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the Middle East



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# Editorial

## The Values of Science\*

Ismail Serageldin

In Egypt and Tunisia, ordinary citizens have toppled autocrats; elsewhere in the Arab World, they still battle dictators, armed with little more than their belief in freedom, human rights, and democracy.

What sort of society comes after the revolution? Many fear that the idealism of the revolutionary democrats will only pave the way for theological autocrats who preach an intolerant doctrine. But fighting extremism is best done not by censorship or autocracy but by embracing pluralism and defeating ideas with ideas. And here, science has much to say, particularly about the values that are needed for societies to be truly open and democratic, because these are the values of science.

As the British scientist Jacob Bronowski observed more than half a century ago, the enterprise of science requires the adoption of certain values that are adhered to by its practitioners with exceptional rigor. These values also provide the basis for enhancing human capabilities and human welfare.

Truth and honor are of the utmost importance. Any scientist who manufactures data risks being ostracized indefinitely from the scientific community, and he or she jeopardizes the credibility of science for the larger society. A scientist may err in interpreting data, but no one can accept the fabrication of data. What other fields of human activity can rival this level of commitment to absolute truth? Teamwork has become essential in most fields of

science, and it requires that all the members of the team receive the recognition they deserve. Scientists reject plagiarism. It is a sentiment well captured in Isaac Newton's famous statement that "if I have seen farther than most, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants".

Science requires the freedom to enquire, to challenge, to think, to imagine the unimagined. It cannot function within the arbitrary limits of convention, nor can it flourish if it is forced to shy away from challenging the accepted. Science advances by overthrowing an existing paradigm, or at least substantially expanding or modifying it.

Thus there is a certain constructive subversiveness built into the scientific enterprise, as a new generation of scientists makes its own contribution. Our respect and admiration for Newton are not diminished by the contributions of Albert Einstein. We can admire both. This constant renewal and advancement of our scientific understanding is a central feature of the scientific enterprise. It requires a tolerant engagement with the contrarian view that is grounded in disputes arbitrated by the rules of evidence and rationality.

Science demands rationality and promotes civility in discourse. Ad hominem attacks are not accepted. Science treats all humans equally. Scientists are concerned with the content of the scientific work, not with the

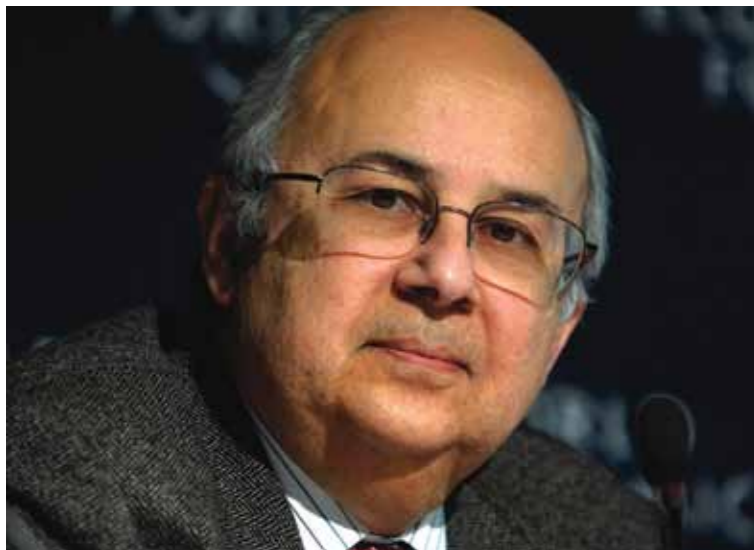
person who produced it. Science is open to all, regardless of nationality, race, religion, or sex. These values of science are universal values worth defending, not just to promote the pursuit of science but to produce a better and more humane society.

The new Arab societies we are building must be open pluralistic societies that are producers of knowledge and new opportunities.

Our youth have sparked our revolution, just as other young people have transformed societies, reinvented business enterprise, and redefined our scientific understanding of the world we live in.

Today, as they lead the rebuilding of our societies, they must embrace the values of science. Together, all armed with these values, we can think of the unborn, remember the forgotten, give hope to the forlorn, include the excluded, reach out to the unreached, and by our actions from this day onward lay the foundation for better tomorrows.

\* The Editorial was published in *Science*, Vol 332, on 3 June 2011. Serageldin was awarded the Public Welfare Medal, the National Academy of Sciences' most prestigious award, in a ceremony held on 1 May 2011.





# BA Highlights

## The BA and Societal Involvement

*Kholoud Said*

Because the BA is "much more than a building", the bridge that connects the Alexandria University campus, the BA and the Mediterranean is not just one for crossing purposes. The University of Alexandria stands as not only the emblem of education and research, but also youth and all its collocations. The bridge thus connects youth, and the society at large for that matter, with the BA, hence opening whole new horizons for them.

This has been the goal ever since its inauguration, but with all the post 25 January energy and enthusiasm, the BA opened its doors to youth groups, initiatives, activists and ideas, trying to integrate them in a society that is currently being renovated.

Right after the well-deserved celebration mood that dominated the Egyptian scene for a short while, the people that outcasted one of the world's most established tyrants did not fail to realize that the new battlefield; the new "square", was that of education and awareness. Emerging from a sincere belief that one cannot really educate people who inspired the whole world during their glorious revolution, the focus of all these attempts is one of political participation, empowerment and involvement, after decades of indifference towards public life. The target is providing the masses with the needed tools to keep on the momentum of the revolution out and loud.

In this context, the BA Futuristic Studies Unit launched a political awareness training program adopting the principle of "Training without Influencing", to assert the value of empowerment without imposing particular ideologies. This Campaign seeks to train

youth activists, groups and initiatives, to deal with different backgrounds, and to provide them with the necessary communication tools through academic material and field work. The program included 16 lectures featuring eminent professors and training experts. It is complemented by a series of sessions to examine the post-revolution scene in Egypt in an aim to spread political awareness, partly by analyzing different political and ideological trends. Hence, Abd El-Meneam Abu El-Fottoh, one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood Society, was hosted; a seminar on students' movement was held; as well as an orientation of the Egyptian Mainstream Trend; among other events.

The BA Library Sector also launched its own program encompassing a number of interactive workshops, including one on the culture of dialogue seeking to strengthen participants' communication skills, promote the respect of others, and emphasize freedom of expression and its limits.

Recognizing the importance of the constitution and the legal aspects in reshaping Egypt's future, the BA Dialogue Forum held a legal and constitutional awareness program including a series of sessions by eminent legal and constitutional experts. The program aims to spread awareness on the constitution and the laws governing the state and drawing its main features. Seminars tackled several issues including the definition of the constitution, the difference between the civil state and the religious state, constitutional rights, setting a national plan for development based on constitutional guarantees, and establishing political parties.

In the BA affiliated El-Sennary House in Cairo, several of these events are held. Youth Salon sessions are also regularly organized, aiming to be a platform for youth to share their ideas, expectations and visions for the future. The Salon provides a space for their talents to be channeled in different fields. Another series of sessions entitled "Egypt...Dialogues of the Future" are held, focusing on the future of Egypt after the Revolution through constructive dialogue that brings together different ideologies and backgrounds. It is worth mentioning that El-Sennary House aspires to revive the role of *L'Institut d'Egypte*, established by Napoleon Bonaparte, where the famous *Le Description de l'Egypte* was compiled.

