

SCRIPT AND IDENTITY: ARAB INTELLECTUAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
TURKISH ALPHABET REFORM

by

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Submitted to the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Sabancı University  
Spring 2013

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DATE OF APPROVAL: 11.06.2013

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Keywords: Turkish alphabet reform, Arabic, Ottoman, Turkish-Arab relations

The passage of Turkey's landmark 1928 alphabet law, which replaced the Arabic-based Ottoman script with a Latin-based alphabet for writing Turkish, has been widely studied in terms of modernization and its implications for Turkish identity. However, there is a lack of scholarship regarding the significance of the Turkish script reform for Arab audiences. This thesis contributes to addressing the dearth in the literature by examining Arab intellectual perspectives on the Turkish script reform using influential Arabic sources contemporaneous with Turkey's passage of the alphabet law. The thesis makes two main assertions: first, that Arab observers at the time were deeply concerned with and closely followed developments on Turkey's alphabet change; and second, that the Turkish alphabet reform served as a framework within which these observers evaluated and renegotiated their own identities, and in the process, connected with or distanced themselves and their communities from Turkey. Highlighting the diverse ways in which Arab intellectuals understood the Turkish reform and discussed its pertinence to modernization in their own societies, this study examines religion-based approaches, as well as Arab and Egyptian nationalist and socialist perspectives. These works are valuable sites for exploring the Arab-Turkish relationship within the context of language, which contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the various components of this relationship, and how it has been shaped and reshaped over time.

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ÖZET

Arap harfli Osmanlıca yazının Latin harfli Türkçe'ye çevrilmesini öngören ve Türkiye'de bir dönüm noktası olan 1928 Harf Devrimi, modernizasyon ve bunun Türk kimliğine etkisi bağlamında çokça çalışılmıştır. Buna karşın, Türk Harf Devrimi'nin Araplar açısından önemi üzerine akademik çalışma eksikliği bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Türk Harf Kanunu'nun geçtiği tarihsel dönemdeki önemli Arap kaynaklarını kullanarak Arap entelektüellerin harf devrimine karşı bakış açılarını incelemeyi ve böylelikle literatürdeki boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada iki temel sav öne sürülmektedir. Çalışmanın birinci savı, Arap gözlemcilerin Türkiye'deki alfabe değişiminden ötürü derin bir kaygı duyduğu ve konuyla yakından ilgilendiği yönündedir. Çalışmada öne sürülen ikinci sav ise Türk Harf Devriminin, Arapların kendi kimliklerini değerlendirip yeniden tartışmaya açtıkları ve bu süreçte Türkiye'ye yakınlaştıkları veya uzaklaştıkları bir düşünsel çerçeve görevi gördüğüdür. Arap entelektüellerin Türk harf devrimini nasıl anladıkları ve bu devrimin modernleşme ile ilişkisini kendi toplumlarında nasıl tartıştıkları ile ilgili farklılıkları ön plana çıkaran bu çalışma, dine dayalı yaklaşımlar ile Arap ve Mısırlı milliyetçi ve sosyalist yaklaşımları ele almaktadır. Söz konusu çalışmalar, çeşitli bileşenler içeren Türk-Arap ilişkilerine daha incelikli bir bakışı açısı sunan dil bağlamından bakarak bu ilişkileri keşfetmek ve yine bu ilişkilerin zamanla yeniden ve nasıl şekillendiğini anlamak açısından çok değerlidir.

*For my parents, whose love and prayers have carried me this far,  
and for Mus'ab, my constant source of comfort, support, and laughter.*

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### **Note on Translation, Transliteration, and Designations**

All the translations in this thesis are by the author unless otherwise indicated. Specialized Arabic terminology is usually defined in the text, or explained with a simple definition provided in the footnotes. Transliteration generally follows the system employed by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. All Arabic or Turkish words are italicized and fully transliterated with diacritical marks, except for words which are widely used in English, such as Qur'an or shari'a. Diacritics are not preserved in personal names, place names, names of political parties and organizations, and titles of books and articles except for *'ayn* and hamza.

The script used for writing Ottoman is referred to in this thesis as an Arabic script, rather than as Arabo-Persian, although it should be noted that the script contains several additional letters used in Persian which are not found in Arabic. Furthermore, because of the varying forms Latin has taken over time, "Roman" is often preferred by researchers as the general designation for the script used in modern Turkish. However, the script is referred to here using the more common "Latin" or "Latin-based alphabet," as these are the terms the Arabic texts presented in this thesis employ.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to examine contemporary Arab perspectives on the Kemalist Turkish script reform, by looking at Arabic sources from around the same time period as, and shortly after, the passage of the 1928 alphabet law which banned the use of the Arabic-based Ottoman script and mandated the use of a Latin alphabet. The idea for this study emerged from a discussion with one of my Turkish language instructors, Dr. Murat Cankara, who emphasized to me the usefulness of focusing on language and script as important aspects of Arab-Turkish relations. My broader interest in these groups' relationships and perceptions of each other was initially sparked by several encounters I experienced in Istanbul during an undergraduate study abroad trip to Turkey in 2007, where it became apparent to me that for many Turks of various backgrounds, the image of Arabs is generally associated with an array of negative connotations, most notably the idea that the Arabs betrayed the Ottomans and 'stabbed them in the back.'<sup>1</sup> Since then, my awareness has only become more acute that peoples who have historically been very interconnected often rely on simplistic binaries, common stereotypes, and superficial reductions of the 'Other' in their understandings of one another. For example, discussions in Jordan with fellow students and colleagues, taxi drivers, friends, and relatives on Turkey inevitably ended up being framed within a narrative of brutal Ottoman colonialism in Arab lands, while more recently, I have found that my identifying as a Palestinian in Turkey is almost always met with significantly more positive reactions than the designation of 'Arab,' as the term Palestinian conjures up feelings of empathy and solidarity with Palestinians suffering under Israeli occupation.

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<sup>1</sup> David Kushner, "Turkish-Syrian Relations: An Update," in *Modern Syria: From Ottoman Rule to Pivotal Role in the Middle East*, ed. Moshe Ma'oz et al. (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), 228.

The Turkish-Arab relationship, broadly defined, has increasingly become the subject of scholarly interest as well as popular discussion. Recent political developments, notably the Justice and Development Party's rise to power in Turkey in 2002 and the 'neo-Ottomanist' style doctrine it advocates, called the "Strategic Depth" policy, have contributed to a period of greater Turkish-Arab connectedness, as Turkey assertively proclaims its determination more than ever to look eastward.<sup>2</sup> Critical works on a range of areas such as Ottoman Orientalism, Turkification measures in the Ottoman Arab provinces, Arab perceptions of Mustafa Kemal's military successes and his abolition of the caliphate, Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, and Turkish-Arab economic relations together offer a nuanced perspective on the various components of this relationship, and how it has been shaped and reshaped over time.<sup>3</sup>

However, there is a dearth in the literature with regards to the role language plays in the formation and expression of Turkish and Arab mutual perceptions, and in the shaping of historically interconnected identities that continue to be increasingly linked today. With

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<sup>2</sup> See Kılıç Buğra Kanat, "AK Party's Foreign Policy: Is Turkey Turning Away From the West?" *Insight Turkey* 12:1 (2010): 205-225; and Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42:6 (2006): 945-964.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of such work include Ussama Makdisi, "Rethinking Ottoman Imperialism: Modernity, Violence and the Cultural Logic of Ottoman Reform," in *The Empire and the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp and Stefan Weber (Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2002); Selim Deringil, "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45:2 (2003): 311-342; Rifaat Abou-el-Haj, "The Social Uses of the Past: Recent Arab Historiography of Ottoman Rule," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14 (1982): 185-201; Sabri Sayari, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990's," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26:3 (1997): pp. 44-55; Dan Tschirgi, "Turkey and the Arab World in the New Millennium," in *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics*, ed. Tareq Y. Ismael and Mustafa Aydın (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 103-120; Basheer Nafi, "The Arabs and Modern Turkey: A Century of Changing Perceptions," *Insight Turkey* 11:1 (2009): 63-82; Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Süleyman Elik, "Turkey's Growing Relations with Iran and Arab Middle East," *Turkish Studies* 12:4 (2011): 643-662; Bülent Aras, "Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship," *Middle East Policy* 12:4 (2005): 89-97; Pamela Ann Smith, "Turkey: the New Economic Power in MENA?" *Middle East* 427 (2011): 48-49; Mahmut B. Aykan, "The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy from the 1950's to the 1990's," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25:1 (1993): 91-110; O. Bengio and G. Özcan, "Old Grievances, New Fears: Arab Perceptions of Turkey and its Alignment with Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37:2 (2001): 50-92; Lemi Baruh and Mihaela Popescu, "Communicating Turkish-Islamic Identity in the Aftermath of the Gaza Flotilla Raid: Who is the "Us" in "Us" versus "Them"?" *New Perspectives on Turkey* 45 (2011): 75-99; Alexandra Buccianti, "Turkish Soap Operas in the Arab World: Social Liberation or Cultural Alienation?" *Arab Media and Society* 10 (2010), [http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20100330130359\\_Buccianti\\_-\\_for\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20100330130359_Buccianti_-_for_PDF.pdf); Christa Salamandra, "The Muhammad Effect: Media Panic, Melodrama, and the Arab Female Gaze," *Anthropological Quarterly* 85:1 (2012): 45-77.

this thesis, I seek to contribute to the ongoing scholarly work on Turkish-Arab relations by examining contemporary Arabic sources on the Turkish alphabet change. Through an exploration of the various ways in which the Turkish script reform was understood and grappled with by Arabs at the time, my aim is to emphasize two main assertions: first, that Arab observers at the time were deeply concerned with and closely followed developments on the alphabet change in Turkey; and second, that the Turkish alphabet reform served as a framework within which these observers evaluated and renegotiated their own identities, and in the process, connected with or distanced themselves and their communities from Turkey.

Recognizing the relationship linking these groups is important to understanding why the developments surrounding the alphabet reform in Turkey were of significance to Arab audiences across the spectrum of religion and ideology. While there were naturally local events taking place in various parts of the Arab world at the time that occupied the minds of journalists, scholars, and average citizens, this did not take away from the fact that a large segment of Arab society had until only recently been joined together with Turks as Ottoman subjects. Arab nationalists struggled to produce programs of action as revolts against European colonialism in the region spread, Egyptian independence had been newly declared with the establishment of the Kingdom of Egypt in the early 1920s, and the question of the governorate of Alexandretta was a thorny issue for Arabs in Syria and remains so today. However, these Arab peoples were still very much connected to the legacy of the empire, the continuation of which they saw in the developments of the Turkish republic's early years. Particularly for many Muslim Arabs, the Ottoman state had been of great symbolic importance, representing Islamic power first as an empire and caliphate, and then in the form of a modern state headed by a Muslim leader who had triumphed in the face of European colonialism. It is reasonable to conclude that this connection perpetuated their interest in the state's affairs well after it was clear that the Kemalist regime was determined to create a secular system of governance.

Another reason for Arab invested concern in the Turkish alphabet reform has to do with the centrality of the Arabic language and its script for Arabs, both Muslim and

otherwise. Although the significance of the Arabic language as a unifying mechanism for all Arabs has been exaggerated and exploited in Arab nationalist rhetoric, it nonetheless holds true that Arabic occupies a unique position of value to many Muslim Arabs due to its religious standing as the language of the Qur'an. It comes as no surprise then that such blatant efforts by the Kemalist regime to distance its society from the Arabic script, as well as to purge the Turkish language from Arabic and Persian loanwords, would be interpreted by many religiously-inclined Muslims around the world as an explicit attack on Islam, and one that was likely to spread to other Muslim countries. As such, Muslim Arab engagement with and reactions to the Turkish script reform events were often driven by genuine fear for the state of their religion.

As for Arab nationalists who were less concerned with Islam, commentary on the events in Turkey varied in focus. The Turkish script changes provided inspiration for Arab and Orientalist European proposals on the feasibility of implementing similar changes in the Arab world. On the one hand, proponents of the idea that the Arabic alphabet was hindering progress in the Arab world heralded the Turkish example as a successful model for modernizing Arab nations to follow. On the other hand, proposals on Latinizing the Arabic script were rejected by some on the grounds that they were yet another mechanism of European colonialism by which to attack the Arabic language, and divide and weaken the Arabs.

Arabic writings on the Turkish alphabet reform are a valuable source for exploring how their authors tackled the rapid changes taking place in the world around them, as great power dynamics shifted and the realization that their societies lagged behind Europe in development and modernization became increasingly apparent. As “the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I pushed Arabs to redefine themselves outside of the Ottoman parameters and to articulate post-Ottoman visions for themselves,”<sup>4</sup> Arab debates on language and script reforms took on profound meaning as arenas for renegotiating identity. The texts presented here engage with the Turkish example from varying angles, understanding its significance and implications for the

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth S. Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 19.

authors' communities differently. In doing so, they all seek to firmly reassert value within the different groups their authors identify with.

These texts also provide us with important insight into what Trix calls the authors' "scriptal environments,"<sup>5</sup> or their attitudes toward scripts in their particular social spaces. Echoed throughout all of the texts is the notion that language, with script as its visible expression, defines a civilization and clearly marks its members' position among other groups as modern or traditional, advanced or backward, powerful or weak, religious or secular. One text, for example, maintains that the use of the Arabic script in Syria illustrates the Syrian people's insistence on defining themselves first and foremost as Arab, connected to their Arab brethren in other countries. In others, a switch to a Latin-based alphabet in Egypt would serve to distinguish Egypt as a modern, developed nation. They all illustrate one of Suleiman's arguments about the symbolic function of written language in general and of the Arabic script in particular:

[T]he symbolic function of language is not restricted to its verbal dimension alone; it also extends to its written manifestation. This is particularly true of Arabic, whose script plays an important role as a boundary marker, particularly vis-a-vis the Latin and Cyrillic scripts which have gained at its expense by the "defection" to these scripts of Turkish, Malay and a host of other languages in Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa ... Yet, in spite of these defections, the Arabic script still functions like Chinese characters to create a community out of signs not sounds, not just with respect to the Islamic culture at whose centre the Qur'an stands, but also in the context of the civic and cultural conceptualizations of the nation in the Arabic-speaking countries.<sup>6</sup>

Although the writers of the texts examined in this thesis took different positions on the Turkish alphabet reform, all agreed that script is of central importance in constructing and expressing individual identities, as well as conveying meaning and value in regards to group-level identity.

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<sup>5</sup> Frances Trix, "The Stamboul Alphabet Of Shemseddin Sami Bey: Precursor To Turkish Script Reform," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 255.

<sup>6</sup> Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 33.

## 1.1. Sources

A number of considerations influenced the selection of sources for examination in this study. First, with the aim of researching texts that provided as contemporary or fresh a perspective as possible on the issue, I limited sources to those published within a time frame of roughly fifteen years from the date of the Turkish alphabet reform law. The texts presented here range from the late 1920s to the early 40s, including one text published after Mustafa Kemal's lifetime.

Second, in researching sources that had potential for valuable study in this thesis, I attempted to survey a number of authors whose various religious, social, and ideological backgrounds would be representative of the diversity of trends in contemporary Arab intellectual thought around the time of the Turkish alphabet reform. The authors selected here include men who are Muslim and Christian, religiously-inclined and secular in their approaches, and hailing from two major Arab countries, Syria and Egypt. A lack of sources authored by women at the time on the subject of language reform narrowed the selection to male writers. The fact that a majority of these texts were published in Cairo does not limit the scope of perspectives presented. During Ottoman times, Cairo was a birthplace and center for proliferation of new intellectual ideas and activities, like proto-nationalist movements. This, as Kassab explains, was due to the margin of freedom it enjoyed compared to other parts of the Ottoman empire where state censorship was more strict.<sup>7</sup>

Third, the texts examined here were authored by recognized intellectuals whose thoughts and writings developed within the context of an Arab awakening, and had far-reaching influence across the Arab world. Muhammad Rashid Rida's *al-Manar al-Islami*, for example, is a primary publication of Islamist modernist reform ideology, while Salama Musa's works on script reform within his broader writings on

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<sup>7</sup> Kassab, 19.

modernization, socialism, and Egyptian nationalism are an important representation of Christian Arab thinkers' protests against religious exclusiveness.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, practical considerations, including the accessibility of sources and the necessity to limit the scope of this thesis, served to constrain the final selection chosen for analysis here. There are numerous Arabic sources that touch on the Turkish alphabet reform available to researchers. This study is an effort to address a largely unexplored but intriguing facet of Arab-Turkish relations and these groups' mutual perceptions, and aims to contribute to the broader scholarly work in this important area.

The chapters of this thesis follow a general thematic grouping of the texts, a design which simultaneously arranges the texts in chronological order. Chapter 2 provides a brief review of the literature on language, scripts, and identity, and on the history of alphabet reforms in the Ottoman empire and Turkey. Chapter 3 examines articles published in various issues of the famous Islamic reform journal, *al-Manar al-Islami*, by three different authors, Rashid Rida, 'Abd al-Hamid al-Rafi'i, and Shakib Arslan. Framing the Turkish script reform as an explicit attack on Islam, these articles share a common opposition to the alphabet change law in Turkey, and fear the danger of the possible spread of similar anti-Islamic sentiments to other segments of the greater Muslim community, or *umma*. For these authors, their connection to Arabic stems from their religious conviction regarding Arabic's Islamic value as the language in which the word of God was revealed. Like the texts explored in the other chapters of this thesis, the writings from *al-Manar* tackle the Turkish alphabet reform within the broader context of modernization and development, as their authors were deeply aware that the Muslim *umma* lagged significantly behind the West in scientific and industrial progress. The cause for this, as they saw it, was Muslims' deviation from true Islam; returning to Islam was the solution for bringing Muslims to the forefront, rather than relying on westernization efforts such as Latinizing the Arabic alphabet.

