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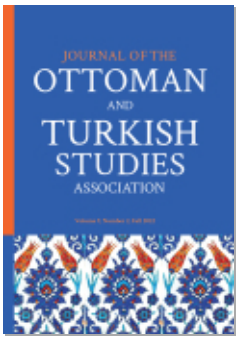

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An Egyptian Shaykh's Literary World, 1870: Digitally Reconstructing Islamic Print Culture Through Mustafa Salama al-Najjari's Books*

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KEYWORDS: print culture, inventory, TEI XML, CETEICean, Arabic dataset

Overview

"An Egyptian Shaykh's Literary World" is an independent project that digitally reconstructs the 480 print and manuscript titles in the handwritten Arabic probate inventory of Shaykh Mustafa Salama al-Najjari (d. 1870), an important but forgotten intellectual in late Ottoman Egypt. Our goal is to investigate the co-existence of manuscript and print cultures, to compare values of texts, to experiment with the HTML and visual representation of bibliographic data, and to understand the late Ottoman Egyptian printing business and its political dimension.

Al-Najjari served in the Egyptian governor's entourage as a poet; he was the editor of the official government gazette between October 1866 and September 1867; and he was among the founders of the Society for Education (*Jamʿiyyat al-Maʿārif*) in 1868, a large semi-private printing enterprise in Cairo. In March 1870, one month after his death, an officer from the khedivial probate office created an inventory of his possessions in an effort to settle his debts. The probate inventory, now in the Egyptian National Archives, contains a detailed list of the books, among other items, in al-Najjari's house at the time of death. Distinguishing between manuscript and printed texts, it records the shorthand titles of his books, their estimated value in piastres (*qirsh*), and sometimes offers a descriptive note about them, such as a comment on how the work was bound. For each of al-Najjari's printed books, the inventory furthermore lists whether it was published by a press belonging to the govern-

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ment (*mīrī*) or by a non-government press (*barrānī*), and the number of volumes it spanned. We do not call these titles a library (the inventory-maker created simply a "books"—*kutub*—section in the inventory) because al-Najjari, as an editor and entrepreneur, stored manuscripts on loan and printed books for sale, too.[1]

This inventory forms our project's starting point. We build a dataset both in Arabic and in transliteration (relying on the Library of Congress ALA-LC standard) using the information provided for each of its manuscript and printed titles—the latter of which also includes what we believe are three large compilations of shorter texts (*majmūʿāt*). In the case of the printed titles, we capitalize on the additional information that the inventory logs to identify existing copies of editions that we are certain, or relatively certain, al-Najjari possessed.[2] We then consult these editions to enhance our dataset with nearly fifty additional bibliographical and extra-bibliographical categories in Arabic and English. They range, for example, from where a text was printed to the names of the text's copyist, printer, corrector, chronogram writer, and financer. We also collect, wherever possible, one example of an already digitized PDF version of each book. Our project is one of the first, if not the first, to hand-gather data from digitized Arabic material that is already available online, giving a fresh digital purpose to texts that were scanned for their intellectual content.

Technical Details:

After first manually enriching the original inventory data in an online Google Excel sheet, our workflow consists of transferring this bilingual, multi-source data into a "table" XML TEI format and then to a "biblStruct" XML TEI format through an XSLT transformation; visualizing the data; and creating an HTML website for teaching and research purposes.