The BA not only hosts youth as passive receivers, it also provides a space for them to do things their own way. For that matter, the BA collaborated with the "Action" Team who hosted Writers Belal Fadl and Nabil Farouq in two seminars. At the BA premises, the "Start Developing" project was held, organized by the *Ibda'* (Start) Initiative. The project's idea was based on a very simple equation set by the initiative's members: 'Revolution plus Awareness plus Reform plus Development equal A Better Egypt'. *Ibda'* believes that the aspired comprehensive development cannot not be achieved in the long run without the development of individuals in the short run to enable everyone to change.



*Various events at El-Sennary House in Cairo*



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The "Press Action" Initiative held a grass-root media project that aims at producing documentary films tackling issues of societal concerns based on field surveys and using people's media as the main tool. The BA also witnessed the launch of "Faces" and the first annual ceremony of the "Step Up" youth initiatives, both aspiring at engaging and empowering youth through the civil society.

Youth and young people have always been at the core of the BA concern, and for that matter, will always be. It is of no surprise that while burning and demolishing a couple of police stations and governmental buildings, ordinary citizens in fact formed a human shield around the BA premises, not that anyone was attempting to attack it, but it is just a symbol that has several meanings. For one, it was *their* Library.



*Hundreds of young participants in one of the BA events*

## Arab and Muslim Culture Classics Reissued

*Sarah Elhaddad*

*"Al-Nahda", is an Arabic term meaning "the renaissance", and describes the cultural awakening and reform that sparked throughout the Muslim and Arab World in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. During this period, a great intellectual production was gifted to the world by Muslim and Arab pioneers.*

**T**oday, in a time when Islam is facing many negative stereotypes around the world, which seems very oblivious to the Muslim and Arab contributions to science and culture, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) started working on the "Reissuing Classics of Arab and Muslim Culture" project, and the first set of books was officially issued last May.

The *Reissuing the Classics* project, implemented by the BA in cooperation with Carnegie Corporation of New York, was launched in order to revive the great classics of Islam and to bring forth the enlightened views of the great Muslim thinkers and reformers by reissuing classics of Arabic and Muslim culture from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*Reissuing the Classics* stemmed from the fact that there are many false perceptions about Islam in the world. The idea was that it was about time that these unfounded thoughts about Islam be drowned out and that the true face of Islam is revealed to the whole world. An alternate phenomenon of promoting dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim cultures, in fact between all cultures, had to take over in order to promote world peace and universal understanding and tolerance among the nations of the world.

Accordingly, the BA looked into Arabic and Muslim culture classics and selected a number of anthologies to be reissued. Much of this material is out of print, or has never been translated from its original language. The project is set to be completed in three phases; the first is reissuing the material; then translating it in order to have editions in Arabic, English, and French. Afterwards the translated editions will be put online.

### **An Image Seldom Propagated**

*Reissuing the Classics* aims to promote public education on the diversity of Islam, and foster a deeper understanding of Muslim states and societies, by introducing the wealth of knowledge in the selected books. Through the revival of the works and classics of Muslims, the underrepresented involvement of Muslims in sciences, technology, culture, history and in all other fields will be exposed to the whole world. It will present an image that is seldom propagated of Muslims and Islam; this image involves a deep appreciation and veneration of science and the role it has to play in the different aspects of life both in old times and in our modern world.

The main target audience of this project include local, regional and international youth; scholars and students, particularly



# BA Highlights

those involved in Middle-Eastern, Oriental or scientific studies; and a general public of internet users who will vary in their interests, cultural backgrounds, gender and age groups. The Project also aspires to encourage young Muslims to become producers of knowledge, promote intra-Muslim debate as well as dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims, erase the barriers to understanding Muslim culture and religion that are created by culturally specific items addressed in the works selected for the Project.

The Project is hoped to eventually preserve the Arabic and Muslim intellectual and scientific heritage in different fields of knowledge, and contribute to passing it to the coming generations. Eventually, *Reissuing the Classics* will form a complete and diverse library including selections of the most important intellectual works of Muslim reform and renovation pioneers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Knowledge Dissemination

Eleven titles were issued in the first phase of the Project. They include: "The Goals of Islamic Shariah" by Mohammad AlTahar ben Aashour, "Islamic School" by Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, "Alienation and the Return to the Self" by Ali Shariati, and "Preliminaries to the History of Islamic Philosophy" by Mustafa Abd al-Raziq.

Each book is preceded by an introduction prepared by a distinguished researcher, following a clear methodology combining introduction of the authors, their works, and the historical and social context that the book was written in. The introductions were peer reviewed by a committee of specialized scholars.

In "The Goals of Islamic Shariah", Mohammad Al Tahar ben Aashour presents his vision on the philosophical thought in Islam, giving a different approach from past

writings that tended to base it on western ideas.

"Islamic School" is a book that comes from the core of Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr's intellectual renaissance project. The book demonstrates the idea that Islam is the intellectual system capable of forming a social system that is best suited for contemporary Islamic societies.

"Alienation and the Return to the Self" is one of the most important publications of Ali Shariati, as it tackles the issue of the return to the self, in a context that confirms the independence of every civilization, refuses any dependency to the West, and demonstrates the existence of the self as a basic condition for the development of nations.

"The Goals of Islamic Shariah" is considered a new revelation in the science of the goals of Shariah, as it is regarded as an establishment of the science and a foundation of its framework.



practical levels. This is done through drawing past and present examples and human experiences from different fields including science, education, commerce, travel, war and peace, translation, diplomacy and others, especially amidst information and communication technology revolution and the change in power relations.

Dr. Mahmoud Azab; Representative of al-Azhar's Grand Imam gave the opening speech in which he talked about Islam as a common heritage between Muslims and the preceding nations. He believes that the philosophy of Islam rests on organic unity with other cultures and civilizations. He highlighted the role of al-Azhar as a source of inspiration throughout the ages, and stressed that al-Azhar will not indulge into arguments on the civil state versus the religious state.

In the first session; entitled "Cross-Cultural Encounters: Establishing the Idea", Saudi-Arabian writer and researcher Dr. Zaki El-Milad explored the concept of 'dialogue among civilizations' as seen by the French Philosopher Roger Garaudy; the first one to advocate the concept, and Former Iranian President Mohamed Khatami who called for an international year for dialogue among civilizations. El-Milad presented his views concerning the adoption of "cross-cultural encounters" as a window on the world and a way leading to progress.

He said that the Quran is the base of the cross-cultural encounters concept, adding that the idea has passed the experiment phase and has now become a very common concept, as well as becoming more precise and more expressive of Islamic thought. He affirmed that cross-cultural encounters can be a means for forming an idea of the world, and reaching the aspired development in the Arab World.

## Cross-Cultural Encounters Promotion

*Reissuing the Classics* is definitely not just about digitizing and publishing books. It is about making printed and online books a means for promoting knowledge, tolerance, and intercultural dialogue; a value embodied by the BA numerous and varied activities.

In order to continue those initiatives, the first international conference organized at the BA after the 25 January Revolution was "Cross-Cultural Encounters" conference, held on 18 and 19 May 2011, with the participation of specialists and academia from different countries, as well as representatives of several organizations.

