

Cristiana Baldazzi

THE ARABS IN THE MIRROR: STORIES AND TRAVEL DIARIES RELATING TO THE UNIVERSAL EXPOSITIONS IN PARIS (1867, 1889, 1900)

Our object is to visit this Fair or ‘Ukāz’ of provinces and nations, this market of fortunes and ambitions, spectacle of precious objects and prestigious projects, of strengths and energies, arena of inventions and innovations, exhibition of perspicacity and guide in the art of imitation and inspiration of the tradition.¹

It is thus that the Egyptian writer Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (1858-1930)² defines the Paris Exposition of 1900 which he chose as the place wherein to set the second part³ of his work *Ḥadīṭ ‘Īsā ibn Hišām*,⁴ one of the first modern Arab novels which follows in

1 M. Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadīṭ ‘Īsā ibn Hišām. Fatra min al-zaman* (Cairo: Kalimāt ‘arabiyya lil-tarğama wa al-našr, 2013), 275.

2 His date of birth is uncertain, 1858 o 1868, especially considering that of his father, Ibrāhīm, which is also uncertain 1844. The author, in the company of his father, traveled in Italy, England and France, where he came in contact with many writers and intellectuals. In 1900 he accompanied the Egyptian Khedivé on an official visit first to London then to Paris for the Universal Exposition. Cf. R. Allen, *A Period of Time. Part One: A Study of Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī’s Ḥadīṭ ‘Īsā ibn Hišām* (London: Ithaca Press, 1992), 1-14; A. Sābāyārd, *Raḥḥālūna al-‘Arab wa ḥaqārat al-ğarb fi al-naḥḍa al-‘arabiyya al-ḥadīṭa* (Beirut: Nawfal, 1992²), 146-147.

3 In this section, made up of nine chapters, the bizarre protagonists – ‘Īsā ibn Hišām, a Pasha risen from the tomb and a friend of his – find themselves in Paris and on the advice of a French Oriental scholar, who offers to be their guide, they visit the Universal Exposition of 1900.

4 The first publication goes back to 1898 when, under the title of *Fatra min al-zaman* (*A Period of Time*), appeared weekly in the periodical started by his father, Ibrāhīm al-Muwayliḥī, *Miṣbāḥ al-Šarq* (*The Lantern of the Orient*) until 1902. In 1907, the author published the work in a volume entitled *Ḥadīṭ ‘Īsā ibn Hišām. Fatra min al-zaman* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif), in a rewritten form and without the last section. The last section had appeared in episodes entitled “Paris” (between 1900 and 1902) and was the section dedicated to the Exposition; it was later added to the fourth edition in 1927 entitled *al-Riḥla al-tāniya* (*The Second Journey*). 1927 was the year in which the work was included among Egyptian school texts. Cf. Allen, *A Period of Time*, 32-48. The work is translated into English in 1923, cf. R. Allen, *Part Two: ‘Īsā ibn Hišām’s Tale* (London: Ithaca Press, 1992); and into French, cf. R. Sabry, *Ce que nous conta ‘Īsa Ibn Hicham. Chronique satirique d’une Egypte fin de siècle* (Clichy, Hauts-de-Seine: Éditions du Jasmin, 2005); *Trois Egyptiens à Paris* (Clichy, Hauts-de-Seine: Éditions du Jasmin, 2008).

the footsteps of the classical tradition of the *maqāmāt*.⁵ But Muwayliḥī is not the only Arab writer to concern himself with the Exposition which emerges as such a far-reaching event that it involves the Orient itself,⁶ exactly as its organizers had hoped. There were numerous illustrious Arabs, among whom the Islamic reformist Ġamāl al-Dīn al-Afġānī, and political personages who were for the most part guests of honor in France, such as the Emir ‘Abd al-Qādir, who had been exiled by Napoleon III from Algeria and who, when he took his leave from the General Commissariat, affirmed: “Ce lieu est le palais de l’intelligence animée par le souffle de Dieu”.⁷ This took place on the occasion of the 1855 Paris Exhibition with its Palace of Industry which was certainly less dazzling and imposing than the Exhibition of 1867 which was held at Champs de Mars and, as the decree declared, was the

plus complètement universelle que les précédentes [...], elle comprenne autant que possible, les oeuvres d’art, les produits industriels de toutes les contrées et en général, les manifestations de toutes les branches de l’activité humaine.⁸

The event was organized with a view to attracting as many visitors as possible and the presence of important persons and heads of State constituted an added attraction for the public. Prominent among the ‘Oriental’ guests were the Ottoman sultan Abdūlaziz (1830-1876), who would then continue his journey, the first in Europe for more than a month; the Shah of Persia Nāṣir al-Dīn and the Egyptian Khedivé Ismā‘īl to whom

5 The *maqāma* is a literary genre in rhymed prose (*sağ*), which was popular around the end of the tenth century with al-Hamaḏānī (968-1008), and reached its apex with al-Ḥarīrī (1054-1122). They are short stories and, in the case of *maqāmāt* of al-Hamaḏānī, they follow a fixed scheme: a narrator, *‘Isā ibn Hišām* recounts in a riunion (*maqāma*) an episode that arose from an encounter, when traveling around the world, with an ambiguous charleton, Abū ‘l-Faṭḥ al-Iskandarī.

6 V. Ogle, “La colonizzazione del tempo: rappresentazioni delle colonie francesi alle esposizioni universali di Parigi del 1889 e del 1900”, *Memoria e Ricerca*, 17 (2004): 191-209; E. Davies, “Representations of the Middle East at American World Fairs 1876-1904”, *The United States and The Middle East: Cultural Encounters*, eds. A. Amanat and M. T. Bernhardsson (New Haven, CT: The Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 2002), 342-385; Z. Celik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth Century World’s Fairs* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford: University of California Press, 1992); Z. Çelik, L. Kinney, “Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles”, *Assemblage*, 13 (1990): 34-49; T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford: University of California Press, 1988); S. Leprun, *Le théâtre de Colonies* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1986); R. van Leeuwen, “Two Egyptians at the World Exhibition in Paris”, *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. R. Ostle, E. de Moor and S. Wild (London: Saqi Books, 1998), 39-50.

7 *Le livre des expositions universelles 1851-1989* (Paris: Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, 1983), 36-37.

8 *L’Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée: publication internationale autorisée par la Commission imperiale, rédacteur en chef F. Duquing* (Paris: Administration de l’Exposition, 1867), 3.

were reserved, within the celebrations and expositions, official ceremonies worthy of their lineage.⁹ The celebrations were covered not only by the French press but also by the Arab intellectuals who had taken part in them and who left firsthand accounts of their experiences. The Exposition, in fact, figures as one of the reasons for their journey alongside commerce, study projects, attendance at congresses and questions of health.¹⁰ The possibility of being present at one of the greatest phantasmagorias of the West was a unique opportunity that many Arab intellectuals did not want to miss: such was the case with Muḥammad Amīn Fikrī (1856-1900) and ‘Umar al-Bāġūrī (n. 1855), and both the Egyptian delegates at the VIII International Congress of Oriental scholars held in Stockholm who, taking advantage of the fact that they were in Europe, visited the 1889 Paris Exposition;¹¹ such was the case too, with Aḥmad Zakī (1867-1934) who was also an Egyptian delegate at the IX Congress of Oriental scholars in London in 1892 and who came back to Europe in 1900 specifically to visit the great Paris Exposition; we can also mention the Tunisians Sulaymān al-Ḥarā’irī (1824-1877),¹² Muḥammad Bayram al-Ḥāmis (1840-1889), Muḥammad al-Sanūsī (1851-1900), and Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥūġa (also Ibn al-Ḥawġa, 1869-1942) and the Syrian Dīmītrī Ni’mat Allāh al-Ḥallāt (d. 1932), all of whom for various reasons, visited Paris for the Expositions. Although the accounts of the Arabs do not constitute a uniform body of work, their texts have certain characteristics in common. The leitmotiv is, in fact, the journey, a universal force that transforms outlooks and social relations, an experience that inevitably contributes to a redefinition of the image of oneself and of the ‘other’. These nineteenth century works which we could insert into the category of the travel literature, revisit and re enact the tradition of the *riḥla* (journey) according to the new needs of Arab society. Modulated according to the universal structure of the journey – departure, transit, arrival –, the texts highlight the various modes by which an encounter with the ‘other’ came about and contributed to forming the consciousness of a collective identity. The Exposition,

9 Celik, *Displaying the Orient*, 32-37; A. Louca, *Voyageurs et Ecrivains Egyptiens en France aux XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Didier, 1970), 186-187.

10 D. Newman, “Myths and Realities in Muslim Alterist Discourse: Arab Travellers in Europe in the Age of the Nahda (19th C.)”, *Chronos*, 6 (2002): 31-34.

11 In the same congress there was also present the Ottoman delegate, Ahmed Midhat, author of *A Tour in Europe (Avrupāda bir Cevelan*, 1889), in which he describes the various stages of his journey from Istanbul to Stockholm, during one of which he visited the Universal Exposition of Paris, cf. C. Vaughn Findley, “An Ottoman Occidental in Europe: Ahmed Midhat meets Madam Gulnar, 1889”, *The American Historical Review*, 103 (1998): 15-49.

