The Government of Egypt’s Press (Matba‘at Bûlāq): A Historical Analysis of Two Hundred Years of Performance

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Abstract: The article is an account of the history of the Government of Egypt’s Press. With two-hundred year of service, this press stands as one of the oldest and largest presses in the Near East. The article outlines the purpose of its establishment and places the press within a larger framework of the plan to modernize Egypt and the history of Arabic printing in Egypt, as well as its link to Italy. With European training and domestic hands, and facing some challenges, the press has played an important role in military publications first, and later in government publications from the start of its production in 1822 until today. Unlike in Europe, the printing of religious texts by the press was prescriptive. An analysis of some of the early works printed by the press sheds some light on the reasons behind the prohibition of the printing of books with religious contexts.

Subjects: Middle East Studies; Anthropology - Soc Sci; History of Science & Technology

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
The question of printed books, in general and in Egypt in particular, is of interest to many people who are yet looking for an answer. This paper offers just that. It was not until 1728 an Arabic book was printed in movable types by Muslim hands. That was in Turkey. In Egypt, however, it was not until the French expedition in 1798 a book was printed in this country. From that point on, the paper followed the development of printing industry in Egypt analyzing the reasons behind it. It further explores the history of printing Arabic books and the role which the Italians played. Also, this paper examines critically the first printed book published in Italy and Turkey. It addresses the significance of establishment of the government of Egypt Press known as Matba‘at Bûlāq. It demonstrates how this Press filled the gap of printing in Egypt and its surroundings.
1. Introduction
The two-hundred year old Bûlāq Press was established in 1815 to be ready for printing on the 4th of November 1821. The green marble fixed in the entrance of the Press includes the date and in whose era this Press was built (Figure 1). It can be look at as a documented evidence. The main purpose behind its establishment was to print the government of Egypt’s official documents. Later, it became known as al-Matba’ah al-Amiriyyah. Its establishment marked the start of the printing revolution in Egypt. It stands today as one of the oldest and the largest printing establishments in the Near East. Although the quality of its production is modest compare to the private sector press. It is still functioning as the official government press.

Muhammad ʿAlī seized power in 1805 and became the vicegerent of Egypt until 1848. He started ruling Egypt with a vigorous plan to modernize Egypt, and part of his plan was to establish a national press. One can rightly assume that this press ought to serve all sectors of the country, with a considerable emphasis on literature, art, and science. However, and soon after its opening, it became clear that its primary purpose was to serve the Egyptian military and its publication needs. Muhammad ʿAlī believed that unless European military innovations were adopted, the antiquated Egyptian army would be unable to stop the ambitious European expansionists and to defend the Muslim territories. In addition, he was profoundly convinced that the only route to such reform was rapid and wide dissemination of the scientific ideas which underlay European military power. Years passed and as the Press grew, it was gradually realized that it was time to accommodate the needs of the entire government. It continued to function as the principal national press for Egyptian government publications for almost two centuries. It further extended its services to the neighboring areas until they were able to establish their own presses.

The significance of this study is to highlight some turning points in the journey of Arabic printing, as it started in Italy, then Turkey, and finished in Egypt. This journey took two hundred years, so the Press should be prepared to celebrate its second centennial this year. The French orientalists, who accompanied the French expedition to Egypt, are the pioneers as they attempted to print the first book ever in Egypt in 1798-1801. The Bûlāq Press had the second attempt that started in 1821, which lasted for two centuries. In addition, it assesses the purpose of its establishment, and raises the questions whether it accomplished its goals in modernizing Egypt as whole, by taking the first step to modernize its army. Further, this study raises the question whether modernizing the Egyptian army was the right start to modernize Egypt or the opposite should have taken place, meaning starting with the civil sectors first and then the army. Finally, evaluating the role that the Press played in printing Arabic materials in the region is in order.
Some works have dealt with the history of Arabic printing in general. However, this study will serve as a nutshell, yet needed, of the continuity of the history of Arabic printing since the publication of the first book in Italy in 1514, until the present time. The main sources for this study are the incunabula of Arabic books, which were printed in Italy, Turkey, and Egypt.2 Also, Radwan's work List of Imprints of Bulaq Press, offers an ample opportunity to examine the early printed works by Bulaq Press. In addition, some articles appeared in al-muqtataf in early twentieth century, which are not available to many researchers on this discipline.3 Furthermore, Iscarus’ series of articles published in al-Hilâl, 1913 about the history of printing in the nineteenth century Egypt, give additional information about the Press that is not be found elsewhere.

2. A Brief History of Printing in Egypt

Although Europe first experienced books in a printed format around 1450 through the ingenuity of Johannes Gutenberg, Egypt had no domestic printing for another three and a half centuries, until Napoleon Bonaparte introduced printing to it during his French Expedition in 1798. To prepare for his journey, Bonaparte established the Committee of Art and Science, which consisted of one hundred seventy-six French scholars who accompanied him. Jean-Joseph Marcel (d. 1854), and Marc Aurel (d. 1834) who were among the French orientalists, specialized in Arabic, working mainly as translators for the French soldiers, and they had brought with them printing machinery and a collection of Arabic types imported from France and Italy.4 Consequently, propaganda pamphlets about the French expedition to Egypt printed in Arabic were among the first printed materials in Egypt. Marcel was responsible for printing all Bonaparte’s proclamations. More importantly he published the first book ever printed in Egypt entitled Exercises in Literary Arabic, Extracted from the Koran, for the Use of Those Who are Studying That Language. Aurel, on the other hand was responsible for publishing Courrier de l’Egypte and La Decade Egyptienne.5 They were the first two French newspapers printed in Egypt, with excerpts in broken Arabic, as al-Jabarti pointed out as it will be mentioning later.