The Conference tackled the concept of "Cross-Cultural Encounters" as a new concept attempting to study the relations between civilizations, and criticize dominant concepts in that regard, such as dialogue, conflict, clash, division, negation, marginalization, among others. It also explored how we can benefit from this concept on both the theoretical and

Conference attendees standing one minute in memory of the Egyptian Revolution martyrs



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Dr. Seif El-Deen Abd El-Fattah; Professor of Political Science at Cairo University, tackled the methodological and cognitive dilemma of this concept. He spoke about the challenges facing cross-cultural encounters; such as ignorance, underestimation, clash, prejudice, stereotyping, among others. He also traced the concept in the Quranic verse number 13, Chapter 49 (Al-Hujurat), "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) The verse presents the concept of 'cross-cultural encounters' in a wider sense, moving from the individual, to the community, to humanity at large.

Researcher Medhat Maher reflected on the concept and posed several questions; such as how far we can depend on one single verse from the Quran to develop this concept, for Prophet Muhammed's Biography gives the concept a vivid meaning; the methodology of explaining the concept, for it could only refer to the minimum level of acquaintance, not encounters; and relations with variables and invariables. Maher stressed on the importance of moving to practical thinking, and he believes that this concept would

also pave the way towards understanding one's self.

Tunisian researcher Sara Hakimi spoke during the conference about the cultural image of the other, in the framework of cross-encounters between civilizations, affirming that the cultural image has the greatest effect as a mechanism in cross-civilization relationships, as the ideas combined in the collective imagination about the other remains in the memory of the civilization and affects the relationship between civilizations, and is very hard to change. She said that positive interaction between civilizations is possible and can perform the task of correcting the distorted cultural image of the other, to get rid of the effect of the negative historical inheritance from the general consciousness.

Turkish academic researcher Nozad Sawash gave a tangible example of initiatives that promote cross-encounters; Turkish schools. The initiative was started by Turkish merchants who wanted to use their money as capital in building cross-civilizations schools, out of their belief that a strong civil society can only be built through adopting educational work. Turkish schools spread throughout Europe reaching two thousand schools in 160 countries. He concluded that schools are now peace islands that focus on common human ethics, and open the horizons of cross-encounters to all diverse members of the society.

## Egyptian-Swedish Youth Exchanging Views

*Ayman Elsherbiny and Kholoud Said*

*"As a politician, I never recall such a strong, loud and clear voice than that of Arab youth this spring calling for freedom, democracy and human rights, all embraced in dignity. Your [Arab] dignity is our [western] dignity; your future is shaping our future." —HE Gunilla Carlsson, Swedish Minister of International Development Cooperation.*

In context of the current changes in the Egyptian scene, the Swedish Institute in Alexandria (SwedAlex), in cooperation with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), launched a new program focusing on youth in democracy-building. The first phase creates a platform for Egyptian and Swedish youth representatives of political parties, to exchange experiences and practices to enhance the role of youth in politics and determine how political awareness and participation of youth can be promoted.

In this regard, SwedAlex and the BA organized a workshop entitled "Youth in Politics" during 7-8 April, focusing on the role of youth in capacity building of political parties, developing party identity/ideology and programs, developing principles into policies and programs for implementation and communicating political messages. Furthermore, funding, gender representation, leadership, mediation and negotiation skills were important issues to discuss.

Swedish Minister Gunilla Carlsson gave a short talk during one of the sessions of the workshop in which she talked about the role of media as a carrier of the message and a means for convening people. Youth are at the core of this new model of political participation, being skilled in the tools of new and social media as they are. "In this dialogue there are no students, only

teachers. Explore, explain and enjoy," she concluded.

Learning the biggest lesson in his life, Ahmed Naguib; Member of the 'Board of Trustees of the Revolution', said that on 28 January he realized that one person can really change the world if s/he put their minds into it. He had started a demonstration with five family members from a neighborhood in Cairo, and ended up 30,000 in Tahrir Square, gathering more and more individuals as they proceeded. The real victory of the Revolution, he said, was not overthrowing Mubarak, but "regaining our dignity, our human side and our country".

He elaborated on how the Revolution was very spontaneous, but equally courageous with people willing to risk their lives at any given second. He gave a quick glimpse on the current political scene in Egypt, with the formation of new parties, coalitions and political groups, and said that we need to invest in the 'momentum'.

On youth non-participation before the Revolution, he said that he did a survey some time back and found that there were several factors accounting for that, chief among which was police brutality. Other reasons were the absence of any other venue of political engagement except the National Democratic Party; the ruling party at that time. "Now it is different, but there are



The First Session of the Conference

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still some challenges, mainly the absence of political awareness," argued Naguib.

Representing the Liberal Youth of Sweden and its organization, Filip Wästberg said that his first expression on Egypt when he first arrived after overthrowing Mubarak's regime was "What a proud people!" He gave a short introduction on his party and the values it embraces, advising youth organizations to have some democratic structure and to keep on dreaming. "You have to keep fighting and never give up. A revolution is not just about changing the government; the whole system has to change," he stated.

Wästberg mentioned that his organization recruits new members by holding campaigns at schools and universities, in addition to reaching out through media. He stressed on the right of freedom of association and added that the state should not hinder that. He concluded that the political structure in Sweden is democratic but still grey. "There is still much to do; they are by no means completely finished with the process."

Kholoud Said, who has been involved in the civil society for several years, drew similarities between youth non-involvement in civil society and in political life; politics being part of the civil society in its wider sense. She spoke of the distinction of people

as 'us' and politicians as 'them', for people did not really feel they owned the country in which they lived and died, and that is one main reason why they did not want to get involved. According to Said, this is changing greatly post 25 January, for people have gained their authentic self and their sense of belonging.

She indicated that there was a media centralization in Cairo's Tahrir Square, disregarding the fact that the Revolution was all over Egypt. She called for people to form their own political parties, pressure groups, networks, coalitions and so on, to work their own hands instead of calling upon and demanding. "The sky is the limit," she asserted.

Said referred to political awareness activities that are being held in different places in Egypt, believing that this is the most important issue to begin with.

Activist Manar El-Gammal said that the 25 January Revolution came with the desire and ability of Egypt, and eventually the Arab World, to change their reality. She highlighted the coalition she is working with, which aims at gathering young people from the Arab World to share experiences and tips for political awareness and a new renaissance. She called for working with the people instead of closed-room meetings,

spreading the word and widening the circle; especially in rural and remote areas, in addition to building a 'self-sustained society'.



Participants group photo

As an example of someone who was inspired by the Revolution to engage in political life, Rasha Ragheb said that she had not practiced politics before. However, the 25 January Revolution changed this. With other colleagues, she is working on establishing 'The Egyptians Coalition Party'; a liberal party that includes people from all walks of life. They launched vocational training programs at universities, as well as programs to eliminate illiteracy. Her colleague, Khaled Serag, pointed out that Egyptians used to join parties according to the name of its leader, not according to its ideology and program. He stressed on the need to change this.

Emma Lidell, from the Social Democratic Party, gave a short introduction about her party, which calls for democracy, not for the sake of democracy itself, but to help people use its tools. As far as she is considered, it is not only a question of attaining democracy, but what will one do with it. "Democracy is not just about voting, but rather a day-to-day participation and engagement, for politics is not only for experts," Lidell affirmed. She added that the party members seek a democratic representation of the society, which requires being close to the people.

Lidell stressed on fighting illiteracy and sees this as very crucial for building a democratic society. "Political programs are by themselves very good tools for education and political awareness."

Focusing on the political scene in Egypt, Hossam Ali; Chairperson of the Egyptian Democratic Academy, spoke of the importance of religion in the Egyptian political life, manifested in the significant role of the Muslim Brotherhood. "Every potential presidential candidate is now trying to attract their votes."