Chapter 4 looks at an article from 1930 published in the official journal of the influential Arabic Language Academy of Damascus by a member of the Academy, Faris

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<sup>8</sup> Majid Khadduri, *Political Trends in the Arab World: The Role of Ideas and Ideals in Politics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 92.

al-Khuri. His Arab nationalist approach rejects Orientalist European proposals to reform the Arabic script in Syria following the successful Turkish example. Within the context of modernization, al-Khuri tackles the concern of typing and printing the Arabic alphabet, and the challenges that it posed. Although he admits that the Arabic script in its form at the time was not ideal for printing, he maintained that a few simple adjustments to the letter forms and diacritical marks would achieve for the Arabic script a perfection in its typed form to match the perfection of all other aspects of the language. In rejecting proposals to reform Arabic along the lines of the Turkish model, al-Khuri draws on a historical legacy that reaches back farther than Islam to argue that Arabic is an inherently superior language to all others, laying out a series of arguments meant to prove the language's distinguished linguistic qualities. Making no mention of Arabic's religious significance, he emphasizes the language's importance as a unifier of all Arab nations, and refutes a need for the kind of script change Turkey underwent.

Chapter 5 explores two books by Egyptian authors, Muhammad Muhammad Tawfiq and Salama Musa. Tawfiq's book is a biography of Mustafa Kemal from 1936, considered even today to be a prime Arabic biographical source on the life of Turkey's first president, while Musa's book from 1945 examines Arabic's place within modern rhetoric. Both authors create a fundamental link between a society's written language and its ability to fully modernize and achieve scientific and industrial development like that of the West. Tawfiq's focus is on his conviction that Latinizing the Turkish alphabet was a watershed event which paved the way for the implementation of other important modernizing reforms. Musa pinpoints Arabic and its then current script as the major cause for the overall backwardness of Egyptian society, calling for a complete reform and Latinization of the alphabet. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by bringing together the main observations from the various chapters, and putting forth suggestions for possible future research ideas.

One of the goals of this thesis has been to include translations of large sections of the original texts wherever possible. Because full English versions of the works are not currently available, the aim is to provide readers with a glimpse into the original writings to allow them a deeper engagement with the material. This thesis is by no



means a search for an absolute in terms of an Arab perspective on the Turkish alphabet reform; rather, it seeks to provide a comparative examination and exploration of intersections, diversities, and anxieties in these writings. Examined together, they give us a more nuanced understanding of the nature of Arab debate and perspectives on Turkish developments which the authors deemed pertinent to a reevaluation of their own lives and identities, as well as those of their larger communities and Turkey itself.

## 2. LANGUAGE, SCRIPTS, AND IDENTITY: SITUATING THE TURKISH ALPHABET REFORM HISTORICALLY

### 2.1. Why Examine Scripts?

The subject of Turkish language reform has been dealt with extensively in recent scholarship. However, a focus on the Turkish alphabet change from an Arabic to a Latin script and its consequences beyond Turkish society has been relatively unexplored. As such, interesting, important insights into relationships between Turks, Arabs, and other peoples with strong attachments to the Arabic script, at a critical time in their shared history, have been missing.

Language, and by extension, its script, is a crucial intersection of socio-political processes and identity. Interest in the relationship between language and identity has become increasingly prominent since the early 1980s, with the production of such seminal works as John Gumperz's 1982 book *Language and Social Identity*, the 1985 *Acts of Identity*, authored by Robert Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller, and John Edwards' *Language, Society and Identity*, also from 1985. While scholars employ a plethora of definitions for the notion of identity, in the simplest of terms, "identity is at the heart of the person, and the group, and the connective tissue that links them."<sup>9</sup> Identity, as the characteristics that belong to us and the way we think about ourselves, encompasses a paradox of both sameness and difference: on the one hand, we are identical with ourselves and others, sharing common attributes, but on the other, we are unique, or different, from others.<sup>10</sup> Identities are multifaceted, inevitably shifting, and

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<sup>9</sup> John Edwards, *Language and Identity: An Introduction*, Key Topics in Sociolinguistics Series, ed. Rajend Mesthrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 2.

can at once be varying and contradictory, stretching across the individual and group levels.

What is important for this thesis is that identity is connected to language in a way that is fundamental to our experience of being human.<sup>11</sup> Joseph explains that “our very sense of who we are, where we belong and why, and how we relate to those around us, all have language at their centre.”<sup>12</sup> Language provides a way to form communities; it binds members of these communities together, and allows individuals to display their value as members of their communities to others.<sup>13</sup> Language has the power to make and unmake groups,<sup>14</sup> and historically has been a crucial element in the process of constructing and reproducing national identities. Joseph presents the example of the British Isles in explaining how national languages are often designed as part of the ideological process of constructing nationalism:

To take the example of the British Isles (a term which is itself offensive to Irish nationalists but for which no alternative has been established), for centuries their linguistic pattern was a patchwork of local dialects, Germanic or Celtic in origin. Only in modern times did individuals motivated by nationalistic ambitions of various sorts set about to establish ‘languages’ for the nations of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as for Cornwall and other smaller regions (which often constitute ‘nations’ in the eyes of their more fervent partisans).<sup>15</sup>

The way in which language is intertwined with individual and group identities in the context of constructing national identity is especially pertinent with respect to linguistic engineering under the Kemalist regime and how it fit within a larger agenda of building a Turkish national identity. Linguistic engineering is defined here as a deliberate attempt to modify the linguistic behavior of a particular community to achieve a particular aim, and in the Turkish case, language was intentionally manipulated to help create a sense of 'groupness,' or shared characteristics, that bound people together at a level deeper than ethnicity. As Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz argue, “social identity [is]...in large part

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<sup>11</sup> Carmen Llamas and Dominic Watt, introduction to *Language and Identities*, ed. Carmen Llamas and Dominic Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>12</sup> John E. Joseph, “Identity,” in Llamas and Watt, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Louis Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*, trans. James Grieve (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 363.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 221.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph, 94.

established and maintained through language,”<sup>16</sup> and this has certainly not been unique to Turkey.<sup>17</sup> Cooper provides the example of the French Academy as a regulatory body established early on to purify French and determine its grammar, spelling, and literature.<sup>18</sup> In Malaysia, a strict national language policy was implemented in the late 1960s in an effort to improve national cohesion and upgrade the status of the Malay language.<sup>19</sup> Language planning in China sought a nationally recognized and standardized modern spoken language, and a simplified written style to increase the spread of literacy.<sup>20</sup> However, as Geoffrey Lewis notes, the Kemalist campaign in Turkey is distinguished from other cases because it was unparalleled both in its effectiveness and the length of time for which it was sustained.<sup>21</sup>

Although the subject of Turkish language reform in general has been dealt with extensively in recent scholarship, a particular focus on the alphabet change and its consequences not only for Turks, but for other peoples with strong attachments to the Arabic script, has been relatively unexplored. Scripts, as the written expression of language, are especially important to examine, for as Diringer puts it, “writing has been the foundation for the development of [man’s] consciousness and his intellect, his comprehension of himself and the world about him, and in the very widest sense possible, of his critical spirit – indeed, of all that we today regard as his unique heritage and his *raison d’être*.”<sup>22</sup> The development of writing entailed that a far greater amount of information could be systematically recorded than could be memorized, and allowed for the widespread dissemination of knowledge as ideas could be preserved and communicated much more broadly.

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<sup>16</sup> John J. Gumperz and Jenny Cook-Gumperz, “Introduction: Language and the Communication of Social Identity,” in *Language and Social Identity*, Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics 2, ed. John J. Gumperz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 7.

<sup>17</sup> For examples, see case studies in Robert B. Kaplan and Richard B. Baldauf Jr., *Language Planning: From Practice to Theory* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Robert L. Cooper, *Language Planning and Social Change* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989), 3-11.

<sup>19</sup> Kaplan and Baldauf, 196-197.

<sup>20</sup> A detailed history can be found in Ping Chen, *Modern Chinese: History and Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>22</sup> David Diringer, *Writing*, Ancient Peoples and Places 25 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), 19.

Within studies of linguistics for much of the twentieth century, writing was long ignored in favor of a focus on speech as “real” language. Sampson gives several reasons for this, arguing that the emphasis of twentieth century linguists on spoken language was a reaction to older traditions of language study which focused on writing in evaluating 'good' and 'bad' linguistic usages. Additionally, perceiving spoken language as, opposed to writing, as 'natural' stems from a biological standpoint, which views speech as the main characteristic distinguishing humans from other species.<sup>23</sup> Since humans have been speaking much longer than they have been writing, and because spoken language precedes reading and writing as the first form of language individuals in literate communities learn, writing was long perceived as a cultural rather than a biological phenomenon, as mere technology rather than an essential part of human nature.<sup>24</sup> As such, the notion that “speech is central and writing peripheral” long dominated the scholarship on language.<sup>25</sup>

The intricate connection of language, and by extension, its script, with notions of identity is particularly strong in the case of Arabic. The unifying role of the Arabic script reached and continues to reach well beyond speakers of the Arabic language. Arabic and the way it is written have a central importance to Islam as a common language uniting a community of believers in daily worship and social interactions. The language of the Qur'an set the standard for a unified literary language in contrast to the various dialects of Arabia. Regardless of their mother tongues, Muslims of diverse backgrounds memorize and recite the Qur'an, as well as various supplications and prophetic traditions, in Arabic. The Qur'an itself continuously re-affirms its attribute of having been revealed in Arabic: “Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an that you might understand;” “this is a confirming Book in an Arabic tongue to warn those who have wronged and as good tidings to the doers of good;” “[i]n a clear, Arabic language.”<sup>26</sup> The style of the Qur'an's language is often pointed to as unparalleled, with its composition that is neither verse nor free-form, and its exquisite figures of speech

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<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Sampson, *Writing Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 11-13.

<sup>24</sup> Florian Coulmas, *Writing Systems: An Introduction to Their Linguistic Analysis*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Sampson, 13.

<sup>26</sup> The Qur'an, trans. *Sahih International* (Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Publishing House: 1997), 12:2; 46:12; 26:195.

and rhetorical devices. The Qur'an challenges anyone to produce a comparable work: "Say, "If mankind and the jinn gathered in order to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like of it ..."<sup>27</sup>

The Arabic script represents the written expression of words which are believed by Muslims to have been revealed to humanity directly from God, and acts as a means of transmitting and spreading these words. As Bernard Lewis puts it, "[f]or the believer, the text of the Koran – including the script in which it is written – is uncreated, eternal, and divine."<sup>28</sup> The script is used to decorate mosques, with calligraphic compositions of the names of God, or verses from the Qur'an. The link between writing and religion is close in Islam as it is in many other societies, with script acting as a clear indicator of one's religious affiliations. Bhatia illustrates the connection between religious identity and script with the example of the Punjabi language, which is often written by Sikh Punjabis in the Gurmukhi script, by Hindu Punjabis in the Devanagiri script, and by Muslim Punjabis in the Arabic-based Shahmukhi script.<sup>29</sup> The influence of Christianity among the people of Malta renders Maltese a particularly interesting example of an Arabic-based language written in a Latin alphabet.<sup>30</sup> Lewis further emphasizes the significance of scripts for religion using the example of the Ottoman world:

The language of the South Slavs is written in Latin letters by the Catholic Croats, in Cyrillic by the orthodox Serbs. In Syria the common Arabic language has been written in Arabic script by Muslims, in Syriac by Christians, in Hebrew script by Jews. Greek-speaking Muslims in Crete wrote Greek in Arabic letters, while Turkish-speaking Christians in Anatolia wrote Turkish in Greek or Armenian letters, according to their Church. Not language, but script was the visible and outward sign distinguishing Muslim from unbeliever.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 17:88.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, second ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 425.

<sup>29</sup> Tej K. Bhatia, "Major Regional Languages," in *Language in South Asia*, ed. Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, and S.N. Sridhar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 128.

<sup>30</sup> See H. Russell Bernard, "Languages and Scripts in Contact: Historical Perspectives," in *Literacy: An International Handbook*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, ed. by Daniel A. Wagner, Richard L. Venezky, and Brian V. Street (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 23; Manwel Mifsud, *Loan Verbs in Maltese: A Descriptive and Comparative Study* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 28-31. See also Karla Mallette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean: Toward a New Philology and a Counter-Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> B. Lewis, 427.

The added level of meaning found in Muslims' attachment to Arabic and its script due to the language's religious significance makes an examination of Arab perspectives on the Turkish alphabet change particularly interesting, as people's reactions and opinions could be quite charged. However, it is important to note that a belief in Arabic and its script's value does not always draw on religious significance as a source for legitimacy. Arab reactions, positive and negative, to abandoning the Arabic script for a Latin alphabet were often not connected to Arabic's religious significance to the Muslim world. As will be explored in the texts in the following chapters, opposition to adopting a Latin script for Arabic has also been framed within an argument positing Arabic's rich historical legacy, reaching back to pre-Islamic Arab society.

Because this thesis refers to Arabic, the question might arise as to whether there is a single 'Arabic' that all Arabs have a similar attachment to. In the introduction to his book on language and identity in Lebanon, Salameh argues against the notion that an 'Arabic language' can refer to a single speech form belonging to a uniform cultural mass. He critiques scholarship on the Middle East that is “too often beholden to the biases and orthodoxies of Arabism and Arab nationalism,”<sup>32</sup> and argues that there is little connecting most Arabs and Muslims to a language that he claims is both arcane and repressive, “alien and incomprehensible to more than one-half of the 300 million presumptive members of the 'Arab nation' and the 'Arab world,’” and not natively spoken nor used as the medium of daily spontaneous human interaction.<sup>33</sup> According to Salameh, the relationship between Arabic and Arabs is not a natural one, one of a “living” language emanating “from living minds by way of a lively dynamic garrulous mouth,” but a relationship of blind commitment to a language that “demands undivided submission to its divine autarchy.”<sup>34</sup>

While this thesis does not seek to fall into the trap that Salameh criticizes, its purpose is also not to define who the Arabs are, what Arabic is, or how natural the relationship between them is. It does, however, assume a basic belief in the validity of emotions and

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<sup>32</sup> Franck Salameh, *Language, Memory, and Identity in the Middle East: The Case for Lebanon* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), xix.

<sup>33</sup> Salameh, xviii.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, xxii

opinions expressed by the authors of the texts examined here who identified as Arabs and wrote in Arabic. Arabic does not carry the same meaning and value for every Middle Easterner or Arabic speaker. The goal of this thesis is to explore what the language and its written expression mean to those who *do* express an attachment to it. The diverse perspectives presented in this study, put forth by authors of varying religious and cultural backgrounds, all center around the idea that Arabic was a fundamental element shaping their lives and their understandings of who they were.

## 2.2. The Kemalist Reforms

The Turkish language was not always written in the Arabic script. Early Orkhon inscriptions in a runiform script, which Findley explains was ultimately derived from Aramaic, have been found and dated back to the eighth century,<sup>35</sup> while the Uyghur alphabet was used later on across Central Asia.<sup>36</sup> The Arabic script was not adopted for writing Turkish until Turkic peoples converted to Islam around the tenth century, such as in the case of the Seljuks and later, the Ottomans. Debates about the problematic nature of the Arabic script for representing Turkish, along with concrete efforts at script reform, began long before Mustafa Kemal's initiatives in the 1920s. The Arabic script was perceived to be ill-suited for conveying many sounds and forms of Turkish, and in Ottoman Turkish, the gap between spelling and pronunciation was immense. Private individuals and groups during Ottoman times made various attempts at both modifying the Arabic script that was already in use for Ottoman, as well as considering an entirely new Latin-based script. Berkes locates the beginning of a shift to focusing on script reform within the modernizing period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Tanzimat, as interest in disseminating the Ottoman language through literacy increased:

[T]he language problem as an important object of reform in the drive for modernization and secularization did not seem solved as long as it was taken merely as a matter of cultivating Ottoman. The experiences of the new school teaching and of the press demonstrated the negative effects

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<sup>35</sup> Carter Vaughn Findley, *The Turks in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 48.

<sup>36</sup> Marcel Erdal, *A Grammar of Old Turkic* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 7.



of the enormous gap existing between the literate language of the elite and the Turkish language of the common people. As the difference between the two was believed to be only a difference between literacy and illiteracy, the necessity of facilitating the dissemination of the Ottoman [sic] through literacy began to appear the real crux of the language problem. Thus interest shifted from language to script – to the means of its dissemination through reading and writing.<sup>37</sup>

Mehmed Tahir Münif Pasha, founder of the Ottoman Scientific Society, believed the Arabic script to be a major obstacle to education and the spread of literacy in the empire, and called for systematic reform. In 1862, he gave a speech to the Society arguing that Turkish words written in the Arabic script could be pronounced multiple ways, leading to confusion and difficulties in comprehension. The lack of accurate representation of Turkish vowels, as well as the problematic letter *kef*, which could stand for four different sound possibilities, were two of the major concerns with regards to using the Arabic script which Münif Pasha tried to illustrate. As 'European writing' did not present such problems, the Pasha believed that more people could more easily become literate with a script change. He opted for spacing letters rather than joining them, using vowels placed between the letters on the same line instead of above or below it, and acknowledged that a trial period would be necessary with limited publications in the new script before the general public would fully accept it.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, in the 1850s, Azeri author and playwright Mirza Feth-'Ali Ahundzade was already working on a series of reforms to the Arabic script to more adequately represent Turkish vowels. By 1863, he presented a proposal in Istanbul with his modifications that was eventually reviewed by the Ottoman Scientific Society, and which argued that the existing script was causing illiteracy. He believed that the script problem was not a religious issue, and that there should be no religious-based opposition to implementing changes. His reformed script offered new symbols set between letters to act as connective diacritical marks instead of the traditional dots and diacritics that were placed above or below the line. He suggested that his script be used alongside the

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<sup>37</sup> Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 195.

