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**Arab-Islamic Thinkers in Paris:
The Cases of Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī, Al-Afḡānī, ‘Abduh and Ṭaha Ḥusayn¹**

Abstract

Living in Europe, continuing studies and attainments, participating in the intellectual life there, was a turning point for a number of Arab-Islamic thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among them, I have chosen Rifā‘a Rāfi’ a ṭ - Ṭ a ḥ ṭ ā w ī, Ḡamāl ad-Dīn al - A f ḡ ā n ī, Muḥammad ‘A b d u h and Ṭaha Ḥ u s a y n. For A ṭ - Ṭ a ḥ ṭ ā w ī the occasion came during his stay in Paris as the imam of a group of Egyptian students sent there by Muḥammad ‘Alī on scholarship. A ṭ - Ṭ a ḥ ṭ ā w ī not only became later a pioneer of a translation movement, as well as the author of “Parisian Impressions” – being the “first Arab eye” to observe Western civilization, but above all an outstanding reformist. As to Al - A f ḡ ā n ī and ‘A b d u h, the effect of their residence in Paris in the 1880’s was the publication of the periodical “Al-‘Urwā al-Wuṭqā” as the organ of a secret society under the same name. Ṭaha Ḥ u s a y n stayed in France during World War I and attended post-graduate courses at the Sorbonne. He played a major role in Egyptian and Arab intellectual life. Among multiple contributions, in a major reformist work “The Future of Culture in Egypt”, he introduced a deep analysis of the Egyptian educational system together with proposals not only for its transformation, but also for the establishment of a democratic system of government. The paper is based on primary sources – i.e., works of mentioned thinkers – and academic literature of Arab and Western writers.

Among XIX century Arab enlightenment thinkers, who derived from indigenous national traditions as well as from European intellectual attainments, the most outstanding

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of them was Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–1873). He, like others, was interested in the causes of the backwardness and mechanisms of the revival of the Arab-Islamic civilization. Successive stages in his life were: years of birth, growth, early education and religious learning (1801–1817); studies in Al-Azhar religious university as one of the most distinguished students (1817–1822); work as lecturer at the University of al-Azhar (1822–1824); performing the duty of imam in the Egyptian army; and for the next five years (1826–1831) as an imam accompanying an Egyptian mission of scholarship students delegated to Paris, where he used to lead their prayers, recite the Holy Koran and render advice in religious matters. In Paris Aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī carried out his own studies, in addition to registering personal impressions. After returning back home, he inaugurated an influential movement of translations, research and reflections that exerted their impact until present times. He sponsored the establishment of the School of Languages (*Madrasat al-Asun*), and the translation of books related to ancient, medieval and modern history of Egypt and foreign countries. For example, on his initiative the work of Montesquieu *Consideration sur les causes et la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* was translated². He alone translated from French some twenty books on geography, history and military sciences.

Aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī is presented as the first “Arab eye”, which observed modern Western civilization represented by the French with deep reflective attitude and favorable criticism³. Starting with his “Parisian Impressions” (*Kitāb taḥlīs al-ibrīz fī talḥīs Bārīz, aw: Ad-Dīwān an-naḥīs bi-īwān Bārīz*)⁴, Aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī shows interest in many aspects of the French political system – including citizens’ rights. He praises Muḥammad ‘Alī for renewing contacts with the outside world after a period of damaging isolation. For him, the sign of French progress is its system, which is based upon laws and institutions.

As to the concept of the French system of government, Aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī seems to have adopted it from Jean Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, French constitutional documents and his own observations. In the case of Rousseau’s social thought, members of a given society resign from some of their liberties in favour of the political authority in exchange for protecting their rights and liberties, and also undertaking the regulation of relationships among themselves. Aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī concluded that the nation is the sole source of rightful authority, but in cases of violating by the political authority of “the social contract”, revolution would have been justified. Rousseau’s ideas were partially reflected in French constitutions of the times of our thinker’s presence in France – among them, the Constitutional Charter declared by Louis XVIII (1815–1824), translated into Arabic by Aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī in his book *Taḥlīs al-ibrīz*.... He admired the principles of

² Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1993*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 71 [1st edition: Oxford University Press, Oxford 1962; Arabic translation of Karīm Asqūl: *Al-Fikr al-‘arabī fī ‘aṣr an-Nahḍa 1798–1993*, Wizārat aṭ-Ṭaqāfa wa-al-İrşād al-Qawmī, Dimaşq (n. d.)].