12 His date of death is uncertain: Pèrès puts it in 1870, Maḥfūz in 1875. Cf. H. Pèrès, “Voyageurs Musulmans en Europe aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles. Notes Bibliographiques”, *Melange Maspero. III Orient Islamique* (Le Caire: Imprimerie de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1935-1940), 189; M. Maḥfūz, *Tarāġim al-Mu’allifin al-Tūnisīyīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 1982, al-ġuz’ al-tānī), 120; cf. also D. Newman, “Sulaymān al-Ḥarā’irī: an Early Tunisian Reformer in Europe”, *Cahiers de Tunisie*, LXII (2009): 19, 47.

therefore, as a destination for the Arab traveler – a traveler who, in this abstract and fleeting ‘place’, lives a dual experience, fascinated and enraptured by the phantasmagoric atmosphere of the event – captures at one and the same time the ephemeral aspect of the representation that it gives of his country with a kind of ‘effect of estrangement’ which, however, soon dissolves like the pavilions of the Exposition, to leave room for the dominant view which is the image that the West was constructing of the East. In this ‘play’ of mirrors there is reflected an attitude that is not only literary but has a much more ample validity: in the convulsive attempt to find answers and solutions – political, technological and cultural – to a sudden and total Western penetration, the Muslim elites abandoned the autogenic categories of reference, by now devoid of sense, to take possession of the points of reference of the ‘other’. The Universal Exposition represents a moment in this development that is more than ever paradigmatic because it transmits a prospective view of reality and, therefore, of the strong points between civilizations in which are contained all the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the difficult confrontation with the ‘other’. This is a view that, paradoxically, was to be profoundly incisive on the process of auto-identification in the Arab world which is still today largely influenced by the image that the West has created of Islam.

I. PARIS, THE *VILLE LUMIÈRE*

The nineteenth century is a period of profound transformation in the Arab world. The Ottoman Empire, by then notably weakened both on a military and on an economic level gambled with the idea of modernization and set in motion the reforms (*tanzîmât*) the model for which was, inevitably the West. Many of the young men of the Turkish and Arab elite who had, formerly, gone to study in the Ottoman capital to ensure for themselves an elevated position in the imperial political structure, now set their sights on studying in Europe. The governor of Egypt, Muḥammad ‘Alī, who was inaugurating a policy of reforms and centralization like that of the Ottoman Empire, was the first to send groups of students to complete their studies in French, English and Italian schools and institutes: between 1813 and 1849 more than three hundred young men went to Europe.¹³ Among the Khedivé counselors figured Bernardino Drovetti from Turin, the French general consul to Cairo, and the Frenchman Edme-François Jomard.¹⁴ Thus

13 J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Luzac, 1938), 104-114; 157-170; 221-223; 243-253.

14 A. Silvera, “Edme-François Jomard and Egyptian Reforms in 1839”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 7 (1971): 301-316; A. Silvera, “The First Egyptian Student Mission to France under Muhammad Ali”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 16 (1980): 1-22; L. Pollard, “The Habits and Customs of Modernity: Egyptians in Europe

Paris, with its *École militaire égyptienne* and *École impériale ottomane*,¹⁵ became one of the most privileged and sought after destinations in Europe, although in the initial stages Drovetti sent promising Egyptian students to Turin. A participant in one of the first delegations of Egyptian students sent to Paris was Rāfi‘ Rifā‘a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī who, on his return from his study stay in Paris, published in 1834 *Taḥlīs al-Ibrīz fī taḥlīs Bārīz*, translated as *L’Or de Paris*,¹⁶ in which he recounts his experiences in France.¹⁷ According to what he says in the preface, Ṭaḥṭāwī affirms that his text – which he was encouraged to write by friends and family members and, above all, by the Sheik Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭār, an enthusiast of wonderful tales and extraordinary works – illustrates

avec attention tout ce qui se produirait au cours de ce voyage, tout ce que je verrais et rencontrerais de curieux et d’étonnant, et à le consigner, afin qu’il servît à dévoiler le visage de cette contrée, dont on dit qu’elle est aussi belle qu’une fiancée; et afin qu’il demeurât un guide pour les voyageurs qui désireraient s’y rendre.¹⁸

Ṭaḥṭāwī’s work is an impassioned and original account which says a lot about France but even more about Egypt and, of its type, it became a veritable literary model. Numbered among the first modern texts, halfway between a literary travelog and an autobiography, *L’Or de Paris* is, in fact, a work of *Adab* (literature) which acts as a link between the classical and the modern ages.

The “belle fiancée” to whom Ṭaḥṭāwī refers, France, fascinates not only young Europeans but also many Arab personages who, attracted by European modernity, depart in search of the first hand ocular testimony that is essential for knowledge.¹⁹ There are more than forty nineteenth-century works (twenty-five in published form and seventeen manuscripts)²⁰ that deal with European experiences. These works are, for the most part, monumental and set themselves up as sources of knowledge and, remodeling

and the Geography of Nineteenth-Century Nationalism”, *The Arab Studies Journal*, 7-8 (1999-2000): 52-74; P. Bret, “L’Égypte de Jomard: la construction d’un mythe orientaliste, de Bonaparte à Méhémet-Ali”, *Romantisme*, 120 (2003): 5-14.

15 Louca, *Voyageurs et Écrivains Égyptiens*, 33-74; Newman, “Myths and Realities”, 13-14.

16 Ṭaḥṭāwī, *L’or de Paris. Relation de voyage. 1826-1831. Traduit de l’arabe et présenté par Anouar Louca* (Paris, Sindbad, 1988).

17 On the advice of Muḥammad ‘Alī, Ṭaḥṭāwī’s work was translated into Turkish in 1839 and distributed free to Egyptian officials and school children. Cf. G. Delanoue, *Moralistes et Politiques Musulmans dans l’Égypte du XIX^e siècle (1798-1882)* (Caire: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale di Caire, 1982), 387-388.

18 Ṭaḥṭāwī, *L’or de Paris*, 43.

19 H. Touati, *Islam et voyage au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000).

20 Newman, “Myths and Realities”, 24. On Arab travelers in the West cf. Sābāyārd, *Raḥḥālūna al-‘Arab*; I. Abu Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A Study in cultural Encounters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Pérès, “Voyageurs Musulmans”, 185-195.

stylistic features typical of medieval literature, they amass data, measure distances, the dimensions of buildings, and provide various kinds of information with the aim of analyzing not only the reasons for European progress but also the causes of the ‘Oriental’ impasse and, sometimes, they point to possible solutions. But who are the authors of these nineteenth-century *rihla* that A. Louca refers to as *Touristes lettrés*?²¹