The first printed document in Arabic in Egypt was a one-page proclamation (maktûb) to the Egyptian people prepared by French orientalists, or it could be by a Christian Syriac. The first paper dealt with the publishing political articles that have appeared on 28 August 1798. It came out in four leaves every five days with a price of six midis. However, this price decreased with a one-year subscription, paid in advance. The second paper was intended to publish technical, commercial, and short literary articles. Its first issue was published on 1 October 1798. It came out every ten days. Instead of commenting on the new unfamiliar innovation, and how it could be of a good use for Arabic publications, 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Jabarti (1756–1825), an Egyptian annalist historian, reaction to the new printing innovation in Egypt was not in favor of the French’s new printing attempt. His accounts after he saw the first attempt of the French printing press are worth mentioning. Al-Jabarti started by criticizing the one-page printed text, with several lengthy pages of his book. He pointed out colloquialism, ellipses, inconsistencies, the number of morphological, typographical, grammatical inaccuracies and errors syntax, and drawing from incorrect usages of terms and vocabularies. A corrupt picture of the French orientalists and their objective was to negatively affect not only the Egyptians, but the Arabic Language as well.7

Not long after the French occupied Egypt, two printing houses were established. The first was L’Imprimerie Orientale et Francaise, built in Alexandria and directed by John J. Marcel, and the second was L’imprimerie de Marc Aurel, Imprimeur de L’armee au Quartier des Francais, built-in Cairo and directed by Marc Aurel.8 Unfortunately, when the French departed from Egypt in 1801, they dismantled their printing presses and took them back to France.9 Radwan states that the French were in the process of printing Nahw al-lughah al-‘Arabiyah al-‘Ammiyih, a book on the grammar of Egyptian colloquial Arabic. They stopped printing this work on page 168 and thus it was left incomplete.10 A step could be considered as a setback to the art of printing in Egypt. However, they had planted the seeds of the printing industry on Egyptian soil. These seeds bore fruits when Muhammad ‘Ali came to power in 1805, and soon became Pasha, and later Khedive or Viceroy of Egypt. He gave priority to printing in his radical reform program to modernize education in Egypt.
3. Muhammad ‘Alî and Printing in Egypt
By 1815, Muhammad ‘Alî had issued a decree to establish the Government Press in Bûlāq. He believed that the Press should have its own foundry where the required types could be cast without dependency upon foreign sources. In 1817, the first educational mission, Ba’that al-Shubbân (the Young-Men Mission) was sent to Europe. Nîqûlâ al-Masâbkî al-Bayrutîan, an important figure in the art of printing, was part of this mission, he would eventually play a significant role in Egypt’s printing industry in the nineteenth century.

Before the establishment of the Bûlāq Press, not much is known about Nîqûlâ other than his first name, and he was a Maronite Christian from Beirut, which was part of greater Syria and now the capital city of Lebanon. However, Sâbât states that he was born in Damascus at the beginning of the 19th century. He migrated with his father to Egypt and resided in al-Rawdah, Cairo. It seems that he had already some knowledge about printing. Additionally, Beirut was one of the first cities in the Near East where the Maronites practiced printing before the French introduced the art of printing in Egypt. Muhammad ‘Alî included him in the mission and sent to Italy for education. Nîqûlâ detoured to Milano for further enhancement of the printing art and to study the principle of printing systematically.

Upon his return from Milano after five years of training, Nîqûlâ became a key figure in the Press. There, he was the main technician, as his main duty was to operate the casting machine for printing letters, sabk al-hurûf. For his performance of casting (sabk), he, therefore, gained the name Masâbkî. Then, he was appointed the first director of the Government Press, a position he held from 1821 until his death in 1830. During his directorship, Masâbkî contributed a great deal to the establishment of the Press and to the setting up its equipment.

Nîqûlâ Masâbkî organized the institution around three presses that he brought with him from Italy and proceeded to teach printing to his fellow Egyptians. In the beginning, he began working in the press with fifteen copy workers: twelve Egyptians, two Greeks, and one Italian. It is interesting to note that a free copy of each work that was published by the press during his directorship was sent to the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. By 1831, the number of employees working in the press reached forty, and some of them were Europeans whose wages were three times that of the Egyptians working there. ‘Abd al-Wahâb Afandi was the only editor and Hasan al-Iskandarâni was the only binder. Since the quality of printing was still in the development stage, the title page was written with the same size font as the rest of the book. This kind of production was not as attractive as it used to be before the establishment of the Press when the title page used to be illuminated with a calligraphic, artistic type of font. For that reason, among others, people were not dramatically encouraged to buy books printed by the press. The number of book copiers (al-nussâkh, pl. of nâsîkh) was not reduced as one might have expected. Along with eight additional presses imported from Paris, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and other European types were included, and the Press made every effort to develop Arabic types locally.