³ Introduction of Muḥammad ‘A m ā r a in: *Al-A‘amāl al-kāmila li-Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī*, Vol. I, Beirut 1973, pp. 29–89.

⁴ Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 7–249.

the Charter that enabled the French to achieve prosperity, advance of knowledge, wealth, rationalism, justice, development and happiness⁵.

The author of *Taḥlīs al-ibrīz*...presented clauses of the Charter, which protect the French – on the one hand – and consolidate royal prerogatives – on the other. Hence, the French were equal according to law, paid taxes, had equal opportunity to undertake state posts in accordance with qualifications, were free to choose their creed and express opinion within the law, and had the right to have their property to be protected. In his commentary to the investigated document, Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī emphasizes Article I, which declared the equality of all citizens before the law. He also analyzes Article IX dealing with property protection, hence – as he concludes – protecting the weak.

It is worthwhile to add, that Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī witnessed the July Revolution of 1830, the downfall of Charles X (1824–1830) and the access to royal power of Louis Philip (1830–1848). The July Constitution was – in his opinion – tantamount to endorsement of French citizens' rights and duties⁶. The Egyptian thinker explained in his *Taḥlīs al-ibrīz*... July events of 1830 in France, the toppling of Charles X (before Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī's return home), adding that the days of Revolution were positively evaluated by the French⁷.

Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī's admiration for the political thought of the French Enlightenment – its political philosophy dealing with authority, society and social system – did not mean resignation nor indifferentism towards the Islamic tradition. As an Islamic thinker, he held the opinion that the socio-political thought of Islam constantly declared ideas that form the core of French Enlightenment thought. According to him, Islamic thought endorsed and endorses the individual's right to freedom and to life in a free society, endorsed and endorses the ideal society (*al-muḡtama' al-fāḍil*) – i.e., the one which acknowledges justice and rulers' duty to serve the subjects of the realm⁸.

In his reflections, Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī went even further. Having as a basis conceptions acquired during his stay in France, he evolved his Islamic socio-political doctrine, whereas the governed community (*umma, milla*) should have the right, and even the duty, to participate in the exercise of political power. Until that could take place, the collective should enhance its own moral standard and undergo a serious political education, so that community members could take up the burden of governance. The revolutionary atmosphere dominating in Paris and France during his stay convinced him that laws, customs and political principles undergo incessant changes. What is appropriate for a given time and place should not be appropriate for another time and place. Hence, we have here a directive of carrying out far-reaching socio-political transformations⁹.

⁵ Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 95.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 104–106.

⁷ Ibid., p. 199.

⁸ Samīr Abū Ḥamdān, *Rifā'a Rāfi' at-Taḥṭāwī: Ra'id at-tahdīṭ al-Urubī fī Miṣr, Aṣ-Šarika al-'Ālamiyya li-al-Kitāb*, Beirut 1992, p. 61.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 61–62.

Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī (1838–1897)¹⁰ – in turn – was of non-Arab origin, who however carried out his activities and disseminated his ideas also in Arab land, among Arabs and together with them. Being born most probably in Afghan Persia, he until his tenth year of age learned the Koran, Arabic language and religious knowledge¹¹. Then (since 1848) in Iranian Qazwīn he attended school under his father's guidance, followed by studies in Iraqi An-Nağaf of: jurisprudence, logic, philosophy, mathematics, medicine and astrology. He later was active (against the British) in the field of politics in British occupied India and in Afghanistan. During 1970's he lived in Egypt for more than eight years. His radical socio-political ideas often led to his expulsion from countries where he tried to settle for a longer period. So in the years 1883-1886 he chose to live in Paris and – among other activities – issue together with Muḥammad 'Abduh a periodical entitled "Al-'Urwā al-Wuṭqā" (The Strongest Link). The mentioned periodical was to be the organ of a secret society under the same name that desired to build branches all over the Islamic world. The objective of the society was to fight the British occupation of Egypt, Sudan and India.

