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Islamic Reformism and Christinaity. A Critical Reading of the Works of Muhammad Rashid Rida and his Associates (1898-1935)

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Chapter Two

Riḍā and Arab Christians: Attitudes towards Syrian Christians and the Egyptian Coptic Community

In order to present a good picture of Riḍā's relations with Arab Christians, I shall first of all make an account of some of his Syrian Christian fellow-citizens, who, like him, made Egypt their new residence after migration. In the course of our discussion we shall turn our focus from a short sketch of Riḍā's political ambitions with them and their struggle for independence from the colonial presence in the Arab East, towards an outline of the personal biographies of those among them with whom Riḍā had lively debates. This is suggested as a useful means of illuminating the historical context of the discussions at stake. Many of these Christian writers had championed secularism. Riḍā's attitudes towards these individuals generated very interesting discussions on religion, history, Islamic philosophy and literature. At another level, Riḍā's polemics with Syrians Christians was extended to include religious controversies with the Arabic Jesuit journal *al-Machreq*. The last part of the chapter is devoted to study Riḍā's attitudes towards the Egyptian Copts, and his reflections as a Syrian émigré on their political demands, ending with his sharp reactions to the Christian writer Salāma Mūsā, who was a close disciple of Syrian Christian publicists in Egypt.

2.1. Syrian Christian Nationalists: A Common Political Agenda

As early as *al-Manār*'s beginning, the Syro-Lebanese emigrant community in Brazil knew about it. The Sao-Paulo-based journal *al-Asma'ī*, co-edited by the Christians Khalīl Milūk and Shukrī al-Khūrī, reviewed *al-Manār* describing it as 'one of the best Islamic journals.'¹ Na'ūm al-Labakī (d. 1924), the founder of the Syrian journal *al-Munāẓir* (The Debater) in Sao Paulo,² blamed Riḍā for restricting the subjects of his journal to religious issues, and that he stopped his discussions on Syrian national problems and religious strife in their homeland Syria. The contents of the journal, according to him, were not in agreement with the subtitle of his journal: 'scientific, literary, informative and educating journal.' In his reply, Riḍā explained that he used to write such items before the banning of his journal in Syria, and they would have been valueless as no Syrian Muslim, Christian or Jew had access anymore to his articles. As the circle of his readers became limited to the people in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, India, Java, and a group of Syrian emigrants in America, it was more appropriate for him to deal mostly with other Islamic religious instructive

¹ 'Al-Manār fī al-Brazīl (*al-Manār* in Brazil)', vol. 1/37 (Rajab 1316/December 1898), p. 734.

² 'Al-Manār wā al-Munāẓir', vol. 2/40 (Sha'bān 1317/December 1899), p. 683. In 1908 Labakī returned back to his birthplace Beirut, where he continued its publication. He was the president of the Representative Council of Lebanon. See, Zirikli, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 40.

issues. Riḍā was also convinced that his treatment of such Islamic themes was not only of benefit for his Muslim readers, but for Christians as well. He asserted that a Christian teacher at one of the high schools in Syria after having read *al-Manār* demanded Riḍā to send him all previous issues. He also persuaded the director of the school to subscribe to the journal and collect its issues in the school's library. Riḍā finally concluded that it was also reasonable to subtitle his journal as 'informative and educating', since religious sciences are the most 'venerated' fields.

Born and bred in Syria, which is known for its religious and ethnical minorities,³ Riḍā was familiar with its substantial Christian population. His coming to Egypt coincided with the resumption of the emigration wave of Syrians (most of them Christians), who fled the Hamidian oppression to Egypt towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁴ In his later political career, Riḍā gathered around his political project of Arabism an active group of Syrian emigrated intellectuals, who opposed the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and promoted the idea of an Arab monarch.⁵

Political interests linked both Muslim and Christian elites in their cultural pride of the Arab heritage, as a means to face the cultural expansion of the West.⁶ Syrian Christians, in particular, played a large role in the revival of the Arab literary movement. After his migration to Egypt, Riḍā came closer to his Syrian Christian fellow writers and publishers, who, like him, had earlier escaped the Hamidian regime. This group probably enjoyed the greatest freedom of thought that was experienced by any group of Arab intellectuals in the twentieth century.⁷ Most of these Syrians were Christians by origin, but adopted a strictly secularist agenda. Although the majority of those Christians enjoyed modern Western education and adopted Western methods of thinking, some of them, however, shared with Riḍā his resentment to the penetration of the West in the Arab world, including missionary activities. Riḍā went closer to

³ Itamar Rabinovich, 'The Compact Minorities and the Syrian State, 1918-45', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 14/4 (Oct., 1979), pp. 693-712. About Christian Arab Nationalism, see, Spencer Lavan, 'Four Christian Arab nationalists: A Comparative Study', *The Muslim World*, vol. LVII (1967), pp. 114-125.

⁴ Thomas Philipp, *The Syrians in Egypt 1725-1975*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1985, pp. 1-53. A. Hourani, 'The Syrians in Egypt in the eighteenth and nineteenth century', *Colloque international sur l'histoire du Caire*, Cairo, 1972.

⁵ Philip S. Khoury, *Urban notables and Arab Nationalism: the Politics of Damascus 1860-1920*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 62-63.

⁶ See, Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 170-182. The Christian Butrus al-Bustānī was one of the pioneers who called for Arabic cultural revival. See, Butrus Abu-Mannch, 'The Christians between Ottomanism and Syrian Nationalism: The Ideas of Butrus al-Bustani', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 11/3 (May, 1980), pp. 287-304.

⁷ See, Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: the Formative years, 1875-1914*, p. 114-121. Cf. Reeve Spector Simon et al (ed.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, Columbia University Press, 1993.

those Eastern Christians, who shared with him the same anxieties that ‘the Sublime Porte would fall in the hands of Europe’.⁸

In 1912 and 1913 new Arab political groupings came into being. One of the best known among these new groups was *Ḥizb al-Lāmarkaziyya al-Idāriyyā al-‘Uthmānī* (Ottoman Administrative Decentralization Party), which Riḍā founded in Cairo in December 1912. The party was dedicated to the achievement of self-government in the Ottoman Empire.⁹ Within the party, Riḍā called for an Arab revival as the necessary herald of the restoration of Islam. He also declared that as a Muslim he was a brother to all Muslims, and as an Arab a brother to all Arabs, and he saw no contradiction between the two.¹⁰ His model of ‘an Arab Empire’ would have recognized both Christianity and Judaism and would have given non-Muslims the right to serve in the administration of the government and the judicial system (except the *Sharī‘a* courts).¹¹

After the rise of the theory of Arabism, some Christian Arabs (mostly Syrians and Palestinians) already had implicitly accepted the theory that Islam is an essential part of Arabism because it brought grandeur to the Arabs.¹² Many Arab Christians, such as Shiblī Shumayyil and the prominent lawyer Iskandar ‘Ammun, had joined Riḍā’s Decentralization Party. Being on close terms with many of these Christian Syrians of his generation, Riḍā managed in his political strife to gain the support of those who ‘were unwilling to admit the inferiority of the East to the West’.¹³ For him, Syrian Christians were ‘the most advanced class in education, wealth, generosity, courage and pride’.¹⁴ By 1914 he had developed his theory of Arabism in its full shape, which was also accepted by a group of Christian Arabs.¹⁵

The impulses for the concept of the ‘Greater Syria’ sharpened Riḍā’s desire for Pan-Arabism. In his struggle against the imposition of the French Mandate in Syria, he played a prominent role with other Muslim, Christian and Druze nationalists. In 1918, a number of Syrian émigrés had established the Syrian-

⁸ See his articles on the Oriental Question, ‘al-Mas’ala al-Sharqiyya’, *al-Manār*, vol. 14/11 (Dhū al-Qi’dah 1329/November 1911), p. 833-853.

⁹ Elie Kedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies*, Routledge, 1974, pp. 43-44.

¹⁰ Mahmoud Haddad, ‘The Rise of Arab Nationalism: reconsidered’, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 26/2 (1994), pp. 215-216 (Quoted below, ‘Rise’); Sami Zubaida, ‘Islam and nationalism: continuities and contradictions’, *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 10/4 (2004), pp. 407-420.

¹¹ Mahmoud Haddad, ‘Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashīd Riḍā’s Ideas on the Caliphate’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 117/2 (April-June 1997), pp. 270-271 (Quoted below, ‘Nationalism’).

¹² C. Ernest Dawn, ‘From Ottomanism to Arabism: The origin of an ideology’, *Review of Politics*, vol. 23/3 (July 1961), p. 396.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Al-Manār*, vol. 15/1, (Muharram 1330/January 1912), p. 44.

¹⁵ Dawn, *op. cit.*, pp. 394-395. More about Riḍā’s ideas on Arabism, see, his letter to the First Arab Congress in Paris (June 1913), *Al-Mu’tamar Al-‘Arabī Al-‘Awwal*, Cairo, 1913, pp. i-iii; J. Jomier, ‘Les raisons de l’adhésion du Sayyed Rashīd Riḍā au nationalisme arabe’, *Bulletin de l’Institut d’Égypte*, no. 53 (1973), pp. 53-61; Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*, Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 20-22.

Palestinian Congress. During its first major session in Geneva (summer of 1921), where demands for Syrian unity and independence were presented to the League of Nations, Riḍā was elected as the vice-president.¹⁶ Its president was Michel Luṭfallah (1880-1961), the son of a wealthy Greek Orthodox Christian émigré in Egypt, who was the inspiration behind the establishment of the Congress and its major financier.¹⁷ But by 1922, disputes between Syrian factions became intense, a rift between Syrian and Palestinian members started to appear, and the Syrian membership was split into two. Luṭfallah, allied with the Damascene physician Abdel-Raḥmān Shāḥbandar (assassinated in 1946), chose to advocate a purely secular nationalism. The other group, headed by Shakīb Arslān, propagated the idea of Arabism, as based on the Islamic Divine tenets. They clashed with Luṭfallah-Shāḥbandar's faction because of their links with the British and the Hashimite royal family. Riḍā chose to remain linked to the former faction, since he as well concentrated on the ideological articulation of nationalism and particularly on the importance of the Islamic content in its formulation.¹⁸

2.1.1. Farah Anṭūn (*al-Jāmi'a*)

Riḍā's acquaintance with Farah Anṭūn goes back to their young age in their hometown Tripoli. In their early years, he met with Anṭūn for the first time at the house of Jurjī Yannī, a teacher and writer in Tripoli. At that time, Riḍā saw Anṭūn as one of the most intelligent Christian young men in Syria. He was modest, shy, but irritable, and often hesitating to give his opinions frankly in case he had not studied the matter in question thoroughly.¹⁹ Both young men agreed that the Syrian stage was too cramped for their dreams of entering the world of journalism. In 1897 they decided to travel to Egypt on an Austrian ship (3 December, 1897) heading towards Alexandria together.²⁰

¹⁶ Marie-Renée Mouton, 'Le Congrès syrio-palestinien de Genève (1921)', *Relations Internationales*, no. 19 (1979), pp. 313-328. About Riḍā's political ideas and activism, see, for example, Eliezer Tauber, 'Three Approaches, One Idea: Religion and State in the Thought of 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Kawākibī, Najīb 'Azūrī and Rashīd Riḍā', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 21/2 (1994), pp. 190-198; id., 'Rashīd Riḍā and Faysal's Kingdom in Syria', *The Muslim World*, vol. 85 (1995), p. 235-245; 'Rashīd Riḍā as Pan-Arabist before the World War I', *The Muslim World*, 79/2 (April 1989), pp. 102-112; 'Rashīd Riḍā and Political Attitudes during the World War I', *The Muslim World*, 85/1-2 (January-April 1995), pp. 107-121, 'The Political Life of Rashīd Riḍā', in *Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic*, vol. 19-20 (1998), pp. 261-272.

¹⁷ Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920-1945*, Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 223.

¹⁸ More about the two factions, see, Philip S. Khoury, 'Factionalism among Syrian Nationalists during the French Mandate', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 13/4 (Nov., 1981), pp. 441-469. Cf. Y. L. Rizq, 'A Diwan of contemporary life (305): Looking towards the Levant', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 449 (30 September-6 October 1999); republished in *Al-Mashriq: A Quarterly Journal of Middle East Studies* (Australia), vol. 3/12 (March 2005), pp. 59.

¹⁹ Riḍā, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 805.

²⁰ Riḍā's diary, December, 1897. The diary of his early months in Egypt reveals that he was on close terms with Anṭūn. When having visited Anṭūn in the hotel in Cairo, Riḍā used, for example, to observe his prayer in the latter's room, since there was no mosque close in the neighbourhood.

During the early years of *al-Manār*, Riḍā entrusted Anṭūn to translate French materials into Arabic.²¹ In Alexandria Anṭūn founded his journal *al-Jāmiʿa* (firstly appeared 1899) through which he disseminated his secularist views. Riḍā was watching the progress of his friend's magazine and brought its contents on ethics, philosophy and sociology to the attention of ʿAbduh, who, as a result, expressed his positive impression of Anṭūn and always recommended his magazine to his friends.²²

The young Christian journalist Anṭūn was much influenced by the ideas of the French writer Ernest Renan, and gave the most systematic presentation of his French writings in the Arab world. He published serial translations of Renan's *La Vie de Jésus*. Following the path of Renan, he very soon published another article in the spring of 1902 on Ibn Rushd in which he also stressed that religious orthodoxy had obstructed the spirit of free inquiry in Islamic civilization.²³ Renan's skeptical attitude towards religion concurred perfectly with Anṭūn's anticlerical feelings.²⁴ In that article, Anṭūn extended his theory to maintain that Christianity, unlike Islam, had been proved to tolerate philosophy.

Alarmed by Anṭūn's arguments, Riḍā promptly raised the problem to ʿAbduh, and fervently requested him to give response. Anṭūn was very surprised to learn that it was Riḍā, as one of his best friends, who agitated the feelings of the mufti against his journal.²⁵ Riḍā eagerly requested ʿAbduh to defend Islam and its scholars against Anṭūn's 'blasphemy'. While staying in Alexandria, ʿAbduh was planning to meet with Anṭūn to discuss the contents of his article personally, but had no chance. During a tour in Northern Egypt, ʿAbduh started drafting his articles of defence depending on his memory, while keeping Riḍā updated in a series of letters with the development of his investigations on the matter. He asked Riḍā to inform ʿAnṭūn of his plan of writing a refutation to his article on Ibn Rushd, and to ask him whether he was ready to publish it in *al-Jāmiʿa*. They agreed that Riḍā would edit the final drafts of the rejoinders in his own handwriting and send them to *al-Jāmiʿa* for publication. Anṭūn was in the beginning hesitant to give space to ʿAbduh's refutation in his journal.²⁶ But later he published most of his ideas in one separate volume supplemented with ʿAbduh's response, which he dedicated to 'the fairly-minded among the Easterners, Christians, Muslims, or followers of any other religion.'²⁷

²¹ Reid, *The Odyssey*, p. ix.

²² Ibid. See, *Tārīkh*, p. 805. Cf. Riḍā's reviews of *al-Jāmiʿa* and other works by Anṭūn, *al-Manār*, vol. 1/48 (Shawwāl 1316/25 February 1899), p. 936; vol. 3/16 (Rabīʿ al-Thānī 1318/July 1900), p. 380.

²³ Ernest Renan, *Averroes et l'Averroïsme*, Paris, 1852.

²⁴ About his anticlericalism, see, Reid, *Odyssey*, pp. 70-74.

²⁵ F. Anṭūn, *Ibn Rushd wā Falsafātuh*, Alexandria, January 1903, p. 2 (Quoted below, *Ibn Rushd*). At that time, ʿAbduh was traveling throughout Egyptian Northern cities to collect donations for the victims of a fire catastrophe in the Delta of Egypt.

²⁶ Riḍā, *Tārīkh*, p. 809-810.

²⁷ Anṭūn, *Ibn Rushd*, p. 1.

Their arguments did not remain purely on an intellectual level. They quickly developed into insult and distortion of each other's position, by changing the conflict into violent and contemptuous hostility.²⁸ Riḍā and Anṭūn charged each other of having escalated the problem in order to gain popularity for their journals and raise the number of subscribers. The issue also spoiled Anṭūn's friendship with Riḍā and both of them turned to insult each other for being ignorant. Anṭūn suggested that Riḍā lacked the knowledge required (especially, of the French language and of the science of *kalām*) to embark on such debates, and should have left the matter to his more erudite teacher. From his side, Riḍā maintained that his adversary not simply made a well-intentioned mistake, but had purposely disparaged Islam as well. He also maintained that Anṭūn's strategy was to separate the teacher from his disciple. Anṭūn declared that while 'Abduh's rejoinders took the shape of a respectable intellectual debate, Riḍā was inclined to slander and offense.²⁹

What irritated Riḍā was what he described as Anṭūn's implicit intention to marker Islam as a religion that is against the spirit of science and wisdom, while Christianity was presented as the religion that promoted science in Europe. He further understood that Anṭūn's ideas explicitly denoted that the nature of Islam predetermines lack of knowledge and civilization; and that Muslims would never achieve progress as long as they would cling to their religion and not convert to Christianity.³⁰

According to Riḍā, some of his readers notified him that articles like those of *al-Jāmi'a* were more dangerous for Muslims than missionary publications. However, he maintained that Anṭūn had the right to defend his religion, but should have uttered his views in a moderate way. Riḍā portrayed *al-Jāmi'a* as a 'sectarian' and 'religious journal' in content, although it did not overtly show any Christian tendency and still claimed itself as a platform for literary, scientific and medical subjects.³¹

Anṭūn fervently accused Riḍā of having manipulated religious issues for propagating *al-Manār* among common Muslims.³² It was observable that *al-Manār* started to gain more reputation, and witnessed a rapid increase of its circulation after Riḍā had published 'Abduh's defenses against Anṭūn's work.³³ Anṭūn explicitly proclaimed that he never intended to take part in debating with the founder of *al-Manār*. By his discussion, he only endeavoured to address 'Abduh as an authoritative and a highly-esteemed Muslim scholar. In Anṭūn's

²⁸ Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 254.