He called for having equal opportunities between all political parties; especially religious groups and others, and then it is up to only the people to decide. He commended the participation in the referendum on the constitutional amendments, which was held in March 2011.

Ali listed some challenges facing political work in Egypt; namely the limited resources and the lack of trust from the people's side to politicians who have always enjoyed a bad reputation. Hence the importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is highlighted.

Representing a party with an Islamic background, Inas Khalifa spoke on behalf of the *Wasat* (Moderate) Party. She has joined the party five years earlier and was then the youngest member. *Wasat* was the first party to get a license after the Revolution. It took them a whole of 16 years to actually receive the license officially. "The Party rests on an Islamic background, but being a Muslim is by no means a condition for joining," she affirmed.



Old Bedouin woman voting in the referendum on the constitutional amendments  
©Sinaonline.net



I am Khaled Said



I am Egypt

A poster of Khaled Said by Kimo Nour ©Wikipedia

### Social Media and the Revolution

Participants in the 'Youth in Politics' workshop also engaged in a discussion on 'Social Media and Outreach Activities'. Karim Elshennawy; Social Media Activist and Film Director, gave a presentation entitled 'Social Media: The Next Steps', in which he traced the widespreading of social media as a powerful tool to the 6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Political and Social Movement, and Khaled Said's fan page on Facebook. Khaled Said; a 28-year-old Egyptian male, was tortured to death at the hands of two secret police members in Alexandria in June 2010. A couple of days after his death, the 'We are all Khaled Said' fan page was created on Facebook proving to be very influential; tackling police torture and corruption.

Elshennawy raised the slogan "From Screens to Streets", referring to the Facebook

groups and pages that played an important role in encouraging people to revolt. He said that this was the first revolution with a known fixed date, and added that no one imagined that the participation in the revolution would be on such a huge scale.

He referred to the speech that the overthrown President Hosni Mubarak delivered on 22 January 2011; 'Police Day' celebration; in which he thanked the police for the work they do in protecting 'the country', and neglected the movements on Facebook, which called for a revolution just 3 days afterwards.

"The regime-affiliated newspapers did not pay much attention to the demonstrations against Mubarak's regime, focusing more on disturbances in Lebanon and other issues! Thus, social media filled this gap by providing information to the people as well as to the local, regional, and international press," Elshennawy stated. He added that ordinary people became reporters, uploading low-quality videos and photos, which were used by prominent media organizations. He pointed out that the 25 January Revolution was a 'social media revolution' in terms of coverage.

Social media became a source of information, not just a tool of interaction. 'From Fax to Status', and 'To Tweet or not to Tweet' were two slogans presented by Elshennawy in this regard. According to him, this raises the issue of credibility and ethics. "It is hard to change the way audience use social media, but you can understand it and act accordingly," he argued.

Elshennawy indicated that a great number of Egyptians are not connected to the Internet. This means that political awareness cannot be achieved through social media alone. Activists need to work all over Egypt through direct communication with the

public. He also asserted on the importance of training activists on the social media ethics.

From the Swedish Moderate Party Youth League, Erik Bengtzboe said that the most important thing about social media is providing people with information. "In social media you cannot control the current; you just follow it. You push information to the people and make it available. You will benefit from social media, when you understand that you do not control it," he affirmed.

Bengtzboe posed a question on being anonymous, for in Sweden, it is a taboo to be anonymous on the Internet, "You have to stand up and defend your views." Activist Ahmed Zahran responded saying that before 25 January 2011, it was almost a must to be anonymous, because otherwise one would be arrested and tortured by the regime. However, he argued that this does not mean that Egyptian activists were afraid of saying what they believed in. Karim Elshennawy added that being anonymous was not a problem as long as there was credibility. "The well-known blogs before the revolution were moderated by anonymous activists."

Erik Bengtzboe then talked about developing a party program, mentioning the fact that his party has a website and an electronic forum, through which people from all over the world can interact and provide their views.

Ahmed Zahran then took the floor and explained how he, together with some of his Egyptian friends in Egypt and abroad, tried to benefit from the Internet. They were "getting together virtually", using the Internet to support causes, and to call for demonstrations. He referred to the fact that some people viewed them as "wealthy young people who do what they do just

for fun, with no concrete actions that might result from it!"

He mentioned that the Egyptian revolution should have begun earlier, especially that Egypt have had political and societal movements since 2003. However, the Tunisian Revolution inspired Egyptians, and encouraged them to revolt against Mubarak's regime.

Zahran indicated that social media enriched our lives. "It is not just a tool to interact with others, but also a source of information, and a guide to demonstration places, how to avoid being arrested, and how to overcome Tear Gas bombs." Social media was and still is a tool of solidarity as well. This was well shown after the Egyptian old regime cut off Internet connections; when Google and Twitter have showed their solidarity with Egyptian protestors and offered them services through landlines.

He also talked about the importance of transforming social media to the population at large through mobile phones in the Arabic language, and stressed that it is technically feasible.

Charlotte Holm from the Liberal Youth Organization in Sweden stated that her organization uses social media to "organize, inform, and mobilize". However, she said that it is essential to use direct communication in recruiting members. She also added that in order to have an impact, activists have to direct clear messages through social media; such as the one used by Egyptians "the people demand overthrowing the regime". "Social media did not make the revolution, you are the ones who did it," she affirmed.

Representing the Youth League of the Green Party, Rebecka Carlsson mentioned that most newspapers in Sweden are liberal, and this affects their coverage. "This is where social media is important, because



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it can balance this situation by offering other points of view.” She said that her organization launched a blog concerned with the environment, and that they had 1,000 followers after one week of launching it. She added that this can be repeated focusing on other topics, such as a blog for labor unions.

Carlsson spoke about her party’s experience. “Forums and discussion groups are organized for all segments in an attempt to listen to all opinions, because everyone does matter. This is also extended to an open-for-public blog to further enrich the debate.”

Chairperson of “Hand in Hand for Egypt” Organization, Michael Mounir started by saying that the Revolution is still in its first phase, “we have not achieved all our goals yet.” He argued that corruption, marginalization, tyranny and the feeling of hopelessness were the main causes of the 25 January Revolution.

He mentioned that social media contributed a lot to the Revolution, but it was among the factors that led to it, not its causes. It was neither fully responsible, nor utterly irrelevant. “Its role is still required in the current phase, as well as the future.”

Bassem Fathy, from the Free Egyptian Party, drew attention to the fact that it was social media that killed Khaled Said, because he uploaded a video showing the corruption of the police, and that is why they wanted him dead. It was also a reason for releasing Bassem from prison, along with 27 other activists, because the news of their arrest spread all over the Internet and many people put pressure on the authorities to release them.

Fathy pointed out to a new project, “You Shahed” (you witness), which is an Internet technology that allows users to upload videos they have shot with violations. It also contains other tools providing a platform for information and opinion exchange.

*Demonstrations in Alexandria during the Revolution*



## Contributions

### The Concept of Christian–Islamic Heritage\*

*Leila Ibrahim Takla*

The respect of human rights is necessary to maintain peace. In the absence of peace, all human rights are violated. This is a simple equation which establishes the interaction between peace and human rights.

Indeed the respect of every human right is a prerequisite to peace and security. However, current events highlight the need to consolidate a specific right on which I shall focus, that is the right to religious freedom and the respect of religious beliefs.

