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French Impact on the Egyptian Educational System under Muhammad Aly and Ismail

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The Egyptian educational system was a creation of Muhammad Aly (1805-1848). Before his time there only was a traditional system of education of *kuttâb* (Quranic schools) and mosques schools which lacked organization and standardization, mainly concentrating on religious matters, language and some subjects in Islamic studies. When Muhammad Aly took over, he planned to build a modern military power which would require reforming the economy and reorganizing the administration. In order to achieve these targets, was needed a certain type of personnel with special qualifications not easily found among graduates of Al-Azhar and other religious schools. It was necessary to train personnel in modern methods of administration and military science, but this would take a long time and heavy investment before producing results.[1]

Being a pragmatic person eager to realize his demands immediately, Muhammad Aly hired European experts, teachers and officers while at the same time starting to train Egyptians in a semi-modern schooling system to gradually replace Europeans in government services. The desperate need for personnel led to the creation of a modern educational system that took almost two decades to materialize. The French teachers and experts who served the Egyptian government of Muhammad Aly played an important role in shaping the Egyptian educational system, and the French trained Egyptian experts and administrators contributed to the development of the system under Khedive Ismail (1863-1879). In both epochs, the design and reform of the Egyptian educational system were tailored to the demands of Egypt, but their terms of reference remained the French educational experience. This

[1] For further details, see Artin (Yacoub Pacha), *L'instruction publique en Egypte*, Paris, 1890; Bokotor (Amir), *School and Society in the Valley of the Nile*, Cairo, 1936.

experience left clear French fingerprints easily identified when we look at the Egyptian educational system before the time of the British Occupation.

However, this does not mean that Muhammad Aly favoured the French over other Europeans. His political ambition along with his desire to avoid European penetration and political pressure made him reluctant to recruit subjects of the Great Powers.

In fact, he did not think of hiring French personnel before the fall of the first Empire, preferring instead the Italians. Italian was the first foreign language to be taught in the early schools established by Muhammad Aly such as Qalah, Qasr Al-Ainî (School of Medicine), Muhandis-Khana (School of Engineering), and the military schools. The first educational missions were sent by Muhammad Aly to major Italian cities, and a majority of teachers, officers and technicians were recruited from there. The first books on modern sciences translated into Turkish and Arabic that were published by Būlâq Press were Italian books.

In a report on medicine in Egypt, Clot Bey[2] stated that when he first came to Egypt (1825), he has found medical service dominated by Italians. Out of 199 physicians and chemists employed by the Egyptian government, there were 44 French, British, German, Polish and Spanish, while the others were Italians. Gradually, Italians were replaced by French personnel: in the 1820's France became Egypt's main source of know-how, and The French language replaced Italian as the first foreign language to be taught in schools. French books on various subjects made up the majority of the published Arabic translations that came out of Būlâq Press.

French personnel served the government of Egypt under Muhammad Aly and Ismail in various positions such as physicians, engineers, teachers, technicians, military experts and administrators. This development enhanced the influence of Latin culture in general and French culture in particular, giving the latter an unchallenged position in Egypt until the British occupation tried to push aside French cultural influence. This last effort however did not meet with much success.[3]

Most of the French personnel recruited by Muhammad Aly were servants of the First Empire, trained and influenced by the traditions of the French revolution and

[2] Clot Bey submitted the report to Bowring; see Bowring J., *Report on Egypt and Candia*, London, 1840, p. 139. See also: Douin G., *une mission militaire auprès de Mohammad Aly*, Correspondance des généraux Belliard et Boyer de Boyer à Jomard (20 mai 1825), Le Caire, 1923, p. 40.

[3] Awad L., *Tarîkh al-fikr al-misrî al-hadith* vol. I, al-Khalfiyya al-Târîkhiyya, kitâb al-Hilâl 215, Feb., 1969, p. 65-68

the epoch of Napoleon.[4] Their ideas, morals and experience reflected on the essence of that era. Naturally, the contribution to designing the educational system of Egypt under Muhammad Aly and Ismail was deeply influenced by the French experience, as were the Egyptians who took part in shaping the system, having been educated in France.

