamic scholars) to one based on the printed word – a readership that was, moreover, constantly expanding in number as a result of Muḥammad 'Alī's educational reforms.[20] The increased scope for the easy dissemination of texts

that printing allowed undoubtedly played a major part in promoting the cultural and national awareness that was later to find fruition not only in the cultural *nahḍa* of the later nineteenth century but also in the subsequent rise of Arab political nationalism.[21] This process was also closely connected with the growth of journalism, which soon began to play a crucial role, not only helping to forge a new sense of national consciousness, but also providing a vital training ground for young writers – a role it has continued to play until today. Associated with these developments were a gradual replacement of Turkish by Arabic as the main language of education and administration, as well as changes in the Arabic language itself, involving the evolution of a more modern, less convoluted prose style and a vocabulary capable of dealing with modern concepts in a manner accessible to the expanding reading public.[22]

From the point of view of literary development, however, the most crucial role was undoubtedly that played by translation. As already noted, Egyptian students returning from abroad had from an early date been required to translate the textbooks they had studied and in 1835, a new impetus was given to the translation movement with the founding of a School of Languages in Cairo for the teaching of Italian, French and English, under the directorship of Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–71). Al-Ṭahṭāwī, who had been sent to Paris by Muḥammad 'Alī as *imām* to the first Egyptian educational mission to France, may be reckoned one of the most distinguished Egyptian *'ulamā'* of the nineteenth century, with a public service career that included, for a time, the editorship of the official newspaper *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya*, the Directorship of the Translation Bureau set up in 1841, and several other official positions under Muḥammad 'Alī's successor Ismā'īl (1863–79). The first translations, often into Turkish rather than Arabic, were largely limited to military and technological works, but in time, works of literary and historical value also began to attract the attention of the Egyptian students, and al-Ṭahṭāwī's own translation of Fénelon's didactic novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, published in Arabic in Beirut in 1867, set a precedent that was enthusiastically followed during the remaining years of the century.[23]

In addition to his role as a translator and educator, al-Ṭahṭāwī made a more direct contribution to the development of Egyptian literature through his authorship of some four literary works that provide a fascinating insight into how traditional Egyptian culture was evolving under Western influence.[24] The best known of these, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz ilā talkhīṣ Bārīz*, written soon after his return to Egypt from Paris,[25] provides a fascinating account of his impressions of France and reveals a surprisingly sympathetic attitude towards Western culture, comparing Western education, in particular, favourably with that of al-Azhar and other Egyptian institutions, with their emphasis on traditional learning. The work is also important on another level, for it set a pattern for a series of works, both by Egyptian writers and those from other parts of the Arab world, in

which they recorded their impressions of the West on their return, and reflected on the differences between Western and Arab civilisation. Among the most interesting of these accounts is that by the Egyptian educator and official 'Alī Mubārak (1823–93), whose four-volume semi-fictional '*Alam al-Dīn* describes the adventures of an Azhar *shaykh* (himself possibly modelled on al-Ṭahṭāwī), who travels to the West with an English orientalist[26] to educate himself in the ways of Western civilisation.[27] This motif found further expression in Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī's seminal work *Ḥadīth 'Īsā ibn Hishām* (1898–), later editions of which contained an additional section entitled *al-Riḥla al-thāniya* ('the second journey'), in which the author, following a path already mapped out by several writers at the end of the nineteenth century, describes the visit made by himself to the Great Paris Exhibition of 1900.[28] As we shall see later,[29] with the rise of a genuine fictional tradition in the twentieth century, the student who goes to the West to pursue his studies, and whose life is thereby both challenged and changed, is a recurrent figure in the works of both Egyptian and other Arab writers, among them the Egyptian Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, the Lebanese Suhayl Idrīs, and the Sudanese al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ.

Although it was Muḥammad 'Alī's reign that arguably saw the beginning of a genuine Egyptian middle class, the educational and other cultural development of his reign rested on a precarious basis, which was heavily dependent on the personality and military fortunes of the ruler himself. As these declined, the translation movement lost much of its momentum. Few, if any, cultural innovations of significance were made during the reigns of Ibrāhīm (1848), 'Abbās I (1849–54) or Sa'īd (1854–63). With the accession of the French-educated Ismā'īl (1863–82), however, the pace of innovation once again began to pick up. More interested than Muḥammad 'Alī in education for its own sake, the new Khedive dispensed his patronage, for whatever motives, with a seeming lack of religious prejudice: the number of European-run schools increased; Catholic missions set up orders in Egypt; and the state school system was revitalised, incorporating for the first time a clear distinction between 'civil' and 'military' establishments. Al-Ṭahṭāwī's School of Languages, originally founded in 1835, was reopened in 1868; the Khedival (now the National) Library (Dār al-Kutub) was established in 1870; the following few years saw the establishment of the first higher training college (Dār al-'Ulūm) in 1872 and the first Egyptian state girls' school (1873).[30] The number of Europeans living in Egypt increased dramatically during Ismā'īl's reign, and a radical development programme transformed the topography of Cairo with new buildings, roads and European-style suburbs in imitation of Hausmann's Paris. Many of these developments were implemented under the supervision of the indefatigable 'Alī Mubārak, already mentioned above for his work '*Alam al-Dīn*,[31] and paved the way for the city's seemingly inexorable growth, both in area and population, during the twentieth century.