Today, insecurity and instability have many faces; military, economic, social, emotional and cultural. Sources and methods of conflict have developed new expressions and motives. The tools of war, usually known and predicted, have become difficult to trace. Conflict is no longer a confrontation between two defined military forces. The enemy is invisible and unidentified. We do not know exactly who the enemy is, where to find him, and how to fight him. It could be anyone, anywhere.

In an illogical effort to identify “The Enemy” and relieve ourselves from the agony of fighting a ghost, we fell in the trap of theories advocating a clash of civilizations and confrontation between religions; thus resorted to generalization and discrimination.

Events led to unjustified distrust of all “the others”, whoever they might be, just because they are different. To some, the other became the “decadent materialistic

unfair Christian West”, to some it became the “cruel militant uncivilized Muslim terrorists”.

That other is different in the way of life, in cultural values and religious beliefs. Variety, which enriches life, became a reason for rejection and a source of conflict.

Today more than ever, we need to gradually incorporate the right of being different and remaining equal. We need to gradually uproot discrimination by knowing about each other. Knowledge is a bliss that chases the phantom of ignorance. It washes away darkness and sparks enlightenment. One whole religion is based on the concept of “knowing”. Siddara, son of King Ashoka, became “Buddha” when he developed into “the one who knows”.

Knowing each other is the way to mutual acceptance, to coexistence and to cooperation without discrimination. Of all the differences between people, religion seems to be the most sensitive one. Religious means that which is Holy. A call for war or violence cannot be Holy. It is a revolt against religions.

Religion should not be a variable in the equation of evaluating a person, or in the process of decision-making. Yet, when we swallowed the concept of an inevitable clash between religions, activities started to have a religious explanation and justification. Every time we explain a conflict on the basis of religion, we are encouraging a trend we should be trying to eliminate.

\*The article is an extract from *Our Common Christian-Islamic Heritage*, Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2006. Slight modifications have been applied for the purpose of this Newsletter.



## Contributions

When some terrorists, who happen to be Muslim, committed outrageous crimes, all Muslims became guilty; and because some Christians are unjust or inhuman in their political decisions, all Christians became "The Enemy".

Instead of realizing that some terrorists are Muslim, Terrorism became Islam itself. On the other hand, Christianity, not some Christians, become "rejected". These attitudes, which are spreading globally, constitute a serious violation of all human rights and are a threat to peace. Today more than ever, we need to scrutinize this Christian versus Muslim trend.

The two questions we face are: Should the war against terrorism be a war against Islam? Do the differences between Christianity and Islam justify that confrontation?

Terrorism has no boundaries, no nationality and no religion; also the good in the world does not have one specific nationality or religion.

There is nothing wrong with Islam, Christianity, or Judaism as a religion; but there is a great deal of wrong committed by Muslim fundamentalists, Christian fanatics and Jewish Zionists. Today, we need to know not only the religions of others but our very own.

Only the truth can make us free of anger, of hate and rejection, and only then we shall see that this is not a clash between civilizations or religions, but should be a struggle of all civilizations and religions, jointly, to free the world from terrorists of all types, terrorists who destroy civilization and abuse religions.

War should be against all terrorists regardless of the religion they claim. Muslim terrorists did not commit their crimes because they are Muslim, but in spite of being Muslim. The US troops did not bomb

Iraq because they are Christian, but in spite of being Christian.

The war in Iraq was not a religious confrontation. Some of the countries in "The Coalition" were Muslim, and the El Qaeda committed crimes in several Muslim and Arab countries. Christian churches were against invading and bombing Iraq. Egypt suffered great human and economic losses at hands of Muslim terrorists who were harbored by the West.

All religions call for peace. "Peace be with you" is the blessing of Christ; "Grant us Peace" is the core of Christian Prayer, and "Peace be on you" is the constant greeting of Islam.

Religion is not the cause of violence though it sometimes appears to be so. In my opinion the war in Ireland was not a religious war. It was not about religion. They did not disagree about whether we say Hail Mary three times or ten times. They did not disagree about the words of the Holy Mass.

The English, who happened to be mainly Protestant, occupied Ireland. The people of Ireland are Catholic. The occupier, as usual, became the powerful and the rich. The occupied remained the less privileged and not well-treated. The Catholic Irish fought the English Protestants for freedom, independence and equality. People fight for their freedom regardless of religious beliefs.

The conflict in Palestine is not a fight of Jews vs. Muslims. Many Christians died or were wounded and lost their homes by the guns of Jewish terrorists and by the tanks of the Israeli Government. Christian Holy Places were damaged or defamed. It is war between the occupier and the occupied. It is a fight between Israel—which is a Jewish State—against Palestinians, who are both Christian and Muslim and lived very well together for generations.

Even the so-called Crusades were not, in my opinion, religious wars, but were induced by economic and political reasons. The European troops were not referred to by the Arabs as "Crusaders", but were called the "Foreigners" and those invaders murdered about 80 Christian priests.

What Muslim terrorists commit is not Jihad. It is reported that Prophet Muhammad, in his late years said, "The minor Jihad has ended and now starts the major Jihad". When asked what is the major Jihad he answered, "The major Jihad is within oneself"; a sentence which means to control and refine one's desires and impulses. A fanatic does not understand the religion of the other. A terrorist does not understand even his own religion.

What we really need today is to know about each other's cultures and religions. We do not know enough about the beliefs of "the others", yet we hasten to reject them and their beliefs.

Various researches have been conducted on the roots of religions and it is amazing

to discover how close their roots are. The concept of the Judeo-Christian heritage has already been established, in spite of the fact that Jews do not believe in Jesus Christ or his message on Earth. It is often said that this concept of Judeo-Christian culture has been motivated by political, not religious reasons. Whether this occurred for religious reasons or political motives, it is best to try to avoid clashes.

Today the world should discover the existing, but ignored, "Christian-Islamic heritage". The similarities between Christianity and Islam are numerous, and more than between any other two religions. Let me refer to only a few.

Christianity is based on the acceptance of Christ; Jesus Christ is highly revered by Muslims.

Just as in the Bible, Jesus is referred to in the Quran as "The Word of God". The first sentence of the book of John is "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God".



Painting on a wall in Cairo of an Egyptian flag that morphs into a Christian Priest and a Muslim Imam  
© blogs.elca.org



## Contributions

The Quran says:

"Jesus, the son of Mary, the Apostle of God, is simply His Word and edict which He authoritatively proclaimed to Mary and a spirit that proceeded from Him." (Surah 4, The Women, verse 171)

The Holy Spirit is one of the Pillars of Christianity. A verse in "Al Baqarah/The Cow" states that:

"God gave Jesus knowledge and the Holy Spirit." (Surah 2, The Cow, verse 87)

According to the Quran, Jesus is the only Prophet whose birth was a miracle. Muslims believe that Jesus "spoke in the crib" as a newborn, they believe in the miracles he performed, and that he ascended to Heaven.

They revere Virgin Mary, who is mentioned in the Quran more times than in the Bible. She is the only female who has a chapter in her name (Surah 19, Maryam).

For Muslims, the Bible is a Holy Book revealed by God and not written by man. A verse in "Al Hadid/The Iron" states:

"We sent Jesus, son of Mary, and We gave him the Bible." (Surah 57, The Iron, verse 27)

Most Christians in the West were misled to believe that violence is part of Islamic creed. The truth is that Islamic creed consists of five articles of faith: belief in one God; in the angels; in the revealed books (including the Torah and the Bible); in the prophets, and in the Day of Judgment.

