Sayı-Issue: 2
Cilt-Volume: 2
Aralık/December 2020 • Yıl: 2

MOVING BEYOND THE "WEST/REST" BINARY: RIFĀ'AH RĀFI' AL-ṬAHṬĀWĪ'S VIEWS ON TURKS AND THE FRENCH IN AN IMAM IN PARIS

"BATI/ÖTEKI" İKILEMINI AŞMAK: TAHLÎSÜ'L-İBRÎZ FÎ TELHÎSI BÂRÎZ ESERINDE RIFÂA RÂFI' ET-TAHTÂVÎ'NIN TÜRKLER VE FRANSIZLAR HAKKINDAKI GÖRÜŞLERI

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Makale Gönderim Tarihi
05.07.2020
Makale Kabul Tarihi
16.09.2020

ABSTRACT

An Imam in Paris (*Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz,* 1832), the famous travelogue that was written by Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī, has often been studied as a work that puts forth the observations of an Arab traveler about the Western culture that he had little familiarity with. However, East and West are not always described as two opposite poles in the travelogue. In fact, al-Ṭahṭāwī sometimes draws attention to similarities between the French and Arabs and emphasizes that Turks and Arabs are different from each other. In order to historically contextualize al-Ṭahṭāwī's observations, this study will first examine various French sources. Most of these sources claimed that many students who came from Egypt to Paris such as al-Ṭahṭāwī were Turks. Furthermore, Edme-Françoi*s* Jomard and Pierre Nicholas Hamont, both of whom played a key role in al-Ṭahṭāwī's education when he was in Paris, argued that Turks halt the progress of civilizations. The second section will give a close reading of al-Ṭahṭāwī's work. In particular, sections in *An Imam in Paris* in which al-Ṭahṭāwī describes his views on Turks and the French will be examined. The conclusion of this essay will emphasize that critics need to examine how Arabic sources from the nineteenth century represent Turks to understand these sources' vision of Westernization and modernization.

Keywords: Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris*, Gustave Flaubert, Orientalism, Turk/Arab relationships, Khedive Mehmet Ali Pasha

ÖZ

Rifâa Râfi' et-Tahtâvî'nin ünlü seyahatnamesi *Tahlîsü'l-ibrîz fî telhîsi Bârîz* (1832), genelde Arap bir seyyahın aşina olmadığı Batı kültürü hakkındaki gözlemlerini ortaya koyan bir eser olarak incelenmiştir. Ancak eserde her zaman Doğu ve Batı birbirine zıt iki kutup olarak tasvir edilmez. Hatta, et-Tahtâvî bazen Fransızlar ve Araplar arasındaki ortak noktalara dikkat çeker ve Araplar ile Türklerin birbirine benzemediğini vurgular. Et-Tahtâvî'nin bu gözlemlerini tarihî bir bağlamda incelemek adına bu çalışmada önce bazı Fransızca kaynaklar incelenecektir. Bu kaynakların pek çoğu et-Tahtâvî gibi Hidiv Mehmet Ali Paşa tarafından Mısır'dan Paris'e gönderilen öğrencilerin Türk olduğunu iddia etmiştir. Ayrıca, et-Tehtâvî Paris'teyken onun eğitiminde önemli rol oynayan Edme-François Jomard ve Pierre Nicholas Hamont, Türklerin medeniyetin gelişmesine engel olduklarını savunmuştur. İkinci kısımda, et-Tahtâvî'nin eserinin yakın okuması yapılacaktır. Özellikle, et-Tahtâvî'nin *Tahlîs* eserinde Fransızlar ve Türkler hakkındaki görüşlerini ortaya koyduğu kısımlar incelenecektir. Bu çalışmanın sonucu, araştırmacıların on dokuzuncu yüzyılda ortaya konan Arapça kaynakların Batılılaşma ve modernleşme vizyonunu anlamak için bu kaynakların Türkleri nasıl temsil ettiklerini incelemesi gerektiğini vurgulayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rifâa Râfi' et-Tahtâvî, *Tahlîsü'l-ibrîz fî telhîsi Bârîz*, Gustave Flaubert, Şarkiyatçılık, Türk/Arap ilişkileri, Hidiv Mehmet Ali Paşa

One of the most important figures of cultural modernization in the Arab world, Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801-1873) was sent by the Khedive Mehmet Ali Pasha (1769-1849) to Paris along with an envoy of Egyptian students. These students were expected to learn various sciences of the West. Al-Ṭahṭāwī writes about his eclectic observations on Paris during his five-year stay in the city in his famous travelogue, *An Imam in Paris* (*Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, 1832).1