Particularly significant in a cultural context was that in 1869, as part of the celebrations to mark the opening of the Suez Canal, the Cairo Opera House was founded, opening with a performance of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Although an institution known as the 'Comédie' had been established during the French occupation in 1800, and occasional performances had been given by amateur European companies in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Opera House gave the Egyptian public their first opportunity to develop a regular acquaintance with Western works and techniques. Many European companies visited Cairo over the succeeding years,[32] and the Opera House, situated in the Ezbekiyya Gardens, remained a focal point in Egyptian cultural life until it was destroyed by fire in 1971.[33]

It is somewhat ironic that Ismā'īl's policies, designed to make Egypt 'part of Europe', should have indirectly led, in 1881–2, to the British occupation of Egypt that lasted, in one form or another, until 1956. At all events, the succeeding period saw a rapid growth in political awareness, which manifested itself both in an increase in the number of newspapers and magazines, and in a re-examination by a number of Egyptian intellectuals of the relationship between Islam and the West, and of the need for religious and social reform. Among the most significant of this group of intellectuals was the pioneer of Islamic modernism, Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905), and the social reformer Qāsim Amīn (1863–1908), whose writings on the position of women in Islam signalled the first stirrings of Egyptian feminism.[34] A further indication of a growing self-awareness on the part of Egyptian women was the appearance of the first Egyptian women's magazine, Hind Nawfal's *al-Fatāh*, in 1892.

Although Egypt had had an official newspaper since 1828, it was not until 1866 that the first non-governmental journal, *Wādī al-Nīl*, had appeared, and it was not until the 1870s that independent journalistic activity in Egypt truly began to flourish. In 1877, an Egyptian Jew, James Sanua (1839–1912),[35] published a satirical magazine, *Abū Naḍḍāra Zarqā'*, but the publication incurred the wrath of the Khedive and Sanua was exiled to Paris. A leading role in the development of the Egyptian press, however, had already begun to be played by Syrian émigrés, many of whom, fleeing the periodic inter-communal strife in Lebanon, had found sanctuary in Egypt, where they helped to stimulate the search for new forms of literary expression. Among those involved in this process were a number of writers who also made major contributions to other fields of literary activity, including Salīm al-Naqqāsh and Adīb Isḥāq.[36] Although many of their publications were short-lived, others flourished and acquired prestige; indeed, the Taqlā brothers' *al-Ahrām*, originally founded in Alexandria in 1876, went on to become for many years the leading newspaper of the Arab world.[37]

Syria

To understand the contribution of these Syrian intellectuals to the literary and cultural developments discussed above, some general background will be necessary, for the existence in Syria and Lebanon of indigenous Christian communities with long-standing links to the West implied a starting point rather different from that in Egypt. Unlike in Egypt, where the Christian Coptic tradition had survived in comparative isolation from the West, the Catholic Church had begun to establish regular contact with the eastern Christian communities in the Levant as early as the sixteenth century; Jesuit and other missionaries were sent to the area, a network of Catholic schools was gradually established, and in 1736 the Maronites concluded a Concordat with Rome guaranteeing their local liturgical traditions in exchange for recognition of the Pope's supremacy. European editions of Arabic material, mainly biblical and liturgical texts, began to circulate among these communities, and through this route Arabic typography was introduced into the Arab world, with the printing of a Melkite Arabic Psalter at Aleppo in 1706.[38]

As a result of these and other developments, an educated priesthood had emerged, knowledgeable not only in the history and languages of the Near East, but also in Italian and Latin, and through the development of the educational system, a class of educated laymen also grew up, who not only began to occupy key positions in trade, finance and administration, but also to develop a taste for scholarship, including an interest in Arabic language and literature, and in the history of their own region.[39] Starting with the Patriarch Isṭifānūs al-Duwayhī (1603–1704), who wrote a 'History of the Times' (Ta'rīkh al-azmina), a number of historians published works centred on the changing fortunes of the Maronites; the Amir Ḥaydar Shihāb (1761–1835) himself produced what was in effect a political history of Lebanon, and Tannūs al-Shidyāq,[40] the brother of the renowned [Aḥmad] Fāris al-Shidyāq,[41] wrote a history of the noble families of Lebanon, embracing not only the Maronites but also Muslim and Druze families.