²⁹ Reid, *Odyssey*, p. 87.

³⁰ *Al-Manār*, vol. 3/12 (Jumāda al-Thāniya 1320/September 1902), p. 471.

³¹ Ibid., 474-475. Riḍā gave another example on how Christian magazines zealously supported Anṭūn in what he saw as anti-Muslim campaign, see, *al-Manār*, vol. 5/13 (Rajab 1320-October 1902), pp. 515-517.

³² Anṭūn, *Ibn Rushd*, p. 6.

³³ See my paper, 'A printed Muslim 'Lighthouse' in Cairo: *al-Manār's* early years, religious aspiration and Reception', presented at the conference, 'Sacred Texts and Print Culture – The Case of Qur'ān and Bible of the Orthodox Churches during the 18th and 19th Century', Central European University, Budapest, 2-4 December 2005.

eyes, Riḍā, whom he had known as a ‘sober’ and ‘restrained’ person, appeared to be of a ‘rash’ and ‘eccentric’ character after having propagated insults against him.³⁴ His reaction, unlike his teacher, was ‘foolish’ and ‘imprudent’. He intolerably did not accept the methods of scientific analysis and the conclusions of *Al-Jāmi‘a*’s article. In Anṭūn’s own words, ‘the irrefutable evidence of [*al-Jāmi‘a*] increased his [Riḍā] foolishness, and he was driven frenzied to the degree that we became anxious about his state of mind’.³⁵ He moreover compared Riḍā in his aloofness to grasp the facts mentioned in *al-Jāmi‘a* in a mocking way with ‘a crocodile [...] when you throw to him a pearl, he would immediately rush to smash it with his teeth, but never try to use it as an ornament to his ears. Having failed to smash the pearl, the crocodile would throw it again and swoop down upon it while being enflamed with anger and grudge’.³⁶

In a sixteen-page private letter addressed to ‘Abduh on the pages of his magazine, Anṭūn accused Riḍā of provoking the problem. His assault on *al-Jāmi‘a*, said Anṭūn, was nothing but ‘envy and lack of decency’. ‘Nothing’, he went further, ‘would satisfy his [Riḍā] rancour, but insulting others’.³⁷ Anṭūn drew ‘Abduh’s attention to the fact that the ‘recklessness’ and ‘foolishness’ of his disciple would harm his position as the grand mufti of Egypt.³⁸ Finally, he made three suggestions to ‘Abduh: 1) to find two trustworthy arbiters among Al-Azhar scholars to judge the whole issue, 2) to disclaim all matters published in *al-Manār*, 3) or to bring the ‘attack’ of Riḍā against him and his journal to an end. In case Riḍā did discontinue his campaign, Anṭūn warned ‘Abduh that he would instantly publish a hundred thousand copies of the letter and distribute them among the public.³⁹

The debate with ‘Abduh undoubtedly pushed the interest in Anṭūn’s magazine to its highest point. But it was Riḍā’s critique of *al-Jāmi‘a*, which led to the immediate withdrawal of Muslim subscribers, which contributed to its collapse. Due to its sharp attack, *al-Manār* was said to be ‘the assassin of *al-Jāmi‘a*’.⁴⁰ But Riḍā believed that the reason for the latter’s collapse was its editor’s lack of knowledge of Islamic matters. After its first failure, Riḍā proudly taunted that ‘no Arab paper would ever survive without its Muslim readership, as they represented the majority of the nation.’⁴¹

Al-Jāmi‘a disappeared in 1904, and was revived irregularly after its editor’s moving to New York in the period between 1906 and 1909. We notice that Riḍā’s attitude towards Anṭūn started to change, and he eulogized Anṭūn’s

³⁴ Anṭūn, *Ibn Rushd*, pp. 85-87, see also pp. 226-227.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁷ As quoted in, Riḍā, *Tārīkh*, p. 812.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 813.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 815.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 811. Cf. Reid, *Odyssey*, p. 54.

⁴¹ Ibid. See also *al-Manār*, vol. 5/14 (Rajab 1320/October 1902), pp. 559-560; Riḍā was later informed by one of his friends that Anṭūn had especially intensified his debate with ‘Abduh only in order that he could gain more subscriptions. *Al-Manār*, vol. 5/14, pp. 559-560.

efforts of republishing his journal in the United States. He described it again as ‘one of the best edited and most useful Arab papers’.⁴² He also welcomed the return of Anṭūn and his magazine to Egypt in 1909.⁴³ But Anṭūn managed only to publish two more issues of *al-Jāmi‘a*, and it disappeared for good in the following years.⁴⁴

After Anṭūn’s death in 1922, it was Riḍā who called upon a ceremony dedicated to his memory. One of Anṭūn’s biographers believes that by this attempt Riḍā tried to make amends for their old conflict.⁴⁵ In a letter (see, appendix IV), Rose Anṭūn, Farah’s younger sister, expressed her gratitude to Riḍā for his initiative by saying: ‘[since] I was staying with my brother in all his doings till the last moment of his life, I know perfectly well how he held you in very high esteem. [...] Now with all what you did, you have added one new noble deed to all the ones we knew from you before. I shall never forget it that you were the first one my eyes had grasped during the funeral ceremony and the first to summon upon my brother’s commemoration.’⁴⁶

2.1.2. Jurjī Zaidān (*al-Hilāl*)

The Greek Orthodox Jurjī Zaidān (1861-1914) was an important member of the Syrian community in Egypt.⁴⁷ In 1892 he founded his magazine *al-Hilāl* (The Crescent) in which he published much on ethics, sociology, geography, literature, Arab history, and world politics. He also published many works on subjects such as the history of Lebanon, education and social order, Machiavelli and Ibn Khaldūn, and the siege of Damiette by the Crusaders. Just as many of his contemporary Syrian Christian intellectuals, Zaidān held the view that each religion is to a certain extent in agreement with sciences, though for him science should remain the decisive criterion in evaluating things. He was impressed by Muḥammad ‘Abduh and his recognition of the ‘duty to interpret the Qur’ān in such a fashion as to bring it into agreement with modern science’.⁴⁸ As a Christian intellectual, Zaidān’s writings on Islam were, as

⁴² *Al-Manār*, vol. 10/2 (Ṣafar 1325/April 1907), p. 158.

⁴³ *Al-Manār*, vol. 13/2 (Ṣafar 1328/March 1910), p. 142.

⁴⁴ Reid, *Odyssey*, p. 42.

⁴⁵ A. Abū Khiḍr Mansī, *Farah Anṭūn*, Cairo, 1923, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Letter, Rose Anṭūn to Riḍā, Cairo, 24 February 1923. The ceremony took place on the first of March 1923 at the American University in Cairo. Riḍā delivered a speech in which he referred to the history of his relation with Anṭūn. For more details about Anṭūn’s commemoration, see, the supplement of his sister’s magazine *Majallat al-Sayyidāt wā al-Rijāl*, *Farah Anṭūn: Ḥayātuh wā Ta’bīnuh wā Mukhtarātuh*, Cairo, September 1923.

⁴⁷ Much has been written on him, see his memoirs, *Mudhakkirāt Jūrjī Zaidān*, edited by Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1968; Hamdi Alkhayat, *Gurjī Zaidan: Leben und Werk*, PhD dissertation, Cologne: Orient Mercur Verlag, 1973; Thomas Philipp, *Gurjī Zaidan: His Life and Thought*, Beirut, 1979 (Quoted below, *Gurjī*); id. ‘Language, History, and Arab National Consciousness in the Thought of Jurjī Zaidan (1861-1914)’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 4/1 (Jan., 1973), pp. 3-22; id., ‘Women in the Historical Perspective of an Early Arab Modernist (Gurjī Zaidan)’, *Welt des Islams*, vol. 18/1-2 (1977), pp. 65-83.

⁴⁸ Philipp, *Gurjī*, pp. 58-59.

described by T. Philipp, mostly ‘precarious’.⁴⁹ When dealing with the relationship between Islam and Christianity he tried to play down any tension between both religions, and tended to show that Christians during most of the history lived in harmony with their Muslim compatriots.⁵⁰

A few days after his arrival in Egypt, Riḍā met Zaidān in the company of Anṭūn for the first time in the latter’s office at *al-Hilāl* (early January 1989). Their first conversation focused on the situation of journalism in Egypt.⁵¹ When Riḍā established himself as a Muslim journalist, Zaidān used to send *al-Manār* his novels on Islamic history and literature in order for Riḍā to review them critically.

In the early years of their relation, Riḍā, at many occasions, praised Zaidān as ‘a historian with objective eyes’⁵² due to his appreciating of others’ criticism of his views.⁵³ While heavily involved in his controversy with Farah Anṭūn, Riḍā was earnestly defending Zaidān against the criticism of some Muslims, who accused him of ‘religious fanaticism’ and tried to disqualify his works on Islamic history as a Christian thinker.⁵⁴ Riḍā, on the contrary, saw the benefit of such novels in educating Muslim youngsters about unknown parts of their own history. He often excused Zaidān for his historical mistakes, since he, as a novelist, was allowed sometimes to collect his information on a non-historical basis. In his historical novel *Fatāt Ghassān* (The Maiden of Ghassān), Zaidān went further by citing the controversial Muslim narrative on the story of *al-Gharāniq*. Riḍā mildly criticised Zaidān for having incautiously mentioned such a controversial story. Despite his strong conviction in its forged nature, Riḍā believed that Zaidān included the story in his novel on the basis of the account of the early Muslim historiographer al-Ṭabarī. He maintained that ‘he [Zaidān], as a Christian, should be forgiven if he believed in the story. Some early Muslim scholars mentioned it without giving any critical remarks.’⁵⁵ Another noteworthy example was the harsh criticism of many Muslims against Zaidān’s

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

⁵¹ Riḍā’s Diary (1897-1898).

⁵² *Al-Manār*, vol. 5/9 (Jumāda al-ʿUlā 1320/August 1902), pp. 356-357.

⁵³ See, for example, *al-Manār*, vol. 6/10 (Jumadā al-ʿUlā 1321/August 1903), pp. 391-398. Riḍā also received questions from his readers as a result of their readings in Zaidān’s novels on Islamic history, see, Riḍā’s *fatwā* on reciting the Qurʾān in the graveyard raised by a student of Al-Azhar, *al-Manār*, vol. 5/13, p. 508.

⁵⁴ The first Muslim to criticize Zaidan was the traveler and book dealer Amīn al-Halwānī al-Madanī. See his short book, *Nabsh al-Hadhayān min Tārikh Jurjī Zaidān*, Bombay, 1307/1890. It was a rejoinder to Zaidan’s history of modern Egypt. In his work, Madanī enumerated 101 errors attributed to the writer. In 1891, Zaidān published his *Radd Rannān ‘alā Nabsh al-Hadhayān* in which he alluded al-Halwānī’s Indian origin and his jealousy of the Syrian success. See, Lewis Beier Ware, *Jurjī Zaydan: The Role of Popular History in the Formation of a New Arab World-View*, PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1973, pp. 196-197. More about Madanī and his visit to Amsterdam and Leiden (1882-1883) and participation in the Leiden Orientalists Congress (1883), see, C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Het Leidsche Orientalistencongres: Indrukken van een Arabisch Congreslid*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1883. About his life, Zirikli, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁵ J. Zaidān, *Fatāt Ghassān*, Beirut: Manshūrat Maktabat al-Hayāh, n. d., part I, p. 75; see Riḍā’s review of it, *al-Manār*, vol. 6/10, p. 392-398.

acceptance of the story that the Prophet's regular meetings with monks (such as Baḥīra) and other lettered people of his time as a young boy had an immense impact on his later religious career as a Prophet, especially during the commercial trips with his uncle.⁵⁶ Although Riḍā rejected Zaidān's interpretation, he was certain that he had no intention whatsoever of defaming Islam. He in the meanwhile demanded Muslims to take their knowledge only from authoritative and well-versed Muslim scholars instead. Despite all these critical remarks, Riḍā insisted on his appreciation of Zaidān's enrichment of Arabic literature. He never thought that the latter had the least intention to offend or attack Islam, nor was he ever proved to be 'a fanatic Christian'.⁵⁷

Riḍā's response to Zaidān's works on Islamic history was inconsistent. His attitude towards the man drastically changed and became basically connected to their political differences later. The most significant example was Riḍā's approach to the latter's voluminous work on the history of Islamic civilization.⁵⁸ When Zaidān embarked upon writing his work (1902), Riḍā regularly praised his endeavours as a service to Muslims and Arabs by compiling their history which is scattered all through the various sources in one piece of work.⁵⁹ He acknowledged Zaidān's initiatives as unprecedented in furnishing the history of Islam, and saw this specific work as 'a useful example for Arab readers'.⁶⁰ He moreover urged other Arab historians to follow his steps.⁶¹ He again disapproved of Muslim attacks on the book as 'unfair to recompense those who make efforts to serve [Muslims] by constantly stressing their lapses before giving mention to the benefits of their works'.⁶² Riḍā continued to give his positive assessment for Zaidān's works in the following years, while he persistently kept requesting other authors to critically review the author's historical data.⁶³

However, by 1908 *al-Manār* turned to sketch its first detailed criticism of Zaidān's work on the pre-Islamic history by publishing two articles by Aḥmad Umar al-Iskandarī (1875-1938), a teacher of Arabic Literature, in which he berated Zaidān's work. In his articles, al-Iskandarī suspected Zaidān's ability to write on Islamic history. Although his effort deserved appreciation, as a historical piece of work it should have been written in a more accurate way.⁶⁴ In

⁵⁶ Zaidan, *ibid*, *passim*, pp. 32-36 & p. 72.

⁵⁷ *Al-Manār*, vol. 7/13 (1 Rajab 1322/11 September 1904), pp. 514-518.

⁵⁸ J. Zaidān, *Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-'Islāmī*, 5 vols., Cairo, 1901-1906.

⁵⁹ *Al-Manār*, vol. 8/13 (Rajab 1323/August 1905), p. 511-512.

⁶⁰ *Al-Manār*, vol. 5/14, p. 552.

⁶¹ *Al-Manār*, vol. 7/4 (Ṣafar 1322/May 1904), p. 149.

⁶² *Al-Manār*, vol. 7/13, p. 518.

⁶³ See, *al-Manār*, vol. 8/16 (Sha'bān 1323/October 1905), p. 638; vol. 9/11 (Dhū al-Qi'ḍah 1324/December 1906), 873-875; 10/7 (Rajab 1325/September 1907), p. 553, 11/8 (Sha'bān 1326/25 September 1908), pp. 619-620.

⁶⁴ J. Zaidān, *al-'Arab Qabl al-Islām*, Cairo, 1907. See, A. al-Iskandarī's critique, 'Ilmāmah bī Kitāb Tārīkh al-'Arab Qabl al-Islām', *al-Manār*, vol. 11/9 (Ramaḍān 1326/October 1907), two articles, pp. 681-750 & vol. 11/10 (Shawwāl 1326/23 November 1908), pp. 780-787. Cf., al-Iskandarī's contributions to the Arabic language, *al-Manār*, vol. 10/12 (Dhū al-Ḥijja 1325/February 1908), pp. 887-915.