<sup>38</sup> Nergis Ertürk, *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 40.

existing one during a period of transition.<sup>39</sup> Although he was well-received, the majority opinion was that his proposal would be difficult to implement and would end up disconnecting people from ancient Islamic works.<sup>40</sup>

Shemseddin Sami Bey, or Sami Frashëri, an Ottoman author and lexicographer of Albanian origin, turned to Latin in formulating a new alphabet for writing his native Albanian.<sup>41</sup> Also, in his well-known *Kamus-i Turki*, he relied on various diacritical marks above the Arabic letter *wāw* to differentiate between the Turkish vowels o, ö, u, and ü.<sup>42</sup> From 1913 onwards, Enver Pasha experimented with a modified Arabic script that was supposed to be better suited to adopting German military terms and simpler for use in military telegraphs. Known as the *huruf-u munfasıla*, or 'disjointed letters,' the script relied on the use of only the final forms of letters, with different forms of *alif*, *wāw*, and *yā* written on the line representing vowels.<sup>43</sup> The result was impractical and the scheme was eventually abandoned. Around this time, several Young Turk authors like Hüseyin Cahit, Abdullah Cevdet, and Celal Nuri were openly arguing that something more than a simple reform of the existing script was needed, and advocating the adoption of the Latin alphabet.<sup>44</sup> Although Bernard Lewis dismisses these early reform proposals, claiming that “nothing very much had come of them,”<sup>45</sup> Ertürk argues that in a period characterized by the emergence of phonocentric writing, the debates of the Tanzimat were crucial in identifying a worrisome gap between the written and spoken languages, which the various proposals “understood as blocking the direct communicative 'travel' of words freed of authorial presence.”<sup>46</sup> This period and its debates are significant as marking the beginning phases of the nationalization of the Ottoman Turkish language, and presenting the notion “of a state society bound by a common language.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Berkes, 196.

<sup>40</sup> G. Lewis, 28.

<sup>41</sup> Trix, 258.

<sup>42</sup> G. Lewis, 29.

<sup>43</sup> G. Lewis, 29.

<sup>44</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, Third Edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 188.

<sup>45</sup> B. Lewis, 277.

<sup>46</sup> Ertürk, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 43.

Even though discussions about adopting a Latin script took place in 1923 at the Izmir economic congress, and in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (GNA) in 1924, there was still significant opposition to the idea from conservative and religious circles. The decision of the Turkic republics of the Soviet Union to adopt the Latin alphabet in 1926 provided further drive for discussions about the issue within Turkey. Mustafa Kemal himself had long been interested in the subject of replacing the Arabic alphabet with a Latin one,<sup>48</sup> and eventually, under his leadership, opposition to the idea was silenced. In the summer of 1928, Mustafa Kemal established a Language Commission to determine how to best adapt the Latin alphabet for the sounds of the Turkish language, and later that summer, officially announced that the Arabic-based Ottoman script would be replaced with a new Turkish alphabet. Instead of spending time on an extended transitional period as initially recommended by the Language Commission, he favored an abrupt switch, proclaiming an 'alphabet mobilization' to teach the new alphabet to the masses, and personally toured the country with a chalkboard explaining the new letters and urging people to teach them to their fellow countrymen.<sup>49</sup> In a symbolic move to mark the transition, he ordered all ship names to be repainted at once using the new alphabet.<sup>50</sup> On November 1 of 1928, law 1353 on the adoption and implementation of the new Turkish alphabet was passed, formalizing the change and making use of the new alphabet compulsory in all public communication starting from January 1, 1929.<sup>51</sup>

Although the alphabet change was heralded by its proponents as the best possible solution for bridging the language gap, increasing literacy, and spreading education in the country, it is clear that there were other motivations underlying it. As Zürcher argues, despite the rational arguments for adopting a Latin alphabet, “the reason Mustafa Kemal and his followers pushed it through so energetically was undoubtedly ideological: it was yet another way to cut off Turkish society from its Ottoman and

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<sup>48</sup> See account of his 1907 remarks to Ben-Yehuda in M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 215-217; also G. Lewis, 30.

<sup>49</sup> Zürcher, 189.

<sup>50</sup> Hanioglu, 217.

<sup>51</sup> Türk harflerinin kabul ve tatbiki hakkında kanun (Türk Büyük Millet Meclisi), Kanun No 1353 (1928), codified at Resmi Gazete No 1030.  
[http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc007/kanuntbmmc007/kanuntbmmc00701353.pdf](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc007/kanuntbmmc007/kanuntbmmc00701353.pdf)

Middle Eastern Islamic traditions and to reorient it towards the West.”<sup>52</sup> One of the most drastic measures towards achieving secularization undertaken by the Kemalist reform program, doing away with the Arabic script entailed both a symbolic and practical break with the past. In the transformation of Turkish society from a multilingual empire to a monolingual nation state, the new alphabet served “both as a practical tool for a new kind of citizen and as a major, or even the main, badge of this new nationality.”<sup>53</sup> Attacking the traditional strongholds of institutionalized Islam, religious symbols, and popular Islam, the Kemalist regime did not seek to merely separate religion and state, but instead took firm control of religion and claimed “all visible expression of authority as a monopoly of the state,” with laws that secularized the legal system and education, abolished venerable religious positions in favor of directorates attached directly to the prime minister's office, banned traditional headgear and restricted religious attire to the mosques, adopted the Western clock and calendar, and even changed the official day of rest to Sunday rather than Friday.<sup>54</sup> In a series of steps aimed at giving the Turkish state a less Islamic character, “there remained one symbol, potent and universal, that bound her to the Orient – the Arabic script,” and this soon “follow[ed] the Caliphate and the Holy Law into oblivion.”<sup>55</sup> At a practical level, the replacement of the Arabic alphabet with Latin, along with measures such as the calendar change, made Turkey's recent Ottoman inaccessible to its people under the new state, allowing the republic to “set itself in a new temporal plane and cut ties with the Ottoman past as the nationalist historians rewrote the history of the Turkish nation in creation.”<sup>56</sup>

A key feature of linguistic modification is that it is frequently a top-down phenomenon. Engineered at the top, language reform is “primarily a socio-political, not a linguistic and cultural, process” formulated mainly by generals, politicians, and social ideologues, then disseminated at the popular level such that “its effects remain to colour the speech

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<sup>52</sup> Zürcher, 189.

<sup>53</sup> Perry, 243.

<sup>54</sup> Zürcher, 187.

<sup>55</sup> B. Lewis, 276-277.

<sup>56</sup> Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 57.

and literature of succeeding generations.”<sup>57</sup> This is certainly true of the Turkish case, where the elite played the main role in shaping and pushing through practices that constructed a particular image of national identity. The alphabet reform was implemented with impressive speed, and gained widespread acceptance from the public, although the old script continued to be used in private writings and correspondence until the 1960s by people who had received their educations prior to 1928. The state system that Mustafa Kemal and the modernizing elites had created, coupled with what historians point to as Mustafa Kemal's authoritarian nature and inability to accept opposition,<sup>58</sup> allowed for such swiftness in implementing the change. A dictatorship of Mustafa Kemal's one-party regime was “made possible by the principle of Populism and its claim that all interests in the state are embodied in the party and represented by its president,”<sup>59</sup> and the “total project” of “embracing and internalizing all the cultural dimensions that made Europe modern,” which the regime believed was the best way for their new country to modernize, took the form of top-down impositions of institutions, beliefs, and behavior deemed to be in line with European standards. In his article “Whither the Project of Modernity?” Keyder points out the problematic aspects of this authoritarian top-down project. Obsessed with simply pushing through modernization, to become “modern” as opposed to “traditional,” without a commitment to real democratic values and an actual transformation toward organizational efficiency and rationality, state modernization left very little room for local culture or individual identity, and “accepted no adulteration of modernity with a qualifying adjective such as Islamic or Turkish.”<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, as the question of modernity became linked with nationalism, the state placed an emphasis on homogeneity and collective purpose, stemming from ethnic unity, and “expressed in a single voice.”<sup>61</sup> This provided a basis for justifying the state's often extremely violent and deadly methods of suppressing

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<sup>57</sup> John. R. Perry, “Language Reform in Turkey and Iran,” in *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization Under Atatürk and Reza Shah*, ed. Touraj Atabaki and Erik J. Zürcher (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2004), 239.

<sup>58</sup> Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey Volume II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 374.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 383-384.

<sup>60</sup> Çağlar Keyder, “Whither the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. by Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 37.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

internal dissent, such as massacres, deportations, and forced population exchanges.<sup>62</sup>

Hanioğlu argues that

[t]he radicalism of Atatürk's program led to the authoritarian character of his politics. Like many other transformative state builders, he harbored little tolerance for dissent or criticism. He regarded the Republican People's Party as his main agent of reform and insisted on its hegemony. Like the CUP leaders who had abandoned democratic politics when it jeopardized their program, Mustafa Kemal resorted to single-party rule in order to execute his agenda without compromise. Since, in his eyes, the mission was historically preordained, all measures were permissible to assure its success.<sup>63</sup>

In the introduction to their book on authoritarian modernization in Turkey and Iran, Atabaki and Zürcher discuss how the authoritarian tendencies of leaders like Mustafa Kemal stemmed in large part from the social, intellectual, and political environments in which they came to develop their views on change and modernization. Many of the Ottoman state's enlightened intelligentsia were exposed to European positivist and scientist writings, and attracted to the authoritarian ideologies of the political right. Works such as those of Gustave LeBon, which tended towards a deep mistrust of the 'masses,' were highly popular among young military officers in the Balkans and Middle East. Convinced that the only means of instigating and pushing through the comprehensive reforms necessary for society to modernize was by way of a powerful and influential leader dominating the ruling institutions, many modernists at the time believed that “in a world divided amongst colonial powers, each intent on expanding its realm, any attempt of examining change and reform from below tended to undermine the country's integrity and sovereignty.”<sup>64</sup> A perceived failure of earlier attempts to introduce modernization shaped the type of authoritarian modernization that was applied in post-World War I Turkey, and Mustafa Kemal's policies of centralizing state power and pushing through reform programs was “in a sense a reaction to this widely felt need for authoritarian reform.”<sup>65</sup> After the tragic territorial losses, humiliating defeats, and disintegration suffered by the Ottoman empire after the Balkan War and

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>63</sup> Hanioğlu, 231-232.

<sup>64</sup> Atabaki and Zürcher, introduction to *Men of Order*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 7.

World War I, the intelligentsia and middle classes of the new republic looked for what Atabaki and Zürcher call

*a man of order*, who, as agent of the nation, would install a centralised, powerful (though not necessarily despotic) government that would be capable of solving the country's growing problems of underdevelopment, while at the same time safeguarding its unity and sovereignty.<sup>66</sup>

The way in which an abrupt severing of the new nation from the previous entity was carried out, and the justifications used to legitimize this, not surprisingly evoked reactions from Arab intellectuals who had been connected to and identified with this entity, not least by the now-marginalized script.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

### 3. “ATTACKING ISLAM:” THE TURKISH SCRIPT CHANGE IN *AL-MANAR*

Early and sustained interest in and reaction to Turkish script reforms appear in *al-Manar al-Islami*, or the Islamic Beacon, which has been referred to as perhaps “the most influential of all intellectual forums in the Muslim world.”<sup>67</sup> One of the foremost publications subscribing to Islamic *salafi* reformist ideology, *al-Manar* was a journal that appeared in Cairo in 1898 through the personal initiative of prominent author and intellectual Muhammad Rashid Rida.<sup>68</sup> Rida was born in Qalamun near Tripoli in 1865, and received his education first in the *kuttab*, or local Qur'anic school of Qalamun, later moving to an Ottoman state school and then the Madrasa Wataniyya in Tripoli. Influenced by his teacher, Shaykh Husayn al-Jisr, to “appreciate and fully accept the ideas” of scholars like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh, he was also schooled in modern sciences and French.<sup>69</sup>

Although Rida spent time as a member of the mystic Naqshabandi order, during which he implemented extreme ascetic practices, he eventually participated in a session of the Mawlawis which he states caused him to doubt Sufism and consider it spiritually dangerous.<sup>70</sup> His encounter with al-Afghani's and 'Abduh's journal, *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa*, was a significant turning point for Rida, as the journal had a profound effect on him,<sup>71</sup> re-directing his thought and providing him with inspiration to view the reform of Islam

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<sup>67</sup> Yusuf Talal De Lorenzo, trans., *The Muhammadan Revelation* (Alexandria: al-Saadawi Publications, 1996), ix.

<sup>68</sup> Biographical information primarily drawn from *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1995 new ed., s.v. “Rashid Rida.”

<sup>69</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought In the Liberal Age: 1789-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 224.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 226.



as the means to political independence.<sup>72</sup> Rida wrote to al-Afghani with a request to come to Istanbul and study under him, but al-Afghani died in 1897 before he could join him.<sup>73</sup>

Rida met with 'Abduh when the latter visited Tripoli in 1894, and in the winter of 1897-8, Rida traveled to Cairo where he joined 'Abduh's modernist circle and became a devoted disciple. In 1898, he began the publication of the first issue of *al-Manar*, which was to be the organ of Islamic reform according to 'Abduh's ideas.<sup>74</sup> Rida continued to publish *al-Manar* quite regularly until his death in 1935, after which the journal's last volume had its ten issues published over the course of six years.<sup>75</sup> Although he wrote a number of other books, the journal became the primary means through which he continued the ideas of 'Abduh, and published his own thoughts on Islamic reform, reflections on spiritual life, responses to various news from around the Muslim world, accounts of his travels, and the Qur'anic commentary *Tafsir al-Manar*, started by 'Abduh and continued by Rida but never completed.<sup>76</sup> The commentary was highly influential, and stood out for its pragmatism, as well the fact that it set “a precedent for discussing chapters as organic unities, in contrast to traditional atomistic exegesis,”<sup>77</sup> further establishing him as a leading intellectual.

In his introduction to the second edition of *al-Manar*'s first volume, Rida describes the difficulties faced in getting the journal started. He had begun by printing and circulating 1500 copies of each issue to prominent figures in Egypt and Syria, but most of the copies that had been sent to Egypt were returned to him, and the Ottoman state blocked those sent to Syria and other parts of the empire. Rida had then decreased printing to 1000 copies per issue, but even after a couple of years, the number of subscribers still

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<sup>72</sup> Simon A. Wood, *Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashid Rida's Modernist Defense of Islam* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2007), 21.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 25. The likelihood that Rida would have been able to study with him is questionable, however, as al-Afghani had been under strict house arrest at the time. For more information, see Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1966, reprint 1997), 62.

<sup>74</sup> Hourani, 226.

<sup>75</sup> *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1991 new ed., s.v. “Al-Manar.”

<sup>76</sup> Hourani, 227.

<sup>77</sup> Wood, 26.

had not increased beyond approximately 300.<sup>78</sup> It was not until 1902 that the journal became more popular, and subscribers began to request copies of previous issues.<sup>79</sup>

Even a basic reading of *al-Manar* indicates the extent to which Rida dedicated himself to the journal; as Hourani notes, “indeed, there is a sense in which, from the time of its foundation, the *Manar* was his life.”<sup>80</sup> The issues of *al-Manar* chronicle the personal development of Rida and his attitudes, focuses, hopes, and disappointments over a period of almost forty years.<sup>81</sup> Transitioning between reading the last issue he personally published to the issues published after his death, one profoundly senses an abrupt lack of his presence among the pages of the journal. But *al-Manar*'s significance derives not only from its being an invaluable source on the life and thought of Rida himself; over the years, the issues reflected events of the Muslim world as viewed from Cairo. The articles by other authors that were chosen for publication in the journal provide us with an additional level of analysis, as they demonstrate which people and what modes of thinking the reformist circle in Cairo at the time deemed acceptable and relevant to the Islamist modernist agenda. *Al-Manar* thus becomes a useful source for exploring connections between the reformist movement and pan-Islamists like Shakib Arslan, Arab nationalism, Wahhabist propaganda, and European Orientalist scholarship on the Middle East.

Publishing the first issue in early 1898, Rida hoped that *al-Manar* would be a means for furthering religious and social reform within the Islamic *umma* and “for those who coexist with it, those whose interests are intertwined with its own.” It would also serve to demonstrate the compatibility of Islam with science, knowledge, and human interests “in every country and era,” and would “refute whatever false claims are made against [Islam], whatever myths are attributed to it.”<sup>82</sup> In his introduction to the first issue, Rida assured readers that his journal would spend time focusing on the education and good upbringing of girls and boys, not the criticism of princes and sultans, and would

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<sup>78</sup> “Muqaddimat al-Tub'ah al-Thaniya lil-Mujallad al-Awwal min al-Manar,” *al-Manar* vol 1 ed 2 (1898): 3.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Hourani, 226.

<sup>81</sup> *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1991 new ed., s.v. “Al-Manar.”

<sup>82</sup> “Muqaddimat al-Tub'ah al-Thaniya,” 2.

encourage the pursuit of the arts and sciences, not opposition to the judiciary and the law.<sup>83</sup> Over the years, *al-Manar* went on to feature articles on important political events, science and medicine, reviews of contemporary books and journals, and interviews with prominent European scholars, as well as answers to questions on religious matters that readers frequently sent in.

*Al-Manar* was also concerned with literature and language, Rida wrote, and would work to promote the various merits of Arabic. For Rida, reviving Arabic studies was a priority, and he stressed the need to spread the Arabic language, rather than Turkish, because an understanding of Arabic was necessary for a clear understanding of Islam and its spread was a crucial step towards reviving the religion.<sup>84</sup> However, even with its emphasis on Arabs and the necessity of Arab revival as a prerequisite to a broader Muslim awakening, *al-Manar* firmly identified itself in its early days as Ottoman; its source of nourishment was its Ottoman roots, and it spoke with a “Hamidian tone.”<sup>85</sup> And although it would tackle foreign and domestic political affairs with a fair and balanced perspective, not aligning itself with any political party, the journal declared that it would justly defend *al-dawlah al-'aliyyah*, or supreme state, “devotedly serving our Sovereign the Great Sultan.”<sup>86</sup> A change in Rida's attitude towards the Ottoman entity in later issues of the journal becomes evident, especially during the period of the Young Turks towards whom he felt great disappointment and agitation.

Rida startlingly breaks with the ideologies of al-Afghani and 'Abduh in his thoughts on economic life. Deeply aware that Islam was facing the threat of economic penetration and domination by Western capitalism, he argued that the Islamic principle of necessity could be invoked to legalize what would otherwise be forbidden, allowing Muslims to move beyond the traditional legal interpretation of the prohibition against taking interest, and build their economic systems on the same basis as the Western world.<sup>87</sup> As part of its aim to explore the means of economic profit and to promote competition with

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<sup>83</sup> “Fatihat al-Sana al-'Ula lil-Manar,” *al-Manar* 1:1 (1898): 11.

<sup>84</sup> C. Ernest Dawn, “From Ottomanism to Arabism: The Origin of an Ideology” in *The Modern Middle East*, second edition, ed. Albert Habib Hourani, Phillip Shukry Khoury, and Mary Christina Wilson (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2005), 384.