4. Development of Arabic Characters for Printing
Printing with the Arabic alphabet involves a number of difficulties which are not found with the Latin alphabet, for example, or even with other Semitic alphabets. One of these difficulties is that each Arabic letter has up to four different forms, depending upon its position in the word. Another difficulty is that Arabic is a squiggling cursive script most letters of which are linked to the preceding and the following letter by a ligature, which varies in both length and direction. A third problem is that since calligraphy is the supreme Islamic art, readers tend to be critical, even of legible typefaces, on aesthetic grounds. Today, for example, few readers are entirely happy with the computerized type in Arabic newspapers. To enhance the art of printing further, more students were sent to Europe for this purpose.

In 1826, the second education mission was sent to Paris. Two students were sent to learn the art of printing and engraving. At the same time, skillful individuals were sought in Egypt. Sinklâh Afandi,
a Persian artist and calligraphy teacher in the School of al-Qasr al-ʿAynî was commissioned, though the decree called him “the Indian calligrapher” to design new typefaces for the press. Sinklâh then became responsible for engraving Arabic characters typeface called Nashk and Nastaliq. These two typefaces caused the Press to gain more readability. It is worth mentioning that the Arabic alphabet consists of 28 characters. Although these characters do not have upper or lower-case shapes, they do take a different form depending on their position at the beginning, middle, or end of each word. Unlike the European languages, Arabic writing runs from right to left. Some European countries started to develop Arabic letters as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century so the church would be able to publish the Gospel in Arabic, as will be mentioned later. To account for all the different shapes of Arabic characters, the Oxford Press employed 282 letters, and the Paris Press employed 800 different types of Arabic letters when they started to print Arabic works. The Bûlûq Press, on the other hand, started with 900 shapes of letters. These presses realized that the higher the number of letters is, the more complicated the process of printing would become. Therefore, steps were taken to reduce this number, and the first press to achieve such a goal was the Oxford Press in England, which was able to employ 112 letters for its Arabic publications. In addition, a committee headed by Ahmad Zakî (d. 1934), an Egyptian philologist, was sent to Europe to study the way to apply this reduction to the Bûlûq Press. After three months of experimenting with various letter shapes, the committee suggested a set of 132 letters, in addition to 46 signs for the press to employ. The committee also made certain that the new set of letters would be able to accommodate printing in the Turkish and Persian languages as well. The press adopted the committee’s recommendations and as a result, the labor expenses in printing were reduced to approximately 75%. Consequently, the new letters contributed to a reduction of about 2% in the cost of printing. Hence, the new method of printing saved time, and the press was able to produce more publications. However, the development of these letters took a different turn.

Later, in 1929, King Fūʿâd I (d. 1936), of Egypt issued a decree to convene a new committee to design more artistic looking shapes of letters. The new letters were developed and were called “al-Tâj”, meaning “the Crown” (see Figure 2). Interestingly enough, the use of these letters was restricted to the Bûlûq Press only and no other press was allowed to use it. The Bûlûq Press accommodated 465 forms of letters, compared to 365 in the private press.

5. The Purpose of the Bûlûq Press
The main purpose of establishing the press was to meet the needs of the Egyptian army. It should be mentioned that Egypt at the beginning of the nineteenth century obtained its independence from the French occupation in 1801. Yet, it was partly under the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire, therefore, it was influenced militarily by the French and by the Turks. Since most of the military works were written in French and Turkish, a division for translation sought to be included in the
Translators employed at the press had to possess an excellent knowledge of Arabic in addition to French, Turkish, or both. The translator had to be able to translate French and Turkish military works into Arabic. Prominent employees of that time included the French-educated and translator Rifâ‘ah al-Tahtâwî (d. 1873), General Saqqâ Zadeh, (Turkish), and Admiral Kâni Bek (French), who supervised this division. Moreover, most government publications during this period came out in all three languages: Arabic, Turkish, and French.

The fundamental purpose behind establishing this printing facility was to disseminate information regarding the training for officers and troops of the Egyptian army, as well as publishing military regulations, manuals, pamphlets, and decrees. Therefore, Muhammad ‘Ali placed ‘Uthmân Nûr—an officer from the Ministry of Defense—in charge of the Press until the transfer of the Press to the Ministry of Education in 1837. Some other ministries expressed the need for such neatly written and well-presented materials. By 1833, the press started to print the official journal of the Egyptian government, known as al-Waqâ‘al-Misriyah (Figure 3).
This journal is one of the oldest publications of the press and continues to be published regularly until the present-day. The contents included in this journal were laws, decrees, official documents, public notices from other ministries, and parliamentary debates among other things. A corresponding French translation entitled Le Moniteur Égyptien appeared side by side with the Arabic text in al-Waqqāʾī. From 1885 onwards, the paper had been given the French name of le Journal Officiel. It did not differ significantly from its Arabic sister al-Waqqāʾī in form or nature. In 1941, when al-Waqqāʾī reached 442 pages, future issues were divided into two-publication: the French text, and the Arabic text, while the parliamentary debates appeared independently in a special edition. The name the Bûlāq Press was changed to become al-Matbaʿah al-Amīriyah, a cliché found in the bottom of any document printed by this press to identify it as an official government document. By 1826, many public schools were established as a part of Muhammad ʿAlī’s plan for developing education in Egypt.26 The press
then had to meet not only the demands of the Egyptian army but also the continuing expansion of schools across Egypt.