Among the most notable characteristics of intellectual life in Greater Syria during this period was the emergence of a number of exceptionally well-educated families, with scholars often spanning more than one generation – among the best known being the Yāzijī, Bustānī and Shidyāq families. Many of these scholars had been educated at the Maronite seminary of 'Ayn Waraqa, and many subsequently found employment, for part at least of their careers, in foreign consulates or with foreign missions. As Christians in a predominantly Muslim environment within the Ottoman empire, this group of intellectuals developed a distinctive outlook quite different from that of the mainly Muslim pioneers of the nahḍa in Egypt: not only was their relationship to the West radically different, but their attitude to the Arabic language (whose development had been intimately linked

to the Qur'ān and Islam) was also more complex. Less bound by tradition than their Muslim counterparts elsewhere, they developed a particular concern with fashioning Arabic as a means of expressing the life and ideas of the contemporary world – a concern that manifested itself not only through literary expression as such, but also through the compilation of dictionaries and encyclopaedias, and a range of journalistic and associated activities.

The 'father' – for want of a better term – of this group of writers was the Maronite poet and teacher Nāṣif al-Yāzijī (1800–71), whose work stands at the crossroads between classical and modern literature. Although his most important publication, *Majma' al-baḥrayn* (1856), has been described as a 'pioneering work',[42] there is little original in the author's use of the traditional *maqāma* form,[43] and indeed it is clear that its purpose was primarily didactic.[44] Al-Yāzijī's importance, however, lies less in his originality than in his passionate concern for the language and literature of the Arabs, and with the impetus that this concern gave to the pioneers of the *nahḍa* in Syria and Lebanon, many of whom had indeed been his students. At least four of his children – Ḥabīb, Ibrāhīm, Warda and Khalīl – were active in literary circles, and the family as a whole may be accounted one of the leading contributors to the nineteenth-century literary revival.[45]

Although the origins of the literary revival in Syria were to some extent independent of those in Egypt, developments in the two areas during the nineteenth century quickly became interwoven. In 1831, anxious to secure a stable regime on his eastern frontier, Muḥammad 'Alī invaded Syria, and for the next decade or so, Syria was effectively under Egyptian occupation, ruled by the Khedive's son, Ibrāhīm Pasha. One immediate result was a rapid increase in Western educational and missionary activity in the country. Not only were a number of new missionary schools opened during this period but the seeds were also sown for the subsequent development of higher education in the region: in 1847, the Americans founded a College that subsequently (1866) became the American College, later evolving into the prestigious American University of Beirut; a few years later, in 1874, the Jesuits opened a College in Beirut that later became the University of St Joseph. Important as the cultural effects of the brief Egyptian occupation were, however, the political and social side-effects of Muḥammad 'Alī's brief foray into the Levant were far from universally positive. Ibrāhīm's attempts to promote religious equality and social reform provoked widespread opposition, and when the regime further aroused Western opposition by marching into Asia Minor, a revolt broke out leading to the evacuation of the Egyptians from the country in 1840.[46] A period of political confusion followed, characterised by an increase in Western interference, a hardening of Ottoman rule, and a growing tension between the various religious communities. In 1860, war broke out between the Druze and Maronite communities, and many

Syrians (including many intellectuals) left the country – a pattern that was to be repeated on several occasions over the succeeding years. Some of these émigrés went to Egypt, where they helped to stimulate the search for new forms of literary expression – their contribution being particularly important in the fields of the theatre[47] and the press. Other émigrés sought sanctuary in the Mahjar[48] communities of North and South America, where a number of literary groups and societies were soon established, bringing together writers such as Mīkhā'īl Nu'ayma and Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān, who were later to play a major role in transmitting the experience of contemporary Western literature to the Arab East.

In Syria, as in Egypt, a major role in the development of the literary renaissance had been played by the press. In 1851, an Arabic journal, Majmū' fawā'id li-nukhbat afāḍil, had been founded by the American Protestant missionaries in Beirut, and the succeeding years saw a major expansion of commercial printing and publishing activity, which established Beirut as one of the major publishing centres of the Arab world – a status that, together with Cairo, it still enjoys. A number of influential publications were founded during this period, including the fortnightly al-Jinān (1870–86), particularly associated with the Bustānī family, and the monthly review al-Muqtaṭaf (1876–1952), initially edited by Ya'qūb Ṣarrūf and Fāris Nimr, which moved from Beirut to Cairo in 1885. Arabic publications of this type also made an appearance in Istanbul, the seat of the Ottoman Empire, where al-Jawā'ib (1861–84), edited by the Lebanese [Aḥmad] Fāris al-Shidyāq,[49] played an important part in the literary revival, stimulating debate on linguistic and literary development and achieving a circulation that stretched as far afield as India, Zanzibar and North Africa. As in Egypt, these and other publications of a similar type served a variety of functions, conveying much information to the general reader about Western thought, civilisation and science, while at the same time serving as a vehicle for the publication of literary texts –whether translations, adaptations, or original works. An additional function – in some cases, at least – was to propagate political ideas, and they thus played an important part in the development of ideas of Arab nationalism within the context of the Ottoman Empire.[50]