<sup>85</sup> “Fatihat al-Sana al-'Ula,” 13.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Hourani, 238.

“civilized nations” in all things beneficial, *al-Manar* alerted the Ottoman state to the fact that financial companies, and not kings or princes, were the source of development and prosperity, and the reason for Europe’s advancements in the arts and industries, as these financial companies established libraries and schools, bolstered workshops and factories, and powered ships.<sup>88</sup> Like his discussions on topics as diverse as women's rights, jihad, power and authority, and social morality, Rida's writings on economic life in *al-Manar* reflect a fundamental principle around which all of his thought was centered: “[t]he need to create a system of law which people could really obey in the modern world – which should therefore be law in the real sense, just as it should be Islamic in the real sense...”<sup>89</sup>

Ultimately, the dominant theme expressed throughout Rida's work is what Wood identifies as “an overwhelming awareness of Muslim weakness relative to non-Muslim strength.”<sup>90</sup> His writings in *al-Manar* over the years demonstrate his sobering realization that the Muslim world was falling behind the West in progress and modernization, which he explained was the result of Muslims' deviation from true Islam. For Rida, Islam was the only inherently perfect social system for all societies in all times, and he argued that a return to true shariah would serve to unite Muslims and bring about the restoration of the Muslim world's rightful glory. Like modernist reformers before him, he believed that Islam was completely compatible with scientific progress, and called for an important distinction between Muslims partaking in scientific development, and their falling victim to the domination of Western cultural values. As Badawi explains, the position of reformers like Rida “was in a sense a resistance to European cultural penetration, and in another it was a yielding to what was considered science and technology.”<sup>91</sup>

As an influential and “very important work in the context of the modern Muslim awakening,”<sup>92</sup> the insights *al-Manar* provides regarding the Kemalist reforms in Turkey, and specifically the language-related reforms, are extremely valuable to a study of Arab

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<sup>88</sup> “Fatihat al-Sana al-'Ula,” 12.

<sup>89</sup> Hourani, 239.

<sup>90</sup> Wood, 17.

<sup>91</sup> M.A. Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt* (London: The Muslim Institute, 1976), 12.

<sup>92</sup> *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1991 new ed., s.v. “Al-Manar,” 361.

perspectives on the Turkish alphabet change. The journal contains a wealth of articles on Arab-Turkish relations in general, and on the language policies of the Turkish republic, which are most often portrayed as hostile attacks on Islam. The authors selected for study in this thesis who published articles in *al-Manar* about the Turkish alphabet change highlight through their writings and their backgrounds the degree of interconnectedness between developments occurring in Turkey and concerned Arab observers who felt that such developments were immensely relevant to their own lives. Rashid Rida, 'Abd al-Hamid al-Rafi'i, and Shakib Arslan had all been born and raised as Ottoman subjects, receiving Ottoman educations and actively participating in Ottoman state affairs at various levels. All three of them were concerned with the issue of Islamic governance and the state of the Muslim *umma*, and were witness to the important role the Ottoman empire played as the major Muslim world power and the caliphate to the Muslim world. It comes as no surprise that these men were deeply connected to the state and involved in its activities, and continued to carefully follow its political and social developments as it eventually lost power and gave way to a new nation state under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal.

Rida's early activism focused on bringing Turks and Arabs together as fellow Muslims within the framework of the Ottoman empire;<sup>93</sup> in early 1907, he founded *Jam'iyyat al-Shura al-'Uthmaniyya* in Cairo together with Rafiq al-'Azm with the goal of increasing co-operation among the different ethnic communities of the empire. As his dissatisfaction with the tyranny of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid increased,<sup>94</sup> he enthusiastically supported the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 that forced the sultan to restore the Ottoman constitution, although he later became disheartened with the Young Turks as well. As an advocate of social progress and reform, a constitutional regime in Istanbul and the granting of new rights had represented a triumph of the ideas he believed in.<sup>95</sup> During his 1909-10 stay in Istanbul, he worked to remove misunderstandings in the

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<sup>93</sup> Eyal Zisser, "Rashid Rida: On the Way to Syrian Nationalism in the Shade of Islam and Arabism," in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers, and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (New York: Routledge, 2011), 128.

<sup>94</sup> Anne-Laure Dupont, "The Ottoman Revolution of 1908 as seen by *al-Hilāl* and *al-Manār*: The Triumph and Diversification of the Reformist Spirit," in *Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean: Late 19th Century until the 1960s*, ed. Christoph Schumann (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 128.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

Arab-Turkish relationship, and also attempted to establish a modern Islamic institute of higher education that would produce graduates who would be able to defend Islam “according to modern standards.”<sup>96</sup>

Although Rida had initially been a supporter of the Ottoman caliphate as a legitimate source of authority over the Muslim *umma* and hoped that a program of Islamic reform and revival could be implemented under the auspices of the Ottoman state, his interest eventually turned to Mustafa Kemal, and he expressed great admiration of him due to a perception of the man's determination to stand up against European colonial aspirations and to preserve the dignity of Muslim nations everywhere. Writing in response to a letter from a reader asking whether Turks and other *a'ājim*<sup>97</sup> should be considered true Muslims, Rida explains that not only might they be proving to be better Muslims than the Arabs were, but that it might even be appropriate to claim that if it were not for Mustafa Kemal, every Muslim on earth would have become degraded and servile.<sup>98</sup>

For a while, the hope Rida held for the future of a strong Turkish state under Mustafa Kemal was so strong that he went as far as requesting that Muslims not react so harshly to what came as a severe shock to the Muslim world when the Kemalist regime reduced the position of caliph to a mere figurehead, insisting that Mustafa Kemal's actions should not be judged prematurely.<sup>99</sup> As the issue quickly became the most hotly debated topic of the time among Muslim intellectuals, Rida argued that while the concept of a caliph as an overall leader of the Muslim *umma* was indeed an essential component of shariah, the popular understanding of what the position of caliph meant had morphed into something that was quite at odds with the true definition. Because no position of spiritual sovereign existed in Islam as it did in Christianity, the premise of a need for separation between religious and legal sovereignty was an unnecessary debate in the Muslim context. Rather, the position of caliph as outlined by shariah simply included both religious and temporal dimensions; a caliph's religious leadership conferred upon him certain privileges in matters of religious practice such as leading prayers or giving

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<sup>96</sup> *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1995 new ed., s.v. “Rashid Rida,” 446.

<sup>97</sup> 'Non-Arab.'

<sup>98</sup> “Islam al-A'ajim 'Ammatan wal-Turk Khassa,” *al-Manar* 23:6 (1922): 432.

<sup>99</sup> “Thafar al-Turk bil-Yunan wa Thalhm 'Arsh Aal-'Uthman wa Ja'lihim al-Khilafa al-Islamiyya Sulta Ruhaniyya Adabiyya,” *al-Manar* 23:9 (1922): 718.

Friday sermons, but this did not mean that Muslims were obligated to follow his opinions on doctrinal issues. His position as legal sovereign implied that his commands should be obeyed as any leader's commands would be, insofar as they did not constitute any form of sin. Because of this,

we believe it is now in the best political interests of Muslims to support the Kemalist Turks in their stance against Europe which seeks to extort whatever remains of Muslim wealth and power, besides that which they had already extorted previously. [Muslims] should not let [the Turks'] mistake regarding the issue of the caliphate be a reason to undermine their position. Rather, we wait until...they are completely independent from the shackles of European influence to put forth our suggestions, as well as our legal and political reasoning, regarding the degree of authority and power the caliphate should wield...At this time, the leaders and *'ahl al-hall wal-'aqd'*<sup>100</sup> in the Turkish state are the Grand National Assembly in Ankara; if they succeed, the state will be saved, and if they are betrayed and let down – God forbid - the state will perish!<sup>101?</sup>

If only Muslims understood 'the truth' of the situation, Rida believed, they would not place so much emphasis on the Turkish attitude towards the caliphate, and would instead work to strengthen Turkey's position vis-a-vis Europe, putting aside their criticisms and suggestions on how to deal with the question of the caliph for later:

We request that Muslims show compassion for the new Turkish state and support it as steadfastly as we used to support the sublime Ottoman state. In doing so, we do not see it necessary to deviate from any of our religion's principles, nor to wholly endorse the soundness of all [Turkey's] actions, since we are supporting it in its resistance to those who are attacking both it and us...<sup>102</sup>

As time passed, however, Rida began to worry that the new Turkish regime was perhaps not so keen on retaining shariah as the basis for the state's legal, political, or even social structure. His alarm at Mustafa Kemal's apparent lack of concern with reevaluating the position of the caliph is clearly voiced in his translation of and commentary on a speech given by Mustafa Kemal during a session of the GNA in early November of 1922 in which it formally abolished the sultanate and stripped the position of caliph of any real authority. Rida indignantly opposed the decision regarding the caliphate, deeming

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<sup>100</sup> A term used in classical Muslim discourse to refer to a body of learned scholars who represent the community's interests and maintain decision-making power, including the decision to appoint a leader.

<sup>101</sup> "Thafar al-Turk bil-Yunan," 718.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 720.

Mustafa Kemal's justification for it completely contradictory to the principles of shariah and the proper Islamic conception of a caliph. He wrote:

I say this as a faithful adviser to this force, supporting it in its resistance of the enemies of Muslims, and I was the first to oppose the attempts to make the Sharif of Mecca – who defected from the state and pledged allegiance to its enemies – the caliph of the Muslims; I endorsed the Kemalists' actions, preferring them over [the Sharif] and his children. But I do not say except that which I believe is the truth, that Ghazi Mustafa Kamal Pasha is mistaken in trying to prove in his speech that the caliphate system is invalid and ill-suited to achieving the well-being of the *ummah*...<sup>103</sup>

Yet despite his evident concern at Mustafa Kemal's disappointing stance and the turn events were taking, Rida remained hopeful that the leader would respond positively to the recommendations he had personally sent him regarding how to best resurrect and utilize the position of caliph. He also called on the Turkish regime as a whole to correct what he saw as an extremely faulty decision, and advised them to consult with various Islamic scholars from across the Muslim world on how to alter the situation.<sup>104</sup> At this point, Rida still viewed the Turkish position on the caliphate as simply the regime's lack of understanding of the importance of the issue from an Islamic perspective, and genuinely believed that proper counsel and clarification would change their stance.<sup>105</sup>

By 1923, Rida's concern was turning into increasing dismay as it became clearer that the new Turkish regime was actively working to eliminate Islam's influence in all legal and public domains of its new state. In an essay on the principles of shariah and an Islamic caliphate, Rida accuses Mustafa Kemal of inventing Islamic legal justifications to allow for a variety of matters that were explicitly forbidden by all four of the major Islamic schools of thought. For example, he presents readers with an instance in which Mustafa Kemal created his own fatwa allowing for the traditionally-prohibited construction of statues and monuments, claiming that the prohibition was no longer valid in modern times where this was a necessary form of art. Rida additionally cites the example of Mustafa Kemal justifying “the intermingling of women and men” as well as many other

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<sup>103</sup> “Khutbat al-Ghazi Mustafa Kamal Basha,” *al-Manar* 23:10 (1922): 785.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> “Infisal al-Saltana 'an al-Khilafa: Kayfa Wada'ahu Majlis Anqara al-Watani,” *al-Manar* 23:10 (1922): 793.



issues that “would not please religious scholars and practicing people.”<sup>106</sup> While Rida acknowledges that Mustafa Kemal is “clever and articulate,” he maintains that it is wrong of him to use his political power to give opinions on religious matters without being a scholar or jurist.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, he warns Turkey against blindly imitating the West, urging it to turn to authentic scholars to ensure that its leadership and society do not stray from the perfect system embodied in the shariah.

### 3.1. Rashid Rida On the Turkish Alphabet Change

The official abolition of the caliphate in 1924 was clear indication for Rida that Mustafa Kemal had no intention of rectifying the position of the caliph, nor of consolidating a Muslim nation along the Ottoman model. The hopeful tone that had echoed throughout his previous writings expressing his optimism for the prospect that the new Turkish state would restore the Muslim *umma's* glory changes to both resignation and disapproval. This disapproval extended to the Turkish alphabet change, illustrated not only in Rida's own opinions voiced throughout his essays in *al-Manar*, but also in his publication of various guest articles by other opponents of the change, such as 'Abd al-Hamid al-Rafi'i and Shakib Arslan, which will be discussed in the following section.

As early as 1925, Rida was predicting with great certainty that the Turkish regime would sooner or later implement an alphabet change, as a continuation of the “Turanian efforts” to rid Turkish society of any semblance of Arabic influence in their grand scheme of separating Turks from Islam.<sup>108</sup> According to Rida, these “extremist nationalist Turkish” ideologies started to gain prominence around 1909, and had practical implications in the form of the colonization and Turkification of the Ottoman Arab territories, the purging of Arabic and Persian words from Turkish,<sup>109</sup> and the

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<sup>106</sup> “al-Khilafa al-Islamiyya 3,” *al-Manar* 24:2 (1923): 113.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 113-114.

<sup>108</sup> “Fitnat al-'Istighna' 'an Kalam Allah al-'Arabiyy al-Munazzal bi-Tarjama A'jamiyya min Kalam al-Bashar,” *al-Manar* 26:1 (1925): 6.

<sup>109</sup> “Haqa'iq fi 'Adawat Mulahadat al-Turk Lil-Islam wa Ta'liq 'ala al-Maqala al-Sabiqa,” *al-Manar* 29:6 (1928): 464.

translation of the Qur'an into Turkish - an act which Rida saw as a way for the Turkish regime to alter the book's content and meaning according to its own interests.<sup>110</sup>

They want to erase everything that is Arabic from the Turkish language and from the souls of the Turkish people. They even created a special society to, as they call it, “purify the Turkish language” from Arabic. Some of them suggested writing their language with Latin letters, and if atheism continues to have sway over this Muslim nation for much longer, they will certainly implement [the alphabet] change just as they implemented others, like replacing the [revealed] Qur'an with a Turkish Qur'an.<sup>111</sup>

For Rida, the importance of Arabic lay solely in its position as “the language of Islam” and therefore in its power to unite Muslims from diverse backgrounds, as they all recited, memorized, and worshiped with the same text in the same language.<sup>112</sup> Because of the clear religious and symbolic significance of Arabic and its written form, the measures taken to alter the Turkish language's association with Arabic and the suggestions to change the Arabic-based script could only be interpreted as part of a clear attempt by the regime to completely reshape the identity of Turkish society. Overhauling the education system to exclude classes on religion, dictating Western attire, translating the Qur'an, and purging the language from Arabic influence all aimed at achieving one goal: definitively identifying Turkey as a European, Western country with no ties to Islam or the East.<sup>113</sup> Anticipating an alphabet change early on, Rida exclaims:

They now want to do to [the language] what they are doing to its speakers; what will remain of the language of the ancient Turks after it becomes Europeanized and Westernized, written with a Latin script as will inevitably happen very soon? For all we know, they might even change its name too!<sup>114</sup>

Rida saw the eventual alphabet change not as unique to the Kemalist reform project, but as the fulfillment of a Westernization policy that extended back to the Young Turks and

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<sup>110</sup> “Tarjamat al-Qur'an wa Tahrif Tarjamatin lahu wa al-Tashkik fih,” *al-Manar* 25:10 (1924): 794-795.

<sup>111</sup> “Fitnat al-'Istighna',” 7.

<sup>112</sup> “Tarjamat al-Qur'an wa Kawn al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya Lughat al-Islam wa Rabitat al-'Ikhwa wal-Salam,” *al-Manar* 32:7 (1932): 540.

<sup>113</sup> “Ghayat Musatafa Kamal Min Marahilih,” *al-Manar* 34:6 (1934): 105-106.

<sup>114</sup> “Fatawa al-Manar: Tatimmat Fatwa al-Libas wal-Zayy, Tafarnuj Zu'ama' al-Turk hatta fil-Libas,” *al-Manar* 26:7 (1925): 485.

early Turkish nationalists.<sup>115</sup> Discounting any arguments that a script change may have been useful for increasing literacy rates across Turkey, Rida attacked the author of an article published in *Majallat al-Rabita al-Sharqiyya* who had praised the positive effects the alphabet change had on Turkish literacy by claiming that “this latest scientific revolution in Turkey is unequaled in the history of mankind,” and by glorifying Mustafa Kemal as a great teacher presiding over a school that comprised his entire nation. “Does this writer, who has become crazed with Kemalist propaganda and who has glorified that which is not great, believe that all people are similarly crazy, and would submissively accept such insane testimony...?”<sup>116</sup> He later accused that journal of blasphemy and of propagating ideas that intended to “weaken faith and undermine Islam's linguistic and social connections;” among them “the exchange of Arabic letters for Latin letters.”<sup>117</sup>

In his introduction to the thirtieth issue of the *al-Manar*, Rida reminds readers of the many grave dangers facing the Muslim world, stating that the “campaign against Islam” had become increasingly severe.

We label as heretic anyone who praises the plan of those Kemalists to expunge the Islamic shariah in its entirety from their government and facilitate the erasure of Islamic beliefs...from the roots of their society by prohibiting the use of Arabic in their country, translating the Qur'an with Turkish terms that cannot do its true meanings justice, and writing it and everything else in Latin letters. Anyone who calls this plan a reform, commends it, or invites support for it is an enemy of Islam...<sup>118</sup>

Throughout the issues of *al-Manar* over the years, Rida repeatedly emphasizes the theme that the Turkish alphabet switch was not a benign reform aimed at streamlining the writing system or improving education and literacy levels among the Turks, but part of an aggressive anti-Islam campaign. Responding to a letter sent in by a reader from Java in 1930 asking for *al-Manar's* clarification on why the Kemalist regime adopted a Latin script and what implications this might have for the future of the Javanese Arabic script, Rida is quick to clarify:

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<sup>115</sup> “Haqa’iq fi ‘Adawat Mulahadat al-Turk,” 464.

<sup>116</sup> “Anba’ al-‘Alam al-Islami: Majallat al-Rabita al-Sharqiyya,” *al-Manar* 29:8 (1928): 621.

<sup>117</sup> “al-‘Ilhad wa Du‘atih fi Majallat al-Rabita al-Sharqiyya wa al-‘Ustath Ahmad Amin,” *al-Manar* 29:9 (1928): 719.