6. Early Publications of the Bûlâq Press

The early publications of the press can be characterized as being mostly of the military education type. Since most of the military terms used in the Egyptian army at the time were in Turkish, one can rightly anticipate that the publications of this nature appeared in this language. The second category was translated works mainly from French into Arabic, and they typically covered subjects in engineering and medicine. Although Egypt was and still is a Muslim country with Arabic as its official language, the press published few books on Islamic studies and the Arabic Language. The first Islamic work was the biography of the Prophet Muhammad written by Taqi al-Din Muhammad ibn Barr Ali al-Barkawi (Elberkevi), published initially in Turkish in Istanbul, in 1728. It was entitled al-Jawhrah bahiyah Ahmadiyah fi sharh al-wasayyah al-Muhammadiyah, and reprinted in Egypt 1825. This biography was publicized, taught and studied in Europe. Garcin de Tassy (Cheng-Hslog, 1238-1267), a French orientalist, translated this biography into French in his work: Exposition de la foi musulmane, traduite du turc de Mohammed ben Pir-Ali Elberkevi, avec des notes, par M. Garcin de Tassy, suivie du Pend-Nameh, poème de Saadi, traduit du persan par le même, et du Borda, poème à la louange de Mahomet, traduit de l’arabe (1822).
The first monographic work published by the press was the work of Bishop Rafā‘īl Zakhkhūr, an Italian language teacher, Dizionario Italiano e Arabo: Che Conteine in Succinto Tutti I Vocaboli che sono piu in uso e piu necessari per imarare a parlare le due lingù l’orrettamente (Figure 4). The two-volume Italian-Arabic dictionary was published, as it appears from its source page in 1238 A. H., which started on 18 of September 1822. Presumably, Niqūl al-Masābkī, the director of the press, was enthusiastic to print this work in order to enable him and his students to understand printing terms having learned his printing skills in Italy (Figure 5). The question why the Būlāq Press was looking up to and influenced by Italy in the art of printing is worth examining.

7. Italy and Printing Arabic Works
It is important to bear in mind that Italy was already at an advanced stage, compared to Egypt, in printing works written in Arabic. In fact, Italy was the first country to produce a printed work in Arabic from movable metal type. For example, the work Book of Hours, was translated from Latin into Arabic as Kitāb Salāt al-Sawā‘i, a book of Christian prayers recognized as the earliest surviving Arabic book printed from moveable type. This works was printed by Gregorius de Gregorii in Fano, Italy in 1514, as the last page of this work suggests. It contains 239 pages measured 15.7 x 22.8 cm (6.2 x 9 inches). (Figure 6)

The process of translating religious scripts into Arabic started under Pope Julius II (d. 1513), probably for distribution among the Christians of the Near East. There is a copy of the Nobel Qur’ān that was discovered recently in Venice, Italy. The main source of this Qur’ān shows that it was printed by Paganinis in Venice in 1537, or 1538. It includes a note of ownership of Teseo Ambrogio degli Albonesi, an orientalist from Pavia, north of Italy, who died soon after 1540. The text was printed entirely in Arabic. Figure 7 shows part of surat al-Mā‘idah (the Table).

As one can see from the sample above, there are so many typos and discrepancies; therefore, the book met with no interests by Muslims who were used to recite the Qur’ān from a neatly
calligraphically hand-written, illuminated and well bounded Qur’ân. The publisher; therefore, could not have distributed the printed Qur’ân for commercial purposes. Consequently, the entire run of the printed Qur’ân was set on fire with the exception of a few copies. Another earlier Arabic work is a translated version of the Gospels printed in Rome in 1591. These Gospels in Arabic with interlinear translation are ascribed to Antonios Sionita. The text begins, without a title page, on page nine, and ends on page 462 followed by one page containing a note “Typographus” and colophon.  

It is very much known that the Near East is the cradle of three major monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Muslims are the guardians of Arabic language. One can rightly assume that works of religious contents would be candidates for printing in the Near East. It was not the case, and even literature had no demand for printed books. The Typographia Medicea asked for a permission from the High Port to print Arabic works. Shaykh al-Islam ʿAbd al-Qâdir Shaykhî Afandî (d. 1594), the grand muftî of the Ottoman Empire (1587–1589),
during Murād III (1574–1595) was reluctant to allow scripts of religious nature to be printed. The foremost reason for his fear was that the brushes and the recipe of the ink used in the printing process might have contained products taken from pigs. In the 22nd of October 1588, a decree from the Sultan was issued based on the Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādīr’s fatwa, that works of scientific nature may be printed (Figure 8). The Sultan’s decree itself was printed as the last page in the Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Tūsī’s (d. 1274) Kitāb tahrīr usūl li-Uqlîdis, the Arabic version of Euclid’s Elements, which was printed by Typographia Medica Press in 1594.34

Furthermore; there is a number of non-religious works, which were also printed in Arabic in Italy. There were also several works that were printed before al-Tūsī’s, such as Kitāb al-bustân (the Book
of Garden), 1584, Mohammed al-Idrīsī's in Geography 1592, the medical work of Ibn Sīnā, known as Avicenna, (980–1037), Kitāb al-Qānūn fī al-tibb, (the Canon in Medicine), 1593. Thus, Italy was a pioneer with extensive experience in printing in Arabic. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Arabic printing appeared in many cities in Europe. Arabic works were printed in Holland in 1616, Paris in 1645, in London in 1657, and in Oxford 1663. It would be worthwhile to examine why printing in movable type was delayed almost four centuries since Gutenberg had invented his printing machine.