First, we downloaded the online Arabic-English dataset, in separate datasheets (manuscript and printed, and sub-sheets of printed *majmūʿ* titles), in XSLX format from our online Google Excel sheet. Next, we transformed the XSLX sheets into XML documents in "table" format using the free online

1. The inventory register is dated 24 Dhu al-Hijja 1286 (27 March 1870), "Awraq al-ifraj ʿan tarikat al-Shaykh Mustafa Salama al-Najjari," Baytmal-i Misr 3002-012642, Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya (Egyptian National Archives). For more details on his life and activity see Adam Mestyan, *Primordial History, Print Capitalism, and Egyptology in Nineteenth-Century Cairo* (Cairo: Ifao, 2021), https://www.ifao.egnet.net/publications/catalogue/9782724708097/; for the printing business of Cairo, see Kathryn A. Schwartz, "The Political Economy of Private Printing in Cairo, As Told from a Commissioning Deal Turned Sour, 1871," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 1 (2017): 25–45, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743816001124; for the khedivial probate office see Adam Mestyan and Rezk Nori, "The Probate Regime—Law, Enchanted Bureaucracy, and The Capital of Orphans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *Law and History Review* 40, no. 4 (2022): 597–624, *https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248022000529*.

2. The criteria for our relative degrees of certainty may be found on our project blog page. See below for link.

OxGarage (https://oxgarage2.tei-c.org/) software. Next, Mestyan created a GitHub repository for the project (https://github.com/ProjectNaggari/naggari_source) and uploaded the XML documents. He started to work on the printed data only. He manually edited and corrected the files to match the standards of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) and merged the sheets containing the titles identified as *majmūʿāt* together with the main printed sheet. Finally, with the help of Hugh Cayless, he wrote an XSLT transformation to transform the "table" format into a "biblStruct" formatted file in September 2021.

The use of the TEI standard for this dataset was an easy choice for three reasons. First, the TEI has developed a vocabulary of XML elements for registering bibliographical citations—the biblStruct element (https://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/ref-biblStruct.html)—which is accepted across languages and disciplines in the large TEI community and makes possible the integration of data with library systems, too. Second, Hugh Cayless and Raffaele Viglianti have developed CETEICean (https://github.com/TEIC/CETEIcean), a Javascript library which helps to display unmodified TEI files in HTML thus making the creation of HTML websites from TEI XML datasets relatively easy. Third, Mestyan (together with Till Grallert) had already used a similar method in the 2020 Project Jara'id database and website (https://projectjaraid.github.io/index.html). As we had limited resources and time, and we could not expect any institutional help in designing and hosting for the website, we decided to use the TEI standard and CETEICean to create the website, hosted by GitHub.

The transformation of the original data through XSLT into "biblStruct" included the automatic assignment of attributes with rich meta-data information such as the source of the information contained in the elements, xml:ids, languages, and types in March 2021. Mestyan, again with the help of Hugh Cayless, wrote a new XSLT code to automatically replace the links pointing to the original online storage where we had stored collected PDFs with links pointing to a new online storage. This was necessary because Schwartz meanwhile had to move these PDFs. Finally, a third XSLT transformation, again with Cayless's help in February 2022, added the links (the content of "ref" elements) as the value of the "target" attribute within the "ref" elements. This last step was important for the display of the data since in this way the links became clickable.

While Schwartz started to create visualizations of the data, Mestyan created a staging HTML site (https://projectnaggari.github.io) to experiment with sharing our data in a human-user friendly format. This included the use of CETEICean and the basic tools of website design. After the creation of a simple HTML framework with a few pages and a menu, he is now experimenting with displaying the data through CSS and Javascript, again with the help of Hugh Cayless. The source of all pages is now the printed dataset in the biblStruct format, except the manuscripts page. The discrepancy between the biblStruct form and the desired representation in limited table formats necessitated addi-

tional Javascript code and behaviors. The goal is to create an easily accessible static website in Arabic and English for teaching and research purposes.

The collection of books recorded in Shaykh al-Najjari's estate represents, at the micro level, one man's literary world. However, given its size and range, it holds a substantial portion of Arabic books printed before 1870. It therefore offers a small window onto the multilayered and understudied textual culture of late Ottoman Cairo, the first African city to develop an indigenous urban print culture, within which manuscripts and printed texts circulated at once. On which subjects would a well-connected, educated Muslim literary scholar keep books? Did different subjects lend themselves to manuscript or to print, and did these formats vary in cost? Did the same networks of people have a hand in their production? Was textual production dominated by the contributions of any one cluster of individuals? From where in the world did printed books reach Cairo? And can we discern differences in the reputations of various presses on the basis of their price points? By combining the groundwork laid by previous and on-going digitization efforts, close readings of these texts, and digital tools to explore our data, we seek to discover new insights and sharpen our understanding of how textual culture operated during this transformational epoch.