<sup>118</sup> “Fatihat al-Juz’ al-Awwal lil-Mujallad al-Thalathin,” *al-Manar* 30:1 (1929): 2.

The author of this letter...should not think that the Kemalist Turks preferred to adopt Latin letters over Arabic as a script for their language because of the ease it brings to education. We have clarified in *al-Manar* that the reason for this preference is to distance their people from the religion of Islam and to cut all ties that used to connect them to it, regardless of other harmful effects that may occur as a result, such as wasting their scholars and learned people's efforts at refining this language and employing it to numerous compilations in all the modern arts and sciences over a period of eighty years, or burying the many logs and registers that preserve their political, social, and military history. They are futilely trying to create a new atheist nation...that has no relationship to the past except for the term "Turk." The Latin letters do not accurately express their language; they do not do it justice nor do they ease the learning of it.<sup>119</sup>

In a later issue, he claims that Turkish in its original form is one of the most limited of all known languages, relying in great part on Persian and Arabic loanwords. For this reason, writing the language with a Latin script confuses speakers and makes it difficult for them to identify the correct roots of words and in turn, their original meanings:

It has been proven that their writing of Turkish with Latin letters has weakened it and halted the spread of sciences and arts in this language. What they may have gained in regulating pronunciation, they have lost many times over with a lack of comprehension and a decrease in the spread of knowledge.<sup>120</sup>

It is important to note that Rida frames the alphabet change as something that was forced onto the Turkish public from top-down, against its will. He explains that although the public disapproved of such a change, Turkish society at the time was too weak to take concrete action against the Kemalist program of reforms. Rida held on to a desperate faith that the Turkish nation would remain patient, waiting for its opportunity to purge society of the dangerous deviations from the religion imposed by its government, and to return to the path of true Islam.<sup>121</sup> Elaborating on this belief, he describes how the new Turkish state

declared heresy and did away with shariah behind [the Ottoman state's] back. It abolished its courts, schools, and endowments; forced its citizens to give up their language, which was Arabic, and write the Turkish language using Latin letters; it rendered the Glorious Qur'an as a Turkish

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<sup>119</sup> "Bab al-Murasala wal-Munathara: al-Kitaba bil Huruf al-Latiniyya fi Jawa," *al-Manar* 30:9 (1929): 720.

<sup>120</sup> "Tarjamat al-Qur'an wa Kawn al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya Lughat al-Islam," 544.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 536.

translation that no Muslim can trust and wrote it with a Latin script, paving the way for it to eventually become obliterated from Turkish lands. The Turkish nation, the vast majority of which are Muslims and in which atheism is like a black spot on a white bull, could not prevent its dominating military government from this heresy, as it was weakened by poverty and long wars that had drained all its strength. It tried multiple times to assassinate the president of its Laicist Republic but failed, and now awaits relief from Allah in the form of another coup.<sup>122</sup>

### **3.2. 'Abd al-Hamid al-Rafi'i: "The Danger of the Kemalist Attack On Islam: Replacing Arabic Letters With Latin Letters and the Necessity of Fighting this Threat to the Islamic World"**

One of the contributing authors featured in *al-Manar* was 'Abd al-Hamid al-Rafi'i, prominent author and poet from Syria who famously came to be known as the 'Nightingale of Syria.' Born in 1859 in Ottoman Tarabulus al-Sham, al-Rafi'i was initially educated at al-Azhar, then later in Istanbul. He held various positions under the Ottoman state, including that of *kaymakam* of Nazareth. Exiled to Medina during World War I, he eventually returned to Tarabulus, where he died in 1932.<sup>123</sup> Like Rashid Rida, al-Rafi'i had spent a significant part of his life as an Ottoman citizen, receiving an Ottoman education and actively participating in the empire's affairs at the state level. This background provided an important motivation for his continued interest in Turkey even after the end of the Ottoman era, and he perceived events occurring in Turkey as having profound implications for the larger Muslim *umma*, especially its youth.

Al-Rafi'i's 1928 essay in *al-Manar* regarding the Turkish script change, titled "Khatar Hujum al-Kamaliyyin 'ala al-Islam, 'Istibdal al-Ahruf al-Latiniyya bil-Huruf al-'Arabiyya: Wujub Muharabat hatha al-Khatar 'ala al-'Alam al-Islami" (The Danger of the Kemalist Attack On Islam: Replacing Arabic Letters With Latin Letters and the Necessity of Fighting this Threat to the Islamic World), expresses great alarm at what he regards as an "explicit attack" by the Kemalists in Ankara who were using "diabolical

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<sup>122</sup> "al-Fath al-'Aurubi wal-Fath al-Islami wal-'Isti'mar al-Britani wal-Faransi," *al-Manar* 31:2 (1930): 151.

<sup>123</sup> *Mu'jam al-Mu'alifin: Tarajim Musannifi al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya*, Volume 2, 1993 ed., s.v. "'Abd al-Hamid al-Rafi'i."

methods” to “erase Islam from the world.” Al-Rafi’i addresses his message to Muslim youth generally and Arab youth specifically, arguing that protecting their religion and preserving the interests of future generations had become a holy obligation upon them. Al-Rafi’i believed that “the enemies of Islam in Ankara” had resorted to funding European intellectuals to spread propaganda that painted a picture of positive reform and development in Turkey while supporting the Kemalists’ aims to destroy Islam. He cites, for example, academic lectures by scholars such as Louis Massignon, then chair of Collège de France, in which efforts were made to convince “Eastern students in Europe” of the merits of replacing Arabic letters with Latin, which would serve to completely eradicate the Qur’an in accordance with the Kemalist plan.<sup>124</sup>

According to al-Rafi’i, further evidence for Kemalist manipulation of European scholarship was an article published in *Journal de Geneve* and authored by whom he refers to simply as “the Swiss author M.J.” He quotes the article extensively, arguing that the Swiss author furthers the propaganda that the Kemalists have instructed him in with his claims that the most important reform undertaken by Mustafa Kemal was changing the Turkish people’s mindset to reject Islam, “cleansing them” of the religion’s “archaic beliefs that do not suit the modern era.”<sup>125</sup> Al-Rafi’i’s emphasis in the first part of his essay is on the notion that the Kemalists had a cunning ability to control the production and dissemination of information in Europe. He insists that the anti-Islamic ideas that were being proliferated by European authors and academics were not actually these people’s own, but were “dictated” to them by the Kemalists. In funding the publication and propagation of anti-Islamic works and lectures in Europe, al-Rafi’i believed that the Kemalist manipulators had gone so far as to surpass any previous attempts by missionaries to undermine Islam.<sup>126</sup>

Al-Rafi’i was also extremely perturbed by a number of people in Egypt who he claimed were willing to “sell their consciences” in order to spread an undeserved admiration for Mustafa Kemal “among the public in Cairo and Alexandria.” They achieved this by

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<sup>124</sup> 'Abd al-Hamid al-Rafi'i, "Khatar Hujum al-Kamaliyyin 'ala al-Islam, 'Istibdal al-Ahruf al-Latiniyya bil-Huruf al-'Arabiyya: Wujub Muharabat hatha al-Khatar 'ala al-'Alam al-Islami," *al-Manar* 29:6 (1928): 356.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 456.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 457.

falsely claiming that Mustafa Kemal was in fact so concerned about protecting Islam that he was employing a shrewd cover of working against the religion to fool Europe into giving him control of the Muslim lands it had occupied. After gaining control, they argued, Mustafa Kemal was sure to immediately grant these lands their independence.<sup>127</sup> For al-Rafi'i, there could be no mindset "more dangerous than the mindset of these [Kemalist] advocates," and "no degradation to Egyptians worse than this."<sup>128</sup>

At this point in his essay, the author carefully makes a distinction between "the Kemalists" plan to undermine the Qur'an and the Arabic language "under Bolshevik instruction," and "our Turkish brothers who have not fallen under the Kemalist influence, and who are just as pained as we are at the situation that has come to be in Turkey," asking these brothers to forgive his harsh writings as an inevitable defense of the religion and the language.<sup>129</sup> A new theme is abruptly incorporated here, shifting the blame for an attack against Islam and Arabic to communism. The focus is no longer on an ultimate Kemalist plot that extends beyond the borders of Turkey itself, manipulating events and the production of knowledge in Europe, but on the Bolsheviks as the source of a campaign against all religions. Just as Europe with its "organized churches, strong nations, and armed governments" united against the Bolsheviks to defend Christianity, al-Rafi'i argues, so too "must we stand up to the danger of the Kemalists, who have been led along by the 'red Russians.'" Al Rafi'i now describes not simply a Kemalist danger to the Islamic world, but a "red Kemalist campaign" that rests on two fundamental claims: first, that Islam is not suitable for the Turks' new life, and second, that the Arabic language with its Arabic letters is a symbol representing the degeneration of "the Turkish component," and the true obstacle standing in the way of the Turks' development.<sup>130</sup> After briefly addressing the first claim by posing a question to Mustafa Kemal as to the value that a Turkish existence ever claimed in history before being honored with Islam, al-Rafi'i moves on to addressing the second claim and main topic of his essay, the issue of the Arabic script and the Turkish alphabet reform.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 458.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

His tone becoming increasingly sarcastic, al-Rafi'i calls on his readers to join the Kemalists "under the shining rays of the sun" and together delve into the question of the Arabic alphabet "which [the Kemalists] claim was a cause for the retardation of their imagined civilization."<sup>131</sup> In a rather extreme display of the interconnectedness of language and identity, al-Rafi'i argues that the essence of the issue of script change is truly only about civilizations and their place in history, and not about practical reforms or educational motivations. He dismisses these points, dedicating minimal space to refuting the 'practical' aspects of adopting a Latin alphabet, including that script's potential for easing reading and drastically increasing national literacy rates in Turkey. Failing to differentiate between Arabic script, Ottoman language, Turkish language, and Arabic language, he instead focuses the rest of his article on evaluating the relationship between the Arabic language and a particular civilization's value. At the heart of al-Rafi'i's concern about Mustafa Kemal's alphabet reforms is not a question of practicality or feasibility, but of the symbolic and tangible worth that the Arabic language brought to Turkish civilization, and what abandoning the Arabic script meant not only for Muslims in Turkey, but for the larger Muslim *umma* as well.

First, al-Rafi'i firmly denies the existence of a true Turkish language<sup>132</sup> - except for what he refers to as ancient "gibberish" that archeologists have only recently been able to interpret - and in turn, the existence of a purely Turkish civilization. "This is the greatest historical evidence that Turkish civilization did not exist," argues al-Rafi'i, "for if it had, it would possess books or ancient inscriptions like those of the Egyptian civilization."<sup>133</sup> He further explains that the language used by Turks of his time, "and which is considered to be the most beautiful of the Eastern languages," is in fact Ottoman, which al-Rafi'i also states was developed "around a century ago" by a group of Turkish, Circassian, Albanian, and Arab Ottoman scholars, and which was comprised mostly of Arabic and Persian, but included Turkish and European words. He posits that any scholarly achievements in science or literature that Turks of his day might claim for

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 458-459.

<sup>132</sup> Similar debates on the legitimacy of Turkish as a proper language took place among Turks in Istanbul during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. See, for example, Hacı İbrahim Efendi in Musa Aksoy, *Moderniteye Karşı Geleneğin Savaşçısı Hacı İbrahim Efendi* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 2005).

<sup>133</sup> Al-Rafi'i, 459.



themselves today were in fact a product of an Ottoman linguistic community, which itself derived all value from its drawing to a large extent on Arabic vocabulary and forms:

[I]f you know that there is no such thing as a Turkish language today, and that the language whose Arabic letters they are replacing with Latin not only draws upon Arabic but claims it as its life source; and that before the creation of an Ottoman language - which derives its life, literature, and sciences from the Arabic language - the science and literature that the Turks boast of never existed; after knowing all of this, you can determine the magnitude of the Kemalists' arrogance and their audacity to lie about science, history, and all of truth...<sup>134</sup>

Al-Rafi'i's attempt to completely deny any legitimacy to claims of Turkish greatness outside of the Turks' connection with Islam appears extreme, but is not unique. Broader parallels to his style of discourse can be located in Western historical scholarship on Turks and the Middle East, specifically in many Byzantinist works that take a similar approach of denying the existence of any real Turkish civilization, in this case, outside of Byzantine influence.<sup>135</sup> Writing in the early 1930s, renowned historian and "the 'founding father' of modern-style Turkish studies"<sup>136</sup> Mehmet Fuat Köprülü was greatly concerned with what he identified as "the prejudices that [European historians] have maintained about the Turks,"<sup>137</sup> which he believed caused them to undertake biased studies of Turkish history and arrive at erroneous conclusions on the subject.<sup>138</sup> Citing works by many eminent Byzantinists, including Rambaud, Diehl, and Nöldeke, Köprülü sought to refute the intellectual hostility and problematic perceptions of these scholars,

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 460.

<sup>135</sup> This is also the case with Orientalist or Arabist scholarship that focuses on Arabs, Persians, and their respective languages in studies of the Middle East, while the spread of Turkish influence is dismissed as the arrival of a crude Asiatic race establishing control over the lands of classical Islam. See discussion on and examples of the limited interest of Orientalist scholars in Turkey and the Turkish language in Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 109-110. On the struggle for academic space and recognition of Turkish studies as a field, see *Turkish Studies in the United States*, ed. Donald Quataert and Sabri Sayarı (Bloomington: Indiana University Ottoman and Modern Turkish Studies Publications, 2003); Howard A. Reed, "Perspectives on the Evolution of Turkish Studies in North America Since 1946," *The Middle East Journal* 51:1 (1997): 15-31; Karl H. Menges, *The Turkic Languages and Peoples: An Introduction to Turkish Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994).

<sup>136</sup> Suraiya Faroqhi, introduction to *New Approaches to the State and Peasant in Ottoman History*, ed. Halil Berktaş and Suraiya Faroqhi (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1992), 3.

<sup>137</sup> Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, *Some Observations On the Influence of Byzantine Institutions On Ottoman Institutions*, trans. Gary Leiser (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1999), 29.

<sup>138</sup> See also Köprülü, *The Origins of the Ottoman Empire*, trans. Gary Leiser (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), 23.

such as the notion that “the historic role of the Turks was military and destructive,” or that the Turks “had no positive role in civilized life.”<sup>139</sup> Most prominent among these faulty notions was the Byzantinist tendency to portray the Ottoman empire as a mere “Islamized continuation of Byzantium,”<sup>140</sup> and to attribute any value of the empire to its reliance on Byzantine traditions and institutions.

Al-Rafi'i's strong denial of pre-Islamic Turkish civilization, while, as demonstrated, was not unique, indicates how fiercely connected his own identity was with language and his deep concern with the shifting power dynamics he saw taking place around him, as it became ever more clear that Muslims no longer represented a force with which to be reckoned, falling further and further behind European progress and development. Replacing Arabic letters with a Latin alphabet in a state that was once the center of Islamic civilization and power was yet another step in what people like al-Rafi'i perceived to be an increasingly threatening change to the status of the broader Muslim world. The major entity that once represented Muslim dominance, first in the form of a world empire and then as a Muslim nation state that had been able to triumph in the face of European colonialism, was now clearly distancing itself from its Islamic heritage, severing its ties with the rest of the Muslim world, and completely redefining its identity as a Muslim society. For al-Rafi'i and others like him, the Turkish alphabet reform was powerfully symbolic, representing how Mustafa Kemal and his new regime were no longer determining their nation's value and status by its connection to Islam and the Arabic language, but rather in its ability to be as European as possible. This carried with it the implication that Islam *itself* was no longer something valuable, or something which powerful nations would proudly desire to adhere to. It also carried the implication that there was no value in being Muslim or a member of a Muslim community. This, then, was the “attack” on Islam that al-Rafi'i feared most.

Al-Rafi'i identified the danger of the script change in Turkey, and the attack on Islam that it constituted, as being in the widespread effects that this reevaluation of Islam's

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<sup>139</sup> Köprülü, *Some Observations*, 29.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 142. Köprülü rejects this idea, arguing that the Ottoman empire was not “a temporary state founded by barbarian nomads who, upon their first defeat, packed their tents and returned to the steppes from where they came, leaving no trace of their rule,” but that it was “a genuine empire based on a solid foundation,” with only limited Byzantine influence (144-145).

role in the identity of a new nation state might have on youth throughout the rest of the Muslim world - effects that he argues had already started to affect places like Iran and Afghanistan, where he claims Turkish atheism and blasphemy had spread and taken root.<sup>141</sup> Responding to what he perceived to be a genuinely dangerous threat to Islam, he attempted to reestablish the source of a society's civilizational value in its connection with Islam, the Arabic language, and the Arabs:

In sum, the Arabic language was for the Turks and other nations that entered the fold of Islamic civilization the language of thought, just as Latin was for Western nations in the middle ages...Turkish, then, was never a language of thought, and it never had an intellectual or literary heritage that would make it attractive to learn even if it were written in Latin...<sup>142</sup>

Al-Rafi'i believed that Turkish could be described as nothing more than a primitive form of communication used among Turkic tribes, only becoming a proper language after these tribes embraced Islam and absorbed the necessary expressions, vocabulary, and rhetoric from Arabic to make it worthy of being deemed an actual language. In his view, Arabic so impressed Turkish society during its era of prosperity post-conversion to Islam that the Turks used it as the language of literature and science.<sup>143</sup> Value could be attributed to the Turks and their language only insofar as they maintained a connection to Islam and Arabic; "without Islam and Arabic, they would have been nothing more than destructive, warring, blood-thirsty savage clans."<sup>144</sup>

In response to the Kemalist regime's attempts to identify Islam and the Muslim world as undesirable and backward, and striving to distance itself from them as much as possible, al-Rafi'i retorted by employing a re-distancing of his own. Countering by placing the label of undesirability squarely on the shoulders of the Kemalists, he portrayed them as dishonest, disillusioned about their own historical legacy, and unfaithful to history. Horrified at the Kemalists' arrogance in denying the significance of the Arabic language as a means of connecting the Turks and Arabs, al-Rafi'i exclaimed:

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<sup>141</sup> Al-Rafi'i, 463.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 462.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 461.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 463.