II. THE AUTHORS OF *RIHLA* (TRAVELOGS)

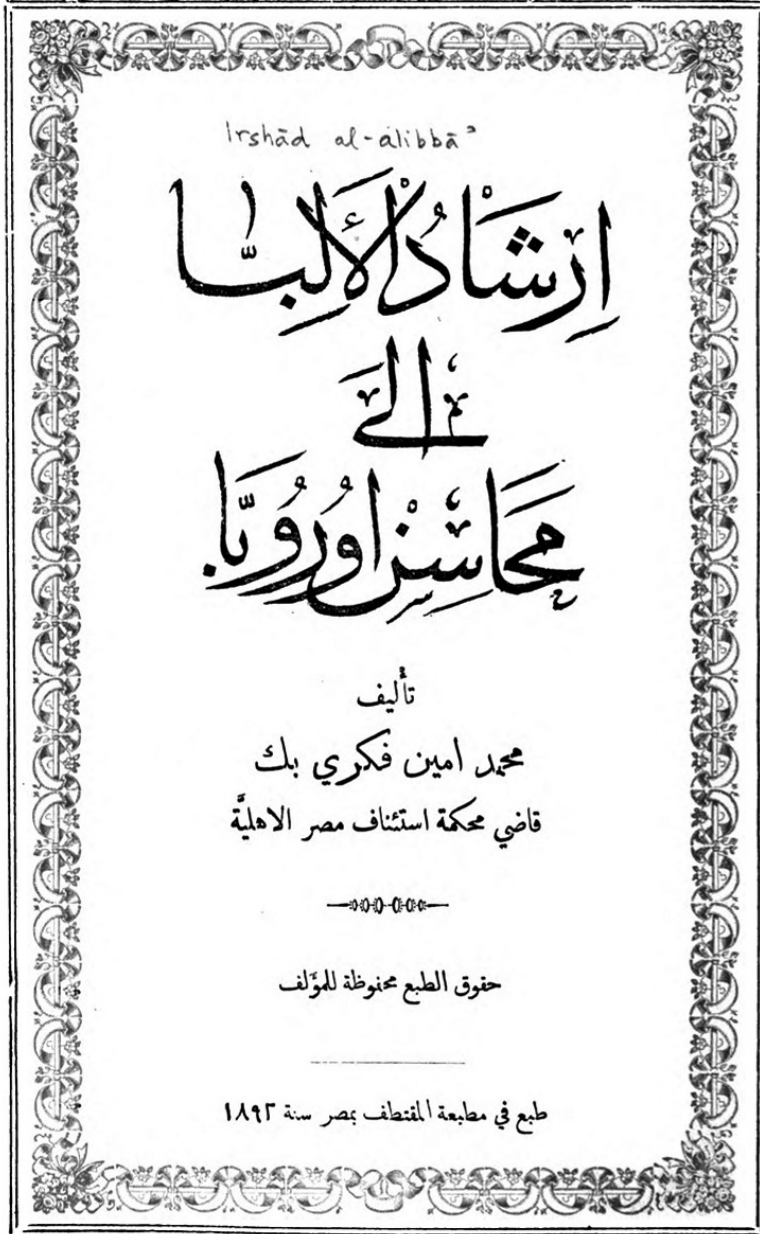
Amīn Fikrī belonged to the Egyptian elite: his father, ‘Abd Allāh (1834-1890), ex minister for Education and someone who was very close to the Khedivé, headed the Egyptian delegation to the Oriental Congress in Stockholm-Christiania.²² Having taken a law degree in Paris, Fikrī, on his return from his sojourn in Europe, was obliged by the death of his father to undertake singlehanded the preparation of a weighty volume²³ – more than 800 pages – in which he recounts observations and curious facts about his European experiences including several chapters dedicated to his visit to the Exposition in Paris which lasted for nine days. Fikrī, in other words, studied abroad according to a model that was diffuse among the elite and which assumed, in many respects, a new, paradigmatic value within that elite. On the basis of new needs that arose within that society, in fact, new professions came to the fore, such as journalism, with the spread of the press, and law, inasmuch as the Ottoman Empire and Egypt entrusted the resolution of certain matters to legal codes different from the *šarī‘a* (law of God), to which the Islamic office of the *qāḍī* was predisposed. More conservative, on the other hand, was ‘Umar al-Bāḡūrī, a descendant of an *‘ulamā’* (scholarly) family, whose formation was wholly Egyptian: he first studied at the Koran school of his native village, al-Bāḡūr, in Upper Egypt, he then moved to Cairo where he attended the university of al-Azhar and finally he moved to Dār al-‘ulūm, where, subsequently, he worked as a teacher until 1889, the year in which he was nominated as Egyptian representative in the Congress of Oriental Scholars. As we can see, therefore, al-Bāḡūrī left Egypt and headed for Sweden and Norway – the Congress was taking place in Stockholm and Christiania – traveling through Italy and Switzerland. In 1891 he published his travel

21 This is the title of the third part of Louca’s work, cf. Louca, *Voyageurs et Ecrivains Egyptiens*, 179.

22 Cf. Louca, *Voyageurs et Ecrivains Egyptiens*, 197; D. M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to the World War I* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 190-192; Sābāyārd, *Raḥḥālūna al-‘Arab*, 145.

23 Muḥammad Amīn Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’ ilā maḥāsin Ūrūbbā* (Guide of Intelligent Men toward the Beauties of Europe) (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Muqtaṭaf, 1892).

Fikrī, Muḥammad Amīn



Title page of *Irshād al-ʿAlibbāʾ ilā Maḥāsīn ʿUrūbbā* (Guide of Intelligent Men toward the Beauties of Europe) (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Muqtaṭaf, 1892) by Muḥammad Amīn Fikrī.



First page of *al-Durar al-bahiyya fī al-riḥla al-urūbāwīyya* (Rare Pearls of a Journey in Europe) (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, 1891) by Maḥmūd ʿUmar al-Bāḡūrī.

L'UNIVERS A PARIS
1900

الدُّنْيَا فِي بَارِيسَ
أَوْ
أَنَا فِي عَالَمِ أُمَّةٍ أَوْلِيَّهَا

وهي الرسائل التي كتبها
أحمد زكي بك
سكرتير نائى مجلس النواب

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بمراجعة
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مزدانة بالصور والرسوم

لقد أتت استطلاع دنياك الذي
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بمثل ما قد قانا وبعوض
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Title page of *al-Dunyā fī Bārīs aw Ayyāmī al-tālīta fī Ūrubbā* (The Universe in Paris or My Age in Europe) (Cairo: n.p., 1900) by Aḥmad Zakī.

accounts,²⁴ in a considerably reduced form – some hundred pages – compared to Fikrī's text which came out shortly afterwards and the later text of Aḥmad Zakī. The latter, a thorough-going cosmopolitan, dedicated an entire work²⁵ to the Universal Exposition of Paris in 1900. Zakī was a latter day man of letters and journalist who wrote and sent from abroad to his compatriots articles rich not only in information but impressions, comments, and anecdotes. He had studied Arabic and French since his primary school days and in 1887 he took a degree in law at the *madrasat al-Idāra* (Administrative School) of Cairo. He was Director of the School of Translation of the Khedivé and teacher of Arabic in the French archeological Mission and he collaborated with and wrote articles for numerous newspapers (*al-Abrām*, *al-Muqaṭṭam*, *al-Hilāl*, etc.). In other words, he was a modern intellectual, an habitu  of the European world – he called himself a “sincere tourist” – who “provided not only information but personal impressions, comments and anecdotes on events of the time, without going into matters of religion or politics”.²⁶ Zakī, younger than his compatriots, therefore, seems very close to the figure of the modern day tourist-traveler, in search not only of factual information but eager to capture the unusual aspects of the reality of the country visited. Zakī organized his trip to France autonomously; his was a free choice as was the case with the journey of the illustrious Tunisian Muḥammad Bayram al-Ḥāmis (the fifth),²⁷ which predated Zakī's by several decades. Bayram V belonged to one of the most important Tunisian families and was an eminent politician of the reformist current who had a profound knowledge of Europe which he appreciated for its scientific and technological progress.²⁸ During his journey which, due to the political situation in Tunisia, became a definitive exile, Bayram V visited the Paris Exposition of 1878 and dedicated several pages to it in the third of the five volumes which make up his monumental *riḥla*.²⁹ Another illustrious Tunisian and a pupil of Bayram V was Muḥammad al-Sanūsī. Of less noble origins than his master, he was a poet, man of letters and reformist who, after spending a period of time in Italy,³⁰ was

24 Maḥmūd ʿUmar al-Bāġūrī, *al-Durar al-bahiyya fi al-riḥla al-urūbāwiyya* (Rare Pearls of a Journey in Europe) (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, 1891).

25 A. Zakī, *al-Dunyā fi Bārīs aw Ayyāmī al-ta_ līta fi ʿUrūbbā* (The Universe in Paris or My Age in Europe) (Cairo: n.p., 1900).

26 The edition I consulted is the one edited by A. Ibrāhīm al-Hawārī, whom I mention in the course of the work: A. Zakī, *al-Dunyā fi Bārīs* (Cairo, Giza: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 2007), 49.

27 From now on Bayram V.

28 See M. Chebbi, *L'image de l'Occident chez les intellectuels tunisiens au XIX^e siècle* (Tunis: Arabesques  ditions, 2010), 76-79; A. Abdesslem, *Les Historiens Tunisiens des XVII^e, XVIII^e et XIX^e si cles. Essai d'histoire culturelle* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1973), 387-396.

29 Muḥammad Bayram al-Ḥāmis, *Ṣafwat al-i'ribār bi-mustawda' al-amṣār wa al-aqtār* (The best of the Cities and Nations of the World) (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-i'lāmiyya, 1885, voll. I-IV; Cairo: al-Muqtaṭaf, 1894, vol. V).

30 A. Chenoufi, *Un savant Tunisien di XIX^{eme} si cle: Muḥammad as-Sanūsī, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Tunis: Universit  de Tunis, 1977); Abdesslem, *Les Historiens Tunisiens*, 407-415; A. M. Medici, *Citt  italiane sulla*

an official guest of the French government in 1889;³¹ he was fascinated by the new means of transport and communication and certainly did not pass up the opportunity of visiting the Exposition which had also become a social event and rendezvous for intellectuals. Funded by the Tunisian government in 1891 (Tunisia had been a French Protectorate since 1881), al-Sanūsī published – probably ‘sur commande’ – *Information on Paris Exposition of 1889*³² in which he dedicated the fourth chapter to the Exposition without, however, reaching, as Chebbi points out, the level of spontaneity of his *Rihla hiḡāziyya*. The political position of al-Sanūsī was less independent than that of Bayram and implied that he could not dissent very much from French colonial policy toward which he shows himself to be indulgent and collaborative to the extent that he became a functionary of the Protectorate.³³ Another Tunisian who was closely involved with France was Sulaymān al-Ḥarāʾirī who, like his compatriots Bayram V and al-Sanūsī, studied at the university of *Zaytūna* and then specialized in the exact sciences without neglecting the study of Islamic law. In 1844 he was a teacher of Arabic for the French delegations and then he began working for the French Consulate, probably thanks to his friendship with a French missionary priest François Bourgade³⁴ who was an expatriate in Tunisia. In 1856, for reasons that are not very clear, he left Tunisia for Paris where he worked as a teacher of Arabic at the ‘École des Langues Orientales’. In 1867 Jules Lesseps (brother of Fernand) commissioned him to write a kind of publicity pamphlet in Arabic on the Exposition,³⁵ with the object of attracting visitors. In the pamphlet Ḥarāʾirī, among other things, stresses the economic advantages that Muslims could expect to obtain from the Exposition. Another official guest of the French government at the Paris Exposition of 1900 was Ibn al-Ḥūḡa,³⁶ a Tunisian of Turkish origin who had studied Arabic and French since his schooldays and began in 1887, at a very young age, to work for the Tunisian government in the Translation sector. This journalist and historian was director for many years of the official Tunisian publishing house and was responsible for the publication of numerous classical texts and translations. He participated actively in the

via della Mecca. Storie di viaggiatori tunisini dell'Ottocento, preface by G. Calchi Novati, translated from Arabic by A. Addous (Turin: L'Harmattan Italia, 2001).