It was in France that the idea if the state controlling education was first revived. Louis René da La Chalotais (1701-1785) expounded the doctrine in his *Essay on National Education* (Eng. Transl., 1934), criticizing at the same time the education given by the Jesuits. His *Essay* had a considerable influence, and during the nineteenth century France developed its highly centralized educational system.

Napoleon initiated this system, creating in1808 the *Université de France* which was a government department under a Rector responsible for the administration of education. Napoleon wished to ensure that the state was well provided with military officers and civil servants, and therefore encouraged the establishment of lycées and collages. He paid little attention to primary education, leaving it to the church and communes.

Francois Guizot, when Minister of Education, first organized primary schools under his law of 1833. Each commune had to maintain such a school. It was under the Third republic that primary education became in the 1880's compulsory and free. Throughout the organization of primary education, the French kept steadily in view the danger of creating an intellectual proletariat. Higher primary schools were created to continue education up to the age of 16 so as to prepare students to take places in the higher ranks of skilled industry, or among the middle professional ranks. French secondary education for boys was given in the lycées which were schools maintained and controlled by the State.[5]

Throughout the nineteenth century European schools in general and French schools in particular followed a system of military-like discipline for creating disciplined members of the community. This was the background of French and Egyptian personnel, members of committees struck by Muhammad Aly to design the Egyptian educational system. No doubt, their work was influenced by that background.

[4] Fot details, see: Zayn al-Din I., *al-Muwazzafûn al-Ajânib fî al-Idâra al-Misriyya* 1805-1882, M.A. Thesis, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, 1984.

[5] Information on French education is taken from the work of Compayré G., *Histoire critique des doctrines de l'education en France*, 2 vols, Paris, 1881

The making of the Egyptian Educational System (1836)

The modern schools had been established on a pragmatic basis from 1181 to meet the demands of Muhammad Aly's administration. Schools were made to train a certain number of students to be government servants and/or army officers. The first students were *Mamlûk* lads and Azharites recruited to study Turkish, Persian and Arabic, Italian, mathematics, and the military arts. Higher education schools were the first to be established, such as the School of Engineering, the Military School, the School of Medicine and Al-Alsun (School of Foreign Languages). Syllabication of each school was left to its European headmaster (*nâzir*) to decide, upon according to his own background and the demands of the viceroy, without any coordination or uniformity[6] between schools.

To supply these higher education schools, known as *madâris khusûsiyya* (special or professional schools), with students, the *Taghîziyya* (preparatory) school was established at Qasr al-Ainî in 1825. Five hundred students, mostly Turks and Circassians, were enrolled. Its syllabus consisted of: Quran, reading, writing, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Italian, mathematics, drawing and calligraphy. Some 60 primary schools (*makâtib*) were gradually established in Cairo, Alexandria and some other cities to teach a limited number of students reading, writing, Quran and some principles of arithmetic. In addition, some one hundred of the traditional *Kuttâb* were maintained by *waqfs*. Excluding *Kuttâb*, all schools of the modern style were run by the department of war (*Dîwân al-Jihâdiyya*) up to 1873.[7]

The modern Egyptian schools needed a framework to organize them into a unified system of education able to cope with the expansion of the vice-royal government which, in 1836, controlled most of the Ottoman provinces of the Near East including Arabia and the Sudan. It also needed to meet the demand of the personnel for military and civil service. For this reason, Muhammad Aly set up in 1836, a committee under the title of *Majlis 'Âmm lil-nazar fî Tanzîm al-Madarîs* (General council of School reorganization).