1 In regards to citations from *An Imam in Paris*, this study uses Daniel L. Newman's English translation and occasionally refers to the Arabic source text when needed. For Arabic transcriptions, the article follows the IJMES guidelines. The literal translation of the Arabic title is "The Extraction of Pure Gold in the Abridgement

This travelogue received extensive attention in the scholarship on modern Arabic literature and Middle Eastern studies, as it has been studied as a work in which an Arab traveler encounters with the unfamiliar Western culture. Therefore, some scholars argued that this encounter prepared the ground for the formation of a national Arab identity that defined itself vis-à-vis the "other," the West (Abdelkader, 2012 and Hourani, 1983). Indeed, al-Ṭahṭāwī often uses the word "strange" (*gharīb*) in *An Imam in Paris*, as though his travel to Paris was a confrontation with the uncanny. For example, he writes, "One of the strange things [*min gharāʾib*, (2002: 116)] about the river Seine is that there are large boats on it, which contain the best-constructed baths in the whole of Paris" (2004: 171).

This study undermines the tendency to study al-Ṭahṭāwī's travelogue solely as the encounter with an unfamiliar West by focusing on a section of al-Ṭahṭāwī's work that did not receive much attention, its epilogue. Al-Ṭahṭāwī emphasizes in this epilogue that the French are more similar to Arabs than to Turks. The article will provide a historical contextualization for such a claim, as it will argue that this claim could be a defensive counter-reaction against a French mindset that homogenized the entire Middle East and North Africa as a Turkified bloc. The second section examines the possible reasons behind why al-Ṭahṭāwī could have emphasized similarities between Arabs and the French. While al-Ṭahṭāwī likely met in his everyday life with people who perceive the Orient as a homogenized and Turkified bloc, Frenchmen who supervised his training described Turks as the archrival of civilizational progress. The second section will give a close reading of *An Imam in Paris* to demonstrate that al-Ṭahṭāwī emphasizes similarities between Arabs and the French as he also emphasizes differences between Arabs and Turks. It will also touch upon al-Ṭahṭāwī's views about gender that provide crucial insights on his perspectives on the West.

A Turkified Orient in French sources

When the Khedive Mehmet Ali Pasha sent students to Paris, residents of Paris at first showed little interest in students. Ultimately, however, Parisians become more interested in them, especially after the Khedive Mehmet Ali sent to King Charles X a giraffe as a present (Allin, 1998). *La Bacriade ou la guerre d'Alger* (*The Bacriade or the Algiers War*, 1827), the mock-heroic epic poem by Joseph Mery and Joseph Barthelemy, refers to the giraffe, which is introduced as "a living marvel" (1827: 59), and Egyptian students, including al-Ṭahṭāwī. In the play, students become embroiled in an international plot, as they had to take the money that a Jewish Algerian merchant, Nathan Bacri, embezzled. The third chapter introduces these students in the following way:

> [E]very Turk, with full excitement,
>
> First takes a walk in the vast city.
>
> Proud of their stay, the hospitable France
>
> Caresses these heroes in a familiar manner
>
> Every day for pleasing these sons of the vizier
>
> It comes up with plays and new pleasures (1827: 44).[2]

Each student, including al-Ṭahṭāwī, is referred here as a "Turk." These lines also describe

of Paris." Since Daniel L. Newman decided to translate the title as *An Imam in Paris*, this article also uses Newman's English title when referring to the text.

2 All translations from French to English, unless otherwise indicated, are the author's.

students as the vizier's "sons," and their ethnic affiliations become subsumed under their "father's," Mehmet Ali's. Never once are these students described as "Arabs" in this chapter, but instead as "Turks" or "Muslims." The play nurtures the popular imagination that perceives the Middle East and North Africa as a homogenous Turco-Muslim bloc.