A particularly important part in the Syrian nahḍa was played by Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819–83) who, in addition to founding the magazine al-Jinān, published a number of translations of Western literary works, including John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. His most distinctive contribution, however, was probably in the field of lexicography: his Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ (1867–70) is usually reckoned the first dictionary by a modern Arab lexicographer, and he also compiled the first volumes of the first Arabic encyclopaedia, Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif (1876–82). Buṭrus's activities were continued by other members of his family, including 'Abd Allāh al-Bustānī (1854–1930), who, in addition to work as a journalist and translator, compiled a massive dictionary

entitled *al-Bustān*; by Salīm al-Bustānī (1846–84), an important pioneer in the development of Arabic fiction;[51] and Sulaymān al-Bustānī (1856–1925), who not only assisted his cousin Buṭrus with work on his encyclopaedia, but also produced a verse translation of Homer's *Iliad*, the first modern attempt to translate a major classical literary work into Arabic.

Major contributions to lexicography and related linguistic sciences were also made by Fāris al-Shidyāq, undoubtedly the most fascinating of this group of writers, whose career also best exemplifies the complex relationships both between East and West, and within the Middle East itself, at this time. Shidyāq's literary output stands at a number of crossroads, drawing as it does on both the Arabic and Western literary traditions, and occupying a pivotal position at the transitional point between 'classical' and 'modern' Arabic literature; in addition, the man himself, both through his travels and through his acquaintance with, and adherence to, different religious and social communities, epitomises the tensions and choices that fell to be faced by many nineteenth-century Middle Eastern intellectuals, confronted as they were with the growing influence of the West.

Born in 1804 into a Maronite family in 'Ashqūt (Lebanon),[52] Fāris al-Shidyāq worked for a time as a copyist for the Amīr Ḥaydar Shihāb, before being recruited by the American Protestant missionaries, for whom he worked as a translator in Malta. He subsequently travelled to England to work (mainly in and around Cambridge) on the translation of the New Testament into Arabic. Over the next few years, he travelled frequently between London and Paris, and also visited Tunis, where he converted to Islam, adding the name Aḥmad to his original name. The final phase of his life was spent in Constantinople, where he had been invited by the Sultan Abdülmecid ('Abd al-Majīd); in 1861 he launched the periodical *al-Jawā'ib*, to which he devoted much of the rest of his life, and which enjoyed an astonishingly wide circulation throughout the Arab world and beyond. After his death in 1887, his body was returned to the family plot at al-Ḥadath, Lebanon, for burial, though the story repeated by Hourani (among others)[53] that he reconverted to Catholicism on his death-bed is almost certainly false, for his tombstone bears a Muslim symbol.

Al-Shidyāq left three substantial works in which his experience of, and views on, the West play an important part: *al-Wāsiṭa fi ma'rifat aḥwāl Māliṭa* (Malta, 1836), which provides a description of the history, geography and customs of the island where al-Shidyāq spent much of his early working life; *Kashf al-mukhabba' 'an funūn ūrubbā* (Tunis, 1866), an account of contemporary Europe that clearly stands in a direct line of descent from Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī's work *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz ilā talkhīṣ Bārīz*; and a part-fictional, part-autobiographical work entitled *al-Sāq 'alā al-Sāq fi mā huwa al-Fāriyāq* (Paris, 1855).

Of these three works, it is *al-Sāq 'alā al-Sāq* that is by far the most significant

from a literary point of view. Indeed, it has been described, not without exaggeration, as 'the first real approach to fiction in modern Arabic literature'.[54] Clearly indebted to Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, al-Shidyāq's narrative technique was, by comparison with his Arab contemporaries, equally clearly ahead of its time: he adopts, for example, the 'distancing device' of referring to himself in the third person;[55] his humour, by turns mocking, sarcastic, or sometimes merely flippant, is invariably based on a close observation of his fellow human beings; and his narrative tone varies so much that at times the reader is uncertain of the precise relationship between fact and fiction.