31 According to Chebbi, al-Sanūsī went to Paris because he was invited by the French authorities, cf. Chebbi, *L'image de l'Occident*, 82-83.

32 *al-Istitla'āt al-Bārīsiyya fī ma'raḡ sanat 1889* (Tunis: al-Maṭba'a al-rasmiyya, 1891).

33 Chebbi, *L'image de l'Occident*, 83, 150-151; see also Abdesselem, *Les Historiens Tunisiens*, 437-443.

34 Ḥarāʾirī shares the Abbot Bourgade's idea that Islam and Christianity constitute two converging, rather than diverging realities, cf. M. Chebbi, *Soliman Al Hrairi* (Tunis: Arabesques, 2012), 21; cf. also Newman, “Sulaymān al-Ḥarāʾirī”, 13-59; Maḡfūz, *Taraḡim al-Mu'allifin*, 120.

35 S. al-Ḥarāʾirī, *Arḡ al-Baḡā'i' al-āmm bi-Baris sanat 1867. L'Exposition Universelle de 1867* (Paris: Impr. De G. Jousset, 1867).

36 Muḡammad ibn al-Ḥūḡa, *Sulūk al-Ibrīz fī Masālik Bārīz* (Threads of Gold in the Streets of Paris) (Tunis: Maṭba'at al-rasmiyya al-tūnisīyya, 1900). Ibn al-Ḥūḡa's title clearly records that of Ṭaḡtāwī (*Tālḡis al-Ibrīz...*).

cultural life of the country and was among the founders of the Khaldunian Association. Less well known, on the other hand, is Dīmītrī Nī‘mat Allāh al-Ḥallāṭ al-Ṭarābulṣī, a Syrian from Alexandria as he writes in the title of his work:³⁷ originally from Tripoli, he set sail together with his brother and the wife of the latter for Europe, first stopping in Italy and then going on to the Paris Exposition. During this long journey, they stopped off in many small centers such as Pompey and Caserta. It transpires from Ḥallāṭ’s text that it was he himself who had organized the trip without having recourse to the by then famous Cook’s Agency which, on the other hand, the Egyptians Fikrī and al-Bāğūrī had used. The people we are dealing with, in other words, are journalists, teachers, lawyers and politicians of more or less illustrious origins who represent the new elite that was developing within the different sectors of the Islamic Arab world.

III. THE TEXTS OF THE TRAVELOGS

As mentioned above, despite the fact that the authors taken into consideration here are not travelers as such, their work is to be inserted within travel literature (*adab al-Rihla*), which is a consolidated genre in Arabic literature³⁸ and the first text of which goes back to the ninth century and is attributed to an elusive merchant Sulaymān.³⁹ The theme of the journey (in the form of pilgrimage, *ḥağğ*, and migration, *hiğra*) has, in fact, constituted an important aspect of Muslim civilization and, albeit with diverse variations on the basis of contexts and historical periods, it continues to be associated with the search for knowledge:⁴⁰ the ‘*ulamā*’, the Muslim scholars, jurists and grammarians, journeyed to the *dār al-islām* not only on pilgrimage, but also to visit a guru or to study a manuscript (between the tenth and the twelfth centuries a scholar could study in more

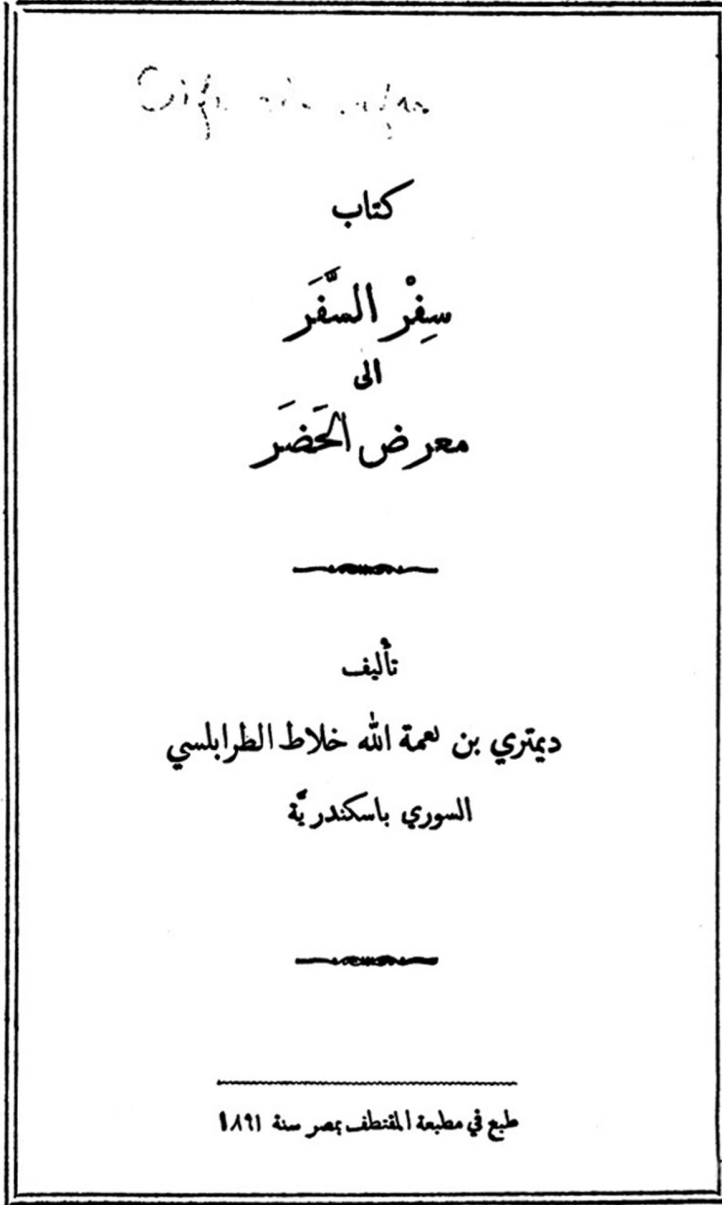
37 *Kitāb Sifr al-Safar ilā ma’rağ al-ḥağar* (A Travel Book on the Exposition of Civilizations) (Cairo: al-Muqataf, 1891).

38 H. Fattah, “Representations of Self and the Other in Two Iraqi Travelogues of the Ottoman Period”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 30 (1998): 51-76; L. Zolondek, “Nineteenth-Century Arab Travellers to Europe: Some Observations on their Writings”, *Muslim World*, 61 (1971): 28-34; A. G. Chejne, “Travel Books in Modern Arabic Literature”, *Muslim World*, 52 (1962): 207-215.

39 This is *Aḥbār al-Šīn wa al-Hind, Relation de la Chine et de l’Inde rédigée en 851*, éd. et trad. par J. Sauvaget (Paris: Belle Lettres, 1948); see also G. Ferrand, *Voyage du marchand arabe Sulayman* (Paris: Bossard, 1922).

40 R. L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslims and Western Travellers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); *Golden Roads: Migration, Pilgrimage and Travel in Mediaeval and Modern Islam*, ed. I. R. Netton (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1993); *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, eds. D. F. Eickelman and J. Piscatori (London: Routledge, 1990).