In Paris, Al-Afġānī was most probably representing the Ottoman Empire, as the embodiment of the idea of "Al-'Urwā al-Wuṭqā", since he personally refers to that notion¹². The diplomatic sense behind the move was that both Istanbul and Paris (having a negative attitude towards the British occupation of Egypt since 1882, carried out unilaterally with a simultaneous promise that the occupation had to last only temporarily) could exert international pressure in the direction of forcing British withdrawal. Paris was active in this field, and the Ottomans had every reason to count upon French support for that matter. Al-Afġānī held the opinion that the Egyptian 'Urābi revolt took place under the banner of bringing about "the strongest link" with the Ottoman Caliphate, while the British suppressed it in order to hamper the integration of the Muslim people within that state.

The Ottoman state was – in his opinion at that time – the protector of the East (including India). Intellectuals should demand unity in the first place and not reform as a prerequisite of their support for the High Port. Demanding reforms could weaken this state community. If this state would collapse, all nations of the community become prey of foreign invasion. Unity and only unity protects them from such an alternative.

¹⁰ Details of his life in: Muḥammad 'Amāra, *Al-A'māl al-kāmila li-Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī*, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Cairo 1968; Louis 'Awad, *Tārīḥ al-fikr al-miṣrī al-ḥadīṭ min al-ḥamla al-faransiyya ilā 'aṣr Ismā'īl*, Vol. II, Part 1, pp. 7–264; Aḥmad Amīn, *Zu'amā' al-iṣlāḥ fī al-'aṣr al-ḥadīṭ*, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beirut 1979, pp. 59–120; Sāmī Abū Ḥamdān, *Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī wa-falsafat al-ġāmi'a al-iṣlāmiyya*, Aṣ-Ṣarika al-'Ālamiyya li-al-Kitāb, Beirut 1992, pp. 15–77; Maḥmūd Abū Riyya, *Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo 1961; Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī & Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Al-'Urwā al-Wuṭqā*, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beirut 1970, pp. 17–29; As-Sayyid Yūsuf, *Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī wa-aṭ-ṭawra aṣ-ṣāmila*, Al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-al-Kitāb, Cairo 1999; 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ar-Rāfi'ī, *Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo 1991.

¹¹ The life of Al-Afġānī in the Introduction of Muḥammad 'Amāra, [in:] *Al-A'māl al-kāmila li-Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī*, op. cit., pp. 2–115.

¹² Louis 'Awad, *Tārīḥ al-fikr al-miṣrī al-ḥadīṭ...*, op. cit., Vol. II, Part 1, p. 174.

In this frank way Al-Afgānī initiated his call for an Islamic Community (*Al-Ġami'a al-Islāmiyya*) and the unity of the Islamic world around the Ottoman state and sultan Abdülhamid II¹³.

However, Al-Afgānī made a visit to London for talks with the British (through the intermediary of Wilfrid Blunt) aimed at convening a British-Ottoman alliance against Russian expansion in Central Asia. However, the British could not treat seriously such a proposal of strategic significance made by an ultimately private person without credentials – although he was a prominent personality.

Al-Afgānī's presence in Paris was multi-dimensional. In addition to the attempts to – firstly forge an anti-British and – secondly – anti-Russian alliances, he attempted to convince the British and French public to mount an anti-Mahdist political alliance. Hence, with the outbreak of the Mahdist uprising in the Sudan, the spread of the movement in 1884, the Gordon mission, the fall of the Omdurman and Khartoum (January 1885), Al-Afgānī made contacts with the British in a quite probable attempt to shape a wide alliance of European powers, including the British Government. These efforts were accompanied by the publication of his articles in the Parisian “Le Transigeant” on the Mahdist movement and tradition, described by him as a common danger to all major powers as well as Islamic nations.