The five pillars, or obligations, of Islam are reciting the profession of faith; prayer; paying the *zakat* (money to charity); fasting; and pilgrimage to Mecca. Are these really different from Christian creed and teachings?!

On the other hand, most Muslims were led to believe that Christianity is not a monotheistic religion; that Christians do not believe in one god, but three; a serious misunderstanding of the concept of the Holy Trinity.

The truth is that the first sentence in the confession of Christian faith is "I believe in one God". When asked what is the foremost of all teachings Jesus replied, "It is that God is one".

For Christians, God the father sent his Holy Spirit to Mary, and Jesus was born of that Holy Spirit. The three are a continuum. The three are the expression of one Holy Spirit and cannot be three.

Saying it is not one but different entities would be against monotheism. This is why Christians start their prayer by saying "In the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen".

Verses about the birth of Jesus in the Bible and in the Quran are remarkably close.

There are differences of course between Christianity and Islam; but there are also differences between denominations of the same religion. Some denominations are closer, in some ways, to denominations of another religion than to those of its own.

The differences between Christianity and Islam do not justify animosity or clash. Those who believe in Jesus cannot be enemies of Christianity. Jesus said, "Those who are not against us are with us" and Muslims believe in Jesus; the Word of God, His message and His Holy Spirit.

What then is the problem? The problem is that we do not know enough about each other and what we do not know we cannot accept, and instantly reject.

Let us not blame civilizations or abuse religions. What is happening is rather a result of people's greed and ambitions, of the desire of some to oppress and of others to rebel and destroy. It is a conflict between what is bad in people and what is good in all religions.

It is also a clash between the have and the have-not; between the rich powerful on one hand and the poor and oppressed on the other, oppressed not only by other powers but often by their own systems; between those who always want more and those who always live in want, in a world where what counts is what you have and not what you are.

It is always power, political economic motives and personal ambitions that are behind violence and aggression...and it is always the innocent in all religions who suffer.

Above all, it is the lack of religious knowledge, and not religions, that cause rejection, conflict and violence. I am convinced that knowing about each others' religions, understanding our own faith and adhering human rights related to respect of religions would enhance peace.

My conviction is not academic...It is a result of practical experience. Living in Egypt, where Christians and Muslims have lived together since the dawn of both religions, where the enlightened and the fanatic currents flow together, I became convinced that sound governmental and non-governmental practices and policies can promote knowledge and acceptance.

Of course there are problems. There will always be fanatics, and some are incurable; and it seems that terrorism, both by people and by governments, formal and informal, will remain with our world for some time.



Protester holding Quran and Cross

This should not discourage us and we must continue to work diligently and together, towards dismantling that growing mountain of misunderstanding and rejection. This is a good starting point, and can be a meaningful and successful contribution to peace.

Without justice there is no peace. Peace is justice. Today, the world has a pressing ardent need for "a culture of peace and justice" based on the belief that: All countries are important, all people are equal, all colors are beautiful, and all religions are great. No one can accomplish that better than women.



## How to Grasp Islamic Architecture?

Khaled Azab



Ahmad ibn Tulun minaret in Cairo

This question may come as a surprise to the readers, researchers, and professors specialized in Islamic architecture and Islamic monuments, in specific. However, grasping the Islamic architecture is still a long way ahead, unfortunately. Many have immersed themselves in the orientalist studies revolving around the form rather than the content in the fields of architecture and Islamic monuments. This had an effect that lasted until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not only on the academic curriculum, but also on architectural designs, metaphorically known as Islamic.

Everyone sought form rather than content, which is the essence of Islamic architecture. Moreover, it is this essence that made it eye-catching in terms of the ornamental form. Also, if the design is contemplated, questions with logical answers emerging from architectural engineering will be raised. This is in addition to other questions with no answers residing in the western and cotemporary consciousness as a part of the mysteries and magic of the East linked to the Arabian Nights tales.

The apparent form in these buildings with façades made of Islamic components is a carbon copy of the monumental Islamic buildings, or done in coordination with the contemporary architectural designs.

A case in point, some buildings have *Masharbiyas*; wooden barriers joined together to form geometric shape in order to disable the neighbors from viewing the inside of the house, provide fresh air, and minimize the heat caused by direct sunlight. This element has been added to modern buildings not for its functions, but in order to make it of Islamic nature.

This phenomenon is due to two reasons: Firstly, it started when our architects traveled to the West and studied architecture through catalogues listing

all the architectural elements with measurements and different forms. All the architect had to do was to coordinate these elements with the available space without contemplating on the design and to what extent it fits our Islamic eastern societies. Thus, they copied the western architecture as is. Currently, this is still the case. In their attempt to bring back Islamic architectural patterns, architects were influenced by this approach. Therefore, the Islamic architecture is revived in terms of the form rather than the content. As a result, architects turned to imitators who lacked creativity and innovation.

The second reason is the society that accepted these western designs, believing it to be the source of western progress. Thus, the *Masharbiyas* on the building façade reflect a society that adheres to Islam as a religion in form rather than content. Architects are following the western footsteps without recognizing that architecture entails civilized approaches, ideas, and values. Thus, Ibn Khaldun's statement, "Those defeated are fond of imitating those victorious" proved right.

Similarly, those studying architectural monuments are no different. They adopted the descriptive approach that describes the architectural form accurately, without raising any question about these forms and the reasons of the different patterns varying from one facility to another. Moreover, most of the undertaken studies revolved around mosques and *Madrasas*; institutes for higher education, without paying any attention to other facilities. It is as if Islam is only a religion and its architecture is limited to temples.

In order to put an end to this conflict and overcome these obstacles, and to obtain an architectural science with independent designs and contents, we must grasp Islamic architecture in the same way we grasp Islam.



# Contributions



Masharbiya in Old Cairo, late 19<sup>th</sup> century

The approach developed to grasp Islamic architecture is based on a number of pillars. The first focuses on studying its law; the jurisprudence of architecture. It is a set of rules that has accumulated over the years due to the interaction between the construction process and society, and the emergence of questions answered by scholars.

The accumulation of these questions has led to imposing the rules governing the construction process in Islamic societies. The society, authorities, and architects followed these rules. This has been recorded by the legislative courts in Cairo, Rasheed, and Tunisia, for example. Moreover, it was explained thoroughly in my two books about the jurisprudence of Islamic architecture. The Egyptian Scholar Ibn Abd El Hakam (died in AH 214/CE 829), was the first to record the rules of architecture in his book; "The Structure". According to scholars,

architecture rules were divided into three main sections:

1. Mandatory Construction: Places of worship; such as mosques where prayers are held, and forts to defend Muslim land.
2. Specialized Construction: The minarets where calls for prayers are made, and markets to provide people with goods and make them available. Thus, establishing markets was allowed by religion.
3. Allowed Construction: Building houses. It is well known that *Sharia*; the sacred law of Islam, aims at protecting religion, individuals, money, honor and children. God has provided humans with physical methods to achieve that; such as houses where people live and keep their money.
4. Forbidden Construction: Places for prostitution and drinking liquor, and building on graves as well as on land owned by others.

The essence of the jurisprudence of architecture should be taught in schools of architecture in our universities, in order to breed a new generation of architects capable of introducing contemporary Islamic architecture.