Khallāt, Dīmītrī



Title page of *Kitāb Sifr al-Safar ilā ma'rad al-ḥadar* (A Travel Book on the Exposition of Civilizations) (Cairo: al-Muqtaṭaf, 1891) by Dīmītrī Ni'mat Allāh al-Ḥallāt al-Ṭarābulṣī.

than twenty cities).⁴¹ In the period under discussion, Europe had become the focus of interest for travelers and attracted Arab visitors largely on account of its scientific progress and new technologies. Although the *riḥla* was now directed toward the West,⁴² the urge to travel remained basically unchanged in that it still adhered to the concept of *ṭalab al-‘ilm*, the ‘quest for knowledge’. These European *riḥla* do not constitute a compact corpus as such – so much so that according to Newman they represent more properly an *Alteriste Literature* –⁴³ but are, rather, the expression of a cultural movement – as Medici has affirmed – the value of which is not only literary, but first and foremost historical and political.⁴⁴ The works under consideration here have, with a few exceptions (Ḥarā’irī, al-Sanūsī), characteristics in common both as regards content and formal structure. Following the pattern of the stylistic features typical of the medieval *riḥla*, the texts follow the spatial-temporal course of the journey and are presented in the form of chronicles, summaries or travel diaries. As had been the case in the classical period, when the *riḥla* was based on the pilgrimage to Mecca with its established stops, so too did the travels in these nineteenth-century works follow a well-defined itinerary, in some cases (such as in that of al-Bāḡūrī and Fikrī) organized by others (by the Thomas Cook agency) and in others organized independently. Typical, and in many ways traditional, is also the minute attention paid to numbers, the calculation of distances, the dimensions of cities, number of inhabitants, heights of buildings and cost of public transport (taxis, trains, ferries with relative timetables, distances and travel time) as well as the cost of entrance tickets to libraries, museums and the Exposition. The subjects dealt with are also analogous; many are taken from the classical texts and from *Or de Paris* by Ṭaḥṭāwī and they become literary topoi: women and their behavior, dress, food, entertainment including the theater but also commerce and new means of transport and, of course, the Universal Exposition which becomes a step in itself of the journey and assumes very precise characteristics as we shall see. Describing the places and things that are peculiar to the ‘other’ and the ‘elsewhere’ and, because of their very difference, worthy of admiring attention is the goal that the nineteenth-century Arab travelers set themselves. Nonetheless, they filter information about the reality of technological progress through details that have a richly imaginative flavor that recalls the medieval imagery of the *Aḡā’ib*

41 Cf. G. Calasso, “Esperienze e scritture di viaggio nell’Islam medievale: il mondo degli altri e il mondo dell’Islam”, *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo. 3. Le culture circostanti. La Cultura Arabo-Islamica*, a c. di B. Scarcia Amoretti (Rome: Salerno, 2003), 379-408.

42 In the preceding centuries there was no lack of journeys to Europe mostly on the part of Arab delegates, and ambassadors, but also single personages. Cf. N. Matar, *In the Land of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003).

43 D. Newman, “Myths and Realities”, 34.

44 Medici, *Città italiane*, 23.

(Marvels). By referring to recurrent themes these authors seem to wish to emphasize their belonging to the tradition and to underline their continuity with the past not only in the spirit of the text (knowledge) but also in the form. In some cases, indeed, the extent of the details that fill out the text to the point, at times, of almost submerging it under the weight of information, confers on them the character of tourist guides, albeit *ante litteram*. Divided into chapters and sometimes even paragraphs with asterisks in the margin to indicate that a new subject is being addressed, these works unfold according to the universal structure of the journey: departure, transit, arrival.⁴⁵

IV. *Rihla*: DEPARTURE, TRANSIT, ARRIVAL

When a journey was sponsored, the incipit contained a note of thanks to those who had financed it – as in the case of Ṭaḥṭāwī who adopts the classical mode. There then followed several introductory paragraphs in which the author outlined the reasons for his journey (attendance at Congresses in the case of Fikrī, al-Bāğūrī and Zakī, a visit to the Exposition in the case of Ibn al-Ḥūğā, or the quest for new medical knowledge and specialized cures as for Bayram V and al-Sanūsī) and justified from a religious point of view his sojourn outside the *dār al-islam* with quotations from the *Koran*. In the same way Ḥarā'irī, who was trying to attract Muslims to the Paris Exposition for the benefit of the French, begins his text by emphasizing the fact that Muslims and Christians are brothers and supports his affirmation by quoting a verse from the *Koran* (LX:8). Bayram V and al-Sanūsī, on the other hand, stress the fact that the quest for knowledge which is the object of their journey, is necessary for the rebirth of Muslim societies and hence for Islam itself. Al-Bāğūrī adds a detailed *tarğama*, a kind of curriculum vitae generally present in classical texts in which the author informs the reader about his origins, his activities and his works. Other authors dwell on descriptions of the preparations for the journey. Fikrī, for example, tells how he brought woolen clothes with him in consideration of the different climatic conditions in Europe (although the journey was taking place in Summer) but no utensils, crockery, sheets or blankets since these were provided by the hotels. The Egyptian writer, what's more, refers also to a series of problems concerning diet, the slaughter of meat, the purity (*tahāra*) of water for ablutions and the necessity of knowing the ritual direction for prayer (*qibla*) and suggests the solution to these problems by quoting illustrious examples such as that of

⁴⁵ Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

the Prophet who ate cheese brought to him from the land of the Rum.⁴⁶ He then adds, by way of reassurance, that the journey to Europe is undertaken by the People of the Book and that the hotels will provide everything a Muslim needs: as regards the *qibla*, all that was needed was to carry a compass.⁴⁷ Unlike Fikrī, Bayram V, whose journey took place earlier (1875), while recognizing that a hotel room was provided with many useful amenities, advises travelers to bring a jug with them “for ablutions, [...] since Europeans do not use jugs which are, however, necessary for Muslims in order to bathe according to the tradition and the Islamic laws of hygiene”.⁴⁸ In addition, Fikrī’s journey, unlike Bayram’s, was organized by Cook’s which was by then famous for saving travelers from numerous inconveniences. The Agency, as Fikrī points out was linked up to a network of hotels in every country in the West and in the East able to satisfy all the traveler’s needs. In the first place the traveler did not have to worry about settling his account each time since it had already been settled with the Agency as was the buying of tickets and the hire of cars for moving about. The cost of the journey varied according to hotel and country, the number of meals consumed (breakfast, lunch, dinner) and if the service did not live up to expectations – for example if the hotel was too far from the center – the traveler could go to the Cook office present in every city and change hotels without any problem.⁴⁹ In these offices, what’s more, travelers could consult books, travel guides, maps and keep in touch with their own country thanks to the telegraph service.⁵⁰ The Agency was created by Thomas Cook (1808-1892),⁵¹ whose biography is outlined by Fikrī who acknowledges Cook’s business acumen and initiative. Cook was a man of modest origins who thanks to his intelligence and hard work managed to expand his activity from 3 to 2,700 employees, thereby creating wealth not only for himself but for the entire country⁵². The long reference to Cook’s activity is in line with the didactic intention of the whole book which sets out to highlight European dynamism and capacity but also to awaken the hearts and minds of the Arabs by presenting them with the models of figures who have succeeded thanks to their initiative.⁵³

46 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 13.

47 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 14.

48 Medici, *Città italiane*, 162.

49 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 18.

50 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 19.

51 Cf. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?*, 89-92.

52 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 22.

53 Another similar example is that of the Bon Marché stores, mentioned both by al-Bāğūrī (*al-Durar al-bahiyya*, 37), by Zakī (*al-Dunyā fī Bārīs*, 170) and by Fikrī. The latter goes further and tells the story of the owner, Monsieur Boucicaut, who managed, with the help of his wife, to turn a small shop into one of the most famous and reasonably priced stores in Paris; one of the reasons for his success was that he provided his employees with an incentive by paying them a percentage on the bases of sales (Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 293-299).

It was in 1800, in fact, that there appeared Ya‘qūb al-Sarrūġ’s Arabic translation of Samuel Smiles’s *Self Help*,⁵⁴ entitled *Sirr al-Naġāh* (The Secret of Success, a collection of the biographies of people of modest origins who, thanks to their innate talents, managed to achieve their ambitions and to make a mark on society) and, in the meantime, there appeared in the newspapers a plethora of articles dedicated to such illustrious figures of the past both in the West and in the East.⁵⁵

Once preparations had been carried out, the journey itself began. The departure was usually from Alexandria (which some of the authors such as al-Bāġūrī and Fikrī, reached by train) or from Tunis (from the port of La Goletta, in the case of Bayram):⁵⁶ it was from the ship that the travelers contemplated the crossing of the Mediterranean and their point of arrival (Italy or France). A sense of detachment is clearly expressed and the emotions of the travelers emerge as the ship, often described in detail (cabins, areas for common use, etc.) leaves the port. From being an imposing and safe haven even in storms, the ship, when on the open sea, seems defenseless like “a bird held in the hand of someone who directs it as he wishes”.⁵⁷ In Zakī too, there is a reference to birds – three seagulls that follow the ship as soon as it leaves the port, “swooping in the air while we are on the sea”. The force of nature prevails over the men who have left their homeland, symbolized by the haven of the port. On the high seas, where there is no land in sight, the sea whips up its waves ever more majestically and al-Bāġūrī remains at their mercy for two days and not even medicines can alleviate his sense of ill-being. The ship lunges back and forth and sideways, heaving and groaning and leaving the passengers overwhelmed; the sense of terror continued the following day and the restaurant is almost deserted – as Fikrī observes – there were only 8 people out of 32.⁵⁸ Bayram V too, who got on board the Italian mail ship Doria at La Goletta suffered seasickness on the high seas: “Seasickness is one of the hardest afflictions to bear by those who are affected

54 This text, along with that of T. Carlyle, *On heroes* – as Zaydān mentions in his autobiography – had a strong influence on his formation and literary career. Ğ. Zaydān, *Mudakkirāt Ğurġī Zaydān* (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ġadīd, 1968), 47; cf. also A.-L. Dupont, “Le grand homme, figure de la ‘Renaissance’ arabe”, *Saints et héros du Moyen Orient contemporain*, ed. C. Mayeur-Jouen (Paris: Maissonneve et Larose, 2002), 47-73.