Our data has already begun to offer some economic, geographic, and network-related takeaways. It shows, for example, that government books were valued more highly per page printed than non-government books, that lithographs were more expensive than typographies per page printed, and that printed books and manuscripts appear to have been valued at roughly the same price, at the average of twenty-eight and 29.9 piastres respectively. We may furthermore see that someone as wealthy, learned, and well-connected as al-Najjari could come into possession of printings from as far west as Paris and Tunis, and as far east as Delhi, Tehran, and Baghdad. Yet despite this cosmopolitan range, the bulk of his books revolved around Cairo, with even nearby Beirut and Istanbul—cities with significant print cultures in their own right by the 1860s—featuring in his collection only small numbers of nine and two books respectively. Finally, we may begin to understand the fixity of the roles played by those who had a hand in bringing forth printed books, which were only rarely overlapping. The network map on view in the image below suggests that commissioners, copyists, and correctors of books tended to specialize in their activities, with only five instances of correctors also serving as commissioners of texts among the printings that we managed to identify and consult.

In addition to offering an empirical view onto the transition between manuscript and print in the modern Middle East, this project contributes to the larger field of Ottoman Studies by incorporating Arabic provincial intellectuals within imperial–Mediterranean histories, and by providing an example of how to use probate inventories in digital humanities. We hope that researchers around the world will benefit from querying our dataset and reading from the corpus that al-Najjari brought together.