It seems that Muslims were content with the handwritten manuscript literature, even when European presses had issued numerous Arabic books. It was almost two centuries after the first Arabic work had appeared in print, namely in 1711, that typography was officially introduced in Muslim countries. But this innovation ran counter to the feelings of Muslim orthodox, the more so in account of the brushes of pigs-bristles used by the printers. However, feelings towards printing Arabic works have been changed. The grand mufti of the Ottoman Empire in the early of the eighteenth century stood contrary to al-Jabarti.

In the Ottoman Empire, Ibrāhīm Mutaferreka (1674–1745), being an artist, was able to coin Arabic fonts that were more developed and neatly carved. When Shaykh al-Islam, Yanî-Shâhīrî ʿAbd Allah Effendi (1718–1730), the Grand Mufti of the Ottoman Empire, who had authorized its printing in 1726, saw how neatly the words appeared next to each other, he wrote: “This book must be regarded as a pearl”. The book referred to was a Turkish translation of an Arabic dictionary, in two volumes, the first containing 666 pages, the second 756. Known as Tāj al-lughah wa Sahâh al-ʿArabiyyah. It was compiled in the 10th century by Abū Nasr Ismā‘īl ibn Hammād al-Jawhari (d. 393/1003), and is one of the classics of Arabic lexicography. The second work published by Ibrâhīm Mutaferreka was Tuḥfat al-athār fī asfār al-kībār, of al-Hājj Khalīfah. It was the first Arabic book, in 150 pages, rolled off the presses by Muslims in 1728. It was unfortunate that more than 4000 professional scribes who have felt threatened to lose their jobs upon seeing this book, they reacted by exercising a strong opposition to Mutaferreka's enterprise. Being afraid that their trade would be totally ruined, they were so loud in their clamors as to alarm the Seraglio (harâm), and as they were supported by a seditious Corps of Janissary, Ahmad III (1673–1736), the Ottoman Sultan, they gave way to their complaints and suppressed
### Table 1. The publications of the press from 1822–42.\textsuperscript{41}

| Field of publications | Turkish language | Works translated from French to Arabic | Arabic language | Military subjects | Arabic in different subject | Islamic studies | Persian | Total |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|---------|-------|
| No. of publications   | 106               | 48                                     | 36              | 29               | 23                          | 10             | 8       | 255   |
| The percentage        | 42                | 20                                     | 14              | 11               | 10                          | 1              | 1       | 100   |
the Press. Consequently, its printing in Arabic fonts has been discontinued. It was not until 1796 when printing was revived in Istanbul.\(^\text{40}\)

From its establishment until 1842, the Bûlâq Press published approximately 252 documented works, some of them were reprinted as second editions. Many of these works are considered antiquarian items and still exist in the National Library of Egypt and the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris. Table 1 provides an idea of the subjects that were published by the press in the first twenty years of its establishment.

Because Egypt was under the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire, works published in Turkish outnumbered those in any other languages published by the press, although Arabic was the official spoken language in Egypt. In addition, Istanbul or (Asatânah), was an attractive center for scholars, professionals and skillful people, and it had a higher standard of living than most other areas within the empire. As a result, there was a flourishing book market, and Egyptian publications were shipped to Istanbul to be sold there. The press' books sold in abundance because of its reputation for good quality print and its position as the largest press in the Near East. In addition, the profits that were generated went back to the press for further development and for enhancing the art of printing.

As shown in Table 1, only a modest number of publications in religion came out of the press. It is interesting to note that unlike Europe where the Bible was the first printed work, religious texts in the Muslim World, especially the Qur'ân, were not allowed to be printed. Muslim ulama (clerics) considered printing religious texts an innovative deed (bid'ah); therefore, forbidden, according to the teachings of Islam, which is a baseless argument. Besides, when the Qur'ân was printed, it included many typos, which affected the recitations of the Qur'ân and hence its interpretations. Finally, in 1858, a decree was issued to pull printed copies of the Qur'ân from the bookstores and destroy them. Anyone obtaining or dealing with such editions would be punished.\(^\text{42}\) It is interesting to note that the current circulated Qur'ân in many countries are not printed, rather are meticulously hand-written (Figure 9). Needles to say it is the holy book for Muslims and must be preserved in the same form of recitation as in the days of the Prophet Muhammad. Not only was the printing of the Qur'ân forbidden to be printed in the early stages of the printing industry in the Muslim world, but any Shari'ah's or fatâwa's (religious advices) texts also merited the same status. For example, when Ibrahim Mutafereka, an Ottoman diplomat, and Sa'id Halabi, a former Ottoman ambassador to Paris, established the first Arabic press in Istanbul around 1710, he had to obtain the consent of the ulama (clergy-men) and the Ottoman sultan himself to allow him to print Arabic or Turkish texts with religious scripts. In 1712, Mutafereka and Halabi started their printing career with works in philosophy, history, medicine, and languages, to the exception of religious texts. Not until 1729, were they allowed to print Jawhari's work Kitâb al-saḥâh, an Arabic dictionary, after he secured a fatwâ (a piece of religious advice) from the Shaykh al-Islam, 'Abd Allah Afandi, the highest religious authority advisor in the Empire.\(^\text{43}\)