The committee was headed by Mustafa Mukhtar Bey Chief of the Civil Council (*Majilis al-Malakiyya*). The members were three Armenians (Artin, Stephan and Hakakian), two Egyptians (Rifâ'a al- Tahtâwi and Muhammad Bayyûmî) and seven French (Cane, Clot, Hamont, Lambert, Lubert, and Varin). The seventh Frenchman M. Duzol acted as secretary of the committee. All non-french members were educated in France or, at least, familiar with French culture (as Artin Yusufîân who was in charge of Trade and Foreign Affairs). All minutes, reports,

[6] Artin, op. cit., p. 69; Abd al-Karim A., *Tarîkh al-Ta'lîm fî 'Asr Muhammas Alî*, Cairo, 1938, p. 82-83.
[7] Mubarak A., *al-Khutat al- Tawfîqiyya*, vol .3, p. 40; Abdul-Karim, op. cit., p. 83-84.

records and communications made by the committee were written in French then translated into Turkish and Arabic.[8]

After a series of meetings and long debates, the committees suggested a plan to reorganize the schools. Accordingly, the educational system would be composed of three stages: primary, preparatory (secondary), and higher education (*khusûsî*), each stage leading to the next. Fifty primary schools were to be established in the provinces according to the percentage of population with a maximum enrollment of 5,500 boys. Two secondary schools were designed to prepare students for higher education, one in Cairo with 1,500 students and the second in Alexandria with 500 students. The main function of higher schools was to train students for military and civil service[9]

The committee concluded the task by designing regulations for each stage of the educational system and suggested a permanent body be in charge of the educational system. Muhammad Aly approved the plan, decreed for its enforcement and created a consultative body to watch over educational matters entitled *Shûrat al-Madâris*. The Shûrâ was headed by Mukhtar Bey with three advisers (Artin, Stephan, and Lambert) but continued to be under the department of war until 1837 when the department of education (*Dîwân al-Madâris*) was created. Despite the weakness of the Egyptian educational system in the last years of Muhammad Aly's rule, and throughout the times of Abbas I and said, the designs made in 1836 by the committee for the reorganization of education formed the core of the educational system of Egypt in the nineteenth century.

The French impact on the designs made by that committee can be found in the limited interest in primary education, a tradition of the Napoleonic era, as the State was mainly concerned with training personnel for civil and military service. The demand of the State for servants decided the size and quality of education in secondary and higher schools, but primary education was not a concern of the State as extending educational services to the people was not considered as a duty of the State or listed as one of the people's rights. In other words, education was confined to the social elite of State servants.

The regulations made by the committee reflected the military nature of the Napoleonic schools, making learning a process of discipline, inspection and continuous obedience. In the Egyptian educational system, both teachers and students were assigned military ranks; captain and lieutenant for teachers, sergeant-

[8] M. Hamont, director of the school of Veterinary Medicine, reported his experience with this committee in his *Histoire de l'Égypte sous Mehemt Aly*, tome 2, Paris, 1843, p. 199.
[9] Abd al-Karim, op.sit., p. 94-95.

major, and sergeant, corporal and private for students. The French influence can be traced too in the central administration of education through autocratic control, and in mandating control of primary education to the provincial administration that lacked the efficiency of its French counterpart.

The committee for the reorganization of education adopted the monitorial system and introduced it to the Egyptian educational system. It was called in French *l'enseignement mutuel* (mutual instruction) originating from the English Lancaster model school, and adopted by France in 1814.[10] In this system students of higher grades in the same school acted as instructors helping other students of lower grades to monitor their lessons.

Nevertheless, the committee had taken into consideration the indigenous cultural factors in designing school syllabus. Besides a great interest in teaching French to the students of secondary schools and making them able to write reports in French, the teaching of Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Quran made up more that forty percent of the syllabus. Reorganization of education did not extend to include the traditional education of Quranic schools (*Kuttâb*), and other religious schools.[11]

Reform of the Educational System under Ismail

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, by the end of Muhammad Aly's time Egypt was gradually integrated into the European economic world after the elimination of state control of the economy. European presence gained a foothold in various fields, from the economy to culture. Foreign influence on Egyptian life in general was growing; as noted by European immigration, foreign schools and the emulation of European style of life by the social elite of landlords, including rulers. Simultaneously, a small but growing and influential group of Egyptians, beneficiaries of scholarships to Europe and graduates of modern schools established since Muhammad Aly, had found that the essence of European progress could be traced to its intellectual tradition. Rifa'a al-Tahtâwî pioneered a trend to modernize Arab thought. He introduced a new conception of society as homeland (*watan*) and nation (*ummah*).[12]