Al-Shidyāq's work was perhaps too idiosyncratic to have had any direct successors, but his career provides a useful reminder that the channels by which the Arabs 'rediscovered' Europe in the nineteenth century (and arguably, through the process of defining their relationship to the West, attempted to redefine themselves), were considerably more complex than some conventional accounts of the process would suggest; marginalised as he was for much of his career, Shidyāq may be regarded as a striking example of the power of an individual personality both to transcend and to reflect the circumstances of his time. In fact, he presents us with one of the most fascinating life stories of the nineteenth-century Middle East – and one that is certainly overdue for further study.

In the meantime, the theatre had also begun to make an appearance in Syria. The first significant step towards the establishment of a modern Arabic drama was taken in 1847, when the Lebanese Mārūn al-Naqqāsh staged an adaptation of Molière's *L'Avare* in his Beirut home; this was followed in 1849 by an original Arabic play, *Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mughaffal aw Hārūn al-Rashīd*, based on a story from the *Thousand and One Nights*. Mārūn's early death was a blow to the development of Arab theatre, but his enthusiasm for the genre, originally acquired on business trips to Europe, was passed on to other members of his family: his plays were published by his brother, Niqūlā al-Naqqāsh (who also wrote plays of his own), and his nephew, Salīm Khalīl al-Naqqāsh, later formed his own troupe. In 1876, at the invitation of the Khedive Ismā'īl, Salīm established himself in Alexandria, and the exodus of theatrical talent from Lebanon to Egypt continued in the 1880s and 1890s.[56]

Although, as will be clear from the above account, most cultural developments in the Levant during this period were centred in Lebanon, the cities of Aleppo and Damascus were not without their share of intellectual activity. In Damascus, Aḥmad Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī (1841–1902) had begun staging plays after the fashion of Mārūn al-Naqqāsh, some deriving their plots from the *Thousand and One Nights*, until in 1884 his theatre was closed down, and he joined the exodus of theatrical talent from Syria to Egypt. In the embryonic field of fiction, his contemporary, Nu'mān 'Abduh al-Qasātilī (1848–1920),

contributed three romances to al-Bustānī's periodical *al-Jinān*.[57] In Aleppo, mention should be made of Fransīs Marrāsh (1836–73), a Melchite writer and poet, whose allegorical work *Ghābat al-ḥaqq* (1865), mainly in dialogue, revolves around the issue of how to achieve 'the kingdom of civilisation and freedom'. Marrāsh's writing career was cut short by his premature death, but his original style (bordering on prose poetry) was later to influence Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān,[58] and, although little read today, he has been described as having some claim to being regarded as 'the first truly universal Arab intellectual of modern times'.[59]

Other areas

Although the most significant developments in the early phases of the *nahḍa* largely centred on Egypt and Greater Syria, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that literary activity was entirely absent elsewhere. Following the founding of the Būlāq Press in Egypt in 1822, Arabic printing presses had begun to appear in most large centres of the Arab Middle East from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, including (among others) Jerusalem (1847), Damascus (1855), Mosul (1856), Tunis (1860), Baghdad (1863), Sana'a (1877), Khartoum (1881), Mecca (1883) and Medina (1885).[60] In most cases, these presses produced not only books but also newspapers and periodicals of various kinds. Although the main intellectual driving forces for cultural and national revival continued to emanate from Cairo, Beirut and Damascus, changes in the pattern of dissemination of texts had therefore become evident in most areas of the Arab world by the last quarter of the nineteenth century (though the practical effect of these changes varied widely from country to country according to the literacy rate and general level of education).[61] Almost everywhere, original works in Arabic were continuing to be written. Often, however, these continued to follow traditional patterns of historical and religious literature, and held little interest for readers outside the immediate locality. Nontheless, although – like many aspects of the earlier 'transitional period' – this is an under-researched area, in Iraq and North Africa, if nowhere else, it is possible to identify a number of individual writers and families whose work echoes, at the very least, the more radical development in the central Arab world.

Iraq

The historical background to literary development in Iraq is a complex one, for the country's geographical position on the eastern extremity of the Arab world had periodically exposed it to Persian influence, be it political, literary or linguistic. By 1800, however, Iraq had been firmly reincorporated into the Ottoman Empire for some 150 years, while its literature for the most part

followed a similar pattern to other parts of the Arab world, with the *maqāma* form continuing to enjoy considerable favour.