55 In the Arab world in the nineteenth century there became popular the cult of personality, under the influence not only of Carlyle and Smiles, but also of G. Le Bon, who in his *Civilisation des Arabes* (translated into arabic and turkish in several editions) maintains that the reason for the existing arabic-islamic decadence lies in the lack of “grands hommes”, on like the past, which had Muḥammad, etc. Cf. G. Le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes* (Paris: Éditions La Fontaine, 1996), 468.

56 al-Sanūsī too left from La Goletta and arrived in Naples, but the text examined here, *Information on Paris Exposition of 1889*, does not deal with the stages of the journey that are the subject of his *Rihla hiġāziyya*.

57 al-Bāġūrī, *al-Durar al-bahiyya*, 8.

58 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 48.

by it [...] it causes a feeling of great tiredness which, however, passes unexpectedly with few exceptions”.⁵⁹ The calm after the storm: the ship in which Fikrī and al-Bāḡūrī were traveling touched on the Greek islands in the Mediterranean sea – about which they furnish historical and geographical facts, naming the rivers that flow there, etc. – and then enters the Adriatic where, after three days of navigation the first stage of their journey comes to an end in Brindisi. “The first European port a traveler arrives in” writes Fikrī, is less than three days journey by sea from Alexandria in Egypt and the city has a railroad that leads to every city in Europe.⁶⁰ The writer seems to wish to underline the fact that Egypt is not so far from Europe. In fact travel by steam ship was already widespread from the first half of the nineteenth century and in the 1860s and 1870s of the century it was the means of connecting the main ports of the Mediterranean.

Once they had disembarked, the travelers visited the old part of the city with its labyrinth of backstreets where the poverty of the inhabitants was evident, as both al-Bāḡūrī and Fikrī noted. The latter recounts having seen people squabbling over the cigarette butts that they themselves had thrown into the street.⁶¹ The second stage of the journey in Italy was Trieste: the two literary-travelers arrived there after a day’s navigation and after a few hours, proceeded to Venice. They both mention the history of the city, its geographical position, its distance from other cities and the number of its inhabitants which, according to al-Bāḡūrī, was no more than 130 thousand.⁶² The descriptions of the cities mentioned in the various works have characteristics in common: generally they begin with place names and topographical details and then describe the physical geography, plains, mountains and rivers of the cities, from which they go on to their history and the customs of their inhabitants (food, clothing, language, etc.). Fikrī and al-Bāḡūrī disembarked at Trieste, right in front of Piazza Unità which was then called Piazza Grande and, after visiting the old part of the city, including Piazza della Borsa, they arrived at the Castle of Miramare. The subsequent stages of the journey of the two Egyptians, some of which were still in Italy, are described according to the same method, with an additional paragraph dedicated to the panorama (*manẓar*) of the Alps, and in particular of Canazei whose snowy peaks captured the imagination of al-Bāḡūrī.⁶³ Having traveled through Switzerland and arriving finally in Paris, Fikrī, confesses: “as soon as we got here the first thing I decided to do was to visit the Exposition”.⁶⁴

59 Medici, *Città italiane*, 158-159.

60 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 50.

61 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 51.

62 al-Bāḡūrī, *al-Durar al-bahiyya*, 11.

63 al-Bāḡūrī, *al-Durar al-bahiyya*, 20-21.

64 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā’*, 120.

V. THE EXPOSITION

It is a great, universal market (*sūq*) that brings together countries near and far and unknown people and languages; everyone exhibits in his own way the crafts and commercial products of his own country, the fruits of his knowledge and all manner of precious and rare objects that demonstrate the level he has reached in the progressive world thanks to the knowledge obtained by a restricted number of people (an élite), whose job it is to put what he has learned into practice as required by science.⁶⁵

This is how al-Bāğūrī presents the Paris Exposition of 1889 to his readers. Since he was undoubtedly aware of the imminent publication of Fikrī's weighty tome, al-Bāğūrī leaves aside the numerous details about the organization, history and dimensions of the pavilions of the preceding Expositions and confines himself with a few exceptions (Cairo street), to a more general description. He is struck, however, by the commercial dimension of the event which, indeed, he refers to as a market or *sūq*, similarly to Sulaymān Ḥarā'irī who sang its praises in his pamphlet of 1867. "In this Parisian event", wrote Ḥarā'irī, "Every nation, by exhibiting its products, diffuses its knowledge and progress and advances the use of commerce in order to better its own position among the Europeans (*ahl al-Ūrūba*)".⁶⁶ In Ḥarā'irī's view, therefore, wealth and commerce are at the basis of European progress and for this reason, he urges his compatriots to take part in this *sūq* and he lists at length the products that they might exhibit, including Arab plates which would greatly appeal to Europeans in that they were new to them and they would, meanwhile, provide a substantial profit for the Arabs.⁶⁷ Zakī too, seems to be of the same opinion, when he writes that "commerce is and will continue to be one of the mechanisms of progress and civilization", adding that "a large number of those who have raised the Arabs and their language like a beacon and have laid the foundations of this illustrious nation have been travelers and merchants".⁶⁸ Enraptured by the sparkling grandiosity of the 1900 Exposition, to the extent that he elevates its marvels to the level of a dream and compares it to the City of Copper⁶⁹ or to one of the marvelous cities of *The Arabian Nights*, Zakī observes that there already existed in the pre-Islamic age 'Ukāz and in the Islamic age al-Mīrbad: "two enormous markets where people worked

65 al-Bāğūrī, *al-Dunār al-bahīyya*, 36.

66 al-Ḥarā'irī, *Arḍ al-baḍā'i*, 2.

67 al-Ḥarā'irī, *Arḍ al-baḍā'i*, 5.

68 Zakī, *al-Dunyā fī Bārīs*, 44.

69 For this tale in the *Arabian Nights*, cf. D. Pinault, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden: Brill, 1992). For the City of Copper, see A. Arioli, *Le Città Mirabili. Labirinto arabo medievale* (Milan: Mimesis, 2003), 52, 165.

and bought and sold but also challenged each other and measured themselves against each other in composing poems with ability and originality”.⁷⁰ That the origins of the Expositions being visited were Arabic was also the opinion of Ibn al-Ḥūḡa and al-Sanūsī who recall the market-fair of ‘Ukāz which, according to Zakī ought to have been mentioned within the Exposition. In other words, Islam was the civilization from which the Europeans had drawn their heritage of knowledge and which allowed them to reach the results that could be seen in the Exposition. This position, expressed in different forms, is traceable in all the authors some of whom are more interested in the policies and administrative norms in Europe while others – perhaps the majority – are more interested in technological innovations (steam, electricity, the telegraph, the press, trains and cars, etc.). The fact remains, however, that there emerge in these writings, as never before, the lacerating ambiguities of an encounter that was already distinguished by the imperialistic combination – the dominators, the dominated, prelude to the colonial one – the conquerors, the conquered.

VI. RUE DU CAIRE AND OTHER ‘ORIENTAL’ PAVILIONS

As far as the Arabic literary-travelers were concerned, the Exposition represented a positive experience, to the extent that they considered the ancient Arab fairs as its harbinger. The most diffuse feelings were of admiration and wonder: Zakī, despite the fact that he was annoyed by the delay in the inauguration of the 1900 Exposition which had obliged him to spend some time on the Côte d’Azur (!), at the end of his first visit wrote:

Yes, the sight of this Exposition is wondrous and inspiring both for the enormity of its dimensions and for the number and diversity of its buildings and their styles. All the nations of the world are present in it, displaying their precious objects and wonders in these extraordinary palaces and edifices which appear before our eyes one more beautiful than the other. The nations compete to show their greatness. There is a fierce war going on between them, but it is a peaceful and safe war of progress and development.⁷¹

The nocturnal lights that illuminated the Exposition – so much so that Zakī compared them to the stars (which, however, paled by comparison) – enchanted the visitors who were, however, also attracted by the cars and means of transport, including the electric train (the underground railway) and the three-speed moving walkway which

⁷⁰ Zakī, *al-Dunyā fī Bārīs*, 44.

⁷¹ Zakī, *al-Dunyā fī Bārīs*, 51.

Zakī describes at length.⁷² In any case the common goal of these journeys was the pursuit of knowledge and the opportunities offered by the Expositions were unique. Wandering round the pavilions which were decked out in the 1867 and above all in the 1889 and 1900 Paris Expositions so as to reproduce exactly the most significant edifices of each nation was tantamount to traveling round the world and all for the modicum price of a franc, the cost of the entrance ticket to the Exposition. It was not for nothing that Zakī entitled his travelog *The Universe in Paris*.