The rejection of Mahdism by Al-Afgānī, as expressed in “Le Transigeant” were due to the following considerations¹⁴:

- The victory of Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Mahdī in the Sudan would rally the Arab world around him, leading to further independence revolts;
- Such independence movements would not be directed only against Western powers, but also the Ottoman Empire, from which they will be separated;
- The gradual demise of the spiritual leadership enjoyed by Caliph Abdühamid II in favour of the Mahdī, because the status of the Mahdī among Muslims is higher than the status of the Caliph. On this basis, Al-Afgānī called upon Western states, in the first place Britain, to cooperate in their own interest with Turkey in overcoming Mahdī and Mahdism by resolving the Sudanese question. He offered his services in the eventual negotiations, alleging personal acquaintance with Mahdī.

As to the contents of “Al-‘Urwā al-Wuṭqā” it should be said at the beginning that on the whole 18 issues of the journal appeared (the last issue was circulated in October 1884)¹⁵. “Al-‘Urwā al-Wuṭqā” was envisaged as the organ of a secret society of the same name, with its chairman being Al-Afgānī and the vice-chairman – ‘Aḇduḥ. The society postulated the unity of the Islamic world (*Al-Ġami'a al-Islāmiyya*). For example, the unity of Iran and Afghanistan was raised in no. 14 of the journal dated 14th August 1884, whereas – according to Al-Afgānī – these two nations are historically linked

¹³ Ibid., pp. 175–176.

¹⁴ Louis ‘Awad, op. cit., Vol. II, Part 1, pp. 223–224

¹⁵ Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afgānī & Muḥammad ‘Aḇduḥ, *Al-‘Urwā al-Wuṭqā*, Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, Beirut 1970.

by Persian language and culture, but above all by the faith of Islam. Calling for Central Asian unity, *Al-Afġānī* postulated its initiation by Iranian-Afghanistan integration;

In no. 2 (20th March 1884) of “*Al-‘Urwā al-Wuṭqā*” *Al-Afġānī* refers to “solidarity of race” (*‘aṣabiyyat al-ġins*), as he calls nationalism (*qawmiyya*), and acknowledges its existence as well as significant role in encountering foreign rule. However, its importance for him ceases with the emergence of a higher solidarity (*‘aṣabiyya*), i.e. of religion. The advocates of racial solidarity regard Islam as merely a spiritual tie, and not a political and social system, or in other words that Islam deals with religion and not the state, whereas it deals with both while its pillar being the “caliphate”. The ideal model of the Islamic state was for him the caliphate of the times of Guiding Caliphs (*Al-Hulafā’ ar-Rāṣidūn*).

No rescue for the Islamic world other than unity in *Al-Ġāmi’a al-Islāmiyya* within the framework of Caliphate integrating religion and state stepping along the path of *Al-Hulafā’ ar-Rāṣidūn* (See the article in no. 5, entitled as usual by a Quranic verse – this time *Wa-i’tasimū bi-ḥabli Allāhi wa-lā-tafarraqu* – “Keep firmly the bond of God and do not follow divergent paths”). Here, he regards the emergence of nationalities inside the Islamic world as the cause of its decline, while the solution according to him provides through a return to religious – instead of national – solidarity. In this sense, *Al-Afġānī* calls for Islamic unity and *Al-Ġāmi’a al-Islāmiyya* as an Islamic Commonwealth led by Turkey, under the leadership of the Ottoman Caliph, with Istanbul as its capital, while community members enjoy autonomy in their internal affairs¹⁶.