Look, *ya ra'āk Allah*,<sup>145</sup> at this arrogance and ingratitude! Look at the extent of the audacity in disregarding the history of one of the most magnificent capitals of Islam and Arabic, in denying the great benefits that the Turks gained from being connected to the Arabs all those years, without which the Turks would not have had an existence worth mentioning.<sup>146</sup>

He maintained the belief that switching to the use of a Latin alphabet would bring nothing positive to Turkey anyway; it would neither add to Turkey's heritage nor create brilliant new minds out of a society that had relied on Arabic-based thought throughout its best days.<sup>147</sup> Al-Rafi'i also reassures readers that any overt European support for the Kemalist program that might exist could be explained as a result of funding by "Ankara's gold." The truth was, that with their actual knowledge of Islam and Arabic civilization as well as an awareness of how the ignorance of Turkish governance led to the colonization and enslavement of Muslim dominions, thousands of European scholars mocked the Kemalists and their reforms.

The culmination of al-Rafi'i's re-distancing lies in his call for all Muslims who were concerned about the attack on their religion to "stand up in the face of the Kemalists to defend Islam before their tide of blasphemy drowns the entire Muslim world."<sup>148</sup> Although throughout his essay he shifts back and forth between blaming the Kemalists and the Bolsheviks for the devious plans to destroy the Muslim *umma* and its status among nations, al-Rafi'i eventually concludes by positioning the Kemalists, under the influence of Bolshevism, as the targets of a necessary jihad: "whoever has the ability to partake in jihad to kill this evil spirit that Bolshevism has thrust onto Ankara, and does not do so, his heart is surely sinful..."<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Literally, "may God protect you," a form of addressing and connecting with the reader similar to how one might use "dear reader" in English.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 462.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 463.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

### 3.3. Shakib Arslan: “The History of Scripts and Arabic's Position”

Another Arab intellectual whose views were spread to a wide audience through *al-Manar* was Shakib Arslan. Born in 1869 to a family of Druze notables in Lebanon's Shuf region, Arslan was educated in Maronite and Ottoman secondary schools. His poetry, first published at the early age of seventeen, and his other literary pursuits earned him the title of Amir al-Bayan, or 'the prince of eloquence,' and he became a prominent intellectual and literary figure. In accordance with his status as a member of a family of powerful notables, he was also involved in politics, serving as *kaymakam* of Shuf in 1902 and then later again in 1908-11, and was elected a member of the Ottoman parliament in 1914.

Arslan was a strong advocate for pan-Islamism and called on the Muslim *umma* to unite under the banner of common religion in order to reassert its position among the world's nations and regain its former glory. Frequenting the literary circles of Istanbul and Cairo, he was influenced by the ideas of al-Afghani and 'Abduh, and became a close friend of Rida, even writing a biography about him titled *al-Sayyid Rashid Rida Aw 'Ikha' 'Arba'in Sana (Mr. Rashid Rida, Or A Forty-Year Brotherhood)*. He worked relentlessly to support the preservation of the Ottoman empire, believing it to be the only means of preventing the *umma* from succumbing to European occupation. After the defeat of the Ottomans in the first world war and the imposition of the mandate system, Arslan was exiled to Switzerland where he served as the unofficial representative of the Syro-Palestinian delegation at the League of Nations. From Switzerland, he published a journal titled *La Nation Arabe*, through which he continued his campaign against European imperialism, as well as his call for Muslims to embrace their common Islamic heritage and unite in the face of Western occupation. Although of Druze origins, his work was firmly rooted in defending Sunni Islam, and he wrote prolifically on a variety of Islamic subjects. Like Rida, he believed in Islam as the crucial base for social order, and as such, disapproved of secularizing efforts like those of Mustafa Kemal's Turkish regime.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> For more detailed biographical information on Arslan, see *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1997 new ed., s.v. “Shakib Arslan.”

In the June 1929 issue of *al-Manar*, the journal republished part of a study by Arslan on the history of written scripts, which had originally been published in *al-'Ahd al-Jadid*. The section of the study republished by *al-Manar*, titled “Tarikh Huruf al-Kitaba wa Makan al-'Arabiyya Minha,” does not actually include any reference to Turkey or the script change there. Whether or not the original piece draws attention to the Turkish case remains a question, but Rida makes sure to add his own introductory comments to the article to ensure that Arslan's work is properly framed in the minds of *al-Manar*'s readers:

Amir al-Bayan had written an article responding to some Westernizing Arab writers who had been deceived into favoring the imitation of the evils brought by the Kemalist Turks upon their own language, culture, schools, and journalism in continuation of what they had brought upon their religion and the morals of their people, and that is writing Turkish using Latin letters...<sup>151</sup>

The study takes a modern 'scientific' approach to researching the origins of written language, using historical inquiry and drawing on opinions from experts in the field to identify ancient Arabic scripts from Yemen as the origin for later alphabets such as Phoenician and then Greek.

The alif ba, or alphabet, was present in Yemen and the entire world two thousand years before Christ. The oldest Arabic script was found in Yemen and was called *musnad*, and the Phoenicians altered this script slightly. This is the opinion that was finally arrived at by researchers, as scholars previously used to believe that the Phoenicians had been the first of nations to use writing. Perhaps what caused Europe to attribute the invention of writing to the Phoenicians is the fact that the Phoenicians spread writing to Greece...Greeks know that writing came to them from the East, and they then spread it to the West.<sup>152</sup>

Citing the opinions of Swiss and German linguistic scholars, Arslan emphasizes the notion that Latin alphabets are completely insufficient for expressing Arabic. He also claims that current Arabic scripts like *naskh* are in fact most deserving of the label “modern,” as they maximize speed and efficiency by allowing the writer to quickly pen words in a form of connected shorthand. This type of shorthand script is “suitable [for]

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<sup>151</sup> Shakib Arslan, “Tarikh Huruf al-Kitaba wa Makan al-'Arabiyya Minha” *al-Manar* 30:2 (1929): 128.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 131.

nations that have reached the peak of modernity and are busy with numerous affairs and activities; it saves time and stationery.”<sup>153</sup>

Contextualizing Arabic alphabets as historically significant and a source upon which Western nations eventually drew for their own forms of written expression provides a way for Arslan to locate value in the Arabic script. It is interesting that he relies solely on European scholarship to lend credibility to his argument that the Arabic alphabet was a valuable part of the historical heritage of written scripts and continues to be completely compatible with modernity, as well as to the idea that Latin letters are inherently inferior for representing Arabic accurately.

Arslan here makes no mention of the importance of Arabic as the language of Islam and the Qur'an, nor of its power to unite the Muslim *umma*. He locates the value of using Arabic script to write language, not in its religious significance, but in its superior linguistic qualities. His concern is with providing a historical and scientific basis for emphasizing the legitimacy of the Arabic script as a means for writing and printing, even in modernizing nations. The use of Arabic script was not in conflict with a modern identity. The inclusion of this excerpt from his study in *al-Manar*, with Rida's introductory comments, implies that Arslan's argument has relevance for and is directed at the Turkish case. Also, although the excerpt itself does not involve a connection between the Turkish alphabet change and a threat to Islam, its publication in *al-Manar* draws one.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 129.

#### 4. ALPHABET REFORM AND ARABIZATION: THE JOURNAL OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE ACADEMY OF DAMASCUS

Given the centrality of the Arabic script to Muslims, interest shown in the Turkish alphabet reform by Muslim scholars may be predictable. However, the journal of the Arabic Language Academy in Damascus provides a particularly demonstrative example of the immediate interest Arab intellectuals who were not concerned with Islam had in the Turkish alphabet reforms, and how they perceived the significance of events in Turkey for language development in the Arab world. Language academies in the Arab world have played a major role in the process of language modernization from the beginning of the twentieth century. Their functions center around guarding Arabic against influence from local dialects and foreign languages, as well as adapting it to the requirements of modern times.<sup>154</sup> Although the academies may differ in their approaches, all of them share a focus on classical language rather than spoken dialects, as well as “a strong faith in the role of universal literacy and of mass communications media in gradually bridging the gaps between the two forms of Arabic.”<sup>155</sup>

Across the Arab world, the language academies work to develop and determine language programs, unify terminology used in different Arab countries, and create scientific and technical terms necessary for various disciplines and branches of government.<sup>156</sup> This process usually involves reviewing lists of terms submitted to the academies by committees of experts and specialists. After extensive review, the terms go through approval by the general assemblies; the approved items are then published in the academies' official journals. A downside of this process, as Versteegh maintains, is

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<sup>154</sup> Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 178.

<sup>155</sup> Salih J. Altoma “Language Education in Arab Countries and the Role of the Academies,” in *Advances in Language Planning*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (The Hague: Mouton & Co. N.V., 1974), 282.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 303-304.



that it can often be complicated and drawn out, and approved items “may take years” to eventually make their way into dictionaries.<sup>157</sup> Relatively newer language academies, such as those of Iraq and Jordan, may have played a less significant role in the modernization of Arabic, but they continue to make contributions nonetheless. For example, the focus of the Iraqi academy was on editing classical texts with the goal of preserving linguistic and literary heritage,<sup>158</sup> while the Jordanian academy today works on the Arabization of education in the kingdom, and organizes conferences and symposiums on a variety of issues pertaining to Arabic.<sup>159</sup>

Historically, the assemblies of the language academies and their official journals have been the sites of important debates on various issues pertaining to alphabet reform. For example, in January of 1944, 'Abd al-'Aziz Fahmi Pasha presented a proposal to the Cairo Academy arguing for the need to make Arabic writing easier, and calling for the adoption of a Latin-based script. The assembly discussed his proposal about a month later, and published its conclusions in the sixth volume of the Academy's journal:

Everything that was discussed during this congress on how to simplify writing is to be printed and announced by the usual means, sent out to specialized organizations and spread to the public. The *usūl* committee will receive comments on this and will present its report at the next congress. It is requested of the government to provide a prize of one thousand *junayhs* for the best proposal on facilitating Arabic writing, with the condition that members of the congress are not eligible to participate in the contest.<sup>160</sup>

Although in the end not much came of Fahmi's proposal, his paper along with other draft proposals and papers submitted to the Academy during the same year together caused an “uproar,” sparking intense debate and criticisms about reforming the Arabic script throughout the Arab world.<sup>161</sup> The importance of the language academies' journals as forums for discussions on critical issues cannot be understated. Articles appearing in them underscore the relevance of the topics discussed to Arab intellectuals.

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<sup>157</sup> Versteegh, 178.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> The Jordan Academy of Arabic, “Nash'at al-Majma' wa 'Ahdafih,” accessed March 10, 2013, <http://www.majma.org.jo/majma/index.php/2008-12-21-07-49-01.html>.

<sup>160</sup> King Fu'ad the First Arabic Language Academy, “Qararat al-Majma' fi Hathihi al-Dawra: Mashru' Taysir al-Kitaba al-'Arabiyya,” *Majallat Majma' Fu'ad al-Awwal lil-Lugha al-'Arabiyya* 6 (1951): 85.

<sup>161</sup> Salameh, 165. For a detailed account in English of Fahmi's alphabet reform project, see Salameh, 165-168, and 230-233.

#### 4.1 Faris al-Khuri: “Opinions and Thoughts: Replacing Arabic Letters with Latin Letters”

Founded in Damascus in 1919 during the era of the Arab Kingdom of Syria, the Arabic Language Academy of Damascus, or *Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiya bi-Dimashq*, was modeled primarily after the *L'Académie Française*, and was the main body responsible for dealing with all matters pertaining to the Arabic language in the new Kingdom. Because Ottoman Turkish had been the official language of the state during the period of Ottoman rule, the Academy was established with the goal of spreading Arabic to the institutions of the new state as well as to various facets of the education system and daily life. The Academy held conferences and published works on diverse aspects of the Arabic language; its main periodical, the Journal of the Arabic Language Academy, published conference proceedings, book reviews, and articles tackling linguistic issues that arose at the time. The introduction to the first issue of the first volume of the journal elaborates on the aims of the publication:

It is the custom of scientific academies in civilized countries to have their own journals, published at certain times, which include the writings of their members and reporters on the topics of sciences and different arts; proceedings of lectures that may be held at these academies from time to time; the latest thoughts and opinions in the world of science as well as various discoveries and inventions; and a summary of the academies' works or works-in-progress...We are of the opinion that our own Arab scientific academy is in need of such a journal, so we have published it in this form...<sup>162</sup>

Issue seven in the ninth volume of the Academy's journal, published in July of 1929, includes an article titled “Ara' wa Afkar: Istibdal al-Huruf al-'Arabiyya bil Huruf al-Latiniyya” (Opinions and Thoughts: Replacing Arabic Letters with Latin Letters), which demonstrates how the alphabet debates and reform in Turkey were deeply consequential for prominent Arab intellectuals, sparking discussions in the Arab world not only about the value of the developments for Turkey itself, but also about the current state of the Arabic script and the feasibility of applying to it similar kinds of reforms. The article, a reprint of a piece originally written by one of the Academy's members, Faris al-Khuri, and published in the Syrian press in 1928 as a response to a recommendation by French Orientalists to replace the Arabic script with a Latin one,

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<sup>162</sup> Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, “Fatihat al-Maqal,” *Majallat al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Arabi* 1:1 (1921): 1.

compares the applicability of a script change like that of the Turkish case to the Arab world. The article posits that the Turkish switch to the use of a Latin alphabet inspired much thought and debate in the broader Middle East about the need to reform the Arabic script, including the drastic suggestion that the Arabs follow the Turks in adopting Latin letters themselves. In response to these suggestions, al-Khuri seeks to lay out the various reasons for his belief that switching to a Latin alphabet would not be feasible in the Arab world.

Al-Khuri expressly indicates that he does “not deny that Arabic writing is in need of some reform,” specifically with regards to the problems of printing *harakāt*, or short vowels, as well as the multiple forms each Arabic letter can take.<sup>163</sup> *Harakāt*, traditionally placed above or below the letters, were extremely difficult to indicate in print, because a mold needed to be created for each letter along with each of the individual *harakāt*, requiring an excessive number of molds and great expense.<sup>164</sup> To address this problem, al-Khuri suggests that the *harakāt* could be rendered as letter-like shapes which would then be inserted wherever necessary in-line with the text, rather than above or below it. Similarly, letters could be written such that their form would not have to be altered according to their location as beginning, middle, or ending letters in a word, thus making printing easier and more efficient with only 29 letter molds instead of the hundreds in use at the time.<sup>165</sup> In fact, a few months later in the eleventh issue of the same volume of the journal, an article was published containing a proposal for a new scheme developed by Zuhayr al-Shihabi to depict the *harakāt* using letter shapes instead of the traditional markings above and below the text.<sup>166</sup> In a commentary section on al-Shihabi's scheme, Academy's member 'Arif al-Nikdi further proposed a method of reshaping the Arabic letters such that a single form for each letter could be maintained regardless of its position in a word.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Faris al-Khuri, “Ara' wa Afkar: Istibdal al-Huruf al-'Arabiyya bil Huruf al-Latiniyya,” *Majallat al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Arabi* 9:7 (1929): 437.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 437-438

<sup>166</sup> Zuhayr al-Shihabi, “Mashru' bi Kitabat al-Harakat bi Huruf 'Arabiyya (wa Isti'mal Abjadiyya Wahida lil-Tab' wal-Kitaba): Muqaddima Mujiza,” *Majallat al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Arabi* 9:11 (1929): 654.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 660. See Appendix for a copy of al-Nikdi's scheme; note the absence of some letters, which al-Nikdi explains he was not able to devise suitable enough renditions for, instead leaving the task up to those more qualified.

But unlike the Turks, al-Khuri did not see the solution to the complications posed by the Arabic script in resorting to the use of a completely foreign alphabet. He firmly believed that switching to a Latin alphabet could not be feasible for Arabic the way it was for Turkish, due to major differences between the two languages “which make that which [the Turks] have chosen for themselves impossible for us [to adopt].”<sup>168</sup> These differences, for example, included a lack of sufficient letters in the Latin alphabet to represent the variety of Arabic consonants. Although Ottoman had included these different written consonants, modern Turkish eliminated many of these distinctions by condensing multiple distinct Arabic letters into single sounds which were easily written with a single Latin letter. Furthermore, Arabic was not in need of the rich array of vowel sounds that a Latin script could offer.

The article also argued that the Arabic script was more economic than other alphabets, able to express a wealth of ideas and detailed content using less space than Latin letters. In his analysis of al-Khafaji's discussion on the communicative features of Arabic, Suleiman refers to this aspect of the Arabic script as “communicative economy,” or the notion that “Arabic can do more with less.”<sup>169</sup> Suleiman explains that those who attribute to Arabic a superior communicative economy relative to other languages point to translations in and out of Arabic as evidence, noting that “(1) an Arabic text tends to be shorter than its corresponding source text, and (2) a foreign target text tends to be longer than its Arabic source text.”<sup>170</sup>

Another reason to prefer maintaining the Arabic script over switching to Latin letters was al-Khuri's belief in the Arabic script's quality of being significantly more 'readable' than Western scripts:

The Arabic script is clearer because of the distances between its letters, which prevent one letter from being confused for another. It can be read in day or night, and in dim light without the help of glasses, and anyone with near or far-sightedness knows this; today, I read Arabic writing without difficulty, but have to use glasses to read *Afranji* writing. This is one advantage of Arabic letters that should not be minimized, as this itself is enough reason to prefer Arabic over any other [language], for

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<sup>168</sup> Al-Khuri, 435.

<sup>169</sup> Suleiman, *Arabic Language and National Identity*, 45.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

you look at an *Afranji* page and can barely make out one letter from the next without having to carefully peer at it and strain the eyesight. That, I believe, is the reason most Europeans have to use glasses even while in their youth, while readers of Arabic remain able to read it with the naked eye even while in their elderly years.<sup>171</sup>

The script simply needed a few alterations to improve its printed and written form, he argued, and doing so would render the Arabic alphabet “free of faults and [completely] adequate.”<sup>172</sup> To this end, the article calls upon Najib Bek Hawawini as well as other famous calligraphers and printing press owners to work on designing new reformed Arabic printing molds. This would “increase the splendor and beauty of Arabic writing, such that this language would remain exceptional in the beauty of its written form, just as it is exceptional in its eloquence and rhetoric.”<sup>173</sup>

Regardless of whether or not al-Khuri's claims about the various superior characteristics of the Arabic script are factually true - assuming that linguistic superiority can even be a measurable trait - his arguments detailing the alphabet's exceptional attributes illustrate what Suleiman refers to as the “organic relationship” between a language and its speakers, “whereby the high prestige of the language” is believed to reflect “the unsurpassable qualities of the people.”<sup>174</sup> Implicit in the belief of Arabic's superiority over other languages is the perception that as speakers of Arabic, the Arabs as a group inevitably possess distinguished qualities compared to other peoples. This implied value serves as an important basis for strongly identifying with the language and the group, and for being reluctant to move away from or alter that source of value.