The press accelerated its efforts for development and sought to expand its activities to include more publications. In 1861, it started to publish the national census of Egypt.\(^\text{44}\) There was a reproduction office of the press at the Survey of Egypt, which undertook printing all types of maps of description, as well as currency notes, deeds, and other publications.\(^\text{45}\) In 1930, a special section was established in the press for dealing with work relating to Ancient Egypt and antiquities, and it is richly stocked with hieroglyphic types. Since then, the press has contributed extensively to disseminating knowledge in the fields of Egyptology and archaeology.\(^\text{46}\) The number of publications produced by the press continued to grow and its workforce expanded.

Because of the growing demand for publications, the number of working men and women in the press reached 3,000 in 1950. In the same year, about three million copies of monographs were printed, so were government pamphlets, forms, annual reports, and others. All of these publications involved the consumption of approximately 5,000 tons of paper, 100 meters of cloth, 70 tons
of cardboard, 5,000 kilograms of ink, 70 tons of metals for type founding, and 1,000 square feet of leather. It is not known how the press acquired these materials when it started. What is known is that the papers were imported from Italy and the ink recipe was developed and produced locally. The press was not only dedicated to the military in Egypt, but it also offered its service to other neighboring countries as well.

For more than fifty years, the Bûlāq Press continued to produce publications for Yemen until 1877 when the Sarî’ Press, (called also Matba’at al-Wilâiyah), was established. The same also can be said about Mecca. The press kept offering its service to the people in Mecca until the al-Miriyah Press was established in 1883. Examples of its publications for these areas were Sâlûnameh, which was the official journal of the Ottoman authority in Hijâz and Yemen, appearing in the Ottoman Turkish language. Also, the work of Ahmad ibn Ramadân al-Marzûqî, one of ‘ulamâ of al-Hijâz entitled Bûlûgh al-marâm li-baydân Sayyid al-anâm, was published in 1873. Gradually, Bûlāq Press gained a distinguished reputation of producing good publications, and hence it became under heavy demands which caused it to have a long list of orders. This encouraged some entrepreneurs publishers to think of establishing competing presses.

Although we do not know for sure when other presses were established in Egypt, one can get an approximate idea about their establishing dates from the dates of their publications. Sarî’ Ra’s al-Tîn Press (Matba’at Sarî’ Ra’s al-Tîn) in Alexandria published works as early as 1834. In Cairo, Shâhîn Press, for example, published works in 1860, and Sharaf Press published works in 1880. More presses continued to increase steadily with more developed fonts that pleased the readers to meet the demand of educated people especially the students of al-Azhar.

8. The Bûlāq Press in More Recent Times
Nowadays, the press, at its original location, can no longer handle all of the governmental printing. Therefore, it established branches in various provinces such as Alexandria in the North and Asyût in the South. The Press experienced some problems, however. The large number of publications awaited to be printed resulted in a huge backlog of publishable materials. It is not unusual for periodicals issued by governmental associations such as the Egyptian Historical Association, Egyptian Geographical Association, or Arabic Language Academy to wait three years to be published. The main reason is that because the Press has a monopoly over government printing, these government-funded associations are not allowed to contract out to get their works printed elsewhere. Nevertheless, the Press encountered competition from the private sector because the quality of the Press’ paper and the quality of printing itself are no longer competitive. Due to a lack of careful proofreading, typographical errors were frequently found in the publications of the Bûlāq Press publications were no longer attractive to many readers in Egypt. The labor law, which had been governing the press since its establishment, was an issue often addressed by the Labor Syndicate but had not come up with solutions to the satisfactions of the workers. For all these problems, some solutions were suggested.