Various French intellectuals frequently substantiated the tendency to consider the Middle East and North Africa as essentially Turkish places. In his famous *Voyage en Orient* (*Voyage to the Orient*, 1849-1850), Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) recounts his affair with one of the famous dancers, Kuchuk Hanem. One of the very first things he notes is Kuchuk Hanem's non-Arab nature: "Kuchuk Hanem is a great and splendid creature—whiter than an Arab" (1991: 281). Later, Flaubert describes her as the epitome of Oriental women in his letter to Louise Colet in 1853: "For Kuchuk Hanem, ah! Put your mind at ease and at the same time rectify your ideas on the Orient….The Oriental woman is a machine, and nothing more; she makes no distinction between one man and another man" (1991: 77). While Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) acutely demonstrates how the representation of Kuchuk Hanem in Flaubert's writings contributed to generating an image of the feminine Orient in the Western imagination, this study draws attention to how Flaubert can make a seamless transition from the description of a non-Arab into sweeping generalizations about Oriental women in general. While Said notes Flaubert had an "encounter with an Egyptian courtesan" (2014: 6), Said also glosses over her non-Arab nature. Similarly, writing about Algeria, Gautier notes in *Constantinople* that "Turkish women" were "surrounded by a mystery and seclusion which offers no scope to even the vaguest desire" (1875: 188) in Algeria. In a similar vein, Gautier makes no mention of the entire Arab population in his work. His remark is an example of an Orientalist discourse that describes anyone who comes from the Orient as a "Turk."

The following sentence from Flaubert's letter to George Sand, his novelist friend, similarly employs a discourse that describes "Oriental people" basically as Turks: "I have come back [from work] as fatigued as the Turk of the giraffe" (1904: 30). "The giraffe" that Flaubert mentions in this letter was so popular during his lifetime that he does not feel a need to tell Sand that he is specifically referring to the giraffe that was sent by the Khedive Mehmet Ali to Paris. Flaubert saw this giraffe and the "Turk of the giraffe" when he was four years old. Once again, Flaubert does not mention to whom the "Turk" refers and assumes that Sand already knows him. The "Turk" here is a Sudanese, Atir, who served Drovetti, the French consul general in Egypt and private advisor to Mehmet Ali (Allin, 1998: 178). He would later become renowned as the giraffe's handler and would exhibit the giraffe to crowds every day. Flaubert describes him as "the Turk," even though Atir is not Turkish.

As various French sources described people from the Middle East and North Africa as Turks, others generated negative perceptions about Turks as the antithesis of civilizational progress. Pierre Nicholas Hamont (1805-1848), who worked for Mehmed Ali, writes about Turks in his work that praises the leadership skills of the Khedive, *Egypt under the Rule of Mehmet Ali* (*L'Égpyte sous Méhémet Ali*, 1843):

> "And what is a Turk? A conceited, insolent, pretentious, haughty, and egoist man, and an enemy of Europeans and whatever emanates from them. Excessively ignorant, he pretends to be the only skilled and capable administrator and superior to other men... He has no idea of administration, and whenever a Turk obtains control, his sole concern is the revenue that he will obtain. By nature, he is the enemy of all progress" (1843: 19).

Hamont codifies Turks as barbarians and savages that Arabs should not emulate, as he also believes that Arabs march towards civilization thanks to the French education that they receive. Hamont may not only have taught Egyptian students important hallmarks of Western civilization but also generated for these students a repertoire of stereotypes about Turks.

Daniel Newman points out that Edme-François Jomard (1777-1862), who was assigned by Mehmet Ali to supervise the studies of al-Ṭahṭāwī, did not hesitate to present Egyptians as Turks for igniting the public interest in Egyptian students: "Meanwhile Jomard's propaganda machine was running at full stream to satisfy heightened popular demand for information and gossip about these 'Turks,' the goals of the mission, their activities, progress etc" (2004: 71). As Jomard describes all students who come from Egypt as Turks, he also makes the following statement about Turks in *Coup d'œil impartial sur l'état présent de l'Égypte, comparé à sa situation antérieure* (*An Objective View of the Present State of Egypt, Compared to Its Previous State*, 1836):

> "In this case, I still think that barbarism would not be able to destroy the work of the reform and deracinate completely a tree with deep roots in the soil and already with many branches… Civilization has minted its currency on the presses of Bulaq; it would continue to mint it still, even after the Turkish crusade. It would do it with the help of Europeans.…Ottomans are decreasing in number each day; the penchant of Arabs for the sciences, their high capacity to learn military sciences, their sagacity, and their perceptiveness recapture their ancient glory" (1836: 54).