As to Muḥammad ‘Aḇḁuḥ (1849–1905), he was born in Egypt (Maḥallat Naṣr), learned basic elements of reading, writing and the Koran, then joined Al-Azhar (since 1864), met Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī in 1871 and since that time became one of the close listeners of his lectures and advocates. During the Egyptian patriotic uprising of early 1880’s ‘Aḇḁuḥ joined the insurgent ‘Urābī movement. With the downfall of the uprising, ‘Aḇḁuḥ was jailed and later disbanded from the country to settle first in Lebanon and then in Paris (since late 1883) to join Al-Afġānī there. Here both of them participated in the edition and dissemination of “*Al-‘Urwā al-Wuṭqā*”. Muḥammad ‘Aḇḁuḥ often traveled in order to promote the ideas of the periodical and society. He also defended the cause of Egypt and Sudan (at times of the Mahdist Uprising), besides carrying out negotiations on that in London with British politicians, parliamentarians and press representatives. Disillusioned probably with the humble results of his work and missions, ‘Aḇḁuḥ left Paris to Tunis and then Lebanon.

Muḥammad ‘Aḇḁuḥ loyally and quietly performed the tasks assigned to him by *Al-Afġānī*, traveling to London and North African countries (as the representative of Al-Afġānī and “*Al-‘Urwā al-Wuṭqā*”). However, something should have occurred in the relations between the two men, since – after one of the visits to Tunis – ‘Aḇḁuḥ returned directly to Beirut. The basic sources do not inform us what happened. ‘Aḇḁuḥ did not justify in his correspondence and writings the reason for his move and the virtual

¹⁶ Louis ‘Awad, op. cit., Vol. II, Part 1, pp. 210–213.

interruption of his cooperation with A l - A f ḡ ā n ī. Generally, we note a change of attitude on his part from the type of political revolutionary activity represented by the latter. Subsequently, ‘A b d u h shifts towards positivist constructive activity. Not long time later, he was pardoned and allowed to return to Egypt (on Sa’d Zaḡlūl’s intervention).

In Beirut and Egypt Muḥammad ‘A b d u h devoted much of his energy to the reform of education in Egypt and Arab countries. Reform of education and the educational system was for him a preliminary, even a magical instrument, to the reform the political system and transformation of the society. The main elements of his educational project were:

- Knowledge (‘ilm) and justice (‘adāla) are organically connected with one and the other and cannot exist separately¹⁷;
- Shortcomings in education of the public would have negative consequences in the form of injustices and deficiencies of people’s characters;
- The education of girls/women should be conceived in connection with the status of women and position of the family;
- Compromises are permissible in order to attain the objective of convincing the rulers about the necessity of introducing educational reforms and disseminating education.

Finally, Ṭaha Ḥ u s a y n (1889–1973) was born in one of the villages at the Al-Mīnā’ province. At an early age he lost his sight, and came to learn and attain successive stage of knowledge as a blind person. He was brought about in a traditional society, dominated by low culture and superstition¹⁸. After learning the Koran by heart, he attended Al-Azhar during the first years of the XX century, when until his death in 1905 ‘Abduh was delivering lectures. At Al-Azhar, he – together with other reformists, disciples of Muḥammad ‘A b d u h – rejected the atmosphere of rigid traditionalism and attachment to the verbal sense of sacred texts. In 1908, alongside studies at Al-Azhar – Ṭaha Ḥ u s a y n joined the private Cairo University (*Al-Ġami’a al-Miṣriyya al-Qadīma*). Here in May 1914 he finished with distinction doctoral studies on the thesis entitled *Fī ḍikrā Abī al-‘Alā’* (“In the Memory of Abū al-‘Alā’”). Subsequently, he was granted Ph.D. scholarship to France, first to Montpellier (1914), then to the Paris Sorbonne (from 1915), where he attended lectures on ancient Greece and Rome, Bizantine Empire, modern history, philosophy, sociology and French literature. He learned Latin. Besides, he attended at College de France lectures on the Koran and psychology. At the Sorbonne, Ṭaha Ḥ u s a y n accomplished his second Ph.D. thesis, this time on the social theory of Ibn Ḥ a l d ū n¹⁹ under the guidance of Émile Durkheim.

¹⁷ *Al-A’māl al-kāmila li-Muḥammad ‘Abduh*, ed. by Muḥammad ‘A m ā r a, Dār aš-Šhurūq, Cairo 1993, Vol. III, pp. 25–27; A ḍ ū n ī s & Ḥ ā l i d a S a ’ ī d, *Muḥtārāt min Muḥammad ‘Abduh*, Dar al-‘Ilm li-al-Malāyīn, Beirut 1983, pp. 111–115; cf. Muḥammad ‘A b d u h, *Al-‘Adāla wa-al-‘ilm*, “Al-Waqā’i’ al-Miṣriyya”, No. 932, 3rd October 1880.