January 1912 *al-Manār* published a sharper criticism launched by the Indian scholar Shiblī al-Nu‘mānī (1869-1914).⁶⁵ Nu‘mānī accused Zaidān of making an effort to belittle the Arabs and to abuse them. Just as Riḍā, Nu‘mānī had been on good terms with Zaidān. At the beginning of their relation, Nu‘mānī did not believe any accusation against him of blatantly misrepresenting Arab history.⁶⁶ At a certain moment, however, Nu‘mānī shifted his attack to the personal integrity of Zaidān by demonstrating that his sole attempt was to deliberately falsify and change the truth about Islamic history. The motive for Nu‘mānī’s response was that Zaidān had engaged in circulating ‘intrigues’ through the publication of such works, while nobody took the initiative to oppose him.⁶⁷ Zaidān on the other hand habitually eulogized Nu‘mānī’s work and highly recognized his scholarly prestige among Indian scholars. But this was no justification for Nu‘mānī to quit his religious ‘zealousness’ by giving concessions. He also made it clear that he was not ready to ‘accept his [Zaidān] praise in return for allowing him to attack the Arabs.’⁶⁸

In October of the same year, two other articles by al-Iskandarī appeared in Riḍā’s journal in which he again sharply criticised Zaidān’s work on the history of Arabic literature.⁶⁹ Some of Zaidān’s shortcomings, according to al-Iskandarī, were his many mistakes in giving references and documentation for his data, his incorrect conclusions, contradicting information, his imitation of orientalist who sometimes formulate their views without any verification, and his literal application of the theory of evolution in all aspects.⁷⁰

Riḍā gave the views of both al-Iskandarī and al-Nu‘mānī more credibility by reprinting their criticism in a separate treatise together with another article by the Jesuit Louis Cheikho, the editor of *al-Machreq*.⁷¹ In his preface to the treatise, Riḍā also retreated his position by saying that Zaidān, as a non-Muslim, wrote his history without any proper qualification in Islamic knowledge from real authoritative scholars. Zaidān, Riḍā contended, relied on the works of Western orientalist in his approach in collecting his historical data rather than

⁶⁵ He was a member of the Salafiyyā movement in India. He is the founder of Nadwat al-‘Ulamā in Lucknow. He wrote many works on the history of Islam. More about his intellectual life, see for example, Aḥmad Anis, ‘Two Approaches to Islamic History: A critique of Shiblī Nu‘mānī’s and Syed Ameer Ali’s interpretations of history’, unpublished PhD dissertation, Temple University, 1980; Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shiblī Nu‘mānī: An exposition of religious and political ideas*, New Delhi, 1996.

⁶⁶ Various letters, quoted in Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

⁶⁷ *Al-Manār*, vol. 15/1 (Muḥarram 1330/January 1912), p. 59.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁶⁹ J. Zaidān, *Tārīkh ‘Adāb al-Lughā al-‘Arabīyyā*, 4 vols, Cairo, 1911-1914.

⁷⁰ *Al-Manār*, vol. 15/10 (Shawwāl 1330/October 1912), pp. 743-744.

⁷¹ *Kitāb ‘Intiqād Kitāb Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-‘Islāmī*, Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Manār, 1330/1912; cf. Philip, *Gurgī*, pp. 64-65. It is interesting to know that in his early review of this book in 1904, Riḍā insisted that Zaidān never intended to be dishonest in dealing with Islamic sources, unlike the Jesuits whom Riḍā considered to intentionally falsify such sources in their attack on Islam, *al-Manār*, vol. 7/13, p. 518. Louis Cheikho was, for instance, one of his main antagonists. Cheikho considered Protestants and members of the Syrian Protestant College as a natural object of wrath, Philip, *Gurgī*, p. 60.

making an effort to directly rely on Islamic sources. For this reason, his works came out with the gravest of errors. However, Riḍā denied that he had anything to do personally with these criticisms and that al-Nu‘mānī (and other authors) must take the responsibility.⁷²

On his part, Zaidān was frustrated by this unexpected Manārist campaign against his works. A few months after the appearance of these articles in *al-Manār*, he complained to his son Emile that the views of al-Iskandarānī and al-Nu‘mānī showed some aspects of religious hatred and fanaticism that he had to contend with occasionally during his career. They were therefore not worthy of any answer.⁷³ Riḍā and al-Nu‘mānī, whom he had considered as good friends, have now turned out to be his adversaries. When al-Nu‘mānī was still extensively involved in writing against Zaidān’s work in *al-Manār* and elsewhere, one of *al-Hilāl*’s Muslim readers in Egypt tried to console the latter for al-Nu‘mānī’s harsh attack on his integrity. In his reply to this reader, Zaidān maintained that he was perplexed by reading these attacks, and had no clear answer why Riḍā and al-Nu‘mānī had turned against him in such a way.⁷⁴ However, he had explicitly mentioned the direct reason behind their campaign in an earlier letter to his son Emile:

I read *al-Manār* and saw, what you saw too. Grief prevailed over all other feelings in me. Not because this foolish criticism had any influence upon me. Indeed, the station of *al-Hilāl* is too lofty as to be hit by any tasteless slander. But I was grieved by the deterioration of the character of our writers to such a level, that even from al-Nu‘mānī, the greatest scholar of India, emanated phrases that even the rabble would be ashamed to use. With all this we were friends for twenty years and our relations were amicable. When I read his criticism I wrote him a letter, reproaching him in very strong terms. A copy of it you will find enclosed [...] As for the owner of *al-Manār* he is excused by his exasperation with *al-Hilāl*, the success of our books, our fame.⁷⁵

In June 1910, Zaidān was invited to teach a course in Islamic history at the recently founded Egyptian University, but a few months later had to learn that the University withdrew his appointment.⁷⁶ He suspected that Riḍā had a hand in opposing his post at the university. He was convinced that the founder of *al-Manār* was angered by the appraisal letter of Prince Muḥammad ‘Alī (b. 1872) in which he maintained that before the appearance of *al-Hilāl* nobody

⁷² Ware, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

⁷³ Letter to Emile, 14 November 1908, as quoted in Ware, *ibid.*, p. 198.

⁷⁴ A question from a certain Muḥammad Muṣṭafā from Alexandria, see, ‘Bāb al-Su‘āl wā al-Iqtirāḥ’, *al-Hilāl*, vol 20/9 (June 1912), pp. 562-563.

⁷⁵ Letter to Emile, Cairo March 28, 1912; as translated and cited in Philip, *Gurgi*, pp. 216-219.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67; more about the affair, see, Donald Malcolm Reid, ‘Cairo University and the Orientalists,’ *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19/1. (1987), pp. 62-64 (Quoted below, ‘Cairo’).

mentioned the history of Islam. Another factor for irritation was, according to Zaidān, Riḍā's failure to imitate him in writing historical novels about Islam. In 1905, Riḍā had approached his Syrian friend Sheikh 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Zuhrāwī (1871-1916) to help him to compose a series of historical novels about Islam because nobody had written about this subject in Arabic earlier.⁷⁷ Referring to this imitation, Zaidān ended his letter to his son: 'regardless of the fact that my novels fill his library and he has read all of them. If this did not change his irritation, how can we blame him that his vexation increased when he started with his project and did not even finish the first novel.'⁷⁸

In truth, Riḍā never openly accused Zaidān of any evil intention to misrepresent the history of Arabs and Islam. He explained his own reasons for publishing this collection of criticisms. Besides his incapability of writing on Islamic history, Riḍā made it clear that he was highly concerned that the Turkish translation of Zaidān's works might add fuel to the fire of Young Turk chauvinism.⁷⁹ The Turkish translation of his work was done by the Christian Zakī Maghāmiz of Aleppo, who was known for his anti-Arab sentiments. In one of his letters, Maghāmiz complained to Zaidān that the illustrations in his book showed too much superiority of the Arab civilization.⁸⁰ Maghāmiz also took part in the Turkish project of translating the Qur'ān. At another occasion, Riḍā suspected Maghāmiz of intentionally misrepresenting the Qur'ān through his assistance in the translation.⁸¹ Zaidān later became a sympathizer of the Young Turks Revolution and strongly opposed any Arab attempt to form independent organizations, such as the Decentralization Party of Riḍā and his group. Riḍā was very disappointed about his stance by granting the Turks rights that he refused to the Arabs.⁸²

This attitude became clearer especially after Zaidān's death. Not long after his death, Riḍā (who was also present at his commemoration ceremony) wrote a biography in which he discussed in details his inclination to the ideas of Ottomanism. For Riḍā, Zaidān was one of the pillars (*rukn*) of the modern Arab renaissance (*nahḍa*). However, he confirmed that after his trip to Istanbul (1908) Zaidān tried to revive the *shu'ūbi* (anti-Arab sentiments) beliefs among the Christian intelligentsia, and became convinced of the validity of absorbing the Arab provinces back into the Empire. He considered Zaidān's tendency as an attempt of championing the Turkish culture over the Arabs. Riḍā, who previously praised his works on Arab civilization, now upheld them as an attack on the Arab identity. For this reason, he allowed Nu'mānī's criticism of the work to be published in his journal in order to prevent the Turks from using Zaidān's work as a source of derision against the Arabs.⁸³

⁷⁷ Philip, *Gurjī*, p. 219.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ The last volume of the Arabic edition of Zaidān's work appeared in 1906. When it had been translated into Turkish six years later, Riḍā made his major effort to criticize it. Ibid, p. 65.

⁸⁰ Letter from Maghāmiz to Zaidān, n.d., n.p., as quoted in ibid, p. 66.

⁸¹ *Al-Manār*, vol. 25/10 (Sha'bān 1343/March 1925), p. 794.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 107-109.

⁸³ *Al-Manār*, vol. 17/8 (Sha'bān 1332/24 July 1914), p. 638-640; Ware, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.

2.1.3. Ya'qūb Ṣarrūf and Fāris Nimr (*al-Muqṭaṭaf*)

As has been mentioned above, *al-Muqṭaṭaf* was one of the Arabic periodicals that brought Riḍā into contact with the Western world during his Syrian years. It was founded by the Syrian Christians Ya'qūb Ṣarrūf (1852-1927) and Fāris Nimr (1856-1951) after their arrival in Egypt in 1876. The great contribution of this journal was the revival of the Arabic language by introducing science and technology to an initially narrow, but ever-increasing Arabic reading public in a simple and sound language.⁸⁴

Al-Muqṭaṭaf met with strong opposition from entrenched traditionalist circles. When its first issues arrived in Baghdad, for instance, conservatives in all communities, Sunnī and Shī'ī, Christian and Jewish resisted it because it preached new and 'dangerous' doctrines. Only some of the younger generation welcomed it.⁸⁵ But its appeal to the awakening needs of the Arabic-speaking East was broad enough to quickly win the support of Muslim intellectual leaders.⁸⁶

Riḍā had friendly relations with the editors of the journal, and never had any confrontations with them. He always placed his ultimate tribute to the skill of the editors and the quality of their journal. His attitude should be explained against the background of *al-Muqṭaṭaf*'s position towards religion in general, and Islam in particular. The journal in many places stressed that there was no conflict between science and religion, and that the revealed Scriptures were not to be read as scientific textbooks.⁸⁷

It was Jurjī Zaidān who recommended Riḍā to the founder of *al-Muqṭaṭaf*, and also had informed Ṣarrūf about Riḍā's coming to Egypt. In their earliest meeting, Riḍā discussed with him various subjects, including his main intention of establishing a journal in which he intended to propagate religious reform and the reconciliation between Islam and Christianity. In their discussion, Ṣarrūf explained to Riḍā the difference between Syria and Egypt. He attributed the spread of knowledge and reform in the Syrian territory to the consciousness of its people. But in Egypt its spread was only due to the efforts made by its government to establish freedom. As Ṣarrūf was greatly interested in philosophy, Riḍā made it clear that his intended journal was also an attempt to remove the thoughts in the minds of the majority of Muslims that philosophy contradicts religion.⁸⁸

In his speech during the tenth anniversary of *al-Manār*, Ṣarrūf expressed his admiration of Riḍā's journal and its role in 'serving religious freedom and

⁸⁴ L.M. Kenny, 'East versus West in *al-Muqṭaṭaf* 1875-1900', in D. Little (ed.) *Essays on Islamic Civilization presented to Niyazi Berkes*, Leiden, 1976, p. 145; More about its linguistic contributions, see, Adrian Gully, 'Arabic Linguistic Issues and Controversies of the Late Nineteenth Centuries', *Journal of Semitic Studies* XLII/1 (Spring 1997), pp. 75-120.

⁸⁵ Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 247.

⁸⁶ Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁸⁸ Riḍā's diary, 1897-1898.

fighting innovations and superstitions'. He told the audience about his primary impression of Riḍā when he read the early issues of his journal. He became convinced at that moment that Muslims would one day deem the reforms of Riḍā and his teacher 'Abduh in Islam just as Calvin and Luther as reformers of Christianity. Muslims, Ṣarrūf went on, had become in dire need for that kind of reformation, which was immensely endorsed in Riḍā's journal by combining religion and civilization. He also stressed that Riḍā's work should please Christians as well as other minority groups in the East, as 'the Near Orient would never advance without the progress of Muslims'.⁸⁹

Riḍā's initial impression about the editors of *al-Muqṭaṭaf* was that they tended to be 'atheists' or 'antagonists' in faith.⁹⁰ Their later discussions on the divine and other religious issues revealed to him that they (especially Ṣarrūf) were not total disbelievers in the existence of God and His might over the world. He enthusiastically quoted the response of *al-Muqṭaṭaf* to a letter by the Coptic writer Salāma Mūsā (more about him below) in which he declared his pride of becoming an agnostic and gave his full sympathy to socialism versus any faith in God. Ṣarrūf argued that 'the rejection of God is the road towards the destruction of human civilization'.⁹¹ Riḍā praised this way of thinking, which to a certain degree resembles the Qur'ānic manner of proving the existence of God.⁹²

Riḍā's admiration of *al-Muqṭaṭaf* and its founders made him formally call for organizing an event of celebrating the golden jubilee of the journal.⁹³ In his speech during that event (30 April, 1926), Riḍā admitted the scientific contributions of the founders of *al-Muqṭaṭaf* to the revival of the Arabic language and its serving the whole umma. However, he was certain that due to the stagnancy of scientific and literal movements in the Arab world *al-Muqṭaṭaf* did not receive the recognition or the circulation it deserved in its time. Riḍā expressed his strong belief that 'the Divine destiny was the moving factor in choosing the founders of *al-Muqṭaṭaf* to be one of the corners of the Arabic scientific renaissance'.⁹⁴ He maintained that it was predestined by the Divine providence that the Americans would come to the East to establish their missionary college in Beirut. In that institution the founders of *al-Muqṭaṭaf* had the chance to become very qualified in their native language and skilled in other languages. The Divine providence, Riḍā went on, was also behind their departure with their journal to Egypt in order that they could enrich the Arabic language with their vast knowledge of science and foreign languages.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ *Al-Manār* vol 10/9 (Ramaḍān 1325/November 1907), pp. 717-718, cf. 'Al-Iḥtifāl bi-al-Manār', *al-Muqṭaṭaf*, vol 33/1 (January 1908).

⁹⁰ *Al-Manār*, 'Al-Dīn wā al-Ilḥād wā al-Ishtirākiyya: Naṣr al-Muqṭaṭaf al-Imān 'alā al-Ta'ṭīl', vol. 13/12, pp. 912-921.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 915.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Al-Manār*, 'Athar al-Muqṭaṭaf fī Nahḍat al-Lughah al-'Arabiyya', vol. 27/10 (Jumādā al-'Ākhira 1345/January 1927) pp. 786-791.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 789.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 790-791.

2.1.4. Shiblī Shumayyil: A Fervent Darwinist

Shiblī Shumayyil (1860-1917), of Syrian Greek Catholic origin, was a graduate of the medical school of the Syrian Protestant College. He also studied medicine in Paris before his settlement in Egypt, where he practiced his profession as a physician and took part in the public and intellectual life of the country. As a young man he clashed with the staff of the College over the theories of Darwin on the evolution. He was a sharp proponent of scientism, and distinctly was the foremost popularizer of Darwinism. The Arab world became acquainted with the evolution theories through Shumayyil's translation of Darwin's works into Arabic.⁹⁶

Like Riḍā, Shumayyil escaped the Hamidian tyranny, and sought liberty in Egypt. Despite his agnostic and secularist line of thought, Shumayyil's general views of politics, religion and sympathy towards Islam must have been the greatest motive for Riḍā to strengthen their relationship. In Shumayyil's view, religion was a factor of division: not religion itself, but the religious leaders, who sowed discord between men, and this kept society weak. He further extended his view to postulate that all types of extreme solidarity taking the shape of national fanaticism had the same danger as the religious one, because they lead to the division of the society. For him, Christianity sprang from egoism: from the love of domination on the part of religious leaders, and the ordinary man's desire of individual survival. When Lord Cromer criticised Islam in his *Modern Egypt* as 'a social system [that] has been a complete failure',⁹⁷ it was the Christian Shumayyil who rushed to the defence of Islam by stating that 'it was not Islam, nor the Qur'ān but the power of the Sheikhs which kept the umma weak'.⁹⁸ In his eyes, there was no difference between Christianity and Islam (though he favoured Islam in other occasions) with regard to their strife to achieve social equality among people,⁹⁹ but his method of comparison between Islam and Christianity was sometimes seen by Christians as an attack on Christianity.¹⁰⁰

Shumayyil's favourable impression of Riḍā was reflected in his regular homage of his figure and his journal. For him, Riḍā was a typical Muslim reformer who was 'keen in his *Manār* on unshackling [...] Islam from all fetters imposed by [conservative] scholars as an attempt to liberate religion from any

⁹⁶ More about him, see, S. Shumayyil, *Majmū'at al-Duktūr Shiblī Shumayyil*, 2 volumes, Cairo: Matba'at Al-Ma'ārif, n.d.; Jean Lecerf, 'Shibli Shumayyil, métaphysicien et moraliste contemporain', *Bulletin d'études Orientales*, i (1931), pp. 153-86; Donald M. Reid, 'The Syrian Christians and early Socialism in the Arab World', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, V (1974), pp. 177-193; Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 248-253.

⁹⁷ Lord Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908.

⁹⁸ See his article, 'Al-Qur'ān wā al-'Umrān', firstly published in *al-Mu'ayyad* (1908), reprinted in his *Majmū'at*, vol. 2, pp. 57-63; cf. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 250-253.