This statement generates a binary of barbarism and civilization and projects Turks as the archenemy whose conquest of Egypt is described as "the Turkish crusade" (*la croisade turque*). This statement erases the early traces of European crusader invasion of Egypt while describing Turks as akin to Christian crusaders that confined Egypt to a dormant state of apathy. However, Egypt now marches steadily towards "civilization," which is, as Jomard puts it, "so rooted" in its soil that this civilization no longer looks like a foreign transplant. He notes that publications from the Bulaq Press, for which al-Ṭahṭāwī played a key role, will bring civilization to Egypt. This paragraph never lets the reader forget that Egypt's move *towards* civilization is inevitably and fundamentally an escape *from* the Ottoman presence. Jomard had a significant impact on al-Ṭahṭāwī. *An Imam in Paris* reserves its final eulogy to Jomard himself and describes him as "an ardent friend of Egypt, both in his words and deeds, as well as in his heart" (2004: 372). Al-Ṭahṭāwī also notes that Jomard has a genuine concern for its burgeoning development in arts, crafts, and sciences (2004: 128). Because of his crucial position, Jomard could have played an important role in how al-Ṭahṭāwī conceptualized France and hence the Western civilization. This study suggests that Jomard's anti-Turkish attitude was most likely a key factor behind why al-Ṭahṭāwī wanted to emphasize discrepancies between Turks and Arabs in his travelogue.

The Turkish Image in *An Imam in Paris*

Şükran Fazlıoğlu has already demonstrated that *An Imam in Paris* generates a negative perception about Turks (2006: 191). By giving some examples from French sources, the previous section provided a historical contextualization behind the possible reason why al-Ṭahṭāwī's travelogue generated such a negative representation. This section will demonstrate that *An Imam in Paris* could have emphasized similarities between Arabs and the French to further emphasize the discrepancy between Arabs and Turks. While various French sources describe the Orient as a Turkish bloc, the Frenchmen who played a pivotal role in shaping Mehmet Ali's policies and the young Egyptian students' education in Paris, such as Jomard, described Turks as the archrival of any civilizational progress. This points out an ambivalent situation: Egyptian students

are described as Turks in French writings, while French men who educated these students also described Turkification as the antithesis of civilizational advancement, and hence as the last thing that these students would ever want. After all, the Khedive Mehmet Ali Pasha sent these students to France so that they become acquainted with and learn from the Western civilization.

The following dialogue in *An Imam in Paris* provides an important insight on al-Ṭahṭāwī's everyday experiences in Paris and tallies well with many French sources that describe Egyptian students as Turks:

> "One day, it happened that as I was walking along a street in Paris, a drunk shouted at me, 'Hey, you Turk!' and grabbed me by my clothes. I was near a confectionary shop, so I entered with him, and sat down on a chair. I then jokingly said to the proprietor of the shop, 'Would you like to buy this man for some sweets or candied nuts?' To which the owner replied, 'Here, things are not like in your country where you can dispose of the human species at your will.' My only retort to this was that I said, 'In his current state, this drunken person is not part of the human race'" (2004: 222).

This conversation might initially seem a small detail and have no significant value compared to the numerous institutions, people, and concepts that al-Ṭahṭāwī describes in *An Imam in Paris*. Yet, given that this is the *only* conversation in the entire travelogue, it probably had some impact on al-Ṭahṭāwī's mind and therefore merits more reflection.

In this seemingly trivial incident, one discerns a glimpse of how a random Frenchman on the street might think of al-Ṭahṭāwī–essentially as a Turk. It opens up the possibility that during his everyday encounters in the West, al-Ṭahṭāwī realized that he, like many other people in Egypt, was categorized as a Turk. Al-Ṭahṭāwī claims to approach the situation in a "joking" manner; however, one cannot dismiss the acerbic tone in his final retort, as he notes that the drunken man is not "part of the human race." The shopkeeper also seems quite uninformed where al-Ṭahṭāwī comes from when he uses the vague phrase "your country." Although al-Ṭahṭāwī's response toward the drunk Frenchman could seem harsh, al-Ṭahṭāwī cannot fully express his sentiments when he confronts with grand accusations and generalizations because his response is the "only retort" that he could give; he cannot express his disdain in any other way. Here, one perceives the contrast between this incident in which a Frenchman describes al-Ṭahṭāwī basically as a Turk and a foreign and many other sections in *An Imam in Paris* in which al-Ṭahṭāwī emphasizes that Arabs are similar to the French.