Some have proposed that privatization might be the solution. In fact, the Press was privatized twice in the last century. Abd al-Rahmân Rushdî purchased the press from the government in 7 October 1862, and he continued to own it until 7 February 1865. During this period, the press carried his name. Rushdî’s purchase marked a turning point in the history of the Press. He modernized it by importing new presses, new characters, and other equipment. The government was a major client of the Press; yet during this period, Rushdî was not able to cover his expenses. In 1865, Ismâ’il Pâshâ, the Viceroy of Egypt from 1863–1979, bought the press for his son, Prince Ibrâhîm Hîlîmî (d. 1927), who owned it until 1880. According to Radwôn, the press advanced dramatically in terms of technology and productivity during this period. It seems that selling the press to the private sector would make it more competitive in the market of publications. The question is whether the current government of Egypt is willing to give up one of its earliest traditional printing strongholds.
9. Conclusion
In summary, two-hundred years ago, Muhammad Ali, viceroy of Egypt 1805–1848, established the Government Press (Matbâ’at Bûlâq) in 1815, with the hope to be a step towards modernizing Egypt as whole. Celebrating its grand opening when it produced its first publication, an Italian-Arabic dictionary, in 1822. Muhammad ‘Ali shifted his vision of the Press and the main purpose of its establishment became serving the Egyptian Army’s needs of publishing military educational materials; hence, the press was administratively supervised by the Army. Although he has sent educational mission to Europe to benefit from European science and technology in order to modernize Egypt, the Bûlâq Press limited its benefit only to the army. It is true however, that later, the Press extended its service to other neighboring areas such as Mecca and Yemen. Not only that, but also to governmental agencies’ publications, which included textbooks, maps, paper currency, forms, journals, periodicals, and other items, to the exception of the public demand for culture and education. The fact that the Press contributed in build a strong army for Egypt as its initial aim is doubtful. It was a step in the right direction when the army bequeathed the directorship of the press to the ministry of education, by helping Egypt catching up with Europe in modernity is questionable.

After the Press has been sold twice in the nineteenth century, it went back to the dominium of the Egyptian government carrying the name of al-Matbû‘ al-Amîrîyah. Despite some challenges, mainly the failure to adopt technological advancements in the field of printing, the press remained, for almost two centuries, as one of the oldest and the largest press in the Near East. Many Presses were established before and after the Bûlâq Press and vanished. Examples of the presses are Typographia Medicea in Italy, Mutafereka Press in Istanbul and even local presses such as Ra’s al-Tîn, in Alexandria, Shîhîn and Sharif, in Cairo. Despite many challenges the Bûlâq Press had to face for two centuries, it firmly remains, until the present day, as a milestone of modern Egypt, thanks to the support of the Egyptian government. However, its contribution to modernize Egypt remains to be assessed.

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My academic training has been multi-disciplinary in the fields of the Early Islamic studies, international relations, and library and information science. I obtained two Master Degrees and a Ph. D. in these fields from the University of Washington, Seattle, and the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA). I have extensive teaching experience in the US and in the Middle East in the fields of Islamic history, World Civilization, Arabic, and Arabic as a foreign language. Furthermore, I have ten years of experience in managing the Arabic and Islamic Studies collections in three major universities in the US (University of California-Berkeley, Brown University, and Ohio State University). I am fluent on both Arabic and English. I have good working knowledge of Persian, French and German. I authored four books in the field of the Islamic history, American history, and literature of Arab emigrants in the new world. I published a number of articles about Arabic in Medieval Europe.