⁹⁹ *Majmū'at*, vol. 2, p. 58.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

blemish, and to make it attain its ultimate goal through *al-ʿAmr bi al-Maʿrūf wa al-Nahy ʿan al-Munkar* (to enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong).¹⁰¹

Riḍā considered Shumayyil's positive views of Islam a kind of recognition made by non-Muslims regarding the authenticity of its divine message.¹⁰² Shumayyil once wrote to him (see, appendix V): 'You look at Muḥammad as a prophet and make him great, while I look at him and make him greater. Although we are in contrast with each other, what we have in common are broad-mindedness and sincerity [...] – and that makes our bond of friendship stronger.'¹⁰³ Despite the fact that Riḍā was appreciative of Shumayyil's high esteem of the Prophet of Islam, he did not accept his statement that the Prophet's political career had been stronger than his prophecy.¹⁰⁴

In a letter to Riḍā, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Qabbānī (1848-1935),¹⁰⁵ the Syrian journalist, disapproved of Shumayyil's propagation of Darwinism as a sign of entire rejection of religion.¹⁰⁶ Riḍā was not alarmed by Qabbānī's accusations, and saw them as not more than exaggeration, since the theories of Darwin were not 'evil' and do not conflict with the Islamic fundamental doctrines. Darwinism was merely a scientific school and should not be studied within the context of religious thought. Despite Shumayyil's agnosticism, Riḍā defended him as somebody who never intended to exclusively disprove religions. For him, Shumayyil was one of the most erudite and independent people in his thinking. Just as many educated Christians, the reason behind his scepticism was his training in the exact sciences according to the European traditions without having any parallel religious education that would convince him of the agreement between science and religion. He reminded his questioner that Shumayyil, at several occasions, had admitted that 'there is no socialist religion, except the religion of the Qurʾān'.¹⁰⁷ Instead of accusing the Christian Shumayyil of unbelief, Riḍā requested Qabbānī and other Muslim writers to

¹⁰¹ The article was firstly published in the Egyptian daily *al-Akhbār*, 1907. It has been reprinted in *Majmūʿāt*, pp. 243-244.

¹⁰² *Al-Manār*, vol. 11/1, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰³ Letter from Shumayyil to Riḍā, n.d., the letter contained a poem by Shumayyil on the Prophet. It was also published in *al-Manār*, vol. 11/1, p. 11.

دع من محمد في سدى قرآنه	ما قد نجاه للحممة الغايات
إني وإن أك قد كفرت بدينه	هل أكفرن بمحكم الآيات
أو ما حوت في ناصع الألفاظ من	حكم روادع للهوى وعظايات
وشرائع لو أنهم عقلوا بها	ما قيّدوا العمران بالعادات
نعم المدبر والحكيم وإنه	رب الفصاحة مصطفى الكلمات
رجل الحجا رجل السياسة والدّها	بطل حليف النصر في الغارات
ببلاغة القرآن قد خلب النهي	وبسيفه أنحي على الهامات
من دونه الأبطال في كل الورى	من سابق أو لاحق أو أت

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ The founder of the journal *Thamarāt al-Funūn* (Fruits of the Arts, founded in 1876). For more about the journal's history, see Donald Ciota, 'Thamarat al-Funūn: Syria's First Islamic Newspaper, 1875-1908', PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1979.

¹⁰⁶ The letter was sent to Riḍā as a result of Qabbānī's reading of one of Shumayyil's articles in *al-Hilāl*, (June 1909); 'al-Duktūr Shiblī Effendi Shumayyil', *al-Manār*, vol. 12/8 (Shaʿbān 1327/September 1909), pp. 632-637.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

sustain him in his struggle against superstitions prevailing among Muslims. They should rather spare their efforts to fight those 'ignorant scholars' of Islam, whose ideas were, in his view, more dangerous to their religion than such theories as Darwinism.¹⁰⁸ If his mission succeeded, Riḍā dared to guarantee that the educated class of non-Muslims (physicians, chemists, astronomers, socialists, lawyers and politicians) would one day convert to Islam!

As far as Shumayyil was concerned, Riḍā had a strong wish that he would once adopt Islam. He was also convinced that if he just had had the chance to study Islam in the way he had studied Darwinism, he would become a Muslim. Riḍā once asked Shumayyil: 'due to your respect of the Qur'ān and the Prophet you are symbolically a Muslim!' In his answer, Shumayyil answered: 'No, I am a Mohammedan!'¹⁰⁹

When the Iraqo-Kurdi poet Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī (1863-1936) published his article on women's rights in Islam in the Egyptian daily *al-Mu'ayyad* (August 1910), he was dismissed from his job as a teacher of *Shari'ah* at the College of Law in Baghdad. Many Muslim writers in Iraq, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere accused him of 'infidelity' and 'atheism'.¹¹⁰ In that article, Zahāwī criticised the position of women in Islam, the veil, the system of inheritance and Islamic regulations of divorce as unjust. In his writings, Zahāwī in general denied the existence of God as the Maker of the world, defied the authority of the Qur'ān and was annoyed with the daily prayers and Ramadan.¹¹¹

Zahāwī was influenced by Shumayyil's Arabic translation of Darwin's works.¹¹² As a result of the anti-Zahāwī campaign, Shumayyil requested Riḍā to write his views as a Muslim scholar on the ideas of the Iraqi poet. In December 1910, Riḍā responded to Shumayyil's request. He was very cautious not to label Zahāwī as infidel, although he could be seen as 'apostate' on the basis of his anti-Islamic statements. Riḍā, on the other hand, was more inclined to remind those who supported Zahāwī (such as Shumayyil) that his expression of such views was 'scorn' and 'ridicule' of Islam as the official religion of the Supreme

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ See Riḍā's review of Shumayyil's Arabic translation of the theories of Darwin, *al-Manār*, vol. 13/5 (Jumādā al-ʿUlā 1328/June 1910), p. 374-376.

¹¹⁰ The article was entitled: 'al-Mar'ah wā al-Difā' 'anhā – Ṣawt Islāhī min al-'Irāq'. See the text of the article in 'Abd al-Rāziq al-Hilālī, *al-Zahāwī: al-Shā'ir al-Faylasūf wā al-Kātib al-Mufakkir*, Cairo, 1976, pp. 190-189. A certain Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Naqshabandī wrote his *al-Sayf al-Bāriq fī 'Unuq al-Māriq* against Zahāwī's views on women's rights. Later Riḍā published a treatise by the Najdī Muslim scholar Sulaymān b. Saḍmān al-Najdī (d. 1930) in Maṭba'at al-Manār in which he attacked Zahāwī: *Al-Diyā' al-Shāriq fī Radd Shubuhāt al-Māziq al-Māriq*, Maṭba'at al-Manār: Cairo, 1925. Cf. Sadok Masliyah, 'Zahawi: A Muslim Pioneer of Women's Liberation', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32/3 (July 1996), 161-171. For more about him, see, G. Widmer & G. Kampffmeyer, 'Übertragungen aus der neuarabischen Literatur. II Der iraqische Dichter Gamil Sidqi az-Zahawi aus Baghdad', *Welt des Islams*, vol. 17/1-2 (1935), pp. 1-79; Wiebke Walther, 'Camil Sidqi az-Zahawi: Ein irakischer Zindiq im ersten Drittel dieses Jahrhunderts', *Oriens*, vol. 34 (1994), pp. 430-450.

¹¹¹ Sadok Masliyah, 'Zahawi's Philosophy and His Views on Islam', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 12/2 (May 1976), p. 180-183.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 180.

Porte. His words should not be defended under the rights of freedom of expression.¹¹³ Putting in mind that he was reacting at Shumayyil's request (whom he earlier had praised for his independence of thought), Riḍā argued that Zahāwī should have pursued his mission of reforming the situation of Muslims in another way, by addressing those superstitions widely spread among Muslims, instead of attacking the religious fundamentals of Islam. Zahāwī was found by Riḍā as to have ridiculed the Islamic Law, and therefore was not entitled to teach it to Muslim students. In order to avoid chaos in society, he strictly forbade Muslim individuals to physically attack him, nor to raid on his property; but they were allowed to manifest their objections in all peaceful means.¹¹⁴

Forty days after Shumayyil's death on January 1, 1917, the Syrian Club in Cairo held an obituary in his memory. In an article in his journal, Riḍā eulogized the late Shumayyil as one of the 'unique and sincere seekers of civil and social reform.'¹¹⁵ Shumayyil's influence, according to Riḍā, was extended to his genuine efforts for the socialist cause besides his profession as a physician. In his comment on Shumayyil's affinity with Darwinism, Riḍā was astonished that the Catholics (especially the Jesuits) did not publicly attempt to criticise Shumayyil and his adherence to such theories. According to him, some priests were said to resist Shumayyil's 'infidelity' and propagation of Darwinism by discouraging Christian patients to visit his clinic for treatment. But the majority of Christians acknowledged his social reform despite his atheism. In Riḍā's understanding, Muslims did not see his manifestation of unbelief as a reason for ignoring him. They treated him, however, as a non-Muslim physician and sociologist.¹¹⁶ Shumayyil's appreciation of the Prophet's personality and his social role in Arabia let Riḍā consider his demonstration of atheism as less destructive. He believed that the only reason he did not embrace Islam was that he studied Islam while being an agnostic, who did not believe in the existence of God. For Riḍā, attributing the Prophet's success only to his human traits had prohibited him from studying his achievements as a Prophet dispatched by God to humanity. But in spite of Shumayyil's materialism, Riḍā praised him for his 'compassion, generosity, sincerity, bravery and sense of honour.'¹¹⁷

2.1.5. 'Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī

Sheikh 'Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī (1847-1906) was one of the most well-known Christian Arab literary figures in the late nineteenth century. His father Naṣīf al-Yāzījī was also a man of letters and a great Arab philologist. Sheikh Ibrāhīm

¹¹³ *Al-Manār*, vol. 13/11 (Dhū al-Qi'ḍah 1328/Decmebr 1910), pp. 841-846.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 844-845.

¹¹⁵ *Al-Manār*, vol. 19/10 (Jumādā Al-'Ākhira 1335/April 1917), p. 625.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 625-626.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 629; after his eulogy of Shumayyil in *al-Manār* an anonymous graduate of Al-Azhar launched a campaign against Riḍā accusing him of infidelity for his acceptance of Darwinism and having put Shumayyil above the Rightly-guided Caliphs. See, *al-Manār*, vol. 20/1 (Shawwāl 1335/July 1917), p. 6.

had contributed to the Jesuit Arabic translation of the Bible. Before that, he had embarked upon learning Hebrew and Syriac. By 1889, he became a freemason in Syria, and migrated to Egypt in 1897 with other Syrian publicists, where he established or contributed to many Arab magazines.¹¹⁸ He belonged to the group of Christian intellectuals who immensely contributed to the revival of the Arabic language in the modern time, and was one of the earliest proponents of Arab nationalism as well. For him, the Arabs were ‘the most remarkable people among all nations’.¹¹⁹

During his early years in Syria, Riḍā never had personal contact with al-Yāzījī, but he formed an unfavourable judgment of him on the basis of stories attributed to him that he attacked the Qur’ān and its language. At that time, Riḍā made no effort to get acquainted with him. Later in Egypt his image temporarily changed when he met with al-Yāzījī at the Egyptian Book Association. According to *al-Manār*, al-Yāzījī showed Riḍā ‘friendliness, gentleness and good manners’. After that meeting, Riḍā started to regularly praise him as one of the most knowledgeable Syrian Christian literary figures. What attracted Riḍā in al-Yāzījī besides his earnest contributions to the revival of the Arabic literary was his enthusiasm in opposing the archaic and foreign elements in the Arabic journals of his time.¹²⁰

In a personal article written two years later entitled: ‘We and al-Yāzījī’, Riḍā, however, noted that many Syrian Christians were disappointed with al-Yāzījī’s pride and arrogance, and that his feeling of superiority had prevented him from sharing his knowledge with others.¹²¹ Riḍā pointed here to Yāzījī’s criticism of Ya‘qūb Ṣarrūf, the founder of *al-Muqṭataf*, for his use of colloquial or foreign words, and for occasional slight grammatical mistakes in his writings. Riḍā’s view of al-Yāzījī was that he himself often made mistakes in his writings.¹²²

In 1903, one of the missionary magazines attacked the Qur’ān on the basis of one work attributed to al-Yāzījī in which he was said to assault its language.¹²³ In his comment on Riḍā’s stance, al-Yāzījī accused *al-Manār* of causing ‘chaos’ and ‘disturbance of thoughts’ among the public by stirring up such accusations with no verification.¹²⁴ On the other hand, Riḍā accused him of arrogance, stating that if he had been really innocent, he should have taken the effort to clear his name by at least writing a letter to the editorial of *al-Manār*. Riḍā repeated that al-Yāzījī hardly had any sincere friends whether in

¹¹⁸ He established with other people newspapers and magazines before his migration to Egypt, such as *al-Najāh* (1872), and *al-Ṭabīb* (co-editors Khalīl Sa‘ādeh and Bishārah Zalzal, 1884-1885). In Egypt he established two: *al-Bayān* (1897-1903), and *al-Diyār* (1898). For more about his life and works, see, ‘Isā Mikhā’il Sabā, *al-Sheikh Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī* (1847-1906), Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1955.

¹¹⁹ Dawisha, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

¹²⁰ *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/15 (Rajab 1319/October 1901), pp. 590-591.

¹²¹ ‘Naḥnu wā al-Yāzījī’, *al-Manār*, vol. 6/8 (Rabī‘ al-Thānī, 1321/July 1903), p. 318.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 319.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

Syria or in Egypt. He also concluded that *al-Manār*'s critical response to him should not be seen as an attack on al-Yāzījī's person, but against the background of its general stance against missionary writings. It was thus in his view in no contradiction with his eagerness to establish concord and friendship with fair Christians.¹²⁵ Al-Yāzījī died three years later, and *al-Manār* was silent in giving any information about Riḍā's further responses to him during these years.

2.1.6. Khalīl Sa'ādeh

Very little is mentioned in *al-Manār* about Riḍā's relation with the Syrian Orthodox Khalīl Sa'ādeh (1857-1934), whose significance actually lied in their cooperation in editing the Arabic translation of the controversial Gospel of Barnabas (see chapter 5). In view of the importance of the Gospel, it might be useful to discuss their relation in the light of some biographical information about Sa'ādeh in order to place him in the intellectual and political setting of our discussion.

Sa'ādeh was known as a 'politically engaged man of letters'. He was born in Shuwayr, Mount Lebanon, and studied medicine at the Syrian Protestant College. In 1882 he was chosen as the spokesman of the student movement at the College. After his graduation in 1883 he became a staff member of the editorial board of the short-lived scientific and medical review *al-Ṭabīb* in Beirut (mentioned above). In the following years, he worked as a medical advisor for the Ottoman government in Palestine. In 1901 he left Syria for Egypt, where he eventually stayed till 1913. Like many of his Syrian fellows, he became involved in journalism, and wrote articles for *al-Ahrām*. He also became a correspondent of English papers, such as *The Times* and *The Standard*.¹²⁶ This period of his life witnessed an intensive intellectual productivity and political involvement. He was able to read in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin. Besides his work as a journalist, Sa'ādeh gained special qualifying skills in English and was able to write literary works in English. He in fact wrote two novels: *The Syrian Prince* (London, 1893) and *Cesar and Cleopatra* (London, 1895). He compiled also an Arabic-English Lexicon during his stay in Cairo in 1911.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ C. Schumann, 'Nationalism, Diaspora and 'civilisational mission': the case of Syrian nationalism in Latin America between World War I and World War II', *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 10 (October 2004), pp. 599-618. More about him, see, Ali Hamie, 'Khalil Saadeh: L'homme en l'œuvre: 1857-1934', unpublished PhD dissertation, Sorbonne, 1986 (Quoted below, 'L'homme'). Thanks to Dr. Hamie for sending me a copy of the thesis. It has been recently translated into Arabic, id. *al-ʿAllāma al-Duktūr Khalīl Sa'ādeh, sīratuh wā A'māluh*, Beirut: al-Furāt li al-Nashr wā al-Tawzī', 2007 (Quoted below, *al-ʿAllāma*). My gratitude is due to my colleague Abdullāh Ṣofān of the American University in Beirut for sending me a copy of the book from Beirut.

¹²⁷ See the speech delivered by his granddaughter Sofia Sa'ādeh during the event of his honor held by the branch of the Society of Feminist Development in his village Shuwayr in 2002, p. 3; available at http://www.shweir.com/ain_el_assis.htm, accessed, 20 November 2006.