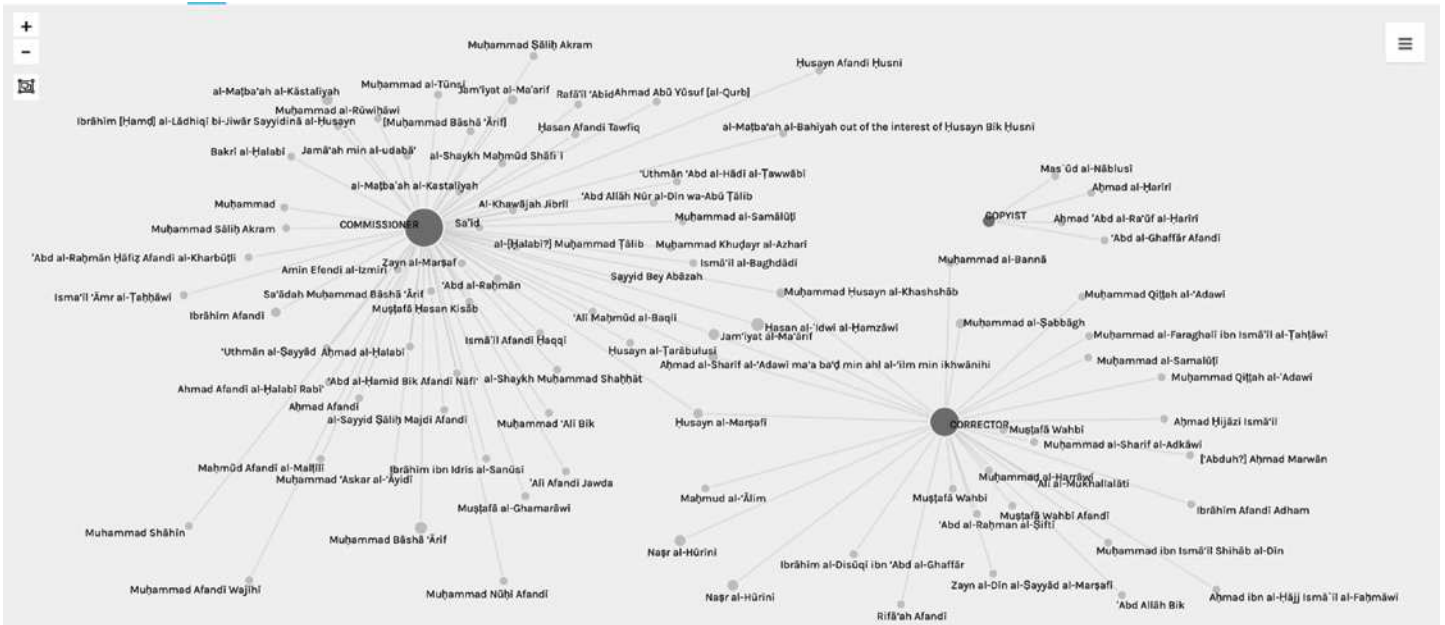

Figure 1: Schwartz used Stanford University's Palladio tool to map the network of commissioners, correctors, and copyists listed among al-Najjari's printed books that we identified and consulted.

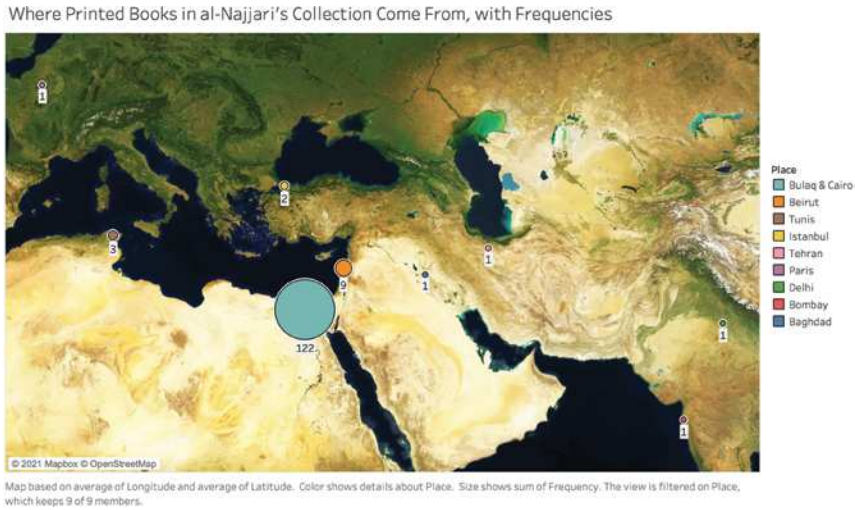

Figure 2: Schwartz used the Mapbox tool to visualize the locations of al-Najjari's books.

Our blog: https://anegyptiansheikhsliteraryworld.umasscreate.net/.
Our static HTML site: https://projectnaggari.github.io.

Afterword

After the sudden and tragic passing of Kathryn Schwartz in May 2022, Adam Mestyan continued to work on the dataset and the website, with the help of Hugh Cayless, during the summer of 2022. They started to modify the representation of the TEI XML dataset in the HTML file through Javascript and CETEICean behaviors. An important conclusion is that while the "bibliStruct" format is excellent for storing bibliographic information the representation of this data in a website requires additional coding. CETEICean transforms the TEI XML format into an HTML representation automatically. The discrepancy between the TEI XML format ("biblStruct") and the required visual representation (two separate English and Arabic columns and displaying only selected data, based on various criteria) implies significant Javascript knowledge.

In September 2022, Mestyan released the first version of the dataset and, in February 2023, a second version through Zenodo.[3] The project, however, remains unfinished.

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Kathryn A. Schwartz was Assistant Professor of History at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a Research Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse, France.

3. Adam Mestyan and Kathryn A. Schwartz, "Project Naggari - the Literary World of A Nineteenth-Century Egyptian Sheikh," *Zenodo*, February 4, 2023. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7606371.