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Notes
1. According to Khalil Sabât, the construction of the Bûlàq Press started in 1819. The grand opening of the Press was 4 November 1821. See Khalîl Sabât (1966), Ta’rîkh al-tibî‘ah fi al-sharq al-‘Arabî, 2nd ed., (Cairo: Dâr al-Ma‘ârîf), p. 133. See also the above green marble. Writers agreed, however, that the first printed work was completed by 1822.
2. Jean-Joseph Marcel was a French printer, engineer and orientalist. He studied Arabic. He accompanied Napoleon’s 1798 campaign in Egypt as a member of the Commission des Sciences et des Arts, a corps of 167 technical experts. He was also a gifted linguist knew Arabic and Greek. He contributed to the discovery of Rosetta Stone of Egypt. Christopher Herold (1963), Bonaparte in Egypt, London: Harper & Row, Publisher, pp. 165, 175, 196.
3. Marc Aurel was one of the private concessionaires who accompanied the French army in his expedition to Egypt. Because his father owned a bookshop and thus, he was familiar with printing business, he published more or less weekly newspaper, Le Courrier de l’Egypte. See Herold, p. 156.
4. Tawfîq Iskârûs, “Ta’rîkh al-tibî‘ah fi Wâdî al-Nil (the history of printing in the Nile Valley),” al-Hîlîl, (October 1913):2:105.
5. Herold, p. 166.
6. See Thimothy Mitchell (1991), Colonizing Egypt, (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 133.
7. See proclamation as part of year of 1213 Hijri A. al-Jabarti, (1988), “A‘jâ‘ib al-athâr fi al-tarajim wa al-athâr, (Cairo: Dar al-Kutubi), v. 3, pp. 4–6. 9 Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarî, 19,975, Ta’rîkh mu‘addat al-
foranensis bi-Misr, tr. by S. Moreh, (Leiden: E. J. Brill), p. 25.
8. Abú al-Futūh Radwān, 1953, Tārikh Matba'at Bulaq, (Cairo: al-Matba'ah al-‘Aminyah), pp. 18–19.
9. Sābūṭ, 141
10. Radwān, Târîkh, p. 29.
11. Bulaq, from which the Press took its name, is the name of a district in Cairo on the east bank of the Nile, although the Press itself in the west bank making it a part of province of Giza.
12. Tawfîq Iskârus states that Nâqîl al-Masābkî went to Italy in 1815 and returned in 1819. See Iskârus, “Târîkh,” al-Hilāl, (Dec. 1913)22: 200.
13. Paolo Branca (2009), Pagine di Letteratura Ababa, (Milano, EDU-Catt), p. 75. Also, Iskârus, Dec. 1913, 200.
14. Iskârus, Dec. 1913, 200, Radwân, Târîkh, pp. 59, 491.
15. Iskârus, pp. 199, 203.
16. Sābūṭ, p. 159.
17. Sābūṭ, p. 158.
18. See Paul Lunde (1981), “Arabic and the Art of Printing,” Aramco World, (March/April 1981) 32: 2. https://archive.aramcoworld.com/content/198102/ara
bic-and-the-art-of-printing-a-special-section.htm.
19. Not much known about Sintâkh other than he is an Iranian artist designed some artistic sceneries and verses from the Qur’an in Muhammad ‘Ali’s mosque.
20. Editorial article, (1903), “Hurūf al-Tabq al-
cAra’ibiyah” (The Printing Letters), al-Mu’taqaf, (April 1903)28P. 285.
21. M. Y. Hammâm, (1952) “History of Printing in Egypt,” Gutenberg Jahrbuch, (May 1952) p. 158.
22. Iskârus, 1913, 199 and editorial article (1940), “Khamsat qurin ‘alâl ikhtirar Jutinberg” (Five centuries passed since Gutenberg invented the printing), al-Mu’taqaf, (February 1940) 96:153.
23. Sābūṭ, 151.
24. Sābūṭ, p. 151.
25. This is issue dated Tuesday 25th of Jumâdâ al-Ilâh, 1244 A. H./the 3rd of December 1828, during the reign of Muhammad Ali. https://www.bibalex.org/
bulaaqpress/en/gallery/pages/bulaaq44.htm
26. Radwān, Târîkh, p. 41.
27. Radwān states 1823 is the year of publication see, pp. 52, 446, 529, which it appears from its record in the National Library of Egypt (Dâr al-Kutub al-
Mislîyâh).
28. Joseph Hélodore Garçin de Tassy also included his translation of the poet Kârîb ibn Zuhaby’s (d. 662) “al-Burādah” in praising Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
29. Radwān states 1823 is the year of publication of this work, see, 52, 446, 529.
30. (see Figure 6: and Ali Hassan (2016), “al-Irhadât al-
lâl lâ tibâ’ah bi-al-lughah al-’Arabiyah fi Uruppp (Earliest Printed Books in 16th Century Europe), Proceedings of the 6th International Conference of Arabic Language, (Dubai, UAE).
31. Angela Nuovo (1990), “The Lost Arabic Koran Rediscovered”, The Library, (December 1990) XII: 4, pp. 273, 237. And Angela Angelo, (1987), “Il Corano arabo ritrovato” (Venezia, P. e A. Pagani, min 1537 e l’ago 1537”, La Bibliofilia, 89: 3, pp. 237–71.
32. Nuovo, “The Lost …, p. 276.
33. The University of California—Los Angeles special collection Library has a copy of this work catalogued as “Bibl. N. Gospels. Arabic. 1591”. It begins as follows: Evangelium sanctum Domini Nostri Iesu Christi conscriptum a quatuor Evangelistis sanctis idest, Matthaeo, Marco, Luca, et Iohanne.
34. See the title page of this work.
35. see Ibn Sînâ, (1593), al-Qanun fi al-tibb, (Rome: Typographia Medicea), the title page and Hassan, (2016).
36. Mu’taqaf (1903) “Hurūf …”, p. 282.
37. The author of this article saw this document during his work at Brown University, Providence, USA (2004–08).
38. J. M. Lenhart (1917), “The first book printed in Arabic Characters”, American Catholic Quarterly Review (Jan-Oct. 1917) v. 42, p. 58.
39. Lunde, 32:2.
40. Richard Clogg (1979), “An Attempt to Revive Turkish Printing in Istanbul in 1779,” International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, (February 1979) 191.
41. See the bibliography of these works in Abû al-Fatûh Radwân, (1953), List of Imprints of the Bulaq Press, (Cairo: al-Matbâ‘ah al-‘Aminyah). And Hus â Chis- Hislog, (1985), The Thirty Thirty Years of Arabic printing in Egypt, 1238–1267 (1822–1851, (Edinburgh: Ph. D. unpublished dissertation submitted to University of Edinburgh).
42. Radwân, Târîkh, p. 485
43. Radwân, Târîkh, p. 12.
44. Iskârus, “Târîkh,” al-Hilāl, (March 1914) 22, p. 429.
45. Hammâm, p. 158.
46. Examples of works published by the Bulaq Press are Excavations at Giza appeared in series, Walter B. Emery, (1945), Great tombs of the First Dynasty; excavations at Saqqara, (Cairo: Government Press), and Oliver H. Myers, (1950), Some applications of statistics to archaeology, (Cairo: Government Press). See Hammâm, p. 157.
47. Iskârus, p. 200.
48. Yâhîya Mahmûd ibn Junayd, (1998), al-Tibb’ah fi shihib al-Jazîrah al-‘Arabiyyah, (al-Riyadh: Dâr Ajo), pp. 22–44.
49. Cheng-Hislog, p. 182.
50. Radwân, Târîkh, p. 174–185.

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