¹⁸ Ṭaha Ḥ u s a y n, *Al-Ayyām*, Part I, Cairo 1929, pp. 93, 96.

¹⁹ Ṭaha Ḥ u s a y n, *Étude analytique et critique de la philosophie sociale d’Ibn Khaldoun*, Sorbonne, Paris 1917; Arabic translation by Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh ‘I n ā n: *Falsafat Ibn Ḥaldūn al-iḡtimā’iyya: Taḥlīl wa-naqd*, 1st edition, Cairo 1925.

The mentality of Ṭaha Ḥusayn was shaped by three sources:

- Egyptian sources (literature, arts – including the folklorist and ancient heritage of Egypt);
- Arabic sources (as he puts it: language, literature, religion and civilization);
- Foreign sources (always present in Egyptian history and life), which are according to him above all French culture, followed by Roman and Greek.

The works and activities of Ṭaha Ḥusayn are too rich to be dealt with in one brief contribution. For our present purpose, it is essential to point out to his reform project elaborated in his book, entitled in a somewhat specific way as *Mustaqbal at-ṭaqāfa fī Miṣr* (“The Future of Culture in Egypt”)²⁰. The background for the project was Egypt’s access to the League of Nations, the conclusion in 1936 of the British-Egyptian Treaty, granting Egypt formal sovereignty, and the abrogation in 1937 of the capitulations system at the Montreux Conference. This work, published in 1938, is an important point in Ṭaha Ḥusayn’s reformist socio-political ideas, which he later elaborates in – for example – *Ḥadīṭ al-arbi’ā’* or *Min ḥadīṭ aṣ-ṣ’ir wa-an-naṭr*. Major ideas of *Mustaqbal at-ṭaqāfa*... are as follow:

Egypt’s path towards the future and progress will undoubtedly be the same as that of Europeans. That path leads to partnership of both sides in the formation of human civilization. Needless to say that Egyptian mind participated in the formation of Mediterranean culture, while in ancient times Egypt did not have an oriental character. According to Ṭaha Ḥusayn, by signing the Treaty with Britain and reinstating of the Constitution, Egyptians have undertaken a solemn obligation to introduce a European-like governmental doctrine, administrative system, legislation, etc. Moreover, the educational system, dominated by the obsolete mentality of Al-Azhar and Azharites, should be reshaped in order to remove obstacles in the Egyptian educational system that hamper the emergence and consolidation of patriotic and citizenship ideas in the modern European sense²¹.

Neither faith, nor language, were for Ṭaha Ḥusayn adequate bases for state functioning. In the past, Muslims based their relations with the outside world upon practical benefits and not religious or ethnic considerations. Politics is one thing, while faith is something else²². He refuted the notion of treating the spiritualistic East as an opposite to the materialistic West²³. According to him, it is false to regard material civilization as the sole product of matter; it is essentially the product of imagination (*ḥayāl*) and spirit (*rūḥ*), the outcome of living spirit tied with the mind, the result of thought generating attainments.

We find also in the mentioned book a comprehensive programme of reforming the entire sphere of culture aimed at the nation’s spiritual resurgence. He emphasised Egypt’s historical role in the defense of human cultural attainments: once, when for ten centuries

²⁰ Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal at-ṭaqāfa fī Miṣr*, in: *Al-Maǧmū’a al-kāmila li-mu’allafat Ṭaha Ḥusayn*, Vol. IX, 4th edition, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, Beirut 1986.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 12.

took care of Greek philosophy and culture, next time, when acquired and defended Islamic civilization – doing that until present times.