Later he moved to Argentina, where he lived during World War I, until 1919. In 1919, he accepted an invitation by the Syrian community of Sao Paolo and moved to Brazil. There he founded the newspaper *al-Jarīda*, which developed into a cultural magazine and changed its name to *al-Majalla* later on. From 1930 until his death in 1934 he was the editor of the prestigious literary magazine *al-Rābiʿa*. During this period in South America, he did not write any direct contributions to Riḍā's journal. But from the Diaspora he had been sharing with him the struggle for the complete independence of Greater Syria. He also founded the Syrian League and the National Democratic Party to support the Syrian quest for complete independence.¹²⁸

Saʿādeh regarded journalism as the measure for the advancement of nations, and the mirror of their morals and cultural refinement.¹²⁹ According to Schumann, Saʿādeh believed that the state of journalism was tied to the state of the nation itself. The nation would decline if the press declined and stagnated. If the nation woke up and joined the 'other living nations', it would be most visible in the awakening of its press. Saʿādeh wrote: '[Today] the hidden forces of the nation become evident in the advanced press. Its working spirits as well as its thinking brains become apparent, and its splendid literature emerges. There is no advanced press, however, unless it is based on excellence, unless its motto is knowledge and unless its strength is respect for the individual. Its content is nourishment for the brain the same way food is necessary for the stomach.'¹³⁰

Saʿādeh was a secularist, who was strongly convinced of the necessity of the separation between religion and state. In Saʿādeh's view, Christianity (his religion by origin) had changed to be ritualistic. Contrary to early Christianity, whose followers had offered their lives for the cause of their faith, it had become one of the modern tricks in the hands of Christian states. He severely attacked religious fanaticism, but believed that religion is an integral part of the Oriental's life, and he had his strong faith that life is meant to dignify religion.¹³¹ Just as Riḍā, Saʿādeh was aware of the diversity of voices and religious orientations in the Syrian homeland as well as in the Diaspora communities in South America. It was not at all his goal to eliminate these differences. Yet he wanted to ensure that his compatriots were united at least in the defense of the national cause in order to make the Syrian voice heard within the international arena, thereby giving hope to the Syrians who had lived in despair.¹³²

In 1906 Riḍā briefly mentioned one of Saʿādeh's scientific works on pulmonary tuberculosis.¹³³ Saʿādeh's fame as a good writer in English was

¹²⁸ Schumann, *op. cit.*, p. 606.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ As quoted in *ibid.*

¹³¹ See the booklet in his honor, p. 29.

¹³² Schumann, *op. cit.*, p. 606-607.

¹³³ Khalīl Saʿādeh, *al-Wiqāyah min al-Sull al-Riʿāwi wā Turuq ʿilājuh*, Cairo, 1906. See the review of *al-Manār*, vol. 9/5 (Jumāda al-ʿŪlā 1324/June 1906), p. 394.

primarily the reason for Riḍā to entrust him with the Arabic translation of the Barnabas Gospel. In his short biography of Saʿādeh, Adel Beshara considered the publication of this Gospel as the most controversial event of his life. He wrote: ‘the publication of Barnabas [Beshara reads it ‘Barnabus’] in Arabic was met with some scepticism largely due to religious sensitivity. The late Rashīd Riḍā inflamed the public by prefacing the work with a preamble that took its entire meaning out of context. The preamble was incorporated into the book without Saʿādeh’s prior knowledge’.¹³⁴ In his statement, Beshārā relies on information cited by Badr Al-Hage, one of Saʿādeh’s biographers, in his collection of some of the unknown works by Saʿādeh. In his account, al-Hage quoted Anṭūn Saʿādeh, Kalīl’s son and the later founder of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.¹³⁵ Tracing the exact source mentioned by al-Hage, I could not find the pages referred to by Anṭūn.¹³⁶

After the English publisher had sent him the English translation of the Gospel, Riḍā soon settled an agreement with Saʿādeh on publishing an exact Arabic translation by his *Manār*. It is conceivable that Saʿādeh must have known Riḍā’s reasons for publishing the Gospel. In his initial advertisement of *al-Manār*’s plan of cooperating with Saʿādeh, Riḍā explicitly maintained that the Gospel’s agreement with many Islamic principles was the very stimulant for him to think of translating it into Arabic. Besides, he was keen on making it known among Arab readers, just as the translators had done for English-speaking people. He also had a great desire that other translators would follow this step by increasing its publicity in all Western languages.¹³⁷ One year after the appearance of the Gospel’s translation, Saʿādeh contributed to *al-Manār* by publishing one of his scientific articles on the Substance theory.¹³⁸ Saʿādeh’s granddaughter Sofia, presently professor at the American University in Beirut, rejects the argument that this period of her grandfather’s life was controversial. In her own words: ‘he was known among his contemporaries as a staunch secular person, and his translation of the Gospel was out of curiosity more than anything else. He tried also to refute the fact that it was genuine, but never publicly fought with Riḍā on this specific matter even after his migration to South America.’¹³⁹

Later we shall discuss Saʿādeh’s detailed evaluation of the Gospel, but it suffices here to stress that his very objective of translating the Gospel was spelled out in his introduction by saying:

¹³⁴ Adel Beshara, ‘Dr. Khalil Saadeh: Nationalist Crusader’, *al-Mashriq: A Quarterly Journal of Middle East studies*, vol. 3/12 (March 2005), p. 68.

¹³⁵ Badr Al-Hage, *Silsilat al-ʿAʿmāl al-Majhūlah: al-Duktūr Khalīl Saʿādeh*, London: Riad al-Rayyes Books, p. 17.

¹³⁶ He cited Anṭūn Saʿādeh, *al-Athār al-Kāmilah*, vol. 12, Beirut, 1984, pp. 11-15.

¹³⁷ *Al-Manār*, vol. 10/5 (Jumādā al-ʿUlā 1325/July 1907), pp. 385-387; Riḍā expressed his gratitude to the editors for sending him a copy of this work. This copy still exists in Riḍā’s family archive with his own signature: *Milk al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā* (Owned by Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā).

¹³⁸ Khalīl Saʿādeh, ‘Istihālat al-Mādah’, *al-Manār*, vol. 11/8, pp. 608-610.

¹³⁹ E-mail to the present writer, 28 April 2005.

'I started translating this book, which is called the Gospel of Barnabas well aware of the responsibility that I had undertaken. My aim was to serve historical studies and of course our language which is perhaps the most logical medium into which this work should be translated. This is the first time this book has come out in the Arabic language. It is a gospel about which scholars and historians have differed sharply. In these closing comments, though, I do have to stress that in this introduction all my discussions are purely scientific and historical in orientation and that I have been scrupulous to avoid all religious controversies which I left to those who are better equipped to deal with them.'¹⁴⁰

Even after the Gospel's publication Sa'ādeh remained in solidarity with other Syrian nationalists, including Riḍā himself (see, appendix VI). Among Riḍā's papers, I found the charter of the Ottoman Socialist Party, founded in Cairo in December 1910. The charter was signed by Sa'ādeh as its secretary general. Among the founders of the Party were its president Shiblī Shumayyil and Rafiq al-ʿAẓm (1867-1925), the prominent Sunnī Muslim and the chairman of the Decentralization Party.¹⁴¹ Although Riḍā's name was not included among the founders, the party's resolutions came close to his later Decentralization Party, which demanded administrative autonomy for the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Sa'ādeh, Shumayyil and al-ʿAẓm shared Riḍā's political cause, and later became members of his above-mentioned Decentralization Party.¹⁴²

2.1.7. *Al-Machreq: A Jesuit Syrian Review*

Let us now turn to discuss Riḍā's polemics with the Catholic Arabic magazine *al-Machreq*. As the mouthpiece of the Syro-Lebanese Jesuits in Beirut since its first publication in 1898, it attempted to convey for the Catholic Arab communities the value and significance of Western science and technology as well as the cultural heritage of the Near East.¹⁴³ Riḍā was involved in controversies with *al-Machreq* around a variety of issues, especially on what he often wrote in his journal on Christianity. According to Riḍā's archival documents, he used to exchange the published issues of *al-Manār* with those of *al-Machreq*. The Oriental Library of the Jesuit Saint-Joseph College was subscribing to his journal, and many of its issues were kept there. Despite their

¹⁴⁰ As quoted in Beshara, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁴¹ MS, the charter of Al-Hizb al-ʿUthmānī al-Ijtīmāʿī, handwritten by Khalīl Sa'ādeh, Riḍā's private archive.

¹⁴² See, Hamie, 'L'homme', pp. 101-104.

¹⁴³ *Al-Machreq: revue catholique orientale*. See, Campbell, Robert Bell, 'The Arabic Journal, 'al-Mashriq': its Beginnings and First Twenty-Five Years under the Editorship of Père Louis Cheikho, S.J.', unpublished PhD dissertation, the University of Michigan, 1972. More about Cheikho, see: Ziriklī, *op. cit.*, vol. 5, pp. 246-247.

heated polemics, the library secretary praised Riḍā's journal as having been the 'mouthpiece of the Islamic Salafī renaissance' (see, Appendix VII).¹⁴⁴

As soon as the above-mentioned *al-Manār* polemicist Ṭāhir al-Tannīr published his '*Aqā'id*', Father Louis Cheikho (1859-1927), the editor of *al-Machreq*, fervently attacked the author.¹⁴⁵ Tannīr's treatise, for him, was nothing but 'a childish' attempt to emulate earlier European works of 'unbelievers, Protestants, and heretics' in their critique of Christianity.¹⁴⁶ In the same year, *al-Machreq* attacked Riḍā's journal of having 'exceeded the proper bounds by attacking the Catholic belief.'¹⁴⁷ When *al-Manār* quoted an article from the Russian Muslim paper *Shūrā* (i.e. Council, founded in 1908)¹⁴⁸ in which Luther had been eulogized for his reformation, the editorial of *al-Machreq* immediately blamed Riḍā for praising him on the basis of his conflict with Catholicism. 'Had the *Shūrā* and *al-Manār* known who Luther and his works precisely were', *al-Machreq* wrote, 'they would have entirely discarded him and would have never contaminated their pages by mentioning his name.'¹⁴⁹

In response to *al-Manār*'s postulation of the doctrine of Trinity, Cheikho counterattacked Riḍā for using the Gospel of Barnabas as a weapon against the doctrine of Trinity. *Al-Machreq* challenged Riḍā that he brought forward an Arabic translation of a 'forged' Gospel, as he lacked solid proofs against Christianity.¹⁵⁰ Riḍā, according to him, failed to recognize the sense of the Trinity's divine mystery. Cheikho's article was specifically formulated in reaction to Riḍā's views (mentioned in the context of his response to the Danish missionary Alfred Nielsen, see, chapter 3) that: 'Muslim theologians agree that there is nothing in the Islamic faith which is logically impossible (*muhāl 'aqlan*), meaning that the Muslim is not required to believe in anything that is logically impossible [...] Other religions than Islam require people to believe in what is rationally impossible, i.e., the reconciliation between two

¹⁴⁴ Letter, *al-Machreq* to Riḍā, Beirut, 2 November 1928, Riḍā's private archive.

¹⁴⁵ Cheikho reacted with a tractate, *Tafnīd al-Tazwīr li Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Tannīr* (Refutation of the falsification of Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Tannīr), Beirut, 1912; as quoted in, G., 'Book Review', *The Moslem World*, vol. 3/2 (April 1913), pp. 197-200. See also, *al-Machreq*, vol. 15 (1912), pp. 432-445 & pp. 529-543. In his answer, Cheikho also quoted western works, such as, Laounan, *Du Brahmanisme et ses rapports avec le Judaïsme et le Christianisme*, Paris, 1888. See also, Arthur T. Upson, 'A Glance at *Al-Manār*', *The Moslem World*, vol. 4/4 (October 1914), pp. 394-395 (Quoted below, 'Glance').

¹⁴⁶ *Al-Machreq*, vol. 15, pp. 435-436.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 718.

¹⁴⁸ It was edited in Ottomanized Tatar language in the southern Uralian city of Orenburg by Riza al-Dīn b. Fakhr al-Dīn (1859-1936). The *Shūrā* was much influenced by *al-Manār*'s reformist ideas. More about the paper, its founder and the influence of *al-Manār*, see, Stéphane A. Dudoignon, 'Echoes to al-Manār among the Muslims of the Russian Empire: A preliminary research note on Riza al-Din b. Fakhr al-Din and the *Shūrā* (1908-1918)', in Dudoignon (et al), *op. cit.*, 2006, pp. 85-116.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 719.

¹⁵⁰ *Al-Machreq*, vol. 12 (1909), pp.558-559.

antitheses or opposites, such as the real Unity and the real Trinity. In other terms, that God is truly one, and truly more than one at the same time.’

Cheikho rebuked Riḍā for his allegation that the Catholic doctrine insists to combine contradictions.¹⁵¹ ‘It is not logical’, Cheikho contended, ‘that such a paradoxical faith would be adopted by more than one third of the inhabitants of the globe among whom are the most civilized nations – such as the Greeks, the Romans and the Arabs.’ He insisted that Trinitarian concepts had been taken from the divine revelation, and Biblical prophets implicitly referred to them in the Old Testament. He pointed to many examples, such as God’s use of the plural form with reference to Himself, and to the plural form for ‘Lord’ used frequently in the Old Testament. In his conclusion, Cheikho reminded Riḍā that Catholic believers do not entirely grasp the mystery of the Trinity. But it is enough for them to know that God revealed it to them. He further upheld that there are many secrets that cannot be interpreted by human intellect, and that it is impossible for human beings to grasp God’s true nature; otherwise they would share with God his divine essence.¹⁵²

Al-Machreq had many criticisms with regard to Riḍā’s religious views of the church. For example, it commented on his statement in one of his *fatwās* on polygamy that the Pope had authorized Charlemagne’s polygamy as historically mistaken. As a matter of fact, although Charlemagne, who was holding power over both the Church and state, married with many wives, the Catholic Church had never authorized him to do so.¹⁵³ Riḍā, according to *al-Machreq*, insisted on writing about many subjects about which he had deficient knowledge. A prominent example was also his insistence that freemasonry organizations collaborated with the Jews to demolish the Papal power in Europe.¹⁵⁴

In 1922, one of *al-Manār*’s readers in Beirut complained to Riḍā about the writings of *al-Machreq* on Islam.¹⁵⁵ Later, when the tenth volume of *Tafṣīr al-Manār* was first published in 1932, *al-Machreq* was critical to his Islamic religious views. It described Riḍā’s commentary on the Qur’ān as a ‘naïve attempt to combine between the Qur’ān and modern scientific discoveries, which had been never known in the time of the Prophet of Islam.’¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ L. Cheikho, ‘Lā Tanāquda fī al-Tawḥīd wā al-Tathlīth’, *al-Machreq*, vol. 22 (1924), pp. 737-744. Among Riḍā’s papers, I have found an unpublished anti-Cheikho article. It was written by a Shī‘ī Muslim from Iraq, who signed it as Muslim Najafī under the title: ‘al-Qawl al-Sahīḥ fī Daḥḍ ‘Ulūhiyyat al-Masīḥ (The True Saying in Refuting the Divinity of Jesus’. MS., Riḍā’s private archive.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 743.

¹⁵³ *Al-Machreq*, vol. 5 (1927), pp. 397-398; see, Riḍā’s *fatwā*, *al-Manār*, vol. 28/1 (Sha‘bān 1345/March 1917), p. 29.

¹⁵⁴ *Al-Machreq*, vol. 30 (1932), pp. 143-144. See, *al-Manār*, 14/3 (Rabī‘ Al-‘Awwal 1929/March 1911), pp. 178; vol. 15/1, pp. 32; vol. 29/4, pp. 271-72. Cf. his article on the role of the Jews in the Freemasonry movement, vol. 6/5 (Rabī‘ al-‘Awwal 1321/May 1903), pp. 196-200, see also, *al-Manār*, vol. 8/11 (Jumādā Al-‘Ākhira 1323/August 1905), pp. 401-403.

¹⁵⁵ *Al-Manār*, vol. 23/4, p. 267.

¹⁵⁶ *Al-Machreq*, vol. 30 (1932), pp. 237-238, cf. vol. 29 (1931), pp. 315-316.

The controversy between Riḍā and *al-Machreq* culminated in 1934, when the Catholic journal embarked upon reacting to his above-mentioned work *al-Wahy*. *Al-Machreq* introduced Riḍā to its readers as ‘a Muslim conservative luminary in Egypt, a friend of the Wahhābi Ibn Saud, and a fervent Muslim apologist, who firmly adhered to the traditions and rejected anything that is not in agreement with the way of the Salaf.’¹⁵⁷ It also depicted Riḍā’s work as an attempt to idealize Islam, which did not add any new aspect of knowledge to the understanding of the concept of revelation in Islam.¹⁵⁸ The author’s exclusive concern was to respond to Christians and verify the superiority of Islam over Christianity without giving any profound treatment of any of his themes. *Al-Machreq* did not deny the religious value of the Qur’ān and its impact on Muslim believers in their liturgy and prayers, but this was not enough to prove its miraculous nature.¹⁵⁹ The writer of *al-Machreq* was of the view that the linguistic value ascribed to the Qur’ān was no miracle, and should be seen as equal to the high standard of the English or German translation of the Bible. In spite of admitting its aesthetic elements, *al-Machreq* alleged that there are many other linguistic and historical contradictions and defects in the Qur’ān.¹⁶⁰ With regard to Riḍā’s arguments that the Qur’ānic miracle was proved by its influence and the change achieved by Islam in many parts of the world – the same argument which was earlier used by Cheikho to prove the authenticity of the Catholic belief – *al-Machreq* viewed it as improbable. The Arabs had conquered decadent nations with ease. Muslims also learnt philosophy and other sciences from other nations, not directly from the Qur’ān. In conclusion, *al-Machreq* wondered why Riḍā dedicated his book to the civilized nations: ‘Is it because he knows perfectly well that Islam has not gained any of the civilized nations in the modern time? Or because he knows that the majority of the more than 240 million Muslims [in the 1930s] were formerly heathens, who considered Islam civilized as compared to their previous paganism?’¹⁶¹

In his introduction to the book, Riḍā’s stated that his work was primarily a proposal to ‘call civilized countries of the West and Japan (see chapter 3) [...] and free-thinking Western scholars to Islam.’ He further vindicated that there were three obstacles that prohibit non-Muslims from grasping the divine message of the Qur’ān: 1) the Church, which opposed it by propagating a tirade of lies and accusations; therefore, its students believe every Muslim to be an enemy of Christ and Christianity; 2) Western politicians, who inherited antagonism from the Church, and accepted its fabrications in order to serve their imperialistic policy; and 3) the state of decadence among Muslims, who were blissfully ignorant of their religion.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ *Al-Machreq*, vol. 31 (1933), p. 956.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 956.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 957-958.