An even greater concern for al-Khuri than economic considerations and readability was that adopting a Latin script would cut off not only the Arabs, but the entire world from a wealth of Arabic written works that formed an “invaluable treasure” of ancient civilization and culture. Future generations would no longer be able to read these works, and they could certainly not all be re-printed in the new script. Al-Khuri argues that

by committing this grave mistake we would sever our ties with the past and destroy all bridges connecting us to it while not having anything to

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<sup>171</sup> Al-Khuri, 436.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 438.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 438.

<sup>174</sup> Suleiman, *Arabic Language and National Identity*, 45.

replace it with. As for the Turks, they do not possess this priceless fortune, and in disconnecting their past from their present, they lose nothing.<sup>175</sup>

The question of inherent value crops up again here with the assumption that any aspect of Turkish civilization that relied on anything other than an Arabic-based writing system was somehow void of any worth. For al-Khuri, Arabic as the superior language was clearly what bestowed any historical value upon the Turks as a civilization, and abandoning the Arabic alphabet for Latin was in turn what stripped them of that value as a modern nation. It is also important to note that the author draws on an Arabic cultural heritage as a source of legitimacy without even a mention of Islam and its emphasis on the importance of Arabic. Framing Arabic's civilizational and cultural significance within a flexible history by tracing its value back farther than its religious status in Islam, the article's message transcends any religious boundaries that might include or exclude various sections of its readers, focusing instead on the cultural continuity of the language as a marker of overall group identity for all Arabs. As Suleiman argues, “[i]t is this flexibility of the past which makes it suitable for the culling of group-identity symbols with the power to evoke and motivate,” and which “enables the community...to mobilize for the purpose of defending itself against externally generated challenges, while, at the same time, embracing change and projecting it as part of the inner fabric of this past in an almost seamless progression of history into the present and beyond.”<sup>176</sup> Regardless of their religious identities, all Arabs could appreciate their greater linguistic heritage and the historical value that this heritage imparted onto their present identity. As a factor binding all Arabs together, moving away from Arabic script in favor of another form of written expression would threaten the ties between Arabs of various nationalities: “We Syrians have no right to sever the strong bonds that connect us to our brothers in Iraq, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa.”<sup>177</sup>

Clearly, the events surrounding the alphabet question in Turkey were of concern to Arab intellectuals, who, in general, not only commented on the consequences of script reforms for Turkey itself, but also on the applicability of such drastic measures to the

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<sup>175</sup> Al-Khuri, 435.

<sup>176</sup> Suleiman, *Arabic Language and National Identity*, 44-45.

<sup>177</sup> Al-Khuri, 436.

Arab world. Al-Khuri's article in the Academy's journal is a clear indication that for Arabs, developments within their Turkish neighbor mattered. The article also poignantly demonstrates how powerfully language is connected to identity; individuals can locate their perception of their own self-worth within their language, and particular versions of the past are often relied upon in the identity-construction process.<sup>178</sup> Al-Khuri focuses much of his article on making claims that Arabic possesses inherently superior linguistic qualities, and as Suleiman maintains, “what is important here is not their factual truth or falsity but their *rhetorical* or symbolic value as assertions of ethnic distinctiveness and superiority.”<sup>179</sup> Here, language's role “in underpinning these assertions indicates its capacity to be used as an attribute of national identity in the modern period.”<sup>180</sup> In line with the Academy's mission of nationalistic Arabization, the article establishes Arabic's value not in its religious status but in its exquisite linguistic attributes and its cultural continuity predating Islam, helping to define what it means to be Arab outside the often prevalent religious context of the region, and providing diverse readers with a broad basis for identification with the al-Khuri's argument against adopting a Latin alphabet.

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<sup>178</sup> See James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory*, in *New Perspectives On the Past* series (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>179</sup> Suleiman, *Arabic Language and National Identity*, 46.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. SCRIPTS AND THE MODERNIZATION PROJECT

The replacement of the Arabic script with a Latin alphabet in Turkey was not always perceived negatively by Arab observers. The Turkish alphabet and language reforms acted as a source of inspiration for Arab reformers who located in Arabic the cause for the Arab world's inability to catch up with Western progress and modernity. Even prominent writers such as Taha Husayn, who had long been occupied with classical Arabic literature, voiced the dire need for language reform, as he believed a majority of Arabs, including Azharite scholars, were not capable of using their own language properly.<sup>181</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, 'Abd al-'Aziz Fahmi and other intellectuals went as far as boldly proposing the adoption of Latin letters for writing Arabic to the Arabic Language Academy in Cairo during a 1944 session.

The two Egyptian authors whose works are discussed in the following sections similarly found Mustafa Kemal's alphabet reform to be inspiring. Although they hail from different religious backgrounds and approach the question of the Turkish script change from different angles, both maintain a causal relationship between a nation's script and its ability to modernize. Identifying scripts as a crucial realm of change necessarily preceding other reforms on a nation's path towards modernization and civilized society, the authors' works indicate their belief in the significant role scripts play in the formulation of identity at both an individual and national level.

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<sup>181</sup> Taha Husayn, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi-Misr*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif), 183.



### 5.1. *Kamal Atatürk* by Muhammad Muhammad Tawfiq

*“To the man who created Turkey, awakened the East, and daunted the West;*

*To the man of politics and war: Kamal Atatürk.*

*From an Egyptian who sees in him the best example of a perfect mujāhid and statesman.”*<sup>182</sup>

Published in 1936 by Dar al-Hilal, Muhammad Muhammad Tawfiq's book *Kamal Atatürk* gives a biographical account of Mustafa Kemal's life, starting with his childhood in Salonika in the 1880s. Drawing on numerous English, French, Ottoman, and Arabic sources, the author's self-proclaimed task is to be a “painter,” “painting a portrait of one of the great men of history.”<sup>183</sup> The book itself is a subject of debate; on the one hand, it is often referenced as an essential and comprehensive Arabic source on the life of Mustafa Kemal, but is also denounced as a Western attempt to disseminate pro-European propaganda in the Arab world, not only for its unconditional praise of Mustafa Kemal and his westernization policies, but also due to certain associations about its publisher, Dar al-Hilal.

The Dar al-Hilal publishing house was founded in Cairo in the early 1890s by the influential Lebanese Christian writer Jurji Zaydan, who, because of his Christian background and secular leanings, was often perceived with suspicion by conservative Muslim circles. For example, critiquing Zaydan's *History of Egypt*, Dr. Muhammad Sayyid al-Wakil accuses Zaydan of writing an inaccurate and twisted account of Islam's history under direct influence from Western media. Critics of his novels dealing with Islamic history, such as al-Hilwani, 'Ashmawi, and al-Mahass, denied him the right to write about Islamic history as a Christian, believing he would be inherently prejudiced against it and as such would produce false or negative versions of the past. Furthermore, Zaydan and his publications were viewed as part of a larger danger posed by Christian immigrants from Greater Syria to Egypt who dominated literary publishing and worked

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<sup>182</sup> Opening dedication in *Kamal Atatürk*, by Muhammad Muhammad Tawfiq (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1936). The term *mujahid* denotes one who struggles for God's cause, while the adjective *kāmil* used in the original text of the dedication is a play on Mustafa Kemal's name, as both *kāmil* and his name, *kamāl*, are derived from the same root, *k-m-l*, which carries meanings of perfection or completion.

<sup>183</sup> Tawfiq, 8. Tawfiq wrote in Arabic, but the descriptions, themes, and imagery he uses (especially the depiction of Mustafa Kemal as a wolf) are strongly reminiscent of Harold C. Armstrong's English-language account of Mustafa Kemal, *Grey Wolf*, published only four years before Tawfiq's.

to divide the Muslim *umma*.<sup>184</sup> Sing notes that Rashid Rida counted Zaydan and Dar al-Hilal's main publication, the *al-Hilal* journal, as being among “the enemies of Islam.”<sup>185</sup> As for Tawfiq's book, at the beginning of a paper titled “Kamal Atatürk wa Isqat al-Khilafa al-Islamiyya” (Kamal Atatürk and the Overthrow of the Islamic Caliphate), Islamist thinker Anwar al-Jundi refers to it as yet another of many works published under the influence of the Western and Zionist propaganda machine. These works, according to al-Jundi, aimed to champion Mustafa Kemal and fully commend his westernization project in Turkey.

Little detail about the background of Tawfiq himself is available except for his self-identification in this book as Egyptian, as well as a brief reference to his Turkish origin in the book's introduction.<sup>186</sup> Tawfiq had personal connections with prominent Turkish contemporaries, including Mehmet Akif, renowned author and member of parliament, whose support he acknowledges at the beginning of the book. Regardless of the political leanings of the publisher or author, the book in its entirety serves as a lavish commendation of the character, personality, and policies of Mustafa Kemal, praising every aspect of his personal and political life and depicting him as an exceptional thinker, writer, and leader. He begins the book with an animated description of Mustafa Kemal:

What a man he is!  
Protruding cheek bones. A prominent forehead. Two thick, disheveled eyebrows. Two resplendent blue eyes, like the eyes of a wolf; beheld within them are magic, magnificence, guile, ruthlessness, and perfidy. Nerves of steel, an iron will; a soul of fire, at times, and of ice, at other times; a voice like poured lead, and a gaze distant yet near...  
For him, there is no difference between birth and death: a child is born and thrown into the midst of life, while a man dons a uniform and is thrown into the line of fire...  
He drives his people towards civilization as he drives them towards the battlefield, and in both, he is an unflinching mass of iron and ice.

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<sup>184</sup> Thomas Philipp, “Jurji Zaydan's Role in the Syro-Arab Nahda: A Re-Evaluation,” in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers, and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (New York: Routledge, 2011), 81.

<sup>185</sup> Cited in Manfred Sing, “Illiberal Metamorphoses of a Liberal Discourse: The Case of Syrian Intellectual Sami Al-Kayyali (1898-1972),” in *Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 301.

<sup>186</sup> Fahmi Abaza, introduction to *Kamal Atatürk*, 7.

The author's approval extends to Mustafa Kemal's decisions regarding the alphabet change as well. In his chapter “al-Thi'b wal-Subbura” (The Wolf and the Chalkboard), Tawfiq praises Mustafa Kemal's replacement of the Arabic alphabet with a Latin script, viewing it as part of the leader's determination to eliminate all foreign influences that were not a component of the “genuine” Turkish heritage. The Arabic letters were, according to Tawfiq, “shackles that restricted the Turks and filled their minds with what was not Turkish.”<sup>187</sup>

Furthermore, the Arabic letters were complicated to read, could take many forms, and required of the reader an in-depth knowledge of the language for correct pronunciation. “Why should the Turkish tribe have to endure such complication from letters that are not part of the heritage of their Asian pastoral ancestors?”<sup>188</sup> Most of the other Central Asian Turkic nations had already abandoned the Arabic script for Latin letters years earlier, and Tawfiq questions why Turkey should not follow suit.

Over the course of the next few pages, Tawfiq vividly describes the long thought process and thorough research undertaken by Mustafa Kemal in order to determine the merits of replacing the Arabic alphabet, before finally announcing the script change to his people, teaching them the new letters during a gathering at the Dolmabahçe palace:

[I]n a short speech, he announces the replacement of the Arabic letters with Latin, then stands in front of the chalkboard and begins to write the new letters in a clear, beautiful hand, pronouncing each letter's sound with a powerful, ringing voice.<sup>189</sup>

A “writing lesson” that would have taken days with the old script now took a matter of minutes with the new, and Tawfiq paints a picture of great excitement spreading among the people as Mustafa Kemal traveled across the country, teaching them how to write with the Latin alphabet. According to the author, the culmination of Mustafa Kemal's efforts was the formal adoption of the Latin letters in place of Arabic with the November 1928 law, which resulted in a rapid increase from a literacy rate of “less than 10%...to more than 90%.”<sup>190</sup> Tawfiq joyfully explains that the passage of the law,

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<sup>187</sup> Tawfiq, 162.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 162-163.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid,165.

together with a systematic effort at ridding the language of Arabic and Persian loanwords, and with translating the Qur'an, the call to prayers, and Friday prayer sermons into Turkish, would return the language to “the era of the tribe,”<sup>191</sup> an identification he apparently finds preferable to anything after that.

“In a matter of a few years, everything had become Turkish!” and “the new Turkey had risen, young and alive, from the ashes of the extinct past,”<sup>192</sup> Tawfiq exclaims, positioning the script change as the watershed event which brought with it a variety of other important reforms that allowed the country to reconstruct its identity based on the notion of a return to a pre-Islamic nomadic Turkic heritage. The practical advantages of adopting a Latin script only figure slightly for Tawfiq, in comparison to the script's crucial role as an identity-marker. In his own words, the Arabic script was “a semblance of a defunct era,”<sup>193</sup> symbolizing a foreign Arab and Islamic civilization<sup>194</sup> rather than a heritage that was truly “Turkish,” and harkening back to an age of antiquity and defeat. Adopting a Latin script was, on the one hand, a clear indication to the world about the direction the young Turkish republic aimed to pursue. But more importantly, it served first and foremost as a means of forcing the Turks themselves to re-evaluate their own position between “the East” and “the West;” it was a new point of reference, developed then transmitted to the public in the form of a top-down decree, from which to derive meaning and value for their national and cultural identity as citizens of a modern Turkish republic.

A selective approach to the past is a main feature of Tawfiq's interpretation of the alphabet reform in Turkey. In determining “genuineness” - what is genuinely “Turkish” versus what is not – Tawfiq appropriates a pre-Islamic, pre-Ottoman “Turkic” past as a legitimate heritage for contemporary Turks to identify with, while adamantly condemning any semblance of an Islamic-Arab historical legacy as a foreign influence that needed to be completely eliminated from the image of the modern Turk. Throughout his book, he positions Mustafa Kemal as the benevolent yet firm chief of a

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 163.

“tribe” of acquiescent followers, the sole decision-maker who alone determines the fate of his venerated people. He exclaims that “everything [in Turkey] happens like miracles; and not surprisingly, for the chief orders, and the tribe obeys!”<sup>195</sup>

Interestingly, Tawfiq's glorification of dictatorship throughout the book, like his fixation on war, is especially highlighted in the book's introduction by Fahmi Abaza, where Mustafa Kemal is compared to Hitler and Mussolini and approvingly determined to be “the most severe in tyranny and the greatest in might.”<sup>196</sup> Like many of his Turkish nationalist counterparts, Tawfiq's work is steeped in what Kieser calls an ethno-nationalist rightist revolutionary ideology, characterized by the belief “in modern progress, in a nation defined ethnically, and in the necessity of using violence to achieve modernity.”<sup>197</sup> The state, personified by Mustafa Kemal, is positioned by Tawfiq as having the right to absolute control over an obedient society. In Turkey, this redefining of the state occurred during what Bozarslan refers to as the “third Kemalism,” or Kemalism between 1930-38, a period which witnessed “an openly and self-consciously anti-liberal and anti-democratic regime.”<sup>198</sup> Bozarslan explains that

[t]he consolidation of the Fascist and Bolshevik experiences, carefully studied in Turkey, and the popularity – and later on, the victory – of Nazism, constituted without any doubt important elements explaining the Kemalist move towards the ambition of a total control of the society by the State. The fusion of the State and the single Party (1937) which marked the ultimate manifestation of this control also changed the status of the People. The People...became the bearer of the Nation's essence – but without being aware of it. The State's (i.e., the “Chief's”) conscious intervention was thus necessary in order to reveal this essence to its bearer.<sup>199</sup>

The earlier Kemalist agendas of westernization and civilization were further strengthened with this state control, although the concept of civilization was turkified,

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<sup>195</sup> Tawfiq, 166.

<sup>196</sup> Fahmi Abaza, introduction to *Kamal Atatürk*, 5.

<sup>197</sup> Hans-Lukas Kieser, “An Ethno-Nationalist Revolutionary and Theorist of Kemalism: Dr Mahmut Esta Bozkurt (1892-1943),” in *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 20.

<sup>198</sup> Hamit Bozarslan, “Kemalism, Westernization, and Anti-Liberalism,” in *Turkey Beyond Nationalism*, 29.

<sup>199</sup> Bozarslan, 33.

resulting in the redefinition of the Turks as a group whose original or essence civilization was in fact the bringer of civilization to others.<sup>200</sup>

Although Tawfiq does not explicitly argue that the Turkish example of script reform is a model which the Arab world should follow, his writings on the matter send a clear message to Arab readership about what it means to be modern and civilized, and the means by which these qualities are to be achieved. For Tawfiq, a society's language is intrinsically connected to its degree of progress, and the state of its script acts as a clear marker of identity and group worth.

## **5.2. Salama Musa's *Modern Rhetoric and the Arabic Language***

Many of the themes featured in Tawfiq's discussions of the Turkish alphabet change are echoed throughout the work of another Egyptian author, Salama Musa, in a book he first published almost ten years after Tawfiq's, titled *al-Balagha al-'Asriyya wal-Lugha al-'Arabiyya (Modern Rhetoric and the Arabic Language)*, and initially published by what appears to be Musa's own publishing house. The book takes a similar stance to Tawfiq's work on the issue of Turkey's script reform, but applies the discourse more directly to the case of Egypt, addressing what Musa saw as an important relationship between the Arabic language and the overall backwardness of Egyptian society.

Musa was an outspoken early proponent of socialism in Egypt, helping to establish the first Egyptian socialist party along with 'Ali al-'Anani.<sup>201</sup> However, as Hourani notes, his socialist thought “derived less from Marx than from the 'advanced thought' of Edwardian England, from Shaw and Wells and through them from Ibsen, Nietzsche, and Tolstoy.”<sup>202</sup> Musa wrote a multitude of books on topics such as social reform, education,

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<sup>200</sup> This is most clearly illustrated in the two 'scientific' theories created and propagated by the regime on the history of civilizations and languages, the Turkish Thesis of History and the Sun-Language Theory.