Although one observes in the above-quoted conversation an example that provides insight into al-Ṭahṭāwī's everyday interactions with French people, al-Ṭahṭāwī also engaged with the French culture through translating canonized French works and taking lessons from the French educated elite such as Jomard. Al-Ṭahṭāwī's translations from French could have not only introduced the French culture for his audience but also contributed to the creation of a new perspective on the Turk that could substantiate al-Ṭahṭāwī's claims. *Burhān al-bayān wa-bayān al-burhān fī istikmāl wa-ikhtilāl dawlat al-Rūmān* (1876), the Arabic translation of Montesquieu's *Considération sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence* (*Reflection on the Causes of Romans' Grandeur and Their Decline*, 1734) that al-Ṭahṭāwī supervised, constitutes an important example in this regard. In the Arabic translation, not only does Montesquieu note that Turks are the ugliest people on earth, but also indicates that the Ottoman Empire is in a state of decline: "The empire of Turks is right now exactly or almost as weak as Greeks once were" (1876: 76). By pointing out the cyclical nature of history, Montesquieu could draw analogies between Byzantine and Ottoman empires and even suggest that the Ottoman Empire, like the Byzantine Empire, could experience demise. While al-Ṭahṭāwī never explicitly wishes

the Ottoman Empire's complete disintegration, his Arabic translation of Montesquieu's work gives the impression that the Ottoman Empire is declining. Al-Ṭahṭāwī may not have written these words, but the translations he supervised can provide important clues about how his engagement with the French culture and language could have shaped his mindset.

In many parts of *An Imam in Paris*, al-Ṭahṭāwī does not praise French customs and emphasizes that Arabs have significant differences from the French. One cannot find a single definition of the term Arab in *An Imam in Paris*. For example, al-Ṭahṭāwī differentiates what he calls "Arabs of the desert" (2004: 103) from people in Egypt, Syria, and Yemen (2004: 104). At the same time, when al-Ṭahṭāwī compares "Arabs" with the French, he does not seem to refer to only "Arabs of the desert" but also to all people, including Egyptians, whose native language is Arabic. Al-Ṭahṭāwī often emphasizes that Arabs are different from the French in the domains of language and poetry:

"What in Arabic is seen as embellishment, the French sometimes perceive as weakness. For instance, to the French, double entendres are only very rarely considered a good stylistic device to use, and their authors will do so for comic effect only" (2004: 182).

Furthermore, unlike Arabic works, French writings have a lucid style (2004: 253). Arabs also differ from the French in regards to romantic love: "[T]he hearts of most people in France, whether male or female, are in thrall to the art of love. Their amorous passion is an aim in itself since they do not believe that they serve any other purpose" (2004: 219).

Although al-Ṭahṭāwī emphasizes numerous differences between Arabs and the French throughout this work, the ending includes a crucial sentence that can shift how one interprets the travelogue. Al-Ṭahṭāwī notes,

> "And so we have reached the end [of this journey], which I have abridged as much as possible. All that remains for me now is to provide a summary of this journey and the observations and ideas that I have carefully scrutinized and examined" (2004: 361).

This is a crucial statement as it foreshadows the work's finale in which al-Ṭahṭāwī would share the overarching conclusions of his travelogue. The sentence following this statement captures al-Ṭahṭāwī's final take on his journey: "I should like to say that after having investigated the morals of the French and their political system it appears to me [*ẓahara lī* (2002: 303)] that they more closely resemble the Arabs than the Turks or other races" (2004: 361). Here, the French no longer seem members of an unfamiliar civilization, as the French resemble Arabs more than any other race. Al-Ṭahṭāwī particularly accentuates the difference between Turks and Arabs as he uses the phrase "Turks and other races." Al-Ṭahṭāwī will not let the reader forget that Turks too are an integral part of "other races." In the Arabic source text, al-Ṭahṭāwī uses the verb "*ẓahara*," which means coming to light. His reflections on the French lead to a state of illumination in which he becomes aware of various bonds of affiliation between Arabs and the French.

Indeed, al-Ṭahṭāwī emphasizes throughout his work similarities between the French and Arabs. For instance, he claims,

> "It is strange to find that among their soldiers there are men whose character is similar to that of the pure Arabs in terms of their great courage... And, as with the Arabs, their war chants are mixed in with love poetry. I have indeed encountered many of their sayings, which are similar to the words used by an Arab poet addressing his loved one" (2004: 256).

Furthermore, al-Ṭahṭāwī provides examples from ancient Egypt to draw similarities between Egyptians and the French: "It is customary among the Franks to write such inscriptions, after the fashion of the ancient Egyptians and other peoples. Look at how the Egyptians built the temples and pyramids of Giza" (2004: 256). He also notes that Ibn Khaldun is known among the French as "Montesquieu of Islam" just as Montesquieu is known as the "European Ibn Khaldun" (2004: 293).