¹⁶⁰ For examples of these, see, *ibid.*, pp. 958-959.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 960.

¹⁶² See the English translation, *The Revelation to Muḥammad*, trans. by Abdus-Samad Sharafuddin, Saudi Arabia, 1960. The book is also mentioned in, Fehmi Jadaane, ‘Revelation et Inspiration en Islam’, *Studia Islamica*, 26 (1967), pp. 23-47.

On 16 May, 1934, a letter from Beirut signed by a certain Cheikh & Ladki (?) drew Riḍā's attention to Cheikho's attacks on his book. According to this letter, a group of scholars intended to react to Cheikho's critique of *al-Manār*. The sender of the letter (Cheikh & Ladki) advised them to wait, since it was the author of the book who should reply (see, appendix VIII).¹⁶³ Some weeks later, Riḍā started to respond to Cheikho in a series of four articles in his journal. He understood that the writer's aim to define him in such a way was to inoculate his readers with the idea that he and his journal would reject any modern religious, scientific and industrial innovations. Nonetheless, Riḍā defended himself by stating that his religious call was bound up to the Qur'ān and the Sunna, while summoning Muslims to acquire all useful modern means in their lives, as far as they do not contradict their religious principles.¹⁶⁴ Riḍā was deeply frustrated by the writer's belittling of his work, blaming him for looking at it 'from behind a black-tinted Jesuit pair of glasses'.¹⁶⁵ On the basis of an Arabic translation on the secrets of the Jesuit order (probably made by Kirām, mentioned above, chapter 1), Riḍā judged that 'the Jesuits are more extravagant and extreme in adoring money than the Jews and capitalists'.¹⁶⁶

In his reply, Riḍā again insisted that Islam remains a 'friend' of Christianity, but not a friend of the church. For him, Islam is also completing the 'real Christian message'. As a Muslim scholar he still regularly wished to cooperate with Christian religious bodies (especially the Vatican) to oppose atheism.¹⁶⁷ The author of *al-Machreq* criticised Riḍā's delineation of Islam as the religion of freedom and brotherhood as contradictory. On the one hand, he asserted that Islam gives people of other religious denominations their rights under Muslim rule, while, on the other, he would strive for 'one Arab and Muslim world' by claiming that social and political reform would never be accomplished without the unity of all nations in terms of religion, language, politics and judiciary system. Riḍā asseverated that human reform cannot be entirely attained without homogeneity of the various aspects of life, even when there is no Arab nation or Muslim legislation. Riḍā insisted that Islam is the most homogenous religion capable of achieving this goal, when we compare it to other religions. The truth of Islam, he went further, does not rely on its acceptance by all human beings, and the goal of each religion is the attainment of the highest level of human perfection.¹⁶⁸

As regard to *al-Machreq's* rejection of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān, Riḍā argued that to make the Qur'ān equal to English or German translation is no valid comparison. The Qur'ān, in his own terms, is inimitable in its language. It had been revealed among those who were known in their age for their

¹⁶³ Letter to Riḍā, Cheikh & Ladki, Beirut, 16 May 1934, Riḍā's private archive.

¹⁶⁴ 'Tafnīd I'tirāḍ Kātib Jesuītī 'alā Kitāb al-Wahy al-Muḥammadī (A refutation of an objection made by a Jesuit writer to al-Wahy al-Muḥammadī', *al-Manār*, vol. 34/2 (Ṣafar 1353/June 1934), pp. 147-151.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 148.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁶⁷ *Al-Manār*, vol. 34/3 (Rabī' al-'Awwal 1353/July 1934), pp. 227-231.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 227-228.

eloquence; while Muḥammad did not belong to the category of well-known Arab poets. Islam also challenged the Arabs to produce verses similar to the Qur'ān, but they failed. On the other hand, none of the English or the German translators had ever claimed that his work is inimitable.¹⁶⁹

Secondly, Riḍā defended the Qur'ān as the miraculous word of God by stressing again that this was agreed upon among many Western scholars, who admitted the prophecy of Muḥammad. In his book, he cited scholars such as Edouard Montet (see, chapter 1), who explained the prophetic characteristics in Islam and stressed the rationalistic essence of Islam. Riḍā moreover tried to rationalize that the prophet without having received the divine message would never have been able to bring such an 'excellent' book containing all those religious, literary and legislative sciences after having reached the age of forty. Riḍā associated the success of the Prophet's mission with the growing number of Muslims throughout history. He compared the Qur'ān to a medical guide brought forward by a physician to cure people. If he were able to cure all of his patients with the help of his guide, people would definitely believe in the soundness of his knowledge. In the same way, he went on, a huge number of non-Arabs adopted Islam, since they believed in the power of its truth to guide them. As for the Arabs especially, they had adopted Islam as a result of the impact of its eloquent language on them.¹⁷⁰

2.2. The Egyptian Coptic Community

Some of the Egyptian Copts saw Riḍā as an intruding Syrian (*dakhīl*), who had no right to interfere in Egyptian affairs.¹⁷¹ The first one to coin the Syrians with the term *dukhalā'* (intruders) in Egypt was the founder of the Egyptian Nationalist Party Muṣṭafā Kāmil, who advocated that the Syrians (especially Christians) were collaborators of the British and hostile to the Egyptian nationalist cause in the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁷² In the following section we will discuss Riḍā's various reactions to the Coptic community in Egypt.

¹⁶⁹ *Al-Manār*, vol. 34/4, pp. 311-315.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 315. See also, *al-Manār*, vol. 34/5, pp. 376-381.

¹⁷¹ *Al-Manār*, vol. 15/1, pp. 48-49.

¹⁷² For Kāmil's ideas on the concept of nationalism, see, Fritz Steppat, 'Nationalismus und Islam bei Muṣṭafā Kamil. Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der ägyptischen Nationalbewegung', *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 4/4 (1956), pp. 241-341. Riḍā was a sharp critic of Kāmil's nationalism, and was one of the early Muslim thinkers who at that moment saw the threat posed by the concept of nationalism to Islamic doctrine. About his rejection of nationalism, see, Safran, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-84. In his turn, Kāmil declared that the Khedive himself was not pleased with Riḍā's stances (especially his regular critique of Al-Azhar), and had a serious plan to send him away from Egypt. See, 'Al-ʿAsabiyya al-Jinsiyya wā al-Liwā', *al-Manār*, vol. 10/7, pp. 536-540. Riḍā defended the existence of the Syrians in Egypt, and fervently propagated the idea that the Syrians were the closest and most united faction among all emigrants to the Egyptians. See, 'Mūsāfahat al-Sūriyyīn lil-Miṣriyyīn', *al-Manār*, vol. 11/3 (Rabi' al-ʿAwwal 1326/May 1908), pp. 230-231.

2.2.1. Riḍā's Attitudes towards the Copts before 1911

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Coptic question and the demands of the Copts for social and religious equality had gradually become visible in the political scene of Egypt. In 1897, for example, a Coptic delegation handed a petition to the Egyptian Prime Minister and the British High Commissioner complaining that Copts were underrepresented in key political and administrative posts.¹⁷³

The Copts, who viewed themselves as alienated within their own society, undertook the defence of their interests in their different newspapers and periodicals. The years 1908-1911 witnessed one of the most critical moments of the Muslim-Christian relations in the country. Muslim and Christian papers launched mutual accusations and their confrontation came to a head. The debates focused primarily on the representation in civil servant employment.¹⁷⁴ In 1908 the Coptic Reform Party, founded by Akhnūkh Fanūs, a wealthy Presbyterian Coptic landlord and member of the Legislative Assembly, had counted the Coptic demands as discrimination in employment and promotion, and the practice of religious rights. But other Coptic groups were anxious about their Muslim fellow-citizens. Some prominent Coptic figures accused Fanūs of the collaboration with the British authorities in destroying the national spirit in their homeland.¹⁷⁵

In the early issues of *al-Manār*, Riḍā's views of the Copts were positive in the general sense. He constantly praised their religious zeal and concern for education, underlining that they were more organized than their Egyptian Muslim compatriots. He maintained that following the steps of other 'civilized lands', the Copts set up schools to teach their children modern sciences, while keeping up their belief and religious identity. As an active class in the society, they promoted proper education to the degree that it had been said that no illiteracy was to be found among them. Muslims, on the other hand, had hardly any similar organizations.¹⁷⁶

Riḍā later developed a negative attitude as a result of what he saw as a campaign of protest against Muslims. He denounced the way the Copts presented their demands arguing that Muslims deliberately aimed at 'rooting' them out of the country. For him, it was natural from a sociological point of

¹⁷³ *Al-Ahram Weekly*, no. 691 (20-26 May 2004).

¹⁷⁴ Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East, A History*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 61.

¹⁷⁵ Ṭāriq al-Bishrī, *al-Muslimūn wā al-Aqbāt fī Itār al-Wahdah al-Waṭaniyya*, 4th ed., Cairo, Dār al-Shurūq, 2004, pp. 79-81. Fanūs had sympathy for the British presence in Egypt. He drafted his project of establishing the Egyptian Party, which called for Egyptian-British friendship, see, id., pp. 72-73.

¹⁷⁶ See his articles, 'Al-Madāris al-Waṭaniyya fī al-Diyār al-Miṣriyya', *al-Manār*, vol. 1/15 (Ṣafar 1316/July 1898), pp. 260-261. In 1898 he wrote that the Copts of Egypt as a minority group had 40 charitable schools of their own while Muslims had only one; see, *al-Manār*, vol. 1/21 (Rabī' al-'Awwal 1316/August 1898), pp. 388-389. See also, 'al-Muslimūn wā al-Qibt: Aw 'Ayat al-Mawt wā 'Ayat al-Ḥayāh', *al-Manār*, vol. 8/9 (Jumāda al-'Ūlā 1323/July 1905), pp. 327-330.

view that any religious minority group must yield to its overzealous sense of unification in order not to be assimilated within the majority group. Being of Syrian origin, Riḍā made no distinction between any of the Egyptian minority groups including the Jews, the Copts or naturalized Orthodox Christians of Syrian or Armenian origin. He affirmed that if the Copts would seriously raise their demands of equality in the public debate, they would have included other Christians in their appeal. The Copts should also stop claiming in their newspapers that Muslims were colonizers and conquerors, and had no right in the country. However, he also criticised those Muslims who exceeded their boundary by taking harsh stances and constantly offending Coptic religious feelings.¹⁷⁷

The Coptic newspaper *al-Waṭan* ('Homeland') was launched in 1877 primarily in order to provide the Coptic community with an outlet for its collective views and grievances. It soon became one of the strongest platforms for enflaming the Coptic confrontation with Muslims. According to *al-Manār*, when the Egyptian government started the project of the revival of Arab literature in the beginning of the 20th century by reprinting famous literary works at the expense of the national budget, *al-Waṭan* vigorously attacked the project as an attempt of 'backwardness'. The Coptic journal criticised the Egyptian government for having embarked upon a project that would 'adulterate its people's taste for sound literatures and useful sciences'.¹⁷⁸ Instead of promoting the Egyptians to the level of civilized nations, the paper went on, the government aimed at 'thrusting them to the darkness of Arab superstitions, nonsense and ignorance'.¹⁷⁹

Riḍā was very discontent with these words and contrasted *al-Waṭan*'s stance with the initiatives of European scholars and other Arab Christians (such as the Jesuits in Syria), who were keen on preserving Arab literary works by printing them. Riḍā counterattacked by maintaining that *al-Waṭan*'s campaign explicitly aimed at 'erasing' Islam, its language and literature from Egypt and replace them with their sense of 'Coptism'. He described the Coptic writer of this article as 'fanatic', 'rude' and 'ignorant' of Arab literature and civilization. The Arabic language was not confined to Muslims, but was always a common ground among Jews and Christians of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. Riḍā reminded the writer of 'fair-minded' Western thinkers (such as Le Bon and others), who admitted the significance and position of the Arabs and their language and literature in history. If the Coptic writer had been motivated to reach his conclusion by the anti-Christian statements in some of the circulating Arabic works, he should have not ignored the anti-Islamic tone in Arabic Christian as well as in Western missionary works. Riḍā ascribed all these remarks to *al-Waṭan*'s insistence on causing religious strife between Muslims

¹⁷⁷ 'Al-Muslimūw wā al-Qibt', vol. 11/5 (Jumādā al-ʿŪlā 1326/June 1908), pp. 338-347.

¹⁷⁸ As quoted in *al-Manār*, vol. 13/12 (Dhū al-Ḥijja 1328/January 1911), p. 909.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

and Copts with confidence that the British authorities would support them in their campaign.¹⁸⁰

2.2.2. The Coptic Congress of 1911

Before analysing Riḍā's response to the Coptic Congress and the assassination of the Coptic Prime Minister Buṭrus Ghālī, we should shortly dwell upon some parts of the historical background of the crisis and its impact on the political scene of the Egypt of 1910-1911.

During his interrogation, the afore-mentioned al-Wardānī (see, the introduction), confessed that he had murdered Ghālī for his mediation between the British imperial officials and the Egyptian officialdom. Most Egyptian Muslim nationalists viewed Ghālī as too pliant and too willing to serve the British interests. He also represented the cabinet on the bench in the notorious Dinshiwāy trial in 1906, which resulted in the death sentences for many Egyptian farmers, the event that gave rise to the National Party of Muṣṭafā Kāmil.¹⁸¹

Although al-Wardānī was sentenced to death, common Muslims held him in esteem as a national hero. During his diplomatic trip in Egypt, the former president of the United States Theodore Roosevelt fanned the flames during his speech at the Egyptian University. In that speech, he praised the British rule, condemned nationalists and vilified the assassin.¹⁸² However, al-Wardānī made it clear that although he was a Muslim and Ghālī a Coptic Christian, religion had no bearing on the motives for shooting the Prime Minister, whom he considered a traitor.¹⁸³

Soon in 1911, a lay Coptic Congress was convened at Asyūṭ (Southern Egypt), whose main agenda was to ask for equal rights of citizenship. Asyūṭ was chosen because it was an important center for the Coptic community, a very significant centre for Protestant missionaries who also supported the idea.¹⁸⁴ The Coptic Congress, numbering 500 members or more (Riḍā counted more than 1000), was held in spite of the opposition of Patriarch Kyrollos V and many other notable Coptic figures. They, as well as the government, feared that the Coptic meeting in Asyūṭ would agitate the public. The Egyptian Khedive 'Abbās Ḥilmī did not welcome the idea of the congress either, and refused to meet its delegation in the Palace.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 908-912.

¹⁸¹ Charles D. Smith, 'The Egyptian Copts: Nationalism, Ethnicity, Definition of Identity for Religious Minority', in Maya Shatzmiller (ed.), *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies*, McGill-Queen's Press, 2005, pp. 68-69. Bishrī, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82. More about Ghālī's life, see, for example, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haikal, *Tarājīm Miṣriyya wā Gharbiyya*, Cairo, 1929, pp. 119-138; Arthur Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999, pp. 61-62.

¹⁸² Reid, (Cairo), pp. 51-75.