Although, by comparison with Egypt and the Levant, Iraq in the nineteenth century remained comparatively unaffected by contact with the West, we can nonetheless detect in Iraq some of the same trends and tensions apparent in Egypt and Greater Syria during the same period. As in Syria, for example, a number of families had emerged with a leading role in the development of literary activity. 'Abd Allāh al-Suwaydī (1692–1761) produced poems, commentaries, and a set of *maqāmāt*, and his talents were continued by his three sons, Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Fatḥ Ibrāhīm, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, and Abū al-Maḥāmīd (1740–95),[62] the last-mentioned of whom produced a *maqāma* full of rich imagery revolving around an enchanted garden. The most influential family of the nineteenth century, however, was undoubtedly the Ālūsī family, who had already been active in the traditional religious and literary fields for some time. The most significant members of the family were Abū al-Thanā' Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd (1802–54) and his grandson, Maḥmūd Shukrī Abū al-Ma 'ālī (1857–1924). Abū al-Thanā', who had studied in Damascus, Beirut and Istanbul and worked as a teacher for a time, wrote three books describing his travels, as well as a collection of *maqāmāt* in which, while following the traditional format and linguistic conventions, he also demonstrated a concern with the present day through his criticism of the Sufi orders for attempting to influence contemporary youth. For his part, the prolific Maḥmūd Shukrī produced some fifty works on a variety of subjects, including history, biography, *fiqh*, lexicography and religion. There can be little doubt that these writers have been unjustly neglected in most discussions of the nineteenth-century *nahḍa* and are due for a reappraisal – as are, indeed, such poets as 'Abd al-Ghanī Jamīl (1780–1863) and 'Abd al-Ghaffār al-Akhraṣ (1805–75), in whose verse one may see the beginnings of an attempt in the Iraqi context to free poetry from its traditional conventions.[63] Other noteworthy Iraqi poets of this period include Ṣāliḥ al-Tamīmī (1762–1845); Ḥaydar al-Ḥillī (1831–86), best known for his elegies; and 'Abd al-Bāqī al-'Umarī (also known as al-Fārūqī, 1790–1862), described as the *imām* of the poets of his time.

North Africa

The relevance of the concept of the *nahḍa* to the countries of the Maghrib (North Africa west of Egypt) is perhaps slightly less clear. Indeed, with the conspicuous exception of the Tunisian statesman and reformer Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī (1832/3?–89), many accounts of the nineteenth-century revival appear to disregard the *nahḍa* in North Africa altogether.[64] The achievements of Khayr al-Dīn, however, suggest that, had it not been for the protracted French occupation of the region,[65] the evolution of Arabic literature and culture in North Africa

might well have taken a different turn. Born in the Caucasus, Khayr al-Dīn had experience of life in Paris and other foreign capitals; he served as Prime Minister of Tunisia from 1873 to 1877, before being forced into exile, and subsequently served as grand vizier from 1878 to 1879. In 1867-8, he produced a monumental work, *Aqwam al-masālik fī ma'rifat al-mamālik*, in which he reviewed the history and political and economic structures of a number of European countries, as well as those of the Ottoman Empire itself; in the most interesting part of the work, the *Muqaddima* (a title borrowed from his illustrious fellow-countryman Ibn Khaldūn [1332–1406]), the author argued in favour of trying to emulate the progress of the West, which in his view sprang from a combination of representative government and the fruits of the industrial revolution. Khayr al-Dīn's works were certainly known to the Egyptian writer Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī, and may indeed have influenced his views in this area.

In other respects also, we may also note parallels between the experience of Egypt following the Napoleonic invasion, and that of the countries of the Maghrib. In each of the countries of North Africa, a quest for national (or at least, indigenous) identity developed alongside a struggle against French (or in the case of Libya, Italian) colonialism, which exerted a powerful grip on the countries concerned, not only in political but also in linguistic terms. The phenomenon of bilingualism, and the propensity of Arab writers for writing in French rather than Arabic, has been a powerful influence on the development of modern Arabic literature in North Africa – particularly, though not only, in Algeria and Morocco.[66]

In Algeria, at all events, the first of the North African countries to be occupied, French-language newspapers had been published as early as 1832, and the first bilingual paper, *al-Mubashshir*, appeared in 1847. The discovery of what appears to be the first known Arabic-language play written under the influence of European models and published in Algiers in 1847,[67] has given additional weight to the argument that the *nahḍa* in North Africa has been seriously under-studied, at least by English-speaking researchers, and deserves more serious consideration.[68] In this regard, the contribution of the *amīr* 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī (Abdel Kader) (1808–83) is also of some interest: better remembered as a staunch nationalist and opponent of the French, he was also a versatile writer who, in addition to technical and military works, composed poetry and philosophical works. Despite this, however, the literary *nahḍa* of Egypt and the Levant appears to have had little significant influence on the course of events in Algeria until some time after the First World War, when 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Bādīs (Ben Badis), who was acquainted with the reformist ideas of Muhammad 'Abduh, founded the *Jam'iyyat al-'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn*, and a period of concentrated journalistic activity ensued, with several publications devoting considerable space to poetry, short stories and even novels:

among the writers who came to prominence during this period, Aḥmad Riḍā
Ḥūḥū (1911–56) is the best known. In Tunisia, literary development followed
a generally similar pattern – the founding of the official journal *al-Rā'id al-tūnisī*
in 1869 being followed by that of the first privately-owned daily newspaper,
al-Zahra, in 1889. Much writing remained traditional in both form and theme
during the nineteenth century, though a few writers such as the poet Maḥmūd
Qabādū (1815–71) were beginning to try to find ways of making their craft
more relevant to the modern world. Muḥammad al-Sanūsī (1851–1900), author
of the *Majma' al-dawāwīn al-tūnisiyya*, compared Christian and Muslim habits
in a way that recalls that of Fāris al-Shidyāq,[69] but it was not until the 1930s
– extremely late by comparison with Egypt – that we see the beginnings of a
modern literary tradition. In Morocco, the process began a little later still, with
the foundation of the first Arabic-language newspaper, *al-Maghrib*, in Tangiers
in 1889; from then on, literary development followed a broadly similar path,
though the linguistic structure of the country has been complicated by the exis-
tence of a substantial number of Berber speakers.

Conclusion

By its very nature, the *nahḍa* was a fluid process: it is difficult, if not impos-
sible, to posit any rigid 'end date' for its completion. In the central parts of the
Arab world, by the end of the 1920s, most of the initial problems involved in
adapting Western literary forms for use in an Arab context had been tackled,
and the groundwork laid for the future development of modern Arabic literature
in the remainder of the twentieth century; the process, however, was an uneven
one, and literary development in most genres took place at different paces in
different countries. The countries most associated with the *nahḍa* in its early
phases had been Egypt and Greater Syria; but the exodus, for political and other
reasons, of a considerable number of intellectuals from the latter area left Egypt
as the undisputed leader in most areas of literary activity at the beginning of
the century – with exile communities in North and South America acting as
an intellectual bridge between Western influences and indigenous development.
In the following chapters, we shall see how these processes evolved over the
following century or so in the three main genres of poetry, prose fiction, and
the drama.

Notes

1 See below, pp. 99–100.
2 Which at this date included not only present-day Syria, but also the territories now
   known as Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine/Israel. For reasons discussed below, the
   contribution made by inhabitants of Lebanon was particularly important at various

stages of the *nahḍa*.

3 Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature*, London, 1971, pp. 26ff.

4 Badawi, *A Short History*, p. 2.

5 Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 29.

6 On this, see Daly, M. W., *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Vol. 2*, especially chapters 3, 4, 5 and 11.

7 Muhammad Siddiq, review of M. M. Badawi (ed.), *Modern Arabic Literature*, in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 26 (1995), p. 270.

8 See above, pp. 23–4.

9 Nelly Hanna, 'Culture in Ottoman Egypt', in Daly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Vol. 2*, pp. 87–112.

10 See below, pp. 163–97.

11 For a succinct account, see Darrell Dykstra, 'The French occupation of Egypt, 1798–1801', in Daly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Vol. 2*, pp. 113–18.

12 Commission des Monuments de l'Egypte, *Description de l'Egypte*, 1st edn, Paris, 1810–29.

13 On these publications, see Wassef, Amin Sami, *L'Information et la presse officielle en Egypte jusqu'à la fin de l'occupation française*, pp. 49–108.

14 Dykstra in Daly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Vol. 2*, p. 113.

15 See al-Turk, Niqūlā, *Chronique d'Egypte, 1798–1804*, ed. G. Wiet, Cairo, 1950.

16 al-Jabartī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Napoleon in Egypt*, Moreh, 1993, p. 47.

17 S. Moreh, s.v. 'al-Jabartī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān', *EAL*, I, p. 403.

18 For a detailed account of Muḥammad 'Alī's reign, see Khalid Fahmy, 'The era of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, 1805–1848', in Daly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Vol. 2*, pp. 139–79.

19 On this, see 'Abduh, Ibrāhīm, *Ta'rīkh al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya, 1828–1942*, Cairo, 1942.

20 On this, see Roper, G., 'Fāris al-Shidyāq and the Transition from Scribal to Print Culture in the Middle East', in *The Book in the Islamic World*, ed. G. N. Atiyeh, pp. 209–32.

21 On this, see Hourani, A., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, London, 1962.

22 On this, see Stetkevych, J., *Modern Arabic Literary Language: Lexical and Stylistic Development*, Chicago, 1970.

23 On al-Ṭahṭāwī, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, pp. 67–83; Crabbs, J. A., *The Writing of History in Nineteenth-century Egypt*, Detroit, 1984, pp. 67–86.