The second pillar of grasping architecture is addressing it as belonging to the whole society rather than individuals. Nowadays, an individual builds his house without putting his neighbors into consideration, unaware of their privacy, and not realizing that he communicates with his neighbors through his house. Even though these aspects do not exist today, they did in the past. At these times, no one could open a window that reveals the inside of his neighbors' houses, as it was considered a violation of architecture law, known as the revealing risk. People living in the same neighborhood used to cooperate in the maintenance of utilities as their authority is derived from that of the Islamic civil society. It is a society stating

that a neighborhood is an independent integrated administrative unit. Therefore, the Islamic cities administration did not suffer from any negativity. The neighborhood's gate was a symbol of the people's solidarity and cooperation in guarding it, and of their lives within its walls.

Moreover, the third pillar is based on the solidarity among the rich to provide services for the city residents. The rich established *Sabils*, public drinking water dispensary, to provide water for the poor in the burning heat, and *Kuttabs*; elementary Quranic schools, to provide them with proper education. Also, they established agencies to fund these facilities. Thus, the *Waqf*; a donation system in Islam, provides a crucial perspective of understanding the nature and role played by service and economic facilities in Islamic architecture.

The fourth pillar, however, revolves around understanding the role played by architects in Islamic societies. The Muslim architect used to deal with architecture through the society and the interaction with its users. Thus, his designs satisfied their needs, and they were rarely modified. Nowadays, however,

residents carry out endless modifications to their houses because the architect designed them in an air-conditioned office without attempting to understand the needs and traditions of the residents.

The fifth pillar is based on the interaction between the emerging architects and the ancient Islamic architecture. This could be achieved through exploring and explaining this architecture in details, and sketching its elements and imagining life in these buildings.

As for the sixth pillar, it is acquainting the vocabulary and terminology of Islamic architecture, including the bent entrance, which is an architectural element developed by Muslims in order to prevent those passing across a house, mosque, or *Madrasa* from viewing what is inside. Therefore, it provides a high degree of privacy, and reduces noise. Thus, it was essential in educational and religious facilities. An exact description of these terms has been acquired, and has enabled us to identify them. These terms include *Shadirwan*; a localized Persian term referring to a glass slab covered with stalactites which had prominent bumps



Mamluk tombs in Egypt, late 19<sup>th</sup> century





Montaza Palace in Alexandria, influenced by the European architecture

for water to run through and be served cool to passersby in *sabils*. In addition, the term *Ablaq* refers to the alternating courses of black and white masonry. This is in addition to terms related to and types of arches such as true arches, segmental arches, lancet arches, equilateral arches, flamboyant arches and depressed arches.

Finally, the seventh pillar is based on identifying the types of Islamic monuments; such as the larger *Masjid Jāmi'* where the daily five prayers and the Friday congregation sermons are held with a high volume of attendance, and the smaller *Masjid* dedicated for the daily five prayers, and

the difference between them. In addition to *Tikiyyas*; Sufi hospices, *Sabils*; water wheels, tubs of drinking water for animals, and *Rab's*; housing facilities including vertical units rented for accommodation. Also, it includes water facilities; such as bridges, creeks, and industrial facilities; such as sugar factories, Meccan textile factories, powder laboratories, dyeing halls, and so on. The planning of Islamic cities is an important aspect that should be entailed in this pillar. It resulted from the accumulation of expertise in Islamic civilization, and the western architects were unable to realize it until the recent years. Unfortunately, it is still neglected in our universities.

Alexandria, Istanbul, and Venice

A Mediterranean Trilogy Rediscovering the Liquid Continent

Sarah Elhaddad

There is an intimacy, a garrulous warmth and near-tribal sociability that belongs to this city and is shared by all others on this sea," says Nicholas Woodsworth about Alexandria, the subject of the first of three volumes of his book "The Liquid Continent - A Mediterranean Trilogy".

Inspired by French writer Jean Cocteau's love for the Mediterranean, who said "Of all that world's continents, it is the only one that is liquid", Woodsworth set out to visit Alexandria, Istanbul, and Venice, as he started not to think of the Mediterranean as an empty space surrounded by Europe, Asia, and Africa. He says, "You can look at the sea as a single entity place from whose coastlines people look not outwards, to this country or that capital, but inwards over the water to each other. This sea has its own cities, its own life, its own way of being."

Woodsworth started his journey in Alexandria. In his book, he describes a life created from little details, as he comments on the streets, the hotels, the food, the city's architecture, even the daily *baksheesh* (tip) he gives to Ali; the bellboy at the Union Hotel where he stayed, and of course, the richest city component; its people.

"I walked along brightly lit main streets where at 11 o'clock shops were still heaving with customers. I picked my way through back-alley cafés where little brass tables and backgammon games and long-stemmed water pipes clogged the route. I strolled jammed bazaars where street hawkers were bulked up in the blankets against the night cold and the air itself was cluttered with tinny music. There was no free space anywhere—it was a luxury Alexandria couldn't afford."

The writer confesses that on this first morning, it was the harbor itself that held his gaze. "I had never seen a port so regularly and evenly formed—it could only have been arranged by the hand of man".

Woodsworth also mentioned the hundreds of foreign buildings he saw in Alexandria, describing downtown Alexandria as transplanted and incongruous; a European metropolis that shipped to the Arab side of the sea. "There was the curvilinear grace of art-deco cornices and the formality of neo-classical columns and pediments. On one side of the street lay the whimsy of art-nouveau apartment décor. On the other, the stylized towers of a neo-Gothic office block.



Sea view of Alexandria  
© alrahalah.com



## Book Review

Stranger still were the Islamic arches, ottoman cupolas and Pharaonic friezes reinterpreted through western eyes—they display the sort of electric orientalism that Edward Luytens, imperial architect of the British Raj, would have enjoyed."

To the writer, the city's character exists most markedly in its people, "They have no trouble at all expressing it. And, it is infectious," as he says. "Could it have been these elderly men who made me feel just a little bit livelier, a little younger and more engaged with the morning around me as I ate my breakfast? Or was it breakfast itself? The *café au lait* and croissants were as good as any I've ever had in Marseilles," he wonders.

He also mentions how he made his way to the Anfoushi neighborhood and kept on walking until he could go no further, and ended up at the narrow, rocky tip of the promontory where the Qait Bey Citadel lay. He describes how this part of Alexandria felt as much as a creation of water as of land. "It was a maritime escape, an open doorway to an endless, bright blue city park." As the writer arrives at the Library of Alexandria, he affirms that it is the most arresting sight in the city. "It seemed to me there was something of importance that had been revived in the new Library—the memory of the old library's grand ambition. Through it the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, as it was loftily christened, was attempting to salvage a part of the city's original identity."

On his circumnavigation of the liquid continent, Nicholas Woodsworth reaches his second destination, Venice, and gives us a second volume in his series. The writer abandons museums and tourist hordes to engage in the city's ongoing love affair with the sea. He investigates the heart of Venice's marine activity; the Arsenal, which prowls the corridors of the city's mysterious

State Archives, and sails across world-class Venetian racing yacht, takes part in a celebrated rowing race, and meets the city's top gondola-builder.

Woodsworth, singing on as a canal-boat delivery man, discovers in the backwaters of Venice a magnificent but intimate city rarely seen by outsiders. He goes on about his trip with his wife, the bohemian-style apartment they rented, and shopping that he described as a "daily expedition conducted at the helm of little two-wheeled carriers".

Everything reminded Woodsworth of the role of Venice long ago, as the focal point of the Mediterranean, the meeting place of Occident and Orient, an exotic maritime bazaar that became the wealthiest market of commercial exchange in the world. "Venetians don't trumpet their past as they once did. Today they are simply Italian—and bourgeois, provincial Italians at that. Yet, that extravagant eastern history is always there, no further away than the nearest palace or the faint trace of nostalgia in a Venetian face."