Present revivalist efforts should – according to Ṭaha Ḥusayn – start with the development of education, which should last for a long time since the majority of Egyptians were illiterate. The state, in its efforts to introduce democratic principles and achieve the goals of democracy, had to start from the dissemination of education under its own sole guidance – i.e., the elimination of foreign and religious (Azharite) education. In general terms, the question of the widest public access to education was high on the agenda in Ṭaha Ḥusayn's reformist social doctrine.

Hence, there was the state-sponsored education which was substantially reduced by by the British, and in consequence its level declined. Also there was foreign education (French, British, American and German) functioning on the basis of government licensing. Ṭaha Ḥusayn's intention was to liberate Egypt from foreign influences. To these, he added Egyptian private educational institutions and schools performing their particular tasks at times when the government was unable to satisfy social educational needs. Above all Ṭaha Ḥusayn was interested in religious education performed by Al-Azhar, and to that case he devoted the major part of his work. The status of that religious higher-education institution and people's adherence to faith protect it from civil authorities supervision. However, the character of this educational institution, the conservative attitude of its executive and the adherence of the latter to medieval practices, cause that it graduates pupils and students in a specific way, contradictory to state education. Al-Azhar, he added, desired to force its stance upon the the public in the name of faith. The University of Al-Azhar tries to monopolize educational life and related vocations: whenever state authorities introduce new university specialties, Al-Azhar introduces the same; whenever the authorities introduce new academic degrees, it does the same. Besides that, it demands from the authorities that – since it has similar institutes and degrees – its graduates should have the same rights to governmental posts. Otherwise, the situation would be regarded as damaging to spiritual leaders and faith. The result was the emergence of a dual educational system: "Nowhere outside Egypt such absurd postulates are achieved"²⁴. Ṭaha Ḥusayn did not demand a radical limitation of Al-Azhar's rights, but merely their accommodation to the requirements of "the appropriate democratic system, so that Al-Azhar could not become a state within the state"²⁵.

Against the background of this religious university's demand to acquire exclusive rights in teaching Arabic language, Ṭaha Ḥusayn responded: "Those, who think that only Al-Azhar could be trustworthy in the sphere of care for Arabic language are wrong and uphold naïve opinion. It is not Al-Azhar which introduced learning Arabic language. It is rather an incident in that field"²⁶. It is true that this university had for centuries carried out Arabic sciences, but it neither developed nor added anything to them. Hence,

²⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 84–85.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 291.

it is neither prepared to monopolize the supervision upon teaching Arabic language, nor encounter the requirements of contemporary life²⁷.

On the whole, the book is an attempt to define Egyptian identity. His demand for general access of young people to modern education, as opposed to traditional Azharite education, was the key issue in the thought of the Egyptian writer – i.e., freedom as the goal cannot coexist with ignorance, while education makes the individual conscious about his or her rights and duties. Freedom depends on having such consciousness, while democracy has to secure freedom. Only the free individual could have the consciousness of belonging to a wider national community (*umma*), having as its geographical boundary Egypt²⁸.

Ṭaha Ḥuṣayn's methodology was academic (logical), accompanied by Descartes' philosophical doubt (*aš-šakk ad-dīkārtī*). This methodology of the French philosopher, applied by Ṭaha Ḥuṣayn to Arab-Islamic tradition, questioned the authenticity of Al-Ġāhiliyya poetry (*Fī aš-ši'r al-ġāhili*), to be expanded to Al-Ġāhiliyya literature (*Fī al-adab al-ġāhili*), and the sources on tradition related to Prophet Muḥammad's life (*Alā hāmiš as-sīra*) – putting him on collusion course with Al-Azhar and Azharites, with whom he had many conflicts and carried out many polemics since his early age.

In conclusion it could be stated that among the investigated thinkers, who resided in Paris for a period of time, the first (Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī) studied Western Europe and tried to adapt the East to the West, and also – adopt moments of strength of the Western civilization to the interest of the evidently-backward East. The second (Al-Afġānī) and the third ('Abduh) were well-established figures, who tried to use Western instruments of diplomacy and power-politics. The fourth (Ṭaha Ḥuṣayn), being convinced of its feasibility, intended to copy the Western path towards progress.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 293.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 101–102.