24 For details, see Crabbs, *The Writing of History*.

25 English translation by Daniel Newman as *An Imam in Paris*, London, 2004.

26 Possibly modelled on Edward Lane.

27 On 'Alī Mubārak, see Crabbs, *The Writing of History*, pp. 109–119, and S. Fliedner, *'Alī Mubārak und seine Ḥitat* (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, 140), Berlin, 1990.

28 On al-Muwayliḥī, see below, pp. 97–9; a translation of al-Muwayliḥī's work, with a useful study may be found in R. Allen, *A Period of Time*, Reading, 1992.

29 See below, for example, p. 116.

30 On these developments, see J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, London, 1939, repr. 1968.

31 See above, p. 28.

32 On this, see P. C. Sadgrove, *The Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, London, 1996.

33 It has since been replaced, on a different site, by a new construction donated by the Japanese.

34 On 'Abduh and Amīn, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, pp. 164–70.

35 Otherwise Ya'qūb Ṣanū', for whom, see below, pp. 167–8.

36 On the theatrical activities of al-Naqqāsh, Isḥāq, etc, see below, pp. 166–7.

37 For a general history of the Arab press, see Ayalon, Ami, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History*, New York, 1995.

38 See Roper, *EAL*, II, 614, s.v. 'Printing and publishing'.

39 See Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, pp. 54ff.

40 See A. Hourani, 'Historians of Lebanon', in B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (eds), *Historians of the Middle East*, London, 1962.

41 For whom, see below, pp. 33–4.

42 P. C. Sadgrove, *EAL*, II, 812, s.v. 'al-Yāzijī, Nāṣif'.

43 See above, p. 10.

44 See Introduction to *Majma' al-baḥrayn*, p. 3.

45 On the Yāzijī family, see Kratschkowsky, I., 'Yāzijī' , *EI¹*, viii, p. 1171.

46 See Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, pp. 60–1; Khaled Fahmy, 'The era of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha', in Daly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Vol. 2*, pp. 165 ff.

47 See below, Chapter 9.

48 Literally, 'place of emigration'.

49 For whose literary activities, see below, pp. 33–4.

50 See Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East*.

51 See below, pp. 99, 107; also, S. Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*, London: Saqi, 1993, pp. 111–13; Matti Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, 2nd edn, Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner, pp. 157–83.

52 The date and place of al-Shidyāq's birth have been disputed. See, for example, *EI²*, s.v. 'Fāris al-Shidyāk'.

53 See Hourani, Albert, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, London, 1970, p. 98.

54 Boutros Hallaq, 'Love and the Birth of Modern Arabic Literature', in R. Allen, H. Kilpatrick and E. de Moor (eds), *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, London, 1995, p. 17.

55 A technique that can also be seen in many later, more conventional autobiographies such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *al-Ayyām* (for which, see below, p. 103).

56 See below, pp. 000; also Badawi, M. M., *Early Arabic Drama*, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 43–67.

57 See Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, pp. 191–5.

58 For whom, see below, pp. 61–4, 88–90.

59 P. C. Sadgrove, *EAL*, II, pp. 510–11, s.v. See also, Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, pp. 185–95.

60 Roper, *EAL*, II, p. 614, s.v. 'Printing and publishing'.

61 On this, see Findley, C.V., 'Knowledge and Education in the Modern Middle East', in G. Sabagh (ed.), *The Modern Economic and Social History of the Middle East in its World Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

62 Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature*, pp. 67–8.

63 On al-Akhraṣ, see Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, pp. 29ff.

64 See, for example, Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge History of Arabic Literature), in which even Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī is apparently unmentioned, either in the index or the text.

65 The French occupation of Algeria lasted from 1830 to 1962; of Tunisia, from 1882 to 1956; and of Morocco, from 1912 to 1956. The Italian occupation of Libya lasted from 1911 to 1943.

66 On this, see Jacqueline Kaye and Abdelhamid Zoubir, *The Ambiguous Compromise: Language, Literature and National Identity*, London and New York, 1990.

67 On this, see S. Moreh and P. Sadgrove, *Jewish Contributions to Nineteenth-Century Arabic Theatre*, Oxford, 1996.

68 For historical reasons that should need no further explanation, the French contribution to scholarship on North African literature is considerably more comprehensive than that of the English-speaking world. Indeed, it is scarcely possible to conduct serious research on North Africa literature without a knowledge of French.

69 For Tunisian literature generally, see J. Fontaine, *Histoire de la littérature tunisienne par les textes*, Bardo, 2 vols, 1988, 1994; idem, *La littérature tunisienne contemporaine*, Paris, 1991; S. Pantuček, *Tunesische Literaturgeschichte*, Wiesbaden, 1974.