Starting from 1867 ‘Exhibition architecture’ was established, which specialized in reproducing the buildings that more than any other symbolized individual nations. Many of the architects taken on to carry out the decorations often chose the easy way out, opting for the ‘picturesque’ and using ‘typical’ architectonic models that made a strong visual impact. There were, however, some notable exceptions such as the *art nouveau* style reconstruction of the Finnish Castle.⁷³ In order to make them seem more ‘true to life’, these pavilions were often manned by natives of the country, dressed in traditional costume and engaged in doing craftwork (weaving, cooking, inlaying, etc.) or serving food and drinks in the restaurants and cafés of the Exposition.⁷⁴ The arrangement of the ‘oriental’ sections was, with a few exceptions, entrusted to European scholars, planners and architects. The real brains behind the 1867 Exhibition were, respectively, the famous French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette (Charles Edmond was the general commissioner) for Egypt and Jules de Lesseps (brother of Ferdinand) for Tunisia and Morocco. In the 1889 Exposition the architect Charles Garnier who had the unenviable task of presiding over the commission, had to take into consideration ministerial decisions, which counted on financial support from the colonies. The government of the Bey of Tunisia agreed to make a financial contribution and, in return, took it upon himself to nominate some of his delegates to the Committee as well as choosing a Tunisian architect to plan the section.⁷⁵ In the case of Egypt which was certainly not enjoying a rosy economic situation and which had been a British Protectorate since 1881, the Baron Delort de Gléon, a French entrepreneur living in Cairo undertook to provide the funds for the decoration of the Egyptian section of 1889, the picturesque Rue du Caire (*Šāri‘ Miṣr*),⁷⁶ while in

72 Zakī, *al-Dunyā fi Bārīs*, 103-104, 106-107.

73 *Le Livre des expositions universelles 1851-1989*, 226-231.

74 This theme is amply dealt with by G. Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra. Esposizioni etniche e invenzioni esotiche in Italia, 1880-1940* (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2013).

75 D. S. Hale, *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized People 1886-1940* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 17.

76 M. Volait, “Bourgoin, architecte: la Rue du Caire”, *Jules Bourgoin (1838-1908). L’obsession du trait* (Paris: Institut national d’histoire de l’art, 2012), 36-37; M. Volait, “La Rue du Caire”, *Les Expositions Universelles à Paris, de 1855 à 1937*, sous la direction de M. Bacha (Paris: Action artistique de la Ville de Paris, 2005), 131-134; Leprun, *Le théâtre de Colonies*, 130-131; Ogle, “La colonizzazione del tempo”, 191-210.

1900 the economic operation was entrusted to an Egyptian of Lebanese origin, Philippe Boulad, and to Muṣṭafā al-Dīb, an Arabic entrepreneur, who employed the architect Marcel Dourgnon to plan the section composed of three buildings: an Egyptian temple, a caravanserai and a theater.⁷⁷ In the same way, for Algeria and Tunisia too, a group of French entrepreneurs (E. Pourtauborde,⁷⁸ A. Chaudoreille, C.-E. Vaucheret) funded both sections of the pavilion (including the Rue de l'Algerie). The most detailed description of these pavilions is by Fikrī who underlines the supervision of the works on the part of the Baron Delort, who made it his business to have sent from Egypt numerous inlaid panels and ancient *mašrabīyyāt* for reuse in the construction of buildings and habitations.⁷⁹

The street opened with a mosque the minaret of which resembled that of Qayt Bey in Cairo and there were some twenty five buildings, one after the other, decorated with *muqarnaš* and *mašrabīyyāt*; inside the street there were boutiques where artisans made their products by hand (vases, jugs) and prepared food and typical sweetmeats, according to a proposal Ḥarā'irī had made in 1867 when he had exhorted his fellow countrymen to sell Arabic culinary art to the West. One had the impression of actually walking along a street in Cairo: “the muezzin’s invitation to prayer, the roll of drums and the *darabukka*, the singing of arias, the sight of jugs and carafes and rugs and sellers of licorice root and lemon drinks and *lucum*”.⁸⁰ To render the layout even more ‘authentic’ there were the crowds, the disorder, the dirty, flaking walls and, above all the braying of the donkeys that moved all over Rue du Caire, led by more than fifty donkey drivers all suitably dressed as the Egyptian writers Fikrī and Bāğūrī and also Ḥallāt observed. The latter, in particular, dwells on this aspect of the layout:

many were the French women (*afranğī*) who, fired with enthusiasm, rode about like doves on the branches of a tree, laughing and chasing and overtaking each other, turning the market into a race course, not to mention the children who made of it their favorite haunt.⁸¹

The attraction of the donkeys and, perhaps, also of their drivers who earned a franc for every customer, created an atmosphere of mirth and fun but also a great deal of confusion, so much so that the organizers were obliged to establish fixed timetables for

77 Louca, *Voyageurs et Ecrivains Egyptiens*, 195; Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?*, 191.

78 Pourtauborde was also engaged to organize the *kermesse* at the Turin Expo, cf. Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra*, 893-894.

79 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā'*, 128.

80 Ḥallāt, *Kitāb Sifr al-Safar*, 132.

81 Ḥallāt, *Kitāb Sifr al-Safar*, 132.

rides.⁸² During the pauses and in the evenings, the donkey drivers⁸³ welcomed visitors into the stalls where, dressed in Egyptian clothes, they beat their drums and clapped their hands for a charge of half a franc. In Ḥallāt's descriptions the Rue du Caire figures as one of the most appealing areas of the Exposition: the atmosphere was perfect and to make it even more authentic there were even mosquitoes brought in by the donkeys and their drivers; the only thing missing were the hot, luminous rays of the Egyptian sun.⁸⁴ There emerges, however, from the words of Fikrī, and even of al-Bāğūrī, who is generally less explicit, a certain sense of discontent at this representation of their country, reduced to a kind of stereotyped *kermesse* in which the predominant note is the exotic-commercial one. This note was evident also in the figure of Muṣṭafā al-Dīb, the only Egyptian entrepreneur in the pavilion whose shop was situated on the Rue du Caire; the conduct of the latter did not bother Fikrī in the least who considered him, on the contrary, as a model for the Egyptians: "the visitors surrounded him, curious not only about his wares but by his manner of dressing; in fact, he wore a caftan, a turban, a red cloak, etc. and, thanks to his spirit of initiative, he had learned a few French words such as 'parfum', 'Madame', 'rose', 'un franc' that helped him sell his goods...".⁸⁵ As well as displaying all kinds of wares just as in the market of Ḥān al-Ḥalīlī, the shop of Muṣṭafā al-Dīb was decorated with furniture, silks, carpets, chandeliers and lamps and was a meeting point for Egyptian intellectuals and personalities studying in France. It was there that Fikrī, while sipping a coffee and smoking the hookah, recounts that he had the honor of meeting not only Arab personalities but also French ones such as the Prime minister and the director of the Exposition.⁸⁶

The spirit of initiative of the Egyptian entrepreneur is, therefore, held up as an example not only of ambition and the quest for knowledge but also of how to enter into the commercial strategies of Europe. And this, according to Fikrī, was the road to follow:

We Egyptians must abandon our laziness and our stubbornness in refusing to leave our country; certainly if the more well-to-do of us made a point of doing so, people would be stimulated to earn their living and to obtain good results both in the East and in the West.⁸⁷

82 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā'*, 133.

83 al-Bāğūrī adds that many of the donkey drivers wasted their whole earnings on women and contracted illnesses of all kinds.

84 Ḥallāt, *Kitāb Sifr al-Safar*, 132.

85 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā'*, 130.

86 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā'*, 131.

87 Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā'*, 132.

That commerce and business needed to be radically modernized and, above all, projected toward western markets was Fikrī's conviction and in this he demonstrated that he had assimilated an image of the East as a lazy and unmotivated area that corresponds exactly to the stereotyped image of the East prevalent in the West:⁸⁸ that of men sunk in lethargy who drank coffee and smoked hookahs indifferent to what surrounded them. Fikrī's disappointment about the donkeys is likened to that of a Dervish performing in a famous Egyptian café in a way that was not at all appropriate to the venue – revolving and speaking the name of Allah while the spectators sipped Arab coffee served in Egyptian cups by Egyptian waiters. But it is above all in the following pages that Fikrī expresses a negative judgment on the Egyptian section, affirming that there was nothing worthy of notice, so much so that there were fewer visitors to it than to the other sections.⁸⁹ This is in contradiction not only with what he said earlier when he stressed how the French loved the street and crowded it at all hours but also with the facts of the matter if we consider that the Rue du Caire was presented again in other Expositions precisely because of the success it had enjoyed. Zakī, for his part, was of the same opinion when he commented on the Egyptian pavilion in the 1900 Exposition, designed by Dourgnon who drew inspiration from different monuments, from the Temple of Dandur to the gate of Ḥān al-Ḥalīlī; according to Zakī the section “does not represent the reality of Egypt; the visitor sees nothing that attests to its evolution in commerce and handicrafts or in science and literature”. The Egyptian writers would have preferred that greater attention had been paid to other aspects of their culture, linked to modernity and not only to the past and to the old traditions. They would have liked it to have been like the Persian pavilion organized by the Persians themselves in which were to be found not only artifacts of ancient times but modern ones too. Both Fikrī and Zakī seem to have been struck by the ephemeral aspect of the Exposition precisely in connection with the section dedicated to their country where even the mosque was only a façade behind which was a café with singers and dancers. Egyptian dress too, was chosen for its exotic appearance thanks to the force of attraction it exercised on French visitors; even the Cook's Agency employees wore *sarāwīl* and tarbush with the name Cook written on them. It is, therefore, within the context of their own country that writers saw the contradictions; the Egyptian pavilion came across to them as a mere place of amusement, a kind of fairground with its heartless attractions. Inside the caravanserai, in a room decked out with beautiful carpets, Zakī relates:

there is a beautiful Armenian girl about 17 years old, to whom God had not given the gift of arms but, in his benevolence, he had given her the possibility of

⁸⁸ E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, It. trans. 1991).