<sup>201</sup> Tareq Y. Ismael and Rifa'at El-Sa'id, *The Communist Movement in Egypt 1920-1988* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>202</sup> Hourani, 339.

and the position of women in society, and authored one of the first Arabic works on socialism, a monograph titled *al-Ishtirakiyya*. During the late 1920s and 30s, he was the initial publisher of the magazine *al-Majalla al-Jadida*, which became a major publication of the liberal cultural scene, focusing on politics and social reform. Contributors to the magazine wrote on an array of political and social problems, among them the need to establish democracy and a society educated in science, as well as the fight against imperialism and the economic inequality that it operates on.<sup>203</sup>

Writing his *al-Balagha al-'Asriyya wal-Lugha al-'Arabiyya* in 1945, Musa saw in Turkey an enviable model for modernization and progress, whose success at adopting for itself a European character and outlook he hoped Egypt would be able to emulate. In tackling the question of language and script reform in Egypt over a decade after Turkey had officially changed its alphabet, he repeatedly cites Turkey as an illustrative example of how his suggested reforms could be implemented successfully. Musa believed the project of modernization in Egypt could not succeed as long as Egyptian society relied on a language that not only was “steeped in the desert ethos and the outdated value system this engenders,”<sup>204</sup> but also whose script was functionally incapable of serving modern scientific thought. “This language,” argues Musa, “cannot satisfy an educated man in the present age, as it does not serve the nation nor develop it,”<sup>205</sup> owing to its inability to keep up with modern scientific discourse in providing Arabic equivalents for modern objects and concepts,<sup>206</sup> and its inadequacy at transcribing scientific terminologies due to its lack of vowels.<sup>207</sup> Considering it a very brave task to speak out for the need to abolish the Arabic script and adopt a Latin alphabet instead, Musa asserts that Egypt could eventually come to occupy a position like Turkey's, if only Egyptians would take action regarding the immediate need for such drastic measures. Musa firmly

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<sup>203</sup> Selma Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism, 1939-1970* (New York: Syracuse University Press), 158-159.

<sup>204</sup> Yasir Suleiman, *A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>205</sup> Salama Musa, *Al-Balagha al-'Asriyya wal-Lugha al-'Arabiyya*, expanded ed., (Cairo: Salama Musa lil-Nashr wal-Tawzi', 1964), 139.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 140-141.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 158.

believed that switching to a Latin alphabet was the single crucial step that had allowed Turkey to “close the doors on its past, and open the doors to its future.”<sup>208</sup>

Entirely ignoring the fact that the Arabic script historically served the development of science and scientific thought during the Islamic 'Golden Age,' where it proved a perfectly adequate means for the translation of Greek works and the interaction between various ancient scientific sources and contemporary Arab scientists, Musa argues that the Arabic script is completely incompatible with modern science:

But can we study the sciences in our own language, such that a scientific culture would prevail side by side with industrialization or a scientific civilization? Yes, we can, but not with the current Arabic letters. The reason for this is that the European and American sciences – and there are no other sciences in the world – rely on deriving words from Latin and Greek to form terminology that can express scientific meanings. The forms of this terminology, based on derivation from these two languages, enlighten the learner, and ease comprehension, as a first glance at a word's form indicates [its meaning].

There is, of course, an effort to translate scientific terms into Arabic, but this is a wasted effort. It is like trying to swim across an ocean; we can swim on the shores of the Atlantic, but we cannot swim across it from the African to the American coast, and this is the concern with Arabic words. There are approximately fifty or sixty thousand words that we cannot possibly translate, meaning we cannot discover or invent Arabic words that express the meanings of these terms. I would even accuse anyone who attempts such a translation with inadvertently retarding our scientific revival. And this is what the [Egyptian] Arabic Language Academy is doing.<sup>209</sup>

He also posited that a Latin script would be easier and require less time for people to learn compared to the Arabic script, although he does not provide any “scientific” or observational evidence to bolster these claims.

An incompatibility with science, however, seems to be a superficial concern when compared with the deeper issue of the ways in which Musa believed adopting a Latin script would serve to transform Egypt's identity, and relegate it to the sphere of modernized, industrialized, and most importantly, European nations. He elaborates:

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 157-158.



- Let us look at some of the positive features of [adopting] a Latin script:
- 1- Firstly, we come closer to achieving the unification of humanity. This script is the tool for reading and writing among those who are civilized and own the means of production, which in turn denotes science, power, and the future. Nations that want to move towards reform adopt this script, like Turkey did, and it is most probable that very soon, this script will prevail across the world.
  - 2- By adopting a Latin script, we remove the psychological barrier that is constructed by those two ominous words “East” and “West,” so that we can also live a modern life. Furthermore, this script will likely bring along with it many other reforms, such as economic equality of the sexes, scientific thinking, and a scientific mentality or psychology, etc...
  - ... 6- When we write with a Latin script, we find that learning European languages also becomes easier, which opens up horizons that are currently closed to us.<sup>210</sup>

Here, the “the unification of humanity” clearly refers to the assimilation of European characteristics and ideals, as Musa locates value in those he considers “civilized” and forward-looking. Dismissing any significance that might be derived from Egypt's own unique position or historical legacy, Musa is solely concerned with “the future” and appropriating an identity that strips Egypt of its negative designation as “Eastern” to re-establish it as modern. With Turkey the definitive example, Musa believed in an alphabet's quality of being the clear indication of a nation's standing; for him, switching to a Latin script in Egypt would become the defining event that would bring with it a flood of other important European-inspired reforms. This point is further emphasized with the assumption that Egyptians should be concerned with learning only European languages, ensuring that Egypt remained firmly connected with Europe, the source that would accord it value as it pursued the path of modernization and industrialization. “In short,” he sums up, “adopting the Latin script is a leap towards the future. But would the elements that benefit from holding onto the Arabic script and traditions accept this leap?”<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 140-141.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 141.

The sinister tone of Musa's question above is illustrative of the antagonistic attitude with which he approaches opposing viewpoints throughout his book. Over the course of the next few chapters, Musa accuses his critics and those who do not see the adoption of a Latin script as the ultimate solution to Egypt's development of having a hidden agenda to keep Egypt steeped in outdated ways of life, of being too ignorant to understand the situation in full, and too emotional and overwhelmed with a hatred of Latin letters, European colonialism, and modernity to recognize the need for a script change.<sup>212</sup> He maintains that Egyptians will never be able to move forward as modern citizens of an industrialized nation as long as they refuse to give up antiquated traditions and mentalities associated with an obsolete, rural lifestyle; first and foremost among them, the Arabic script.

When we moved from a rural to an urban setting and riding the tram, the train, the automobile, and even the airplane, we were required to be more energetic and to wear lighter clothing. We began wearing trousers, because they allow greater freedom of movement for the legs, and we left behind the robes (*jalābīb*) and caftans (*qafātin*) that we used to wear in the villages... Most of us now admit to the advantages of European attire over our robes and caftans, because we live in cities, not in villages.

This is also the case with Latin letters, which are the modern attire for modern thought, for scientific thought... Just as we have people who are still attached to the loose Eastern attire, because they prefer a life of complacency and have no need for energetic activity, we similarly have people who hate Latin letters, because they have never read a single book in their entire lives. They do not understand the meaning of scientific accuracy. They are...a burden on us, dragging down our progress.<sup>213</sup>

He then continues, in a chapter titled “Our Imperative Need for Latin Letters:”

[C]ivilized nations do not triumph over Eastern nations except through industry, and only industry. All [these nations'] mental decency, their freedoms for men and women, their sciences and arts; all of this is the result of industrialization...Do you know what steel is?...It is power in war, and civilization in peace. It is civilization, because it accords us the morals of the civilized, the morals of knowledge and logic. It is what will take us away from our agricultural, feudal morals, the morals of religion and tradition, and our backward focus on the past, to looking forward towards the future.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 153-154.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 155.

In fact, Musa only deviates from a discourse that is overtly averse to the past<sup>215</sup> when he uses particular historical examples to justify replacing the Arabic script with a Latin one, claiming that “there is no shame [in changing scripts], as Egypt adopted the Greek alphabet two thousand years ago in place of hieroglyphics, and Europe adopted Arabic numerals in place of Latin numerals, while the Arabs adopted Indian numerals in place of Arabic numerals...”<sup>216</sup> Only by following these successful examples and switching to a Latin alphabet would Egyptians be able to foster a scientific culture that drives and guides industrialization.<sup>217</sup> He insists that adopting a Latin script would transport the nation a thousand years forward, requiring after that only a couple of years for Egypt to completely “cross the bridge between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age.”<sup>218</sup> Questioning what he refers to as blind and senseless attachment to the Arabic letters, he calls on his nation to bravely take action and adopt a Latin script, “acquiring, as a result, a scientific culture that elevates us with its broad horizons to the status of modern nations, in thought and in substance.”<sup>219</sup> Arabic, with its rhetorical emphasis on emotions and desires, and its vocabulary drawn from a primitive, desert lifestyle was not suited to the modern requirements of logic, clarity, and accuracy.<sup>220</sup> Furthermore, he reminds people again of the noble, human aspect of adopting a Latin alphabet, which would join Egypt to a culture shared by one billion “civilized human beings,” transforming “separation into connectivity” and “dispute into harmony – and in all of this is peace, love, and humanity.”<sup>221</sup> Alluding to the Turkish example once again, he warns critics against playing the religion card, “for of the world's 300 million Muslims, only 60 million of them write Arabic; besides, the alphabet used for the Muslim Turkish language is a Latin script.”<sup>222</sup>

Throughout his chapters on language and modernization, the vicious tone of Musa's arguments as well as his condemnatory attitude towards Arabic and the culture of those

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 181-182.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 160.

who identify with it make his work seem more like an attack rather than a practical ideology which could attract average Egyptian sympathizers. A large segment of the Egyptian population, especially those who were religiously-inclined Muslims, would have reason to take offense at his view that “many of the crimes committed in Egypt are...first and foremost linguistic crimes motivated by a fossilized language serving a fossilized religion.”<sup>223</sup> However, the severity of his criticisms of Arabic and of whomever he identified as reactionaries helped gain his work widespread attention, and his writings were some of the notable few language reform proposals that went as far as calling for a full-fledged replacement of Arabic with a foreign alphabet.

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<sup>223</sup> Suleiman, *War of Words*, 44.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The authors whose works are presented in this thesis were part of a world that was undergoing many changes. Some of them had gone from being subjects of an empire, to actively participating in the struggle for the establishment of independent Arab nation states. Through war, the fall of the Ottoman empire, the triumph of a Turkish Muslim state (in character and perception, if not in name) in the face of European colonialism, and the loss of the most important symbol of unified Muslim power that occurred with the abolition of the caliphate, shared heritages and relationships were constantly being reevaluated and reshaped. Examining intellectual writings from the Arab world in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s on the Turkish alphabet reform offers important insight into how these intellectuals conceived of their identity and the position of their societies in the world, and the connection this had with the language they spoke and wrote. Importantly, their works are valuable sites for exploring the Arab-Turkish relationship within the context of language.

The writings examined in this thesis underline the fact that Arabs of diverse backgrounds and perspectives were aware of and interested in language-related developments taking place in Turkey at the time. Some of them, such as the authors featured in *al-Manar*, were concerned about the Turkish script change from a religious perspective, viewing the change as an attack against Islam and an effort to rid Turkey of its Muslim identity. For them, the Arabic script was an important symbol of Islam, visually representing the word of God and unifying not only Arabs but Muslims from all corners of the *umma*.

For others whose predominant ideology was that of Arab or Egyptian nationalism, the alphabet reform in Turkey could be interpreted in multiple ways. Some, like al-Khuri,

accepted the change for Turkey but rejected the notion that a similar reform should be implemented in the Arab world. Not only did he view European Orientalist proposals to Latinize the Arabic script as a devious instrument of colonialism by which to divide various Arab peoples, Latinizing the Arabic script represented an attack on a valuable Arab linguistic heritage and cultural continuity which stretched back far before Islam. As a language with a noble heritage and superior linguistic qualities, he preferred to preserve the Arabic script while tackling the modern question of how to facilitate Arabic printing by looking for simplifying solutions within the current script itself. Maintaining the Arabic script would avoid any loss of connection to heritage and history, a concern noted in the Kemalist example of Turkey.

Yet others pointed to the Arabic script to explain what they saw as the disturbing condition of their nations' backwardness. These authors concerned themselves not with restoring former glory to religion-based conceptions of an *umma*, nor with reaching back to the past as a means of attributing value to the present. For them, the only hope for their societies to progress was by modernizing along the lines of western development and industrialization. A complete replacement of what they believed to be a defunct and cumbersome script with a new, Latin-based alphabet that was well-suited to modern scientific education was a crucial first step in the process of modernization. Furthermore, a new, modern script would cause people to reevaluate their own perceptions of their identity, in addition to marking their nations as new and modern for others. For these authors, the Turkish alphabet reform was an inspiring success whose example they hoped could be emulated by their own peoples.

Arab intellectuals' perspectives on the Turkish alphabet reform resist predictability. To take one example from the works cited, al-Khuri and Musa share some similarities in background; both were nationalists, and both came from Christian backgrounds, although Musa was Coptic, unlike most Christians of Syria. Both of them attribute to scripts the quality of defining, in very large part, what it means to be Arab, Syrian, or Egyptian, but the way they conceptualize the issue at hand is vastly different. Al-Khuri applies a critical approach that acknowledges shortcomings of the Arabic script in the modern context, and looks for creative and economic solutions within the script itself.

He draws on the past as a source of validation of Arabic's 'noble pedigree,' insisting on the need to preserve the language and its script from foreign tampering. For al-Khuri, the Turkish model is not one to be emulated by Syria, as he takes into account differing historical and geographical factors that make the positions of each of the two countries unique. Musa, on the other hand, in his complete dismissal of any possible virtues of the Arabic script, only locates value for Egypt in its ability to distance itself from Arabic and pursue the European modernization project, applauding what he saw as Turkey's success at transforming the character and outlook of an overwhelmingly Muslim state into that of a European nation.

Despite the diversity of these authors' backgrounds, ideologies, and approaches, what is common to all their works is a firm belief in the integral link between script and identity, or how the alphabet one uses to write one's language helps them to define who they are, and serves as a group marker that identifies them with and to others. Approaching the issue from various angles, these authors strongly felt that the alphabet reform in Turkey was more than an isolated development; instead, it pertained to them and had repercussions for their connected societies in one way or another.

There is a wealth of Arabic sources on the Turkish language and script reforms still to be studied. A possibility for future research might be to examine contemporary Arab popular media coverage of the 1928 alphabet law, using newspapers from major cities to compare the coverage with the approaches of the intellectuals whose works are explored in the present thesis. News reporting can act as an agenda-setter for the issues that audiences 'should' focus on and be concerned about. The way its function of interpreting events and providing analysis and commentary is carried out can also indicate what the public is interested in.<sup>224</sup> News coverage is a useful place to look for how images of the "other" are manifested.<sup>225</sup> Arabic newspaper archives from the late 1920s and early 30s are a potentially valuable venue for further exploration of the topic.

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<sup>224</sup> Rasha A. Abdulla, "Arab Media Over the Past Twenty Years: Opportunities and Challenges," in *The Changing Middle East: A New Look at Regional Dynamics*, ed. Bahgat Korany (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 62.

<sup>225</sup> Noha Mellor, *The Making of Arab News* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005), 42.

Another possible area for future study would be a comparative analysis of coverage of the Turkish alphabet reform, or broader language reform efforts, in two Arabic magazines of diverse outlooks but of comparable influence and reach, such as *al-Manar* and *al-Hilal*. A search for support of the Turkish alphabet change, and even more drastically, the call for the Latinization of the Arabic script from thinkers of explicitly religiously-conservative background would also be useful in adding to the spectrum of diverse perspectives analyzed in this thesis.

Why does it matter to study how Arabs perceived of Turkey within any given context, or how relations and mutual perceptions of these groups operated in the past? Beyond being of value, at the most basic level, to a more nuanced understanding of history, research that explores the many facets of Turkish-Arab relations provides us with an indispensable link between the past and the direction of behavior in the future. As Arabs become increasingly interconnected with Turkey today, and ever more interested in and aware of its domestic and international affairs, their perceptions and opinions of the country and its people become more complex. Similarly, a revival within Turkish society of interest in Turkey's Ottoman heritage and the domains of the former empire both at the scholarly and public levels through degree programs, conferences, social media outlets, and even politics contributes to the process of shifting perceptions and redefining relations.

With Turkey increasingly being deemed a role model for developing Arab countries in the wake of the Arab Spring,<sup>226</sup> the Arab world will continue to eye Turkey with great interest, especially in areas such as the relationship between religion and politics, and relationships between nations. Historical research on relations and perceptions in the past is of benefit in thinking about how these groups will move forward together, dictate policies about each other, create opportunities for cooperation and positive change, and simply interact with each other outside the confines of stereotypes, negative images, and Othering.

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<sup>226</sup> Bülent Aras and Karakaya Polat, "Turkey and the Middle East: Frontiers of the New Geographic Imagination," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61:4 (2007): 478.



## Appendix

### ا ب ج د ه و ز ح ط ي ك ل م ن هـ و

والحروف بشكلها هذا قد روعيت صورها الاصلية على قدر الامكان .  
اما الحركات فتصير حروفاً على هذا الشكل :

ل ا ا — فتكون الضمة مصدر الواو ، والفتحة والكسرة كرمي بوضعان عليها .  
او يختار شكل آخر يكون اكثر موافقة .  
او تكون الالف (ا) مضاعف الالف الحاضرة او ( هـ ) بما يقرب من رسمها  
الديواني .

والفتحة ( ا ) اي نصف الالف والكسرة ( ا ) نصف الياء كما هي حقيقةتهما .  
كحقي — هذا ما سبق فأجبت به عن الاقتراح . وازيد على ذلك : ان الحروف  
( ر ز ص ض ط ظ م ) لم اوفق فيها الى شكل يرضي فأترك أمرها وأمر اصلاح  
الحروف التي عرضتها وتبنيها تعديلاً الى من هم اولي مني بهذا العمل النبي .  
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