This is the background against which we view developments at the time of khedive Ismail, who tried to play the role of an enlightened despot striving to make his country part of Europe, supported by a class of officials deeply interested in and influenced by European culture through their French educational background. Few

[10] Heyworth-Dunne J., *An introduction to the history of education in modern Egypt*, London, 1939, p. 246.
[11] Abd al-Karim, op.cit., p. 75-78.
[12] For details, see; Hourani A., *Arabic thoughts in the Liberal Age* 1798-1939, London, 1962, p. 69 ff.; Al-Shayyal J., *Târîkh al-Tarjama wal-Haraka al-Thaqafiyya fi 'Asr Muhammad Ali*, Cairo, 1951, p. 126; see also Sabry M., *La genèse de l'esprit national égyptien* 1863-1882 (N.P.1924), p.97.

days after his accession, Ismail reopened the Department of Education (*Dîwân al-Madârîs*), closed by Said in 1854. Ismail not only showed concern for the reconstruction of the military schools but also ordered the immediate opening of a primary and secondary school in both Cairo and Alexandria. In 1864 he began planning for the establishment of primary schools in the provinces.[13]

Interest in primary education as a means of creating civic society and fostering national feeling was then an important issue in France and Western Europe. Gradually, primary education became a state concern. It aimed to be a melting pot liable to providing uniformity in public education, producing good citizens and cultivating feelings of national affiliation.

The government of Ismail wanted to catch up with this national trend of public primary education. Being short of financial means to push forward such a costly project, the government inspired dome members of the Consultative Chamber of Deputies (*Majilis Shûrat al-Nuwwâb*) established in 1866, to propose the opening of a primary school in each of the provinces. The proposal (January, 1867) included an appeal to the population to support the schools by voluntary contributions. Admission of pupils would be without regard to social status or religion. Being financed by the provinces, charitable funds and *waqfs*, primary education would be free. Indications are that the project had from the outset been inspired by the government which had to win public support for raising the necessary funds.

Aly Mubarak, outstanding administrator and educator, graduate of the French educational system, was entrusted to draft proposals for the execution of the project. He chaired a committee, whose members included '*ulamâ*' and notables, to draft the Primary School Law of 1868 which was more advanced than the Shûrâ Chamber project. The traditional Quranic schools (*Kuttâb*) were included in the system of modern primary schools.[14] The primary school law of 1868 decreed, for the first time, that the state would supervise all *Kuttâb*.[15]

As qualitative and quantitative improvement of the schools depended not only on finance but also on availability of a sufficient number of suitable teachers, Aly Mubarak founded *Dâr al'Ulûm* in 1871, as the first teachers' college in Egypt.[16] Certainly Aly Mubârak had in mind the model of teachers' colleges of France

[13] Artin, op.cit., p. 95, 169; Heyworth-Dune, op.cit., p. 347 ff.
[14] Sami A., *Taqwîm al-Nîl wa 'Asr Ismâ'îl*, 3 :2, Cairo, 1936, p. 552, 600; Douin, *Histoire du règne du Khédive Ismail*, Rome, 1934, tome I, p. 310 ff.
[15] For the text of the Primary School Law known as *Lâ'ihat Rajab*, see: Abd al-Karim, *Târîkh al ta'lîm fi Misr min nihâyat hukun Muhammad 'Alî ilâ awâ'il hukm Tawfîq*, Cairo, 1945, vol. 3, p. 34.
[16] Artin, op.cit., p.100.

known as the *école normale* when designing *Dâr al-'Ulûm*, including however consideration of the cultural differences.

When Ismail was deposed in 1879, there were some thirty schools controlled by the Department of Education, most of which were in Cairo and Alexandria with an enrollment of about 5,500 pupils; the percentage of females was 15-20 percent.[17] Yet it was obvious that funds were not sufficient to make primary public education available to all. Some private (*Ahlî*) primary schools were founded by wealthy persons and charitable Muslim and Coptic societies following the system of government-sponsored primary schools, which was influenced by the French system.