Venice's naval museum allowed the writer to sail into the city's medieval past, and explore the development of its arsenal throughout the centuries. He expresses his admiration for gondolas, that he numerated and classified as plastics, key-chain, blinking plug-in bedside, and battery-operated gondolas, that played popular Italian music selections. He also states several places of attraction such as Saint Mark's Basin, the Riva degli Schiavoni, the Danieli, the Bridge of Sighs, the Piazza San Marco, and the Ducal Palace.

By the end of his journey, the writer comes to a conclusion that he shares with the readers, "The city might no longer be a seat of power, a display of unimaginable wealth, or a jumping-off spot for the East.

The great era of its truly cosmopolitan existence was long over, the age of its maritime dominance past. Not even the Mediterranean itself was the great sea it used to be. Despite the changes the world has brought to it, though, Venice remains what it has been from the beginning. He adds, "Venice remained a jumping-off spot for the East. Perhaps traces of that old cosmopolitan existence lay there still."

Woodsworth reaches Istanbul; the last destination in his liquid continent journey, as he took the road less travelled, through Albania towards the Aegean archipelago, visiting Lesbos, and the Dardanelles on the way to Istanbul. Woodsworth installed himself in a former Benedictine monastery overlooking the Golden Horn, watching the social life of a city that was once the capital of a vast and ethnically-complex empire, as he gets to meet a diverse range of citizens, from fishermen of the Bosphorus to the remnants of the port-city's Greek and Armenian communities.

In the third volume, the writer highlights the historical importance of Istanbul, stating that under the Ottomans, who ruled the eastern Mediterranean for 500 years, cosmopolitan life in Istanbul—or Constantinople as it was then—took a particularly vigorous

and productive form, creating a web of connection and identity that is conspicuously absent in our own era.

The writer also finds in today's Istanbul a city that offers solutions to the future of globalization, as he monitors the difference between modern secularism and traditional Islam. The city's history and modern life has also created many questions in his mind about globalization and commercial competition, and he sat daydreaming and imagining an authentically cosmopolitan world, and a system based on a single global commerce and multiple global identities.

Last March, Nicholas Woodsworth spoke at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina about his book series. He said that he set up his trip to understand this common identity that combines Mediterranean port cities. He added that no matter where he goes, he finds an amazing similarity in these Mediterranean port cities, and he gets the same feeling, especially about the people.

"It didn't take me long to find out that it is cosmopolitanism that makes these cities so similar. It is their ability to accept and integrate with other cultures, with the common aim of benefiting the world," concluded Woodsworth.

The Piazza San Marco  
© Wikipedia





# Book Review

## *L'Égypte de Tahrir: Anatomie d'une révolution\**

*An Inside Look by Shaymaa El-Sherif, Bibliotheca Alexandrina*

*L'Égypte de Tahrir: Anatomie d'une révolution* is about us! It expresses the state of our nation before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January.



Alexandrian kid lifting a sign saying "I wish I would have been older to go to Tahrir".

The book, written by the two Cairo-based French Journalists; Tangi Salaün and Claude Guibal, discusses the numtust details of the 18-day revolution that caused the fall of Mubarak and his regime. It describes in detail how the Egyptians, who have long had their shoulders burdened with pain and worry, felt both before and after the Revolution. Thus, this book can be truly considered an analytical study (as its subtitle suggests) not only of the Revolution but also of the life of Egyptians as a whole.

The first chapter of the book is entitled "18 Days of Spring in Winter", which beautifully adds an aesthetic dimension to the concept of the Egyptian Revolution which came like a spring breeze in the cruel winter.

Time and again, readers get the feeling that they are reading a book written by Egyptian writers and translated into French! The book remarkably reflects the authors' thorough knowledge and deep understanding of the Egyptian spirit which they explained in an objectivity so impeccable that it becomes the book's chief point of strength.

In fact, the authors know so well the names of the most famous activists and bloggers, politicians and businessmen; and they know a lot about them as well. They also know the

historical sequence of both the most glorious and the most trivial of events. For example, they described the case of Khaled Said, who was tortured and killed by the police in 2010, as "the decisive spark that overthrew Hosni Mubarak's regime", and they reflected the national worry Egyptians have about repeating the Syrian example represented in the "Inherited Republic".

On the other hand, the authors were touched by the tears Wael Ghonim shed during his TV interview with Mona El-Shazly, and they perceived the various meaning of the word "ma'alesh" commonly used by Egyptians. They appreciated Mohamed Mounir's song "Ezzay", and Shaaban Abdel-Rehim's "I Hate Israel and Love Amr Moussa". They also grasped the most

popular slogans of the Revolution; such as: "The People Want to Overthrow the Regime", "He Should Go, We Won't Go". The two authors also used these slogans as introductory phrases which they placed at the beginning of every chapter in the book; they transliterated them first then translated them into French.

The writers' style is lucid and clear, adorned with short phrases and witty expressions that add depth to the meaning. Let's read together: "In the flow of every word, and in the gush of pains unheard, we come across the words bread, work, care, education, citizenship and dignity".

In another context, we read what the authors wrote in reference to Facebook and Twitter: "In the land of inscriptions and hieroglyphs, writing is what overthrew the Pharaoh". Awaiting the departure of Mubarak, they described Tahrir as follows: "Tahrir is shaking, Tahrir is celebrating". And commenting on the stand of the Egyptian army during the events, they wrote: "On the pavement stands a soldier in uniform watching the raging movement of the revolutionaries quietly and silently", and "The Army and the People are One Hand". Throughout the days of the Revolution, Egyptians repeated this slogan like a sacred

charm to protect them from what they feared at the beginning, and they went on repeating it with all confidence and courage.

The only comment I have is that all the chapters of the book—except the first—do not follow a specific timeline. The authors divided them according to the topic they discussed, mentioning the important dates as time references in many stories. It would have been better for the book, however, to follow a chronological order, so those readers who do not know the details of the events in Egypt could easily follow.

The concluding statement of the book, which ends with the word "Tahrir", came to bear in a manner that is both clear and subtle, the overpowering spirit of this Square which became a symbol for the whole world. The final statement sheds light on the Egyptian determination and perseverance embodied in the Revolution and the Egyptians' strong desire to bring about change. The authors conclude their valuable book with these words: "Egyptians believe that their victory is fragile. But they all say that they know their way. And if need be, they will return again to Tahrir".



Tahrir Square full of demonstrators

\* This book was launched by Tangi Salaün in an event organized by the BA Francophone Library in June 2011.



# Words to Remember

“The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds the most discoveries, is not “Eureka!” (I found it!) but “That is funny...”

—Isaac Asimov

“There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale returns of conjecture out of such a trifling investment of fact.”

—Mark Twain

“The scientist is not a person who gives the right answers, he is one who asks the right questions.”

—Claude Lévi-Strauss

“Science is a wonderful thing if one does not have to earn one's living at it.”

—Albert Einstein

“Science is always wrong. It never solves a problem without creating ten more.”

—George Bernard Shaw

“I am compelled to fear that science will be used to promote the power of dominant groups rather than to make men happy.”

—Bertrand Russell

“The best scientist is open to experience and begins with romance—the idea that anything is possible.”

—Ray Bradbury

“But in science the credit goes to the man who convinces the world, not to the man to whom the idea first occurs.”

—Francis Darwin