¹⁸³ Badrawī, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁸⁴ Bishrī, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

The congress, however, resulted in a petition briefing the Coptic demands before the khedive and the British. The representative of the Coptic Press in London, Kyriakos Mikhail, recorded the works of the Congress and other relevant discussions.¹⁸⁶ The congress demanded the government: 1) to exempt the Coptic government officials from their jobs and students from study on Sundays, 2) to entirely open administrative posts in the government services to the Copts, 3) to change the electoral system in the Egyptian provincial Councils to one similar to that in operation in Belgium in order to secure their rights as minorities, 4) the Copts should have equal rights to take advantage of all educational facilities provided by the new Provincial Councils; and 5) government grants should be bestowed on deserving institutions without any distinction of race or creed.¹⁸⁷

In April 1911, Muslim Egyptians denounced the requests by organizing a rival congress in Heliopolis in Cairo under the auspices of the then Prime Minister Muḥammad Riyāḍ Pasha, and other politicians. The Congress committee reported that the Copts were planning to establish 'a separate state for themselves'.¹⁸⁸ They also protested against the endeavour of the Copts 'to divide the Egyptian nation as one political unit into two religious groups, a Muslim majority and a Coptic minority'.¹⁸⁹ It also concluded that the prime reason behind the escalation of the problem was the close relation of the Coptic organisers with Western missionary bodies in Southern Egypt, who had convinced them that the Europeans could give them protection in case they would fail to get their demands.¹⁹⁰

In his immediate reply, Riḍā reacted to the Coptic demands in some articles in *al-Manār* and *al-Mu'ayyad*, which he later compiled in one small volume.¹⁹¹ He considered the Coptic congress as exercising influence in awakening Egyptian Muslims to organize their own Islamic one, and making them seriously deliberate their common social and religious affairs. He propounded to the Muslim congress that its participants should try to avoid any discussions on politics, and engage themselves instead in preparing statistical tables on the number of Coptic employees in various sectors in Egypt.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ Mikhail, *op. cit.* The Coptic community was planning to hold such a congress even before the murder of Ghālī, but that incident encouraged them to put it into reality. See, Bishrī, *ibid.*, p. 82. The demands of the Congress were no different from the ones presented to Lord Cromer and Mustafā Fahmī Pasha (d. 1914), who was a strong supporter of British interests in Egypt. The Copts submitted a similar petition to Lord Cromer and Fahmī Pasha in which they requested complete equality in the appointment of administrative jobs, closing the courts on Sunday, appointing an additional member to consultative council, and teaching Christianity to Christian students in governmental schools, see, Tagher, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

¹⁸⁷ Mikhail, *ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

¹⁸⁸ Tagher, *op. cit.*, p. 211f. More about the resolutions of the Congress, see, *al-Manār*, vol. 14/5 (Jumādā al-ʿUlā 1329/May 1911), pp. 353-372.

¹⁸⁹ The congress proceedings, Cairo, 1911; as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 218.

¹⁹⁰ *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/5, p. 356.

¹⁹¹ Riḍā, *Mu'tamar*.

¹⁹² *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/2, p. 158. Participants of the congress probably presented such statistical numbers before the congress, see, for example, the report of education in Egypt and the share of

Riḍā deplored the loss of Buṭrus Ghālī as a prudent leader. Contrary to the organizers of the Coptic Congress, he was capable of defending the interests of his community in a peaceful way. Despite Ghālī's participation in the Dinshiwāy trial and his siding with the British, Riḍā enumerated other advantages of Ghālī. The most important of these was his concern for his own community, while being fair in dealing with other groups.¹⁹³ Riḍā was convinced that the real motive behind his assassination was secular, not religious. Al-Wardānī made his attempt on the basis of the ideas he became acquainted with during his stay in Europe, and had never joined Al-Azhar or any other religious institution. The Copts, in Riḍā's view, were not satisfied with the official Muslim condemnation of the act, but intensified their accusation of Muslims as fanatics on the basis of this individual case only.¹⁹⁴ It might be interesting to know that al-Wardānī had mixed with anarchists in Lausanne, and was influenced by their ideas. His two-year sojourn in Switzerland stimulated his interest in European institutions, and induced him to obtain pamphlets on different aspects of humanitarian concerns.¹⁹⁵

In his judgment of the religious motivations behind the congress, Riḍā was cynical. He stressed that the Muslim majority would have the right to determine the weekly day off. 'If they had no desire to work on Sundays in the Muslim government of Hājī 'Abbās Ḥilmī [Khedive of Egypt]', Riḍā said, 'they would better relinquish their jobs and exclusively devote themselves to contemplation and prayer.'¹⁹⁶ He also refused any Coptic claim that they as original inhabitants had the right to rule the country. The Copts were, for Riḍā, subjects to the 'Muslim Prince' of Egypt, who granted them their posts in the government services by means of tolerance, and not as a matter of obligation.¹⁹⁷

Riḍā, nevertheless, demonstrated that the Islamic government throughout its history contained different people with other religious beliefs, though its legislative and political principles remained decided by the majority group. He also stressed that the Islamic law gave other religious groups the right to freely follow their religious laws, without complying with any Islamic rules.¹⁹⁸

In Riḍā's thinking, 'Coptism' should remain a religious identity, and not to be mixed with any political ideologies. In other words, the Christians of Egypt should use the word 'Copt' only in addressing their religious affairs. They should only express themselves as 'Arab Egyptians'. He warned the Copts that

Muslims and Copts. See, *al-Ta'lim fī Miṣr wā Haz al-Muslimīn wā al-Aqbāt Minhū*, Cairo: Matba'at al-al-Adāb wā al-Mu'ayyad, n.d. In his report, Sir Eldon Gorst also presented statistics of employment of Copts and Muslims in the Civil Service, see, Mikhail, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁹³ *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/3 (Rabi' al-'Awwal 1329/March 1911), p. 202.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203-204.

¹⁹⁵ His landlady in Lausanne would later speak of his gentleness, loyalty and kindness, but he became quite agitated and upset whenever he spoke of Egypt. Another Swiss would observe that the youth spoke of nothing but politics, and that he did so very passionately. Bardawi, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

Muslims were the majority, and they should avoid any clash with them; otherwise it would certainly end up in the loss of their rights as a minority group in case Muslims would decide to boycott them. Riḍā postulated that the Copts might have been convinced to consider the idea that ‘Christian Europe’ would interfere to force the Muslim majority to yield to their demands. In that case, Muslims would subtly try to exclude them from social life, by favoring Muslims by all means in all official posts.¹⁹⁹

In his address to the Coptic Congress, the orator of the Coptic movement Akhnūkh Fanūs stressed that working on Sunday was a violation of the divine obligation upon Christians to observe it as ‘a holy Sabbath’.²⁰⁰ He further clarified that ‘any Christian who intentionally works on Sunday should be put to death.’²⁰¹ As a reply to the Congress’ demand in this regard, Riḍā turned to expound his religious views on the ‘weekly feast’ in the three monotheistic religions. As compared to Riḍā’s analysis, the Egyptian Congress accused the Copts of raising that issue out of ‘greediness’ and ‘opportunism’ as they had certain expectations from the ‘Christian’ imperial powers to assist them in removing Islamic features from the whole society.²⁰² Riḍā maintained that he did understand the prime significance of weekly holidays for all nations as a sign of unity, without which religious minority groups could also become weak and were liable to vanish. But the national unity of each state should be given priority. He pointed out to the Coptic Congress that the Sabbath was clearly based on many passages in the Old Testament. The sanctification of Sunday, however, was not obviously established in the New Testament; and nowhere did we find in the Bible that Christ or the Apostles ordered the Sabbath to be changed from Saturday to Sunday. Riḍā referred to passages from the Old Testament relating that it was a ‘perpetual covenant ... [for] the people of Israel’ as regard to the day during which God rested after having completed the Creation in six days.²⁰³ He insisted that Jesus did not break the Sabbath, and did not permit his disciples to break the Sabbath. Riḍā quoted other New Testament passages in which it was related that Jesus allowed his followers to do a little or good activity on the holy day.²⁰⁴ In order to differ from the Jews, Riḍā went on, the Church replaced Saturday with Sunday, and Paul named it the Lord’s Day.²⁰⁵ He also stressed that Jewish and Muslim scriptures proving the importance of the weekly day of rest were clearer than the Christian ones. Riḍā did not mind that minorities would follow the majority in this regard, as it

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 211-212. In December 1930, Riḍā, as advocate of Arabism, was invited to take part in a public debate held at the Faculty of Law (the Egyptian University) on the concepts of ‘Coptism’ and ‘Pharaonism’. His counterpart was the Egyptian lawyer Lutfī Jum’ah. See, *al-Manār*, vol. 31/6 (Shā‘bān 1349/January 1931), pp. 465-474.

²⁰⁰ Bishrī, *op. cit.*, p. 98. Riḍā connects here Sunday to the Sabbath in the Old Testament: Exodus (31:14-15) and Exodus (35:2).

²⁰¹ *Al-Manār*, vol. 31/6, p. 216.

²⁰² *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/5, p. 358.

²⁰³ Such as, Genesis 2:2-3, Exodus 23:12, 31:16-17, and Isaiah 56:6-8.

²⁰⁴ Such as, Matthew 12:1-12, Mark 1:21-22, Luke 13:10-17, and John 5:1-18.

²⁰⁵ *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/3, pp. 214-215.

was the case with Christians leaving work on Fridays under the Islamic rule, and Muslims on Sundays under the Russian Christian government. Riḍā, however, lamented that religious Christians were able to convince Muslim traders in some Islamic states to leave work on Sundays instead of Fridays. Muslims were not entirely prohibited to work on Fridays. But Riḍā argued that it was not attainable to open government offices on Fridays, while it was highly recommended in Islam to attend the service at the mosque as early as possible. For the sake of public interest and social unity, Riḍā concluded that all religious groups in Egypt should accommodate their official schedules according to the majority in matters of labour and government office hours.²⁰⁶

The Coptic Congress also raised the question of equality between Muslim and Coptic children in religious education. They pleaded that all the *kuttābs* (local religious schools) and the official schools should be open to all Egyptian children irrespective of their religion. The *kuttābs* were officially declared by the Ministry of Education to be purely Islamic institutions. The Coptic Congress requested that Coptic children should have their religious teaching within the *kuttābs*, just as their Muslim counterparts. According to the Provincial Councils, none of the tax revenues were devoted to Coptic educational interests, and the children of poorer Copts were dependent for their education upon private enterprise and generosity.²⁰⁷

The issue of the Coptic partaking in religious education in primary schools had been debated in Egypt earlier. In 1907 Riḍā asserted that the Coptic demand had its religious and political aspects. From a religious point of view, accepting their demand would be also profitable for Muslims, who would be stimulated to revive their religious education parallel to that of their Christian fellows. Riḍā warned the Copts against the harm that might be caused by random attacks from the side of Muslim riot-makers in case the government would take any positive decision in that regard. Those riot-makers will use it as a pretext to warn the public opinion against what they will see as a potential plan to replace the Islamic government entirely. At that time, Riḍā however was not anxious about the introduction of Coptic religious education at primary schools, and did not fear that it would lead to any kind of religious fanaticism among the members of both communities.²⁰⁸

In response to the Coptic Congress, Riḍā argued that it was known that there were many states which were not obliged to provide religious education to different religious groups. As it represented the majority group, the Russian state schools for instance did not teach any other religious faith, except the Orthodox doctrine. Jewish and Muslim communities had no right to give their children their own religious education in public schools. As part of the Ottoman Empire, Egyptian state schools confined their religious education only to Islam according to the Hanafī School of Law. For Riḍā, it was reasonable that the ruling majority would have the right to decide upon

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 218-219.

²⁰⁷ Mikhail, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

²⁰⁸ 'Al-Ta'lim al-Dīnī', *al-Manār*, vol. 10/2, p. 128.

religious education. It was unreasonable of the Coptic Congress to appeal to the Muslim government in Egypt to change the religion of the majority. It would be unfair if the government introduced Coptic religious education in state schools, without including other religious denominations, such as all the various divisions of Judaism and Christianity.²⁰⁹ ‘Opening the gate’ of pluralism would also make the followers of the other Islamic *madhāhib* require the government to include their doctrines in religious education.²¹⁰

The Copts pleaded for more rights than any other religious community, as they considered themselves as the native population of the country. Riḍā did not entirely approve that view. But his remark in this regard was self-contradictory. He contended that ‘suppose that you [Copts] were the original descendants of the ancient Egyptians, then we [Muslims] would also have the option to follow the model of America – the most civilized Christian government in knowledge, justice and freedom – in [persecuting] Native Americans.’²¹¹ But he immediately renounced that by stating that the Muslim Egyptian government gave equal rights to the Copts as nationals of the country. All holders of Egyptian citizenship, Riḍā went on, had equal rights with no regard of their Pharaonic, Israelite, or Arab origin. However, if the Copts were true in their allegation of being descendants from the ancient Pharaohs, the Jews in their progeny should be, according to Riḍā, nobler, since they descend from the line of Prophets. But Islam does not make any differentiation between both groups regarding their religion.²¹²

Riḍā argued that it would not have been unusual if the Egyptian government had followed the European example in stipulating one religion to be taught to all children in public schools. In Egypt, however, there were Muslim institutes supported by the *Awqāf* system (religious endowments) fed by Muslims resources donated for teaching Muslim children. Such institutes, which were run by the government, accepted both Muslim and Coptic children. These endowments, according to Riḍā, used to pay the Egyptian University five thousand pounds annually (which accepted both communities as well). Riḍā was convinced that although they were a minority, the Copts were more active, and their demands were merely a token of their being immoderately desirous of acquiring more power over the Muslims.²¹³

The Coptic press attacked Riḍā for his articles about their congress. Riḍā defended himself by stating that he never thought of causing discord between the two communities. His contribution to the whole debate was purely intended for the sake of public interest. He reminded his Coptic opponents of his earlier writings in which he as a non-Egyptian had drawn attention to the religious and social unity and strength of the Coptic minority community, as

²⁰⁹ *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/3, pp. 221-222.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 225-226.

compared with their Muslim counterpart whom he frequently criticised of religious laxity.²¹⁴

What alarmed Riḍā was what he saw as a Coptic demand of establishing a secular system in Egypt. His reaction to this point can be seen as a new phase in his thinking. He considered their demand as a threat that would diminish the Islamic presence in Egypt. The Coptic Congress had actually softened its language by asking for equality between Muslims and Copts.²¹⁵ Despite its mild tone, Riḍā still understood the Coptic plea as an attempt to replace Islam altogether with a new Coptic religious system. In line with the Egyptian Congress, he reconfirmed that the Egyptian 'Islamic' government treated the Copts with 'excessive tolerance and generosity'. Foreign powers had particularly accused the 'fragile' Muslims of discriminating religious minority groups. He understood that members of the Coptic Congress did not only claim more rights for the Copts, but also pleaded for an Egyptian government which should remain Islamic. Despite the spread of the non-Islamic 'illicit' acts (such as wine-drinking and adultery), Riḍā defended the Egyptian government as Islamic. Islamic Law, he moreover argued, does not consider those who commit sins as unbelievers. Although the foreign authorities did not give Egypt its complete independency at that time, Riḍā still believed that the government had not lost its entire Islamic face. Many Islamic features characterized the Egyptian society, such as the Shar'ī judicial system, religious endowments, Al-Azhar's religious institutions, and religious feasts. In their demands, the Copts, Riḍā stressed, indirectly aimed at 'erasing' these Muslim aspects and replacing them with their own.²¹⁶

Riḍā believed that due to their Western education Eastern Christians in general became very keen on power and authority; and had a strong desire that both Ottoman and Egyptian governments would forsake their Islamic character altogether. He concluded that the Copts rushed to put forward their demands out of their 'hatred' of the Arabs. At the same time he ironically referred to those whom he often called as 'geographic Muslim leaders', whom he believed to have a stronger desire to remove the Islamic nature of Egypt as well. He was convinced that such a secularist group among Muslims would gradually attain the same aim by weeding out Islamic elements in their opposition to any Islamic initiative in the society. Riḍā again warned the Copts that they should remain content with the rights they had already been given enabling them to reach high official positions in Egypt. He further notified the Copts that their demands would agitate the Muslim public feelings against them, if their wishes of replacing the Muslim character of the government were to be put into practice. The Supreme Porte might also interfere to retain its Islamic state. It would also widen the gap of understanding between Islam and Christianity in other Muslim lands, as Egypt was seen as one of the pivotal centres of Islam. The British officials, as a result, would try to diminish any discontent among

²¹⁴ *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/4, pp. 273-279.

²¹⁵ Bishrī, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-100.

²¹⁶ *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/4, pp. 279-284.

Muslims in their colonies (especially India) by opposing the Coptic plans. The Copts, Riḍā argued, would in this way harm their status and lose some of their rights instead of gaining any.²¹⁷

Although he did not take part in its activities, Riḍā fully stood behind the Muslim Egyptian Congress. It was, in his view, effective, but belated. The first fruitful consequence was the change of tone in the Coptic protest. He believed that the Copts adopted a milder tone in presenting their question after they saw that the Muslim majority attempted to recover their unity. He compared the situation in Egypt with India. Muslims of India had recognized the importance of their unity by holding their annual meetings and congresses, when they saw the Hindus trying to promote their social unity. The same held true for Egyptian Muslims who through this congress achieved a remarkable progress in the direction of their unity. The dependency of Muslim Egyptians on their government in regulating their affairs was, in Riḍā's view, the reason they had been tardy in achieving integrity and unity. Following Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī's political ideas, Riḍā strongly believed that any governmental reform could not be established without the reform of the state as a whole. The leaders of any state should also exert much of their efforts and the natural resources of their countries in serving their subjects, preventing their people from any unneeded involvement in politics. Politics, as well as religious, economical and social public affairs should be run by a group of experts whom the people would trust. Riḍā related the success of Western societies to their great care for talented people in various fields by giving them leadership in offices and institutions. He was therefore satisfied with the decision of the Egyptian Congress not to interfere in any political discussion or conflict, and to concentrate on investigating the Coptic demands only, and on collecting facts and statistics of Coptic and Muslim officials in various offices. He again warned the Copts to stop accusing Muslims of stirring up religious fanaticism and to make an end to their writings in such a 'despising' language in their press.²¹⁸

Riḍā concluded by recommending the Egyptian Congress to regulate the religious and social Islamic affairs. His proposal was general and did not include any suggestion directly related to the Coptic question. He prompted its members to have its center in Cairo and establish five permanent committees: 1) an administrative committee to regulate all further work; 2) a committee for education, which would organize charitable educational institutes and schools, and would in the future make a plan for establishing an Islamic college for girls; 3) a committee for preaching and guidance (*al-Wa'z wā al-'Irshād*), which would be entrusted to supervise preachers who would be dispatched all over the country; 4) an economic and financial committee, which would take care of investigating the matter of giving loans to poor families and combating usury

²¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 285-287.

²¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 288-291.

and non-Islamic financial transactions; and 5) a charitable committee, which would provide assistance for aged, orphans and needy people.²¹⁹

2.2.3. Salāma Mūsā

Even after his sharp critique of the Coptic Congress, Riḍā still admitted its success in adhering to their social and ethnical bond among the Copts more than the Muslims. At the same time, he constantly accused 'Coptic Egyptianists' of attacking *al-Manār* as a platform for Islamic ideas. Some of the Coptic newspapers also heavily criticised Riḍā for his anti-Christian writings.

Riḍā took part in polemics against the Coptic intellectual Salāma Mūsā (1887-1958) for his writings on Islam and religions in general. It is worth noting that Mūsā was the foremost disciple of the Syrian intelligentsia in Egypt. By the 1920s, when the zenith of the Syrian Christians in Egypt started to be on the wane (Zaidān died in 1914, Shumayyil in 1917, Anṭūn in 1922, and Ṣarrūf in 1927), Mūsā adopted without any hesitation the secularism of the Syrian Christians. His readings in their works had highly moulded his ideas on various subjects. Unlike his Syrian mentors, Mūsā was blunt and straightforward in his critique of Islam. Zaidān once advised him to omit a few offending paragraphs in one of his articles on Islam. 'Never mind', said Zaidān, 'if we criticise the Christians, for they themselves have already written the critique of their religion [Christianity]. But we must treat Muslims with circumspection. They have not yet produced any self-criticism.'²²⁰ Mūsā developed his philosophy of 'Egyptianism', and advocated the idea of liberating society from what he deemed as shackles of theological traditions. Unlike the sense of 'Arabness' we have noted among Syrian Christians, Mūsā argued that Arabic should be 'declassicized' for the sake of Egypt. He encouraged therefore the idea of promoting the Egyptian dialect in literary works.²²¹

In 1912 Salāma Mūsā published his Arabic translation of the treatise of the famous British writer Grant Allen (1848-99), *The Evolution of the Idea of God*.²²² Throughout his work, Allen tried to demonstrate that theology is a product of the human mind, and Christianity is riddled with pagan traditions. Two years later, Riḍā reviewed the book by stating that such attacks of modern atheists on religion have no impact on the conception of monotheism in Islam. Such European writers, he argued, became very critical of Christianity once they observed its 'pagan' elements.²²³ Consequently, the Coptic newspaper *Miṣr*

²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 295-298.

²²⁰ Salama Musa, *Tarbiyyat Salāma Mūsā*, Cairo, 1947, p. 185; English Translation, *The Education of Salama Musa*, Leiden, EJ Brill, 1961, p. 153.

²²¹ More about him, see, Sylvia G. Haim, 'Salama Musa, An Appreciation of his Autobiography', *Welt des Islams*, vol. 2/1 (1952), pp. 10-24, Ibrahim A. Ibrahim, 'Salama Musa: An Essay on Cultural Alienation', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15 (1979), pp. 346-357, Vernon Egger, *A Fabian in Egypt: Salamah Musa and the Rise of the Professional Classes in Egypt, 1909-1939*, University Press of America, 1986.

²²² Grant Allen, *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, London, 1903.

²²³ See, *al-Manār*, vol. 17/3, pp. 225-231.

(‘Egypt’, firstly published 1895) launched a campaign against Riḍā for his assault on Christianity as a pagan religion. The paper appealed to the Egyptian government to ban Riḍā’s journal and banish him from Egypt for causing religious strife among Muslims and Copts. Ḥusayn Rushdī (1863-1928), the Prime Minister, invited Riḍā to his house to discuss the matter.²²⁴ Riḍā explained to him that he had published a review of that book just as many other Egyptian papers. He also elucidated that his intention was to defend Islam against missionary writings by using such critical writings in his counterattack. He adamantly added that his journal would continue its anti-missionary campaign as long as they would publish their attacks on Islam. Rushdī requested Riḍā to confine his writings to defence only. Riḍā expressed his readiness to prepare a long list of anti-Islamic citations in missionary literature. He also tried to convince the Prime Minister that the Coptic daily was seeking the support of British missionaries in order to close down his journal and his preaching of Islam in Cairo.²²⁵

According to Riḍā, the anti-*Manār* campaign was led by Yūsuf al-Khāzin (died in Italy, 1944), a Christian Syrian editor in Cairo. He was a member of the staff editorial of the above-mentioned Coptic newspaper *al-Waṭan*.²²⁶ Riḍā accused him of being one of the most fanatic Christians. According to *al-Manār*, al-Khāzin was reported to have said that he ‘felt uncomfortable when a Muslim would greet him’.²²⁷ Riḍā again claimed that his opponents made another attempt to approach the British Commission and the Egyptian government to imprison or banish him from Egypt, but their campaign would not be successful. He moreover stressed that people knew the objective of his journal from its early beginning as it never intended to propagate any religious strife or animosity against Christians.²²⁸

In Riḍā’s view, worse than missionaries were those westernised among Muslims and Christians. He deemed the originally born Christian Salāma Mūsā as one of the strongest propagators of ‘atheism’ and ‘absolute looseness’, who certainly endangered the Egyptian nation through his contributions in *al-Hilāl*.²²⁹ By the 1920s Mūsā became the principal writer and a leading pundit in the magazine. He also published nine books since he had joined the staff of the company.²³⁰ Riḍā became upset that Emile Zaidān, the later editor of *al-Hilāl*, had given Mūsā this opportunity of attacking religion, and did not follow the line of his father who was more mindful of religions, their values and the entity of the Arab nation. Riḍā saw Mūsā’s books published by *al-Hilāl* as a ‘destructive propaganda against any oriental nation, which might be dazzled by

²²⁴ *Al-Manār*, ‘Muḥārabat Muta‘aṣṣibī al-Qibṭ wā Ghayrihim lil-Manār (The Fanatic Copts [...] Combating *al-Manār*)’, vol. 17/6 (Jumādā al-‘Ākhira 1332/May 1914), pp. 487-490.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 479.

²²⁶ In Cairo, he founded other journals *al-Akḥbār* (1896), *al-Khizāna* (1900), and *al-Aḥad*. Later he became a member of the Parliament in Lebanon. See, Zirkli, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 228.

²²⁷ ‘Al-Ta’aṣṣub ‘alā al-Manār’, *al-Manār*, vol. 17/4, p. 317.

²²⁸ Ibid., pp. 318-319.

²²⁹ *Al-Manār*, vol. 29/2 (Shawwāl 1346/April, 1928), p. 118.

²³⁰ Egger, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

his subverting materialistic philosophy'.²³¹ On its part, Mūsā's own magazine *al-Majalla al-Jadida* accused Riḍā that he had accumulated a huge wealth through the distribution of his journal in which he offended Muslim thinkers by constantly charging them of infidelity.²³²

Riḍā was one of the founding members of *Jam'īyat al-Rābiṭa al-Sharqiyya* (Association of Oriental League, established 1921-1922).²³³ When the mouthpiece of the association, *Majallat al-Rābiṭa al-Sharqiyya*, first appeared in 1928, its editor was the controversial modernist 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq, and several of its contributors were leading Egyptian liberals, including Salāma Mūsā. Mūsā openly proclaimed his 'disbelief' in the East and 'faith' in the West. His 'anti-Easternism' swirled polemics and he was criticised for his assertions that Egypt was historically part of the Western rather than the Eastern world and that even the ethnographic and linguistic roots of Egypt were closer to the peoples of Europe as opposed to those of Asia.²³⁴

Riḍā immediately attacked the association for its drift to 'spreading atheist culture' in publishing the views of such liberals in its mouthpiece.²³⁵ He was disappointed that the association, which had earlier gained his support, had now given the opportunity to Mūsā as 'propagator of unbelief and impudence' and an 'enemy of religions in general and Islam in particular, of morality and spiritual values, and of any Eastern nationalist, ethnical or linguistic bond'.²³⁶ Riḍā had no reservation to qualify his ongoing propagation for a 'westernised' Egyptian society and the excessive praise in his writings of the British as an attempt to convince his readers of the necessity of 'assimilating Muslims into the English nation'.²³⁷ For him, the westernisation process of Muslims would only be achieved at the expense of Islamic traditions and values. The present Christianity and its doctrine of the Trinity, for Riḍā, were far removed from the authentic message of Jesus, which was only to be found in the Gospel of John:

²³¹ *Al-Manār*, 29/2, p. 118.

²³² *Al-Majalla al-Jadida*, vol. 2/10 (August 1931), p. 1180.

²³³ The Association of the Oriental League was Egypt's Asian affiliation was aimed at disseminating the arts, literatures and sciences of the Orient, strengthening relationships between countries of the region and acquainting Egypt with that part of the world, regardless of race and religion. More about the association, see, J. Jankowski 'The Eastern Idea and the Eastern Union in Interwar Egypt', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 14/4 (1981), pp. 643-666. More about Riḍā's activities in the association, see *al-Manār*, vol. 23/3 (Rajab 1340/March 1922), pp. 219-223. In Riḍā archive, there are copies of the charter of the association and some reports of its gatherings besides some remaining letters addressed to him by its chairman Aḥmad Saḥfīq Pasha.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 645. More in Egger, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-132.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 660. Riḍā's major opponent in the League was 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq, the author of the well-known book *al-'Islām wā 'Uṣūl al-Ḥukm*, who was also appointed as the editor of the magazine. The tension between *al-Manār* and the League's magazine escalated, and both sides exchanged insults. Amin al-Husaynī, the mufti of Jerusalem, had to interfere to reconcile between both sides. See, *al-Manār*, vol. 29/10 (Shawwal 1347/April 1929), p. 788-791.

²³⁶ *Al-Manār*, vol. 29/8 (Jumādā Al-'Ākhira 1347/December 1928), p. 620.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 623; Mūsā described the English as 'the greatest nation on earth', their government is the most advanced, England surpasses all other countries, the English are unsurpassed in quality of character. See Egger, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.

‘Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the Only True God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent’ (3:17).

In the 1930s Riḍā became involved in the public discussions about Egypt’s religious and national identity. A well attended debate over the issue whether Egypt’s culture was ‘Pharaonic’ or ‘Arab’ was held at the Faculty of Law of the Egyptian University in December 1930. In this debate Riḍā claimed the massive and decisive Arab and Islamic character of Egypt, while his counterpart the Egyptian lawyer, Muḥammad Luṭfī Jum‘ah, defended the uniqueness of Egyptian culture.²³⁸ Mūsā advocated the Pharaonic identity of Egypt as well, which he considered as superior to the Arab-Islamic heritage both by virtue of its more ancient age and its remarkable achievements.²³⁹ In his debates on the ‘Arabness’ of the Egyptian culture, Riḍā frequently ridiculed Mūsā for his backing of the concept of Pharaonism. What irritated Riḍā was Mūsā’s giving precedence to the ancient Egyptian culture above the shari’a besides what he understood as ‘insults’ and ‘offences’ against anyone who would advocate Islam and its establishments in Egypt. He was very saddened by Mūsā’s depiction of Shakīb Arslān as ‘villain,’ (*waghd*). Riḍā felt also very offended and tried to prove his Egyptian nationality, when Mūsā personally debunked him as a non-Egyptian, who had no right to interfere in Egyptian affairs. Mūsā now reminded his readers of Riḍā’s part in the ‘Abduh-Anṭūn debate by pointing out that *al-Manār* had assassinated *al-Jāmi‘a*. The Egyptian youth had thus lost one of the significant intellectual sources in the country. In his words, Mūsā commented: ‘we [Egyptians] should understand our duty [...] the Egyptian press should remain an Egyptian craft, not only with its Egyptian public readers, but also with its craftsmen and editors, who must also remain Egyptian.’²⁴⁰

Riḍā related Mūsā’s views on Islam to his ‘ignorance’ and ‘animosity’. An example was his critique of the inequality between men and women in the inheritance law. Riḍā believed that the motivation behind Mūsā’s criticism was his ambition of replacing the Eastern identity by Western models of life and their style of dress. Riḍā was disappointed that the mouthpiece of the Oriental League had given Mūsā the chance to spread his ideas. The famous Egyptian feminist Hudā Sha‘rāwī (1879-1947), according to Riḍā, had once rejected a request put forward by Mūsā to her and her feminist society in which he had requested to appeal to the Egyptian government for the equality of inheritance law. She rejected his request because she had a strong conviction that any plan of reforming the social standards of women should emanate from Islamic Law itself.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 28.

²³⁹ Egger, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-139.

²⁴⁰ As quoted in *al-Manār*, vol. 32/1 (Jumādā al-‘Ākhira 1350/October 1931), p. 59.

²⁴¹ *Al-Manār*, vol. 29/8, p. 624.

Riḍā took up the issue of women's inheritance law once again in a lecture delivered by him at the Egyptian University.²⁴² He attacked Mūsā again that the impelling reason behind his hatred against the Arabs was that they had conquered his land and had changed it into a Muslim state. He probably preferred that it would have been a part of the Christian Roman Empire despite their persecution of his Coptic people for many years. Looking at Mūsā's own writings, we find that although he gave priority to the Pharaonic culture, he did not deny the social impact of Arabs and Islam on the Egyptians. He believed that the Arab conquest of Egypt had brought a new era of civilization, and that Islam had unfettered its people from sectarian disputes and the Roman political and economical exploitation.²⁴³

In addition to his propagation of atheism, Riḍā continued, Mūsā spared no effort out of pure animosity to drive Muslims away from their religion. Some Muslim 'atheists' rallied behind him under the slogan of *tajdīd* (renewal). Riḍā referred to one of the lectures delivered by Mūsā in 1928 to the members of the Association of Christian Young Men (A.C.Y.M.) in which he held the status of women in Islam as inferior, especially in its stipulation of inheritance. Riḍā maintained that Mūsā was the first writer to raise these allegations. The Egyptian Constitutionalist Maḥmūd 'Azmi and the Coptic-Catholic Faraj Mikhā'il delivered a similar lecture on the same subject. The three of them, Riḍā believed, brought forward the issue of women's inheritance not because they were concerned with removing inequality between men and women, but by raising such discussions they aimed at disintegrating the umma.²⁴⁴

2.3. Conclusion

In order to evaluate Riḍā's attitudes towards the Arab Christians of his age, we have analysed various cases. Syrian Christian émigrés in Egypt, who had lively relations with him, were mostly drawn to the world of journalism and political activism. We have observed how complex his approaches were towards them as secularists: sometimes they were on friendly terms, but he tended to have religious and intellectual controversies and heated polemics with some others as well. His positive or negative postures were mostly determined by his counterpart's stances towards the concepts he adamantly espoused in his writings, especially those related to Islamism or Arabism. He was therefore pragmatic in his political cooperation with them, and ready to cooperate with many of them as long as they accepted the Islamic character of society. Riḍā's critique was intertwined with an assault on those whom he called 'geographic Muslims', who were also trying to weep out the Islamic elements from society. I would venture to say that the rejection by Arab Christians of many Christian

²⁴² *Al-Manār*, vol. 30/9 (Dhū al-Qi'dah 1348/April 1930), pp. 690-709.

²⁴³ See, for instance, Ghālī Shukrī, *Salāma Mūsā wā Azmat al-Ḍamīr al-'Arabī*, Beirut, 4th edition, 1983, p. 137. Mūsā never denied the tolerance of Islam given to other religious groups, and attributed the negative behaviour to some Muslim rulers, id., p. 219.

²⁴⁴ *Al-Manār*, vol. 30/9, p. 700.

fundamentals and their sharp criticism of Christian clergymen were likely among the prime motives behind his willingness to cooperate with them. He, on the other hand, was not willing to tolerate the Jesuit attack on Islam and Mūsā's critique of Islam.

Riḍā's attitude towards the Coptic community was more sensitive. Some Copts considered him a non-Egyptian 'intruder', who had no right to interfere in Egyptian affairs. In its response to the Coptic Congress, *al-Manār* did not attempt to deeply analyse the drastic impact of al-Wardānī's assassination of Buṭrus Ghālī on the long-standing and sensitive relation between Muslims and Copts. Riḍā's stance was more apologetic to their demands. He did not take the issue further than discussing the status of non-Muslim minorities under Islamic rule, and accusing some Coptic groups who in his eyes were inflaming the religious strife among different communities. His tone was sometimes cynical. This has been clearly shown when he reproached the Copts to be 'satisfied' with the rule of the Khedive 'Ḥāj Abbās'. Throughout his articles, Riḍā did neither severely condemn Wardānī's crime, nor did he extol his act. He was also silent on the religious discourse prevalent among Muslim scholars (who did not condemn his act) and some nationalist groups (who hailed al-Wardānī as a national hero).²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ The then mufti of Egypt, for example, did not support the verdict of the Egyptian court by considering imposing the death penalty on al-Wardānī as unjustified from his own religious point of view. See, Badrawi, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