In regards to gender roles, al-Ṭahṭāwī also suggests that Arabs may not be as different from the French as what one may assume. Al-Ṭahṭāwī at first notes that French women are different from their Arab counterparts, because French women freely mingle with men. This generally culminates in debaucheries that rest outside the boundaries of acceptable morality for al-Ṭahṭāwī: "In short, this city, like all great cities of France and Europe, is filled with a great deal of immorality, heresies, and human error" (2004: 181). The differences in gender relations can easily undermine the wish to flesh out similarities between Arabs and the French. Yet, al-Ṭahṭāwī also writes in the epilogue of *An Imam in Paris*, "The issue of personal honor, which makes the French and the Arabs similar to each other, consists of the perception of the ideal of manhood, the fact of telling the truth and other qualities of [moral integrity and] perfection" (2004: 365). It is probably no coincidence that al-Ṭahṭāwī writes about gender issues after he claims that Arabs are more akin to French than to Turks, since Arabs and the French may seem incompatible due to gender roles in their communities. What seems on the surface two polarized ways of understanding gender roles, however, turns out to depend upon the same ideal of manhood. The apparent discrepancies in gender roles should not let his audience overlook the honor, the key common factor that generates the bond of affinity between the French and Arabs:

> "One should not assume that because [the French] are not jealous about their women, they do not have any honor in this regard, since it is in this area that it is most visible. Although they are devoid of jealousy, when their women misbehave, they are the most malicious of men against themselves and against those who have betrayed them with the women" (2004: 362).

Al-Ṭahṭāwī also notes that one should not assume that French and Arab women are significantly different from each other just because Arab women wear veil while the French women do not:

> "As everybody is often asked about the condition of women among the Franks, we have lifted the veil that hangs over their situation. In summary, we can again say that the confusion with regard to the chastity of women does not arise from whether they wear veil or not. Rather, it is linked to whether a woman has a good or bad education, whether she is accustomed to loving only one man rather than sharing her love among others and whether there is peace and harmony" (2004: 364).

Al-Ṭahṭāwī claims that Arabs and the French can be different in terms of appearance, especially because French women do not wear a veil. Yet, this statement suggests that French women are more similar to Arab women than what many people assume, since "the chastity of women does not arise from whether they wear veil or not."

Al-Ṭahṭāwī's claim that the French are more akin to Arabs than to Turks posits a strong contrast with the tendency among some French intellectuals to perceive all students from Egypt as Turks. Furthermore, Jomard, who played a key role in al-Ṭahṭāwī's education, insinuated that Arabs deteriorated under the Ottoman rule. Al-Ṭahṭāwī calls for reviving and reinvigorating important "Arab" traits as he encounters with people like Jomard who believed that Turks threatened the efflorescence of these traits:

> "This [the honor] is also one of the features that is found among the Arabs and is rooted in their noble character. However, these days it has waned and melted away as they have suffered the hardships of oppression and the calamities of time, and their situation has driven them to humbling themselves and begging" (2004: 365).

Arabs could find in the French almost a mirror image that could remind themselves of their foundational trait, honor, in an "oppressive" Turkish milieu that was adamant to uproot it.

Conclusion

Al-Ṭahṭāwī's *An Imam in Paris* has often been studied as a pioneering work of the Arab renaissance (*al-nahḍah*) in which al-Ṭahṭāwī encounters a Western culture that he had little familiarity with. However, al-Ṭahṭāwī sometimes emphasizes similarities between Arabs and the French as he also underlines discrepancies between Arabs and Turks in his travelogue. This study has undermined the tendency to study *An Imam in Paris* as an encounter "between the two opposite worlds" of East and West. Given the historical context in which many French authors describe al-Ṭahṭāwī and other Egyptian students as Turks, al-Ṭahṭāwī may have likely wanted to emphasize that Arabs and Turks are different, and that Arabs can be more similar to the French than what is commonly assumed.

This article has demonstrated that al-Ṭahṭāwī may make such claims also because many French sources have described Turks as the archenemy of any progress as these sources also describe anyone who comes from Egypt as Turks. By focusing on sections from *An Imam in Paris* that received little attention, such as its epilogue, this study has complicated the "West vs. Rest" paradigm that has shaped much of the scholarship on travel writings. To understand the representations of the West in Arabic writings, one also needs to examine the representation of Turks in these works. These works use the image of the Turk to ultimately express their vision of Westernization and modernization.

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