The Egyptian School in Paris

In addition to the French impact on the Egyptian educational system of Muhammad Aly, and the reform of education under Ismail, the French educated Egyptians of the School in Paris were a unique example of French educational influence. The fact that most of the high ranking Egyptian officials who served in different government departments until the end of the nineteenth century were graduates of this school makes its influence significant.

The school known as *Al-Madrasa al-Misriyya al-Harbiyya bi-Bâris* (The Egyptian Military School in Paris), was founded in 1844 supervised by the French Ministry of War, it received a mission of seventy students chosen from military schools of Cairo, The School of Engineering, The School of Medicine and the School of Foreign Languages (*al-Alsun*). Among the members of this mission were some teachers sent to complete their education, and four Emris (two sons and two grandsons of Muhammad Aly). The object of this school was to provide suitable preparation for students to be enrolled in military and civil French higher education institutions.

A special syllabus was designed for the school. Besides military arts and drills, the students had to take courses in mathematics, physics, chemistry, history and geography. Stress was made on an intensive course of French in addition to Turkish and Arabic. The syllabus included Quran and Islamic law.

Those who passed the stage of preparation were enrolled in the Military School of Metz, the *École Polytechnique* in Paris, the School of Medicine or the School of Law according to the assignment of each student. All students had to stay in the

[17] There is a problem with statistics as sources show different figures. The above gives an estimation based on Abd al-Karim, op. cit., p. 65 ff., Heyworth-Dunne, op. cit., p. 371 ff; see also Steppat F., "National Education projects in Egypt before British Occupation", in Polk & Chambers ed., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East, the Nineteenth Century*, Chicago, 1968, p. 290 ff.

dormitories of the Egyptian School where instructors of various discipline helped them daily by monitoring their study materials. Monthly reports on the achievement of each student were to be sent regularly to the Department of Education (*Dîwân al-Madâris*) in Cairo. After earning their diplomas, graduates of the Egyptian School were assigned a certain period of training in the French army or public utilities institutions before returning to Egypt. [18]

The Egyptian School in Paris was canceled by Abbas I in 1849, to be reopened by Ismail in 1869 with an enrollment of a hundred students. It resumed its function under the supervision of the French War Ministry. Naturally, when the 1870 was erupted, the school had a very hard time. Eventually, it was closed in 1871, and students were distributed to different French schools. Those who failed to be enrolled were sent home.[19]

It is significant that among the students of this school, we can identify a group of outstanding administrators such as Aly Mubarak, Minister of Education and *Waqfs*, Aly Ibrahim who succeeded Mubarak under Tawfiq, Muhammas Sharif, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister several times under Tawfiq, Uthman Sabry who became president of the mixed court of Appeal, Shihata Isa, director of the Military Staff College under Ismail, to name just some of the elite graduates of that outstanding School. Needless to say that these high-ranking officials educated at and through the Egyptian School in Paris were responsible in one way or another for the development of Egypt in the nineteenth century.

The reluctant of Muhammad Aly to recruit French personnel until 1825 for political reasons did not prevent Egypt from taking advantage of this special relationship. Most of the missions were directed to France, and gradually the Egyptian graduates made their way to prominence in society. Soon they made a cultural bridge that joined modern Egypt with France. The French cultural influence in Egypt caused problems for the British Occupation, which tried actively to replace the French in the field of culture, but in vain.

It is noteworthy that opening cultural channels with France was the free choice of Egypt represented by its rulers and social elite. The services rendered to Egypt by French expertise were always appreciated, especially in the field of education. As shown above, the educational system of Egypt from Muhammad Aly to the British Occupation reflected French influence directly through the work of French experts or indirectly through the work of the Egyptians educated in France. In designing

[18] For details, see: Abd al-Karim, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 750 ff.

[19] On the system of the Egyptian School in Paris, see: *ibid*, P. 756 ff.; Mitchell (Timothy), *colonizing Egypt*, Cambridge-New York, 1990, p. 70-74.

and reforming the Egyptian educational system, they significantly considered indigenous culture and traditions. They did their best to modernize the system within available limits, without causing much disturbance to the wider society.