⁸⁹ Fikrī, *Iršād al-Alibbā'*, 375.

carrying out with her feet women's work such as spinning, weaving, combing her hair and playing musical instruments.⁹⁰

By now sucked in as they were by the laws of modernity, the Egyptian authors were unable to formulate the extent to which the world had been commodified and of which Expositions were the main expression⁹¹ but they were able to express their sense of extra-ness and unease by means of a 'false' character who is present in both Fikrī's and Zakī's texts and whom the writers recognize because he is an old acquaintance of theirs and so they can unmask him.⁹²

These literary modes recall, in a way, the *maqāma* when 'Īsa ibn Hišām meets Abū 'l-Faṭḥ al-Iskandarī who, despite the fact that he is disguised as the most varied characters, is recognized and unmasked. Fikrī describes how, while he was visiting the Tunisian section and walking in the *sūq* alongside the palace that was a reproduction of the Bardo in Tunis, among artisans, barbers, weavers etc., he came across a scribe who was writing in Arabic script the names of visitors in exchange for a few cents. Fikrī recognizes him as a school fellow from Egypt who had cut short his studies in medicine to go in search of fortune which, in fact, he never found. Zakī, on the other hand, was in the Egyptian section when he saw a man walking along tiredly, dressed in a *ḡubba* and caftan and a false turban, and passing himself off as a sheik of al-Azhar, while he was taking the French visitors in by writing their names in Arabic script as a memento of the Egyptian pavilion. "[...] Would to heaven he had been a real sheik and that his gains were honestly come by! But Mr Tawfiq Šalhūb was an employee in the Iranian Consulate in Alexandria".⁹³

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The texts examined here are, therefore, paradigmatic in content and structure. They make evident, in fact, the arduous attempt made by the Arab travelers to modernize their culture without, however, betraying it. In other words they use a common, traditional

90 Zakī, *al-Dunyā fi Bārīs*, 75. Muwayliḥī too describes the same scene: the three protagonists, while they are getting ready to leave their country's pavilion, highly annoyed by what they had seen, bump into one of the organizers who takes them to see one of the most incredible marvels: a young girl without arms intent spinning and in other activities by feet. See Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadīṯ 'Īsa ibn Hišām*, 306.

91 W. Benjamin, *Parigi, Capitale del XIX secolo. I «Passages» di Parigi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 10-12.

92 The literary expedient of the 'false' character is found also in Muwayliḥī, in the chapter dedicated to the Egyptian section (entitled *The maligned Homeland*), where the protagonists bump into a sheik who writes the name of the visitors in Arabic script, but they immediately recognize from his accent that he is not Egyptian but Syrian! Cf. Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadīṯ 'Īsa ibn Hišām*, 305.

93 Zakī, *al-Dunyā fi Bārīs*, 74.

form which is that of the *rihla* which they bring to life again by updating the contents, the language, the style and the terminology in relation to their new discoveries (translation from European languages or the invention of new terms using Arabic roots).⁹⁴ These Arabic works which also have a corresponding version in Turkish,⁹⁵ were directed at a wider public than was the case with the medieval *rihla* and they used a simpler and more immediate language as in the case of Zakī whose text can be considered as a travel diary where the author allows himself ample space for his own considerations. But the contradictions that I mentioned earlier already emerge in these texts which, although written with the intention of getting to know Europeans better in order to defend themselves from them, inevitably take on the European point of view which as we have seen does not always coincide with that of the ‘other’. None of the Egyptian authors dealt with here felt himself to be represented in the pavilion dedicated to his country although, by their own admission, the image of Egypt presented by the Europeans was very close to reality. This attitude, however, is not to be found in the texts of the other literary-travelers considered here. On the contrary, they seem to have enjoyed and appreciated both the Egyptian pavilion and that of their own country, Tunisia. There is no doubt that the reason for this difference in attitude can be attributed to the fact that texts such as those of al-Sanūsī and Ibn al-Ḥūḡa were published at the expense of their governments so that their position could not be one of criticism. But perhaps a more profound reason for the negative judgment of the Egyptian writers is to be found in the history itself of their country where contradictions seemed to be more evident. Notwithstanding the fact that they had gone the way of Tunisia –⁹⁶ debts contracted to the West and, in consequence, occupation by the Western powers – Egypt was the first country to develop a concept of *waṭan* or *patrie* (with Ṭaḥṭāwī) and, at the same time they undertook an accelerated race toward modernization of which, naturally, the principal point of reference was Europe. The process of Haussmanization of Cairo the object of which was to make of the city a modern European capital was already under way when in 1881 the British occupied the country and the following year repressed in bloody reprisals the nationalist revolt of ‘Urābī Paša. But the paradox in which Egypt was moving is also made clear in the nationalist movement which was developing

94 Zakī, unlike the other authors provides explanation of the foreign terms used in a long final note.

95 Numerous are the travel accounts in the nineteenth century, such as that of Ömer Fâiz Efendi who accompanied the sultan Abdülaziz in his journey to Europe and to the Paris Exposition of 1867 and that of Ahmed Mîdhat who in 1889 took part in the Congress of Orientalists scholars at Stockholm. Cf. C. Hillebrand, “Ottoman Travel Accounts to Europe”, *Venturing beyond Borders: Reflections on Genre, Function and Boundaries in Middle Eastern Travel Writing*, eds. B. Agai, O. Akyiliz and C. Hillebrand (Wurzburg: Ergon, 2013), 53-74.

96 Tunisia, after declaring bankruptcy in 1867, was obliged to subject itself to the tutelage of a French, English and Italian Commission and in 1881 it became a French Protectorate.

in the country thanks also to Pharaohonism, a current of thought that developed under the influence of European Egyptologists and that became part of the ideology on which was based the idea of a modern Egyptian nation. All this seems to reflect perfectly the ambiguity of the Western idea of Egypt: a Pharaoh-based Egypt, symbol of ancient splendor which had become a common world heritage (the architecture of the Expositions in Paris made a great display of Egyptian Sphinxes, arabesques, symbols and decorations) as opposed to the idea of a 'modern' Egypt represented by the picturesque backstreets and markets of the old city as in the Oriental pictures of the Rue du Caire. The Egyptians, inevitably, are subjected to the predominant vision that wants to depict them as exotic Orientals, in sharp contrast to the idea of modernity and a renewed style of life to which they themselves aspired. Al-Bāğūrī, Fikrī and Zakī in their texts show in a decidedly paradigmatic way the profound contradiction on which relations with the West were based, tightly bound up, as they were, on a process of modernization and at the same time of colonization. The Egyptian elite felt a strong fascination with the West and if, initially, it still seemed possible that the evolution of a process of interaction and reinterpretation was possible, at this particular point in history such a process had already been compromised by acculturation.⁹⁷ The travelers here dealt with, although conscious of the dangers of Westernization, of becoming a hybrid culture that was "neither Eastern nor Western", were overcome by the West-Modernity paradigm and it is through this prism that they regard the Exposition and themselves. Finally, to go back to the Exposition, it is within this richly imaginative and unreal space that the Egyptian travelers undergo a decisive experience concerning the relation between their own culture and that of the 'other', in that they take note of the fact, however fleetingly and partially, that they are actors in a representation of the world – that of the West – which relegates them to the subordinate and marginal role of tradition, the exotic, the picturesque, of the 'other' in himself and for himself – to use Hegel's terminology – or, in other words to a role that has nothing to do with modernity, progress or civilization in a European or Western sense. Looking at his own image in the great mirror of the expo, the Arab intellectual does not recognize himself, he experiences for an instant a sense of estrangement (similar to that which a mirror image produces when the right seems to be the left and vice versa) – a feeling, however, that is destined to vanish as he leaves the pavilion.

97 P. La Greca work on the modernization of Cairo highlights an analogous phenomenon from the urbanistic point of view; the author underlines the fact that up until the seventies of the nineteenth century the urban transformation of the city, although it welcomed external stimuli, was the fruit of local reinterpretation to the extent that it became "a cumulative knowledge", while later on, also because of a massive presence of foreign investors, assumed a strongly colonial character. Cf. P. La Greca, *Il Cairo. Una metropoli in transizione* (Rome: Officina, 1